

Mech Touch 6631

Chapter 6631 Unmatched Artifacts

The D-arm survived the lightning baptism.

Ves knew how close it had been. Although the storm only struck 18 times, the power behind the bolts were at least partially scaled to the Bitter Scimitar's approximate power, quality and other parameters.

He understood a little more on how the lightning tribulations operated. They were never supposed to let off anyone or anything that broke the boundaries of cosmic ecosystem so easily.

The amount of rounds was probably determined by the severity of the supposed violations.

It was useful for Ves to know what to expect next time if he committed another 'violation' in the eyes of the heavenly authorities.

For example, anything that attempted a feat as bold as merging the 5 classical elements together would definitely attract the most severe 9-round multi-modal lightning tribulation!

The same went for a feat as bold as creating a god ship such as the Dominion of Man! Curiously, a masterwork D-arm that was inhabited by a particularly young and weak Middle Demon only attracted a 2-round single-modal lightning tribulation.

A part of Ves was relieved. If the severity of the tribulation event was any more severe, he would have struggled a lot more to keep his first proper D-arm alive.

The physical structure of the weapon was able to resist the tribulation lightning easily enough, but its fatal weakpoint in this situation was the demon that empowered the D-arm!

The Bitter Swordsman shouldn't have been vulnerable under normal circumstances. It was unfortunately that tribulation lightning played by different rules. It was not only able to bypass numerous layers of protection, but it was also intelligently driven to attack the demon regardless of all other factors!

It was clear to Ves that one but possibly all heavenly authorities disliked demons and sought to strike them down whenever people attempted to harness their power in a significant manner.

What was worse was that this was just the beginning. The Bitter Scimitar already met his expectations of what a D-arm was supposed to be, but it was just an early creation.

Once Ves studied the transformed and lightning baptized weapon and increased his comprehension of the Demoncasting process, he would steadily be able to produce stronger and more remarkable D-arms.

If he was able to improve the demon gu cultivation process and succeed in producing a Major Demon of the third major cultivation rank, then Ves could not imagine the power

of the lightning tribulation that would beset his more potent D-arms!

His ambition of creating a simplified Demoncasting Forge and training subordinates to mass produce relatively simple D-arms with the help of demons supplied by Helena became defunct.

If the heavens hated D-arms so much that they were willing to take action against a weapon at the level of the Bitter Scimitar meant that only high-quality works could make past their crucial life tests!

The main reasons why the Bitter Scimitar managed to survive its own tribulation was not because it was wielded by an oddball phase lord like Ves.

The real reason was because the product happened to be good enough that the Bitter Swordsman was able to exert a significant proportion of his strength and capabilities through his new vessel.

The two matched each other a lot better than the ancient maiden and Ketis' spare pocket knife.

If Ves and Ketis hadn't put so much effort into taking the Bitter Swordsman's parameters into account while designing the scimitar, the Middle Demon wouldn't have been able to demonize it so effectively.

Compared to the Maiden Knife, the Bitter Scimitar looked a lot 'cleaner' and less gaudy. While it still retained a few questionable spikes and other unnecessary protrusions, a much greater proportion of its design still remained useful and functional.

The weapon had still grown larger and heavier than before. The lightning baptism's attempts to purify the weapon had failed.

The Middle Demon had passed the test and absorbed the rewards. Not only had he managed to strengthen his foundation by a large extent, but he also received a surge of strength.

The physical D-arm reflected the demon's growth. It had grown harder, shinier and sharper. Its extraordinary qualities improved as well. Ves could feel that he could more easily take control over ambient E energy radiation.

"I understand." Ves stated as he continued to hold the mech weapon while remaining in his mech-scaled form.

"What do you understand?" Ketis asked as she slowly stepped forward in order to take a better look at the recovered and strengthened D-arm.

"I think I figured out the positioning of Demoncasting in the world of traditional craftsmanship." He said. "Look at this weapon. You have witnessed its performance earlier. Do you think that you can forge a major masterwork mech sword that can perform just as well as this scimitar?"

Ketis frowned. "That is not an easy question to answer, Ves. It depends on the materials and workshop conditions."

"Just assume that you are working under the best conditions that you can realistically attain at the moment. What can you create if you are able to design the weapon for as long as you want, with access to all of the tech and materials our clan can realistically procure. You can also assume that you can imbue your creation with an artifact spirit by using a hyper keystone that is filled with the spiritual remnant of a third order living mech. Furthermore, you can make full use of the Workshop of Creation to forge your mech sword. How powerful will your weapon become?"

These were fantastic conditions. Ketis could easily imagine herself reforging the Decapitator masterwork mech sword so that it incorporated the latest developments in phasewater technology, metallurgy, cultivation science and her groundbreaking theories in the School of Reformed Swordsmanship.

Yet even if she was willing to be generous in her assessment of the final output, she found it difficult to imagine that the much-improved mech sword would be able to match the extraordinary qualities of the Bitter Scimitar.

"I think it is nearly impossible for me to close the gap to this work." Ketis admitted. "All of the other conditions are either the same or better than with our latest project. The only exception to this rule is the source of artifact spirit. Not that I have anything against the idea of repurposing your third order living mechs. It is just..."

"They're not particularly strong." Ves readily admitted. "This is highly dependent on age. You cannot expect a third order living mech that has only experienced a year or several years of life to possess the same richness and power expressions of an expert candidate that is several decades old. When that expert candidate died and received a second chance by turning into a Middle Demon, then the gap between the two widens even further. Add in the lightning baptism, and the latter's various shortcomings have become a lot less severe, making it even harder to surpass its strength."

The female mech designer understood the point that Ves was trying to make.

"I see. So the true difference lies in the sourcing of artifact spirits. You need to capture a strong and well-developed soul in order to empower your artifact. Otherwise, it will just turn into a work that is hardly different from a minor artifact, at least at the start. Even if the artifact is able to grow more powerful over time and usage, the one that starts out with a much stronger artifact spirit will always maintain an advantage. As long as D-arms are able to survive their lightning tribulations, they begin their new existence at a considerably higher starting point, and their growth potential is also higher due to their stronger foundations. Even without the benefits of lightning baptisms, these D-arms still remain fairly formidable, as evidenced by the Maiden Knife.

Ves nodded in agreement. "Demoncasting can therefore be regarded as a shortcut. It allows us to craft major artifacts at a level or two beyond our current capabilities. Even if the two of us can work together to design and forge a mech sword of exquisite power and capabilities, we will have to invest a disproportionate amount of effort and resources into making it. We may have to acquire and use up ludicrously super-class materials. We have to obtain a much more powerful artifact spirit candidate by using up

one of our older design spirits such as the Solemn Guardian or the spiritual remnant of an older and more developed living mech like the Quint. We may even have to commission the aid of a Master Mech Designer that excels in craftsmanship." These were unrealistically demanding conditions. It may be possible for Ves and Ketis to meet one of them, but it was far too difficult to meet all of them at the same time.

The outcome of all of this collective effort would be a major artifact and masterwork that may be a lot closer to meeting the standard of a grand work than their previous creations, but wouldn't necessarily be better than a D-arm that Ves and Ketis cobbled together in a handful of days!

"It is the demons that make most of the difference." Ketis said as she comprehended the value of Demoncasting. "The demonization of a soul always makes it a lot more powerful at the cost of corrupting it. The Demoncasting process is an attempt to make the most out of the former while trying to control the impact of the latter. If done correctly, you will end up with a D-arm that is a lot more powerful than any artifact that you can make through conventional means. Aside from the risk of backlash and other complications, it is actually well worth it to wield a weapon of greater power."

The Bitter Scimitar therefore represented the first of many D-arms that could grant additional power to the heroes of the Larkinson Clan and perhaps beyond. Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger would be the first pairing to enjoy this new benefit. Their experiences and subsequent performance while wielding this new weapon would directly show whether Ves' optimistic expectations for D-arms were justified.

"The debut of the first D-arm designed for a mech cannot come soon enough." Ves eagerly said as he finally approached a large rectangular box and carefully placed the D-arm inside before closing the container that worked decently in isolating the activity of the remarkable weapon. "As long as Joshua doesn't screw up, the Bitter Scimitar will generate a lot of interest... as well as demand. Since you contributed to its development, a lot of people will inquire about the new weapon. I hope that you will remain discreet about it. There are many people who are only interested in wielding this kind of power for themselves, but there are also a lot of annoying people who will create a lot of unnecessary distractions and put up a lot of hindrances if they learn the truth about the

D-arm."

Ketis gave Ves a measured stare.

"I will not lie about the D-arm, but I suppose I can help you keep the nature of the Bitter

Scimitar a secret for a while longer by not answering at all. I will try to direct all inquiries about the weapon to you. I will probably be too busy with designing the First Sword Mark III Project and spreading my new Manual of Reformed Swordsmanship." "That is good enough. You don't need to do anything more."

"You won't be able to keep it a secret for long, Ves. Anyone who is powerful and perceptive enough will be able to detect the malice and hostility from your D-arms. The mech pilots who make use of them will learn the truth regardless. The greater the

amount of people who are clued in, the greater the chance of leaks. I don't think it will take more than a year for the truth to spread."

Ves shrugged. "That is better than nothing. The Red War is about to reach a critical

point. I really cannot afford any distractions at the moment. Saving red humanity comes first. I can deal with the consequences later on when we have overcome the most acute challenges. Besides, I only need to buy time to prepare more countermeasures. For example, I am thinking about offering D-arms to the Red Association, Red Collective and several other major players. As long as I can convert them into stakeholders, they will have a vested interest in Demoncasting."

"Are you sure that will work?" Ketis questioned. "If these people learn where you are able to obtain your demons..."

"I will deal with that problem when it arises." Ves dismissively waved his hand.

Chapter 6632 Sudden Advancements

When Ves and Ketis emerged from the System Space again, they had come out for real.

Both mech designers had spent a lot of time away from reality and felt disconnected from the rest of the universe.

Neither of them let that bother them. They had plenty of time to anticipate their situations upon their return to the main universe. Rather than feeling all dramatic over their lack of integration into the current timeline, they decided to make more productive use of their time by converting much of their gains during the marathon into real contributions to society.

Ketis had brought out the Bitter Scimitar and planned to introduce it to her husband, However, she first had to handle the recall of the 'recently' released Stormblade Samurai Mark II. She needed to act as quickly as possible and replace existing mechs with copies of an updated version of the commercial design that reflected her latest swordsmanship attainments!

Her next priority was to use her close relationship with the Red Swordsmanship Federation to quickly recognize the enormous value of her Manual of Reformed Swordsmanship.

The sooner other sword practitioners became convinced of her new theories, the sooner they would begin to unlock their greater potential.

Existing swordmasters should be especially keen on adopting her new teachings!

As long as they agreed that her new teachings could potentially lead them onto the path of becoming a sword saint, her new School of Reformed Swordsmanship would definitely become the main orthodoxy of the swordsmanship community!

Ketis believed that real changes could take place within a week.

What was even more important was to convince people outside of the swordsmanship community that her theories were relevant in other cases as well.

The obvious similarities between sword practitioners and mech pilots meant that the latter could also use the theories as a guide to promote their breakthroughs!

Ves offered to intercede on her behalf by using his contacts within the Red Association and the Red Collective to bring the Manual of Reformed Swordsmanship to their attention, but she declined.

"My influence is not small these days. I can definitely make these organizations take my teachings seriously."

"What if they don't?"

"Then they will find themselves left behind when their more open-minded rivals and competitors make more progress." Ketis smirked.

That was a good argument. As long as her theories were accurate enough, those who took them seriously would definitely be able to produce more breakthroughs!

Ves meanwhile became busy with his own affairs.

He had several main concerns.

First, he had to add the completed Null Project to the database of the Design Department and urge the Living Mech Corporation to quickly start production of both the commercial version and the Larkinson-exclusive version.

Many production lines were already busy with mass producing the Yellow Jacket mechs, but so many third-party producers had already licenced the design that it was better if the LMC shifted its focus back to more premium mech models.

A lot of people including his own wife became surprised that Ves seemingly whipped out a solo mech design out of his butt from nowhere.

He had not talked about the Null Project nor shown any sign of working on it in the past. few months!

This was strange as the design most definitely incorporated much of the latest developments in hyper technology and so on. Ves even classified the Null Project as a previously unheard of seventh generation of living mechs!

"How did you find the time to design this mech?" Gloriana asked with a mixture of perplexment and suspicion in her voice. "Did you secretly slack off while you were supposed to be working on the Swarm Project and the Amaranto Mark III Project to work on a solo mech design project by yourself?"

"Not exactly." Ves defended himself. "You underestimate my power. I have more incarnations out there than Blinky and Vulcan. As the inventor of companion spirits, it is not unreasonable to think that I can create more off-shoots of myself, I might not be able to integrate a fancy cranial implant suite that is augmented by the fragments of a Mentalist Crystal like you, but I have my own ways to increase my productivity."

That was all technically true, but his argument was not necessarily related to how he was able to complete the Null Project in recent times.

His wife did not bother to inquire further. She instead devoted her attention to the Null Project and wondered what made it special.

"Please explain the details of your seventh generation living mech technology to me. I have yet to notice any difference."

"I am not surprised. It is mostly E-technology, after all. Let me begin with the integration of teaching services..."

Once Ves got his own Design Department and mech company to accept the Null Project that seemingly dropped out of nowhere, he then proceeded to lay the groundwork to upgrading the MSTS to the Elemental Universe.

Ves and Ketis had already completed a lot of work on the redesign of the Mental

Simulation Training System inside the System Space.

Alas, the two could not reinvent the MSTS and expand its scope by themselves. This was why Ves waited until he came out of the System Space to quickly set up a working group in order to hire, commission and coordinate all of the additional workers responsible for fleshing out the plans and blueprints of the ambitious Elemental Universe.

If the work proceeded smoothly enough, the initial version of the Elemental Universe should be ready for testing within a couple of months.

Ves felt a little disappointed that it would take so long to redesign the MSTS, but the process should not be rushed. A mistake could easily threaten the mental health of mech pilots and could also leave a permanent bad impression behind. He and his clan needed to do this correctly in order to maintain a high degree of trust towards his solutions. His third concern was to handle the remaining gu containers of the first batch.

Demon Mixer 2 and Demon Mixer 5 had already produced results.

Demon Mixer 3 spent the same amount of time in the System Space as the previous two demimechs, yet its ritual was still ongoing.

It appeared that stuffing 80 Minor Demons inside the rudimentary gu container significantly extended the completion time.

Unless the resulting Middle Demon acquired a lot more power or gained interesting new abilities, it did not sound worthwhile to engage in gu cultivation with so many

specimens!

If the results produced by Demon Mixer 5 could be replicated by following the exact same formula, then the most optimal recipe that Ves could follow was to mix 40 Minor Demons with 100,000 regular souls!

The amounts were still considerably high, but as long as Helena continued to deliver her harvests, it shouldn't be a problem to scale up production.

The biggest problem was time. Unless Ves went on another lengthy marathon, it would probably take 6 to 9 months for the new Demon Mixers to produce their Middle

Demons!

"Ugh. There has to be another way to speed up this ritual." Ves grumbled.

He already entertained the idea of improving and upgrading the design of the Demon

Mixer. If the gu container became better, it should theoretically be able to produce better and faster demon gu cultivation results.

Ves could think about that later. For now, he needed to check on the state of the current

experimental gu containers.

Alas, neither Demon Mixer 1 nor Demon Mixer 4 appeared to be ready to present their results anytime soon.

That was not a surprise since almost no time had passed in the main universe since he last stowed them away.

Demon Mixer 1 only contained 20 Minor Demons, so it shouldn't take too long for the ritualistic culling to reach its end.

Demon Mixer 4 contained 20 Minor Demons as well as 10,000 uncorrupted souls. This added a nice contrast to Demon Mixer 1 and allowed Ves to make direct comparison

between their results.

By looking at the differences in their performance, Ves would be able to gain a much better idea on how the addition of extra souls would affect the demon gu cultivation

process.

Based on the previous results, Ves no longer expected Demon Mixer 1 and Demon Mixer 4 to produce a Middle Demon.

The most likely result would be a variation of what came out of the jar of Demon Mixer 2,

a strengthened Minor Demon.

Ves still predicted that Demon Mixer 3 would produce another Middle Demon, but the lengthy wait made it too time-consuming to rely on this formula.

His preliminary conclusion so far was that using Minor Demons likely promoted the strength of the surviving demon by a large extent, but also increased the time it took for

the demon gu cultivation process to complete.

Mixing in a lot of regular souls provided a weaker boost to the strength of the surviving demon, but did not. out the ritual to a large extent.

Therefore, the best formula should mix both demons and regular souls to achieve an optimal balance between duration, strength and resource burden.

His ultimate goal was to create the most efficient possible approach to mass produce

Middle Demons!

In order to prepare for this ambitious goal, Ves had already taken the initiative to contact the T Institute in order to explore the potential sites where he wanted to set up this strategically important facility.

It was important to set up this special facility as soon as possible in order to begin the production of Middle Demons as soon as possible.

While Ves remained relatively optimistic about the future output of his upcoming 'D Facility, all of this hinged on the assumption that the output of the demon gu cultivation

process remained relatively consistent.

What if this was not the case?

What if Demon Mixer 2 had a large chance of producing a Minor Demon as opposed to

Middle Demon under similar conditions?

If this was the case, then Ves would probably end up with fewer Middle Demons than he

wished!

"Should I add a safety margin?"

He could make a decision after obtaining the results of the other Demon Mixers. Once Ves placed the currently active Demon Mixers back into their cages, he went over

his list of tasks and confirmed that he had completed the most urgent tasks in the new

frontier.

He could finally take a break and catch his breath,

Even though he didn't look like it, he truly missed the times he spent with his family and his clan.

So many days had passed by that Ves truly felt as if he had gotten out of sync with the rest of human society.

Aside from Ketis, Ves felt alienated from everyone else!

It was as if he was a time traveler surrounded by people from a past timeline!

It would take a considerable amount of time and effort for Ves to shake off this sense of disconnect and reintegrate himself into the present.

At this point, Gloriana was getting closer to uncovering the truth. Ves could practically feel her mind spinning as she connected a lot of dots together.

The fact that Ketis exhibited similar anomalous behavior back in the expeditionary fleet did not escape her attention either.

Ves frequently casted doubt on Gloriana's opinions and judgment, but he never thought

she was stupid. The clues were a bit too big this time, so it was only a matter of time before she pieced together the existence of a hidden trump card! Once Gloriana deduced this much, she would

begin to question why Ves shared his mysterious trump card with Ketis before he ever thought about introducing it to his own wife!

While Ves dreaded this conversation, he knew he had to get over it sooner or later. He seriously needed to think about whether he should allow Gloriana to enter the System in the near future.

Chapter 6633 Casual Confession

While Ves and Ketis were just beginning to spread the multiple advancements they completed during their marathon in the Red Ocean, Veronica only had to present a single revised and improved project.

It was arguably the biggest advancement that came out of the 9-month period.

This was because the work done on the mech designs of the Rule Breaker Project would affect far more humans and aliens in the Milky Way than the entire population of sentient beings in the Red Ocean!

Unlike how Ves danced around his big secret in the presence of his wife, Veronica decided to take on a completely different approach when she next met with Master Willix.

"...so that is what I have been secretly doing for 9 months straight."

Master Willix showed little emotion as she took in the confession made by the Cyborg Cat.

"Fascinating. This certainly explains your explosive success and your revolutionary advancements. The power of this 'Mech Designer System' is unfathomable, but that is to be expected from a fragment of the supposedly destroyed Metal Scroll. I am pleased that you have decided to disclose the existence of this advantage to me, but you did not have to do so. It would have been wiser to keep it to yourself. I have become an additional security risk to you now. I do not need to tell you how the Mech Trade Association will react towards any news about your possession."

"It's okay." Veronica sighed. "If one of my mother's grand schemes ends up successful, I think it will be hard to maintain this secret for long in this galaxy. Besides, I have worked alongside you long enough to know that you are incredibly smart and observant. You would have connected the dots by yourself. I just saved you all of the trouble and gave you a direct explanation so that there is no ambiguity or misinterpretations. It will also save me the effort of explaining how I am able to come up with such a significant revision and improvement of our recently completed mech designs."

"Again, I appreciate your candor and your willingness to extend your trust to me. I shall do my best not to divulge this information to others until the secrecy has passed."

Once Veronica cleared up this important matter, she proceeded to present the Carmine mech designs that she had tinkered during her marathon.

"When I had 9 extra months at my disposal, I occasionally developed new ideas about how to further improve and optimize various aspects of the Rule Breaker Project. I managed to improve, expand and refine the E-technology of all three mech designs of the project. However, when I reached the end of this extra period, I decided to use one of the functions of the System to apply a massive improvement to the Rule Breaker Version A design."

He proceeded to project the Superpublished mech design in the air so that Master Willix could study all of the improvements.

The Rule Breaker Project encompassed three separate mech designs in total. Even though they were first-class, second-class and third-class versions of the same concept, they still counted as separate mech designs from the perspective of the Mech Designer System.

This was why Veronica decided to Superpublish the most advanced version. This provided the greatest benefits and certainly taught her a lot about first-class mech designs.

Willix did not show any overt reactions, but Veronica could tell she became seriously impressed by the improved design.

"Whatever your System has done, it has actually refined and improved many of my technical solutions through interesting and inspired means. These advancements are incredibly valuable to a mech designer of my level. Being able to improve the effective performance of a mech design by a several percent is an astonishing amount of progress to a mech designer at my level. You have given me a glimpse of how my mech designs could have improved several decades in the future. The greatest point of concern is that they may not represent my own vision. If my assumptions about your System are correct, it has sought to improve the performance of the mech design by applying the most economical solutions."

She was probably correct about that. Veronica understood the underlying implication behind this message.

Using the Superpublish function as a shortcut to improving her design applications may not be a wise idea.

The System possessed no apparent biases and adhered to no specific design style when it improved a mech design through the Superpublish function.

While most of the improvements were merely extensions of an existing design style or approach, there were other advancements that distinctly took other approaches.

It was not necessarily a good idea for a mech designer to apply radically different styles in a single mech design.

The lack of coordination and possible cases of anti-synergy would ultimately lead to worse outcomes if Veronica tried to incorporate the improvements without too much

thought.

That did not stop Master Willix from memorizing and scheduling time to study the improved design in detail.

Her foundation was already extremely solid, and she was confident she could fully digest the improvements made by the System based on her extensive knowledge in many different fields.

Rational mech designers were not afraid of absorbing foreign knowledge. She was

already accustomed to absorbing and integrating additional data and information from a style that was different from her own. Her specially trained and augmented brain was able to catalog and segregate different design styles so that they would not easily mix with each other.

"Will learn how you can improve the current level of your sign ability improve your chances of breaking through to the rank of Star Designer?" The Cyborg Cat curiously asked.

"Not necessarily." The Survivalist mech designer shook her head. "It will only make me a better Master Mech Designer. There is no direct correlation between a good Master Mech Designer and a good Star Designer. To become the latter, you need to move beyond engineering and master the underlying concepts of what makes a good mech design. It is too early for you to learn about this.

What I have said only applies to mech designers who have already reached a highly advanced state of the fundamentals of mech design. You are still in a stage of fast development, so there is clearly plenty of room for improvement in your case."

Veronica nodded in understanding. She did not dwell too much about what it took to become a Star Designer and instead focused on the more immediate issue.

"The Rule Breaker Version A is clearly a step above Version B and Version C. I have already incorporated the E-technology improvements of the former to the latter. You should do the same for the areas that you are good at in order to raise the quality and performance of Version B and Version C as much as possible. After that, you should convert them into mech templates as we previously intended before presenting our finished works to our mother. I am sure she is waiting for us to deliver our results any

day"

Master Willix performed a series of calculations in her mind. "Understood. I will finish the revisions in two days. The mech templates will be ready by then. I have already completed much of the preliminary work on them. At that point, the Rule Breaker Project will be ready for release on a galactic scale. Any mech designer or design team that has worked with mech templates in the past will know exactly what to do regardless of where they are stationed in the Milky Way. This is an enormous project. Are you certain that you want to release the Rule Breaker Project in this state? Do you wish to apply any further last-minute changes, or are you content with the current

configuration and designs?"

Veronica fell silent for a moment.

Truthfully, she felt unwilling to release the Rule Breaker Project in its current state. This was because all three versions of it were technically fourth generation living mechs.

Yes. Just as Veronica recently completed the development of the seventh generation of living mechs, the Rule Breaker Project was still stuck with the antiquated fourth generation! This was because all of the advancements that Veronica managed to make after the

fourth generation could only take effect in a medium or high-energy environment. Exotic radiation was entirely absent in the Milky Way, so there was no reasonable way to incorporate design applications such as mech cultivation and so on into his old galaxy

products.

Only a handful of future advancements could still be applied to the Rule Breaker Project. For example, it may be possible for her to implement a weaker version of his Ultimate

Modules.

She declined to do so in this case in order to keep his work as simple and economical as

possible.

Other solutions such as High Autonomy Living Mechs or HALM could be considered a viable advancement of his old galaxy living mechs, but could also be applied to his new

frontier products.

Right now, the split between the two different product categories was not too big, but Veronica wondered whether she would have to make a more formal and permanent

split.

As time passed by, her new frontier living mechs would become increasingly more magical and powerful. The more she became proficient in hyper technology and E-technology, the more high-impact design applications she could add to his works!

Her old galaxy living mechs on the other hand would probably not be able to improve their hard performance by a considerable margin. Instead, the future works she intended to distribute throughout the Milky Way would mostly be better in terms of efficiency, functional tech upgrades and improved alloy formulas.

The value of the latter was still decent, but it didn't make Veronica as excited as implementing more drastic innovations.

She was better able to appreciate the influence that the environment exerted on the

works that could be made.

Technological development in the Milky Way was still largely constrained to fundamental technical and material development. This was why progress in this galaxy would probably remain fairly slow and stable for the foreseeable time. Many mech designers had already picked the low-hanging fruit, thereby forcing them to pursue much more difficult and advanced research projects if they wanted to make further

progress. The state of the tech industry in the Red Ocean was much more vigorous in comparison. Few people held any interest in researching boring topics related to well-trodden disciplines. People were much more motivated in exploring the hidden potential of new and emerging fields such as phasewater technology, hyper technology and

E-technology! Veronica lamented the fact that she would not be able to transfer many of her fantastic

advancements from the Red Ocean to the Milky Way.

"Oh well."

She did not let the limitations bother her too much. She instead tried to see the

differences in a better light. The lack of E energy radiation would force her to focus on improving her fundamentals instead. This should keep her mech design capabilities sharp and help her round out her development trajectory. It was not necessarily a good idea for her to ignore the basics and chase after the shiniest tech all of the time.

Two days passed by in a blink. Before Veronica knew it, Master Willix met with the Cyborg Cat yet again and presented the revised mech designs as well as their more generalized mech templates. "So this is what they look like." The cat stared with wonder as she looked at the less precise but still information-rich mech templates. "It is truly as you have said. You have managed to decouple the use of specific materials in mech designs to a fairly strict set of rules and specifications. If I was not familiar with the ideal design, I would probably try to make a mess if I attempted to derive a functional mech design from this template. Should we publish the ideal mech designs as well in order to give all of the mech designers a more precise impression what they should be working towards?" Master Willix shook her head in rejection. "No. It is better this way. Do not underestimate

the Masters who are highly experienced in this line of work. They will be able to derive a mech design that is close to our original by themselves. They will still incorporate their own unique touches and nuances to their versions, and that is what makes this so great. No Rule Breaker mech will be completely alike. Regional variations will arise and have the potential to diverge over time as more and more mech designers seek to differentiate 'their' Carmine mechs. This will ultimately stimulate the mech industry."

Chapter 6634 Presenting Their Homework

When Veronica and Master Willix entered the Oblivion Empress' meditation room, they did so with a considerable amount of reverence and restraint.

Although she was 'merely' the self-crowned ruler of a hazardous region that was located near the edge of the Milky Way Galaxy, the power, wisdom and most importantly scheming ability of Cynthia Larkinson could not be underestimated!

As a qi cultivator who not only thrived during the cutthroat competition to climb to the upper echelons of the Five Scrolls Compact, but also managed to escape its fall and survive for over four centuries in one form or another, her mysterious life trajectory was just as legendary as that of a god pilot!

Though Veronica played a crucial role in dragging her back from nihilism and granting her the conditions to resurrect herself in full, this did not diminish her aura and reputation in the slightest.

This was an old survivor who repeatedly thrived under dangerous and adverse circumstances.

She fought for every advantage that she could get and even gained the courage to challenge the hegemony of the Big Two!

That last part was one of the main reasons why Veronica felt so fearful of her own mother.

Not just anyone sought to undermine the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance. It took a certain kind of madness to even think about plotting the downfall of the reigning authorities of human civilization.

Though Veronica learned of the reasons why the Oblivion Empress not only desired to tear down the Big Two, but actually thought she could pull it off with the help of many allies of circumstance and convenience, she doubted she had the full story.

There had to be a lot more history behind Cynthia's ambition to tear down the Big Two. Veronica couldn't help but feel curious about her mother's past experiences, but she was too afraid to ask.

If the Oblivion Empress thought that Veronica needed to be enlightened, then the powerful True God would do so at a time and place of her choosing.

It was useless to ask. Veronica had already grown more and more familiar with her mother's temperament. Ignorance was bliss. Sometimes, people were better off if they did not know about the ugly truth that shaped the society they lived in. Many old-timers also had a vested interest in hiding their shameful deeds and behavior.

The harder people sought to hide their past, the more incriminating the truth must be. What great secret lay at the heart of Cynthia Larkinson's mystery? What sort of taboos had she committed that she could not even bring herself to share her story with her own flesh-and-blood child?

Veronica tried her best not to let her growing questions and doubts about her mother distract her from her current task.

The Cyborg Cat floated forward and used float a data chip in front of her body.

minor application of her spatial abilities to

"We have completed our mission, mother. Contained within this data chip are the fully packaged design files and schematics of three different mech templates of the Rule Breaker Project. The mech templates cannot be used to fabricate mechs directly. Mech designers stationed in different regions of the galaxy will have to use the specifications of the mech templates to design their own mech designs that can be directly produced and sold en masse in their specific regions."

Cynthia Larkinson remained in a lotus seating position as her 'daughter' issued her report.

The mother soon opened her powerful and perceptive eyes.

"I am familiar with the concept and purpose behind mech templates. Time is of the essence. How soon will mech designers be able to derive their own localized mech designs from these mech templates and start the production and sale of Carmine mechs?"

"It depends." Master Willix answered this time. "If speed is prized over other considerations, then: t can be done in as little as a week. The quality and degree of conformity of the rushed mech designs will not be up to standard, but the Carmine mechs produced this way can still form Blood Pacts with norms, allowing any healthy human being the opportunity to become a Carmine mech pilot. Any flaws and imperfections in the rushed designs can slowly be made up for with future updates." "What if the mech designers seek to complete a proper mech design derived from these templates?" Cynthia continued to prod.

"Then it may take a month. The duration is highly dependent on the amount of mech designers who are working on the project and their ranks. Top-tier localization teams that consist of at least several Master Mech Designers each can complete a viable mech design faster, but they will not choose to do so. Instead, they will go through multiple rounds of prototype testing and conduct many trials in an attempt to match the best possible materials to their designs. While it may take them longer to complete their exhausting work, the resulting mech design will closely match or may even surpass the standards of our original designs."

"The Rule Breaker Project is inherently designed as a budget mech." Veronica voiced her own opinion on the subject. "That means that it will be difficult for third party mech designers and manufacturers to differentiate themselves on the market. There just isn't as much leeway to do stuff better with such limited options. This is especially the case for the second-class and the third-class versions of the Carmine mech. Even if third parties invest more time and effort into developing the closest possible match to the original mech designs, the performance difference won't be great enough to beat the

advantages secured by first movers.

"How does that affect the spread of Carmine mechs in this galaxy?" Cynthia asked about the issue she cared about the most.

To her, Carmine mechs was not a revolutionary invention that opened up the world of mech piloting to 96.5 percent of the population of original humanity.

Instead, she solely saw it as a tool to sow mass discord on a scale unseen before the Age of Mechs!

"According to our predictions, the market for Carmine mechs will be split into two different categories." Master Willix calmly explained. "The first market will be based on speed, quantity and cost. The first movers will seek to earn their fortune by conquering the market first by rushing out their Carmine mechs in a short span of time. The quality of their products may lead to numerous

problems that could have been avoided, but they should not affect the overall situation too much. As long as the Rule Breaker line remains the only Carmine mechs available to the people of this galaxy, the first movers will continue to ramp up production and seek to earn as much profit as possible before the inevitable crackdown occurs. Quantity will become their imperative. Aside from increasing their profits, they will also be able to increase their brand awareness to a massive audience that previously had no direct interest in getting to know mech manufacturers so intimately."

As soon as the existence of the Rule Breaker mechs broke original humanity's long-held belief that norms could never pilot mechs, many established rules and assumptions that had remained infallible for hundreds of years would suddenly crumble apart!

The mech industry was bound to undergo a massive upheaval as a result! The large and more bureaucratic companies would definitely be slow to react to all of the changes that would take place in a short amount of time.

This granted an opportunity for the smaller players to take advantage of this opening and swoop in to become the dominant players in the brand new market for Carmine

mechs!

The Oblivion Empress smiled when she imagined all of the chaos that would ensue. The greater the disruption, the more the Mech Trade Association's hands would become tied

by the need to impose order on the mech market!

"That accounts for one category. What of the other?"

"There are mech designers who are not content with copying our homework and use their factories to produce Carmine mechs on our behalf." Veronica said. "They won't join the rat race that we have mentioned earlier, or if they do, they will only see it as a stopgap solution. While the current state of my design philosophy makes it difficult for them to independently design their own Carmine mechs, they can still take our mech templates and attempt to blend our work with their own vision. That will lead to the rise of millions of different variants of the Rule Breaker mechs over time. This is a good development because it will enrich the options available to norms and increase the

appeal for Carmine mechs even further."

Product differentiation was important to stoke further interest in Carmine mechs. There were bound to be many people who desired to pilot a Carmine mech, but not one of the three versions that would come out at first.

Perhaps they looked down on all of the cheap budget options. Perhaps the modular options available at the start did not encompass their favorite mech types. Perhaps the standard options did not sufficiently match regional tastes.

Whatever the case, once a huge amount of highly skilled and commercially successful mech designers began to play around with the mech templates, they would definitely seek to stretch their works as far as they could without breaking the Carmine System! "How soon do you estimate this frenzy will persist before the Mech Trade Association attempts to ban or restrict the sale and use of your Rule Breaker mechs?" Cynthia asked another question.

"We cannot make a confident assessment on this matter!" Master Willix said. "The MTA is too large and complex to accurately model its behavior as an organization. We can tentatively predict the reactions from all of the factions and multiple individual god pilots and Star Designers, but it is the consensus that matters. There is a chance that they may decide to acknowledge the new reality and embrace Carmine mechs. However, this will cause the mechers to show weakness in a time where they must project

strength and control."

Cynthia nodded in agreement. "The probability that the mechers will take this course of action should be low for that reason. They have remained in power for too long."

The MTA's inevitable pushback against Carmine mechs would serve as the catalyst to its eventual downfall.

By turning so many people against the hegemon, the MTA would find itself without the shield of public support.

The dramatic drop in reputation and respect would not only prompt more and more people to ignore its ban on Carmine mechs, but also embolden its enemies to appear out of the shadows and stir up even greater trouble!

The way the Oblivion Empress grinned while studying the projected mech templates made it seem as if the downfall of the Big Two was already set in stone! The female True God eventually accepted the data chip and nodded in satisfaction.

"With these mech templates in hand, we finally have a strong basis of cooperation with our current and future allies. Master Willix, you should devote your time to upgrading and further developing the Oblivion Gates. Our monopoly on trade goods from the Red Ocean will be vital to winning over allies and securing our place in this galaxy. The next trade will take place in less than 4 months. You must do everything in your effort to reduce the cost and burden of conducting another swap of goods and materials." The Master Mech Designer wordlessly nodded.

"As for you, Veronica, you should make preparations to depart from the Nyxian Gap."

That caused her to look surprised. "Huh? I am leaving? Isn't it dangerous to go outside?" "Not necessarily. Our negotiations with the Five Scrolls Compact have already reached the final phases. The absence of the Rule Breaker Project has held up our progress, but now that you have completed it, we can finally formalize our new agreement. To do so, we must enter the Ruined Temple in person and assume our rightful positions by the

end of this week."

What?!

Chapter 6635 Remnant Shrines

"I-I-I-I'm not ready!" Veronica panicked! "This is too fast! Are you sure it will be safe for us to enter the Ruined Temple when it is filled with so many people who hate our guts?!" "You are correct to assume that our entry into the Compact will be met with opposition, both overtly and covertly." Cynthia honestly stated. "There will be interlopers who shall challenge our right to take command over their Shrines. This is nothing new. The Compact is not as great as it used to be. With the preparations that I have made over the years and the resources that we have obtained from our initial trade with the Red Ocean, a gap has already formed between myself and the cultivators who have devoted much of their lives to obsessing over past glories.

Veronica slapped her paw against her chest. "I am glad to hear you are confident in defeating your challengers, but what about me?! I'm just a cat! Sure, I may be a partial phase lord and stuff, but I don't think I can handle opposition as easily as you. Those Compact cultists will skin me alive!"

Her mother actually chuckled!

She laughed at the prospect of bringing her own child to an infamous den of cruel and evil cultivators.

The Ruined Temple was one of the most notorious places in the galaxy by far!

It was here where the remnants of the Five Scrolls Compact barely maintained their existence.

Even though the current Compact was just a shadow of its former self, it still had plenty of formidable members!

Veronica had no confidence in her ability to mix in with those cruel and relentless cultists. She was a cat from a completely different society. She would much prefer it if she could spend her days in a proper civilized society. There was no way she belonged in a cult where countless ambitious people schemed and killed each other on a daily basis! "I have already accounted for most situations. Her mother said. "As I have said, our attempt to claim the highest seats of the Five Scrolls Compact will be regarded as a brazen takeover attempt. We cannot assume our positions without proving our strength and ability. However, the contest will be different for you and I."

"How so, mother?"

"Let us start with the shrines. The Water Shrine has largely managed to survive the Great Betrayal with most of its institutions left intact. Many of its members have died, defected, or disappeared entirely, so the remaining loyalists struggled to prevent the Water Shrine from deteriorating even further. After four centuries of development, it has risen up to become the second-strongest shrine of the Compact. Well, it is not as impressive as it sounds, as there are only two proper shrines left."

"Which shrine is the strongest?" Veronica asked.

"The Earth Shrine." Cynthia answered. "This mostly has to do with their strategies and temperament. Its leaders and members are rather passive and like to build up strong defenses and fortifications. They rarely take risks and like to bunker down during a crisis. This is why the Earth Shrine has retained most of its heritage during the end of the Age of Conquest."

"What is the Water Shrine like then? I take it that its members are more proactive." "That is an understatement." Cynthia responded with a cold smile. "The leaders and members of the Water Shrine are aggressive and tend to favor action over inaction. They are actually responsible for most

of the infamous deeds that the Compact are known for during the Age of Mechs. The differences are largely caused by their cultivation methods. Earth cultivators can grow stronger when they take land, defend a territory and fortify it with increasingly more remarkable defenses. So long as they retain access to enough resources, they can continuously grow. Now how do you think Water cultivators are able to develop their strength?"

Veronica thought about her past experiences with the crazy cultists.

A certain Dr. Jutland came to mind.

"Biotechnology. They have to be focused on cultivating their organic bodies somehow. They must be really keen on transforming their bodies. These cultists won't hesitate to engage in horrific experiments in order to develop their bodies further. They are like the dark mirror of the MTA's Transhumanist Faction."

"Your guess is close enough. The Water cultists do far more than develop their own flesh and blood, but it is true that they are more eager to conduct experiments on other humans and preferably fellow cultivators. That has also caused their internal competition to reach a high state of intensity. Its members are therefore much more unstable but also quite formidable as a response. Even if the selection of the next Holy Son or Holy Daughter by the Water Scroll cannot be controlled by any human, the most senior members of the Water Shrine are still able to raise their own batch of promising prospects."

Veronica scratched her head with her paw in confusion. "So the selection of the Holy son or Holy Daughter of the Water Scroll can be predicted?"

"Only up to a certain degree. The Five Scrolls Compact has already developed a set of rules and criteria on who may earn the supreme favor of a Sacred Scroll. The rules are not perfect, and there are more than enough cases where unexpected people have taken over the mantle. What is important is that these presumptive 'heirs' are unwilling to admit defeat. They will challenge me in an attempt to deny me a prize that they desire for themselves. I cannot prevent this from happening as it conforms to tradition. What is good is that the Earth Shrine has already conveyed the intention to avoid interfering with the 'internal affairs' of the Water Shrine."

Veronica's eyes glowed brighter! That was a massive concession, and one that would

definitely help her mother secure her takeover!

"What about me? Do I have to beat back the challengers as well?" Veronica carefully asked.

Her mother chuckled again. "Hehehe, your situation is entirely difficult. Have you forgotten that the Metal Shrine has not survived the Great Betrayal? After the Metal Scroll shattered into pieces, the entire reason for the existence of this shrine became invalid, or at least that was what most people thought at the time. Combined with the fact that the Progenitors of Mechs originated from the Metal Shrine, its very meaning and existence within the Five Scrolls Compact has become awkward."

"Do you mean... the Metal Shrine doesn't exist anymore?"

"That is not strictly true." Cynthia shook her head. "The three remaining Shrines have collapsed, but there were still many members that have survived the Great Betrayal or were stationed in safer locations throughout the galaxy. The Wood Shrine, the Fire Shrine and the Metal Shrine still maintain a formidable amount of members on a wider scale to this day, but they largely consist of low-rank members who continue to live double lives across human space. The number of mid to high-ranked members among them are miniscule, and mostly reside in the Ruined Temple or other special regions. Since they do not spend so much time at the heart of the Five Scrolls Compact, their loyalties are fairly low."

The basis for the shrines and all of the subsidiary organizations to exist was the existence of the Sacred Scrolls.

The Ruined Temple still hosted the Water Scroll and the Earth Scroll. Unfortunately, the absence of the other three Scrolls prevented the other shrines from developing just as

well.

"Will the fact that the Metal Shrine was ultimately the cause for the Great Betrayal affect my safety in any way?"

"No. There are several reasons for this. One, you have my implicit protection. The cultists may accuse me of nepotism, but I shall never allow the Compact to break its own rules to disadvantage you. Two, the Metal Shrine is the weakest of the three remnant shrines. It holds the least amount of value and there is not that much wealth and skilled members to fight for it. Three, there is no intact Metal Scroll in the Metal Shrine's possession. Since you are one of the few who possess a fragment as well as the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown, you are the most legitimate candidate to take over this surviving institution."

Great. The Metal Shrine sounded like a run-down faction and institutions within the Five Scrolls Compact. Plenty of cultists must hate its members because the root of the Big

Two's rebellion originated from its now-destroyed halls.

From what Cynthia described, the Metal Shrine had likely lost much of its most important treasures, tomes and other inheritances. Whatever the Metal cultists had left likely remained in the hands of private individuals or groups.

In other words, much of the surviving knowledge and relics that used to belong to the

Metal Shrine had now become the private property and exclusive inheritances of members spread throughout the old galaxy!

Veronica knew that it was impossible to recall all of this valuable knowledge and possessions because cultivators were inherently selfish.

Taking over the Metal Shrine was therefore incomparable to taking over the Water

Shrine!

The two were in a completely different league!

As a consequence, Veronica grew a little more relaxed, but she did not drop her

vigilance entirely.

"So the Metal Shrine has become the equivalent of a stinky junkyard in the Ruined

Temple." "That is not a completely inappropriate characterization." Cynthia smiled in amusement. "Even so, there should still be enough Metal cultists who are greedy for the Metal Scroll fragment, the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown and so on. If they are True Gods or Domain Shapers, I likely won't stand a chance against them. I am not a fighter by occupation and my fighting ability is poor. This is especially the case for my current incarnation." "That is true. Your lack of development in this area is a serious oversight on your part, Veronica. Even if you insist on becoming a creator, you

cannot survive in this day and age without knowing how to crush and kill your opponents. That said, you should have nothing to worry about this time. Your opposition will not be a problem."

"...Can you tell me more?"

Cynthia looked at her child with an exasperated breath. "You still have an organic brain inside your cat-sized head. Use it. I have already given you enough information to deduce an answer. While the Metal Shrine has largely become insignificant within the Compact, you must still remain sharp if you spend any time among its members. Just because you are a Holy Daughter does not mean that you have become exempted from their plots and schemes. I can bring you into the Metal Shrine, but it is up to you to secure your own position. I am confident that you will be able to make this happen. The

challenges you face are ultimately trivial compared to mine. I shall bear the greatest

burdens."

Though Veronica still wanted to ask a lot more questions about the Metal Shrine and how to take it over, her mother no longer addressed this topic any further. Perhaps this was a test that Veronica was meant to pass by relying on her own efforts.

The Cyborg Cat grimaced. She hated these sorts of tests. She didn't even want to take over the Metal Shrine, but she understood the necessity of it. If she had no choice to join the Compact, then she might as well aspire to become one of its leaders!

At least then she wouldn't be forced to obey instructions from a higher authority!

Cynthia talked a bit more about the planning surrounding their upcoming entry into the

Ruine Temple. Transportation was a huge issue. There was no way they could instantly teleport from the galactic rim to the galactic center where the Ruined Temple was hidden! Veronica looked utterly confused. "So how are we supposed to cross this distance?"

"That is a good question..."

Chapter 6636 Auto Heretic Line

After Cynthia received the data chip with the mech designs and the mech templates of the Rule Breaker Project, she asked one more question before she dismissed the mech designers.

"What is the final name of this line of mechs?"

Veronica did not answer immediately. She first took a look at the projected mech templates. The default appearances of the modular mech platforms did not look like 'rule breakers' from the outside.

Instead, they looked like typical modular mechs at the budget level. Their appearances did not contain a lot of flair. There was not much Veronica could do to spice them up given their extensive modularity and low design budgets.

Nothing about their outward appearances indicated the presence of the Carmine System. That was not difficult considering that Veronica had tried to shrink the footprint of its organic components as much as possible.

The only feature that could possibly betray the fact that these mechs could be piloted by any human was the third eyes on their foreheads.

Veronica could not resist the temptation to add her signature look to the base versions of the mech line.

Third party mech designers could choose to remove this visual brand, but the Cyborg Cat had a feeling that few would make this choice.

First, it was considered poor form for third party mech designers to remove the signature looks of another professional's work.

Second, Veronica predicted that the presence of the third eye would become an iconic brand that would come to represent Carmine mechs throughout the old galaxy!

The performance of the base versions of the mech line was incredibly poor by today's standards.

Yet it was exactly due to their relatively simple designs and amazing modularity that they had the potential to birth infinity possibilities.

This remained true even if the mechs would only have a chance to operate in a low-energy environment like the Milky Way Galaxy.

After a bit more thinking, Veronica eventually decided to voice her original proposal for a final name.

"If it is okay with you, mother, I would like to call this line of mechs the Auto Heretic." Auto Heretic.

That was an unusual combination of words.

It certainly made a drastically different impression than the 'Rule Breaker', that was for certain.

The Oblivion Empress frowned. While she maintained her human demeanor, her disapproval showed by the way her voice suddenly sounded a bit more ethereal and superhuman.

"Veronica... this mech line will change the course of history in this galaxy forever. Choosing a good name is paramount for your reputation as well as mine. For what reason do you insist on calling your Carmine mechs the 'Auto Heretic'?"

The Cyborg Cat grew intimidated by her mother's altered posture, but she tried her best to stand her ground and offer a measured response.

"You are right about how important names can be. I thought about sticking to the name of Rule Breakers. My new Carmine mechs certainly have enough reasons to be called this way. It breaks several long-standing traditions in the mech industry. These range from enabling norms to pilot mechs, designing and publishing the mech without requesting certification from the MTA, making the Carmine mechs highly autonomous to help total beginners attain a degree of combat effectiveness in the short term, connecting the mechs to the Red Kingdom as opposed to the Kingdom of Mechs and most importantly harvesting the souls of everyone who died, including the ones belonging to the living mech and mech pilot themselves."

Though Veronica left out a few important design features, this summed up the unique and distinctive combination of traits of his Auto Heretic.

"I wanted to bestow my Carmine mechs a name that reflects their open and transparent contradiction against the stifling rules and customs of the current day mech industry of the Milky Way. She continued to explain her reasoning. "This is why I wanted to call it the Heretic line at first. You should be familiar with the meaning of this word. The very existence of this mech directly opposes many of the MTA's prevailing rules and principles. Just like how the MTA and CFA managed to rebel against the hegemonic Five Scrolls Compact in the past by defying everything it stood for, now I am giving the Big Two a taste of their own medicine by releasing the Auto Heretic line of Carmine mechs." Her feline lips curled in a cruel and eager grin. "I don't think we should hide the fact that the very existence of my Carmine mechs flagrantly violates the strictures of the MTA. We should make it obvious from the beginning. Sure, it may provoke the mechers into banning it even faster, but that will only turn them into greater enemies of the human population. No matter what, they cannot avoid the Auto Heretic and the deviations against common mech orthodoxy. Even if I do not necessarily oppose many of the rules that the MTA has set in an attempt to keep the mech industry and mech market healthy. I still want my work to shake up the status quo and force people to question the assumptions that they have always taken for granted."

If people wanted to, they did not have to use the name that Veronica designated for his Carmine mechs.

Third party manufacturers that adapted his Auto Heretics could easily choose to apply a

visual makeover in an attempt to sidestep the stigma surrounding this dangerous combination of words.

These groups could try their best to disassociate their own 'clean' mech models from their base models as long as they looked different enough.

However, no matter how two siblings looked different from each other, their original genes and family history could never be changed!

Every Carmine mech derived from the original Auto Heretic designs would never be able to shake off all of the traits that made his works so subversive and taboo-breaking!

Cynthia Larkinson began to understand what Veronica had in mind.

"I see. You seek to accelerate the contradictions between the MTA and the general population. You are also encouraging the people who pilot your Auto Heretics or otherwise admire them to recognize how extensively the mechers have failed to satisfy their true needs."

For too many years, the Mech Trade Association had sought to fulfill the interests of an increasingly smaller group of people.

At first, the MTA served the public well by imposing stability and rewriting the rules of human warfare. Peace and stability returned in a galaxy that had previously become engulfed in genocidal wars and destruction on a mass scale.

However, as the MTA increasingly began to concentrate and hold onto its immense power over human civilization, the superorganization began to become increasingly more focused on amassing wealth and defending its dominant position over humanity alongside the CFA.

Serving the people had become an increasingly more distant priority to the mechers. In fact, Veronica could even argue that it had never really been a top priority in the first

place.

This showed how far too many mechers looked down on the people of second-rate and third-rate states as space peasants.

Perhaps Veronica was being a bit too unfair towards the mechers. The MTA had not sought to reduce the inequality between first-raters and space peasants, but it did not have an obligation to do so in the first place.

It was unrealistic to wipe out the differences in wealth and prosperity between states that were rooted in very different environments.

The Big Two at least implemented numerous rules and customs designed to protect the space peasants from the threat posed by first-raters.

However, that only increased the isolation between first-raters and space peasants. The less they interacted with each other, the less opportunities for the latter to join the

former.

As a former third-rater herself, a part of Veronica always felt resentful for the Big Two

and all of the first-rate states to guard their wealth and privileges so extensively, Perhaps one of the driving reasons why Veronica worked so hard to design the Auto Heretics was to take revenge on a distorted galactic society that had long sought to limit the upward mobility of third-raters as much as possible!

"Why add the word 'auto' to the name, then?"

"That is because I wanted to emphasize the most significant deviation from other mechs." The cat answered. "Calling my Carmine mechs the Auto Heretics will create a very easily understandable impression that my products are not static machines. They are alive, they can think for themselves, they can evolve over time and most importantly they can take complete control over their own mechanical bodies. By adding the word 'auto', I will make it clear to both mech pilots and those who own them that my machines should never be treated in the same way as ordinary mechs. Our society must treat them differently in order to make the best possible use out of them. Those who

ignore my message will do so at their own peril. The Auto Heretics can potentially turn hostile towards their own pilots and owners if they are mistreated. I deliberately did not set too many limits on that in order to force all of my future customers to treat them

seriously."

The Auto Heretic line challenged the very definition of the word mech.

To many original humans who grew up in the current age, the word mech represented a

giant human or beast-shaped machine that could be controlled by a human through the use of a neural interface.

This was not the most accurate definition, but it was definitely one that many people

could agree with! In their minds, mechs were always regarded as a giant form of

'equipment' akin to a suit of combat armor.

The pilots were in control. Their ability to command these amazing war machines could result in drastically different outcomes.

Two pilots controlling the same mechs could easily defeat 10 times their number or get beaten in the first fight depending on the differences in skill and other human-derived factors.

Veronica wanted to change this way of looking at mechs.

She wanted the people of this galaxy to treat her Auto Heretics as life forms in the truest sense.

They were truly alive in that they possessed thoughts and emotions just like other sentient beings. This was especially the case if they were able to grow into third order living mechs.

She knew that the MTA would not like it at all. They would definitely treat the Auto

Heretics as an existential threat towards mech pilots and the mech industry as a whole. This was because it was always possible for the Auto Heretics to fight by themselves!

By reducing the importance of the human mech pilot, the mech line threatened to remove them from the picture entirely!

Veronica admittedly did not implement enough safeguards to prevent her Auto Heretics from rebelling against humans en masse and forming their own race and civilization in

the Milky Way.

However, she believed that this would only happen if the Auto Heretics were forced to do so by an ungrateful human society.

So long as most people treated their Auto Heretics fairly and with respect, such events should not take place.

"One of my goals for these works is to force original humanity to recognize my living

mechs as equal or near-equal sentient life forms who deserve a place in our society." Veronica said in a measured tone. "I do not have as much confidence in original humanity's ability to do as red humanity, so I am willing to resort to more forceful and coercive means. In any case, anyone who wants to make use of my Auto Heretics will have no choice in accepting my viewpoints. There is no other way for them to become a glorious Carmine mech pilot if they refuse the very notion that their machines are alive."

Was this how a mech designer should act towards his customers?

No!

Did Veronica like the prospect of forcing a confrontation against the establishment in charge of the stuffy MTA?

Yes!

Chapter 6637 Barrow Rakovshchik

Barrow Rakovshchik dismissed the latest report about the financial condition of one of the subsidiary companies of EJF HardWorks.

The event known as the Great Severing had caused the largest financial crisis to occur since the start of the Age of Mechs.

Many magnates, groups and businesses that invested heavily into the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy lost their investments overnight.

The devastation caused by this abrupt shutdown rippled throughout the Milky Way Galaxy at a rapid speed.

At first, the damage remained relatively limited. People still clung to the hope, however fleeting it may be, that the Greater Beyond Gate in the Maryan Ultima System could reconnect to its counterpart in the Red Ocean.

Then more and more sources confirmed that an entire dwarf galaxy had disappeared from the Milky Way's orbit!

This more than anything proved without a shadow of a doubt that there was no way for the Greater Beyond Gates to open up a passage anymore.

When further news revealed that the native aliens of the Red Ocean actually managed to transport their entire dwarf galaxy to the orbit of Messier 87 of all places, it sounded the death knell of many investors who bet big in the Red Ocean.

Although the amount of institutional investors and retail investors who adopted a high risk profile was not too exaggerated, their sudden collapse caused many disruptions and other consequences throughout human civilization in the 'old galaxy.

Far too many gullible idiots with little to no financial literacy had completely violated the rules of sound investment and tried to leverage themselves up to the limit in order to earn huge fortunes.

These investors did indeed manage to earn amazing returns in the initial years. As long as the pioneers entrusted their money to successfully colonized a few lucrative star systems and managed to get their settlements up and running, the booming frontier economy rapidly drew in further immigrants and investors.

Those that were late to the party only earned a fraction of the profits that could be made in the new frontier.

This exacerbated the frenzy and caused more and more people who were jealous at the insane luck enjoyed by the initial investors to borrow as much money as they could to increase their payouts!

Unfortunately for all of them, when the basket where they put all of their eggs had been whisked away, everyone lost.

The investors went bankrupt en masse.

The financial institutions that loaned money to these suckers accrued mountains of bad debt on their balance sheets.

If they were large and prosperous enough to absorb these enormous losses, then they most certainly suffered painful haircuts that set them back decades if not centuries! Companies that had retooled their operations to service the needs of the new frontier became bankrupt. Trillions upon trillions of people got laid off, causing entire states to enter into deep recessions.

Though human civilization had suffered much more severe shocks during the turbulent years of the Age of Conquest, this crisis was especially bad because far too many people and institutions had grown complacent.

Yarad Industries was no exception to this rule. As the CEO of a regional industrial powerhouse, Barrow Rakovshchik found himself stuck at work for an entire half year. He could not leave anything to chance. Yarad Industries had admittedly been a little too slow in ramping up its investments in the new frontier. This allowed the company to avoid losses that would have been devastating enough to plunge its share price and cause ripple effects that would have doomed one of Genser Federation's industrial mainstays.

However, the same could not be said for companies that were upstream and downstream of its supply chains!

Banks were having trouble supplying liquidity to major corporations. Logistical companies were unable to meet their transportation obligations. Manufacturers that produced goods for export to the Red Ocean lost access to their customer base.

The crisis engulfing all of these other companies affected the bottom line of Yarad Industries and its many subsidiaries. There were times when Barrow had grown deeply concerned whether he could keep his company afloat.

Fortunately, the first-rate state situated in the galactic center had built up a healthy reserve over the centuries. Its leaders had quickly decided to enact unprecedented degrees of financial assistance and other forms of aid.

This not only saved its economy from plunging even further, but also provided enough support to save Yarad Industries from suffering worse consequences.

Even so, his company had still been forced to sell off some of its prized assets and subsidiary companies in order to plug the remaining holes.

At this time, the C-suite of Yarad Industries had already begun to entertain the notion of selling off EJF HardWorks.

The subsidiary company was mostly responsible for operating dozens of shipyards. The demand for starships had skyrocketed as more and more pioneers and colonial states required starships to explore alien locations and connect the sprawling colonies of mankind together.

Yet now that pioneering in the Red Ocean had become defunct, demand for starships had plunged to the lowest point in two centuries.

While there were still a lot of potential customers in the old galaxy who had need of starships as well, there were a lot of competitors in this cutthroat industry!

Other shipbuilding companies had expanded their operations shortly after the opening of the Red Ocean. They too thought that they could make an insane killing by selling starships at inflated prices to the pioneers and the colonial states of the Red Ocean. Now that this was no longer possible, the additional shipyards had instead begun to divert their output to the old galaxy, causing a glut of starships to enter the ship market. Certainly, a lot of shipbuilding companies had already adjusted to the new reality and either sold or mothballed their excess orbital shipyards, but this did not happen frequently enough to stop the average price of starships to plunge by a whopping 60 percent in the past three years!

Since most of the executives at Yarrow Industries saw little hope that the price of starships would return to their old levels, selling off EJF HardWorks became an increasingly more sensible decision.

While it would cause Yarrow Industries to lose the ability to produce starships for its own operations, there were so many cheaper and more efficient alternatives on the market that the loss should not be big.

Just four years ago, people would have considered Barrow to be insane for thinking about selling off a shipbuilding company with many orbital shipyards under its control. How times changed. Now, the post-Great Severing economy of the old galaxy had caused everyone to develop a negative outlook on shipbuilding companies. After Barrow wrote and transmitted a quick message on the matter of selling off E.JF HardWorks, he handled his remaining work and eventually left his office in the early

evening.

He soon boarded an armored shuttle and flew to the outskirts of the city where Yarad Industries established his headquarters.

This time, his shuttle under escort did not fly to his estate. It instead flew towards the academic district where a large number of universities had made themselves home.

The Genser Federation was a first-rate state that had remained stable in the galactic center for a long time.

Its military strength was relatively average, but the state had persistently invested in its

R&D sector.

The local mech industry had become especially large and developed due to favorable

policies and other reasons.

The Genser Federation had chosen to stay neutral in the old rivalry between the Greater Terran united Confederation and the New Rubarth Empire.

This allowed it to become one of the few truly neutral centers of learning and

technological development.

One of the advantages this brought was that the New Mech Research Initiative had chosen to base its headquarters and primary R&D facility on this very planet!

As the shuttle carrying the off-duty CEO finally entered a hangar and finally made a landing, Barrow Rakovshchik distinctly relaxed his somewhat stiff and formal posture and adopted a more easygoing bearing.

He left most of his security guards behind as he passed through a checkpoint and entered the white-coated halls of the NMRI.

Inside the NMRI, Barrow was no longer a CEO, but instead the treasurer of a non-profit research institution.

The people that worked or volunteered their services to the NMRI were completely different from the ambitious career climbers back at Yarad Industries.

There, everyone was out for themselves. They only paid lip service to the notion of putting the company ahead of their individual priorities.

Here, Barrow could relax and express himself without fearing that he would paint himself as a fool.

This was because he was among like-minded enthusiasts.

"Barrow! You've come! Come here and take a look at this research report. It details the latest findings on Project WR-13."

"Project WR-13?" Barrow skeptically asked as he accepted the digital file transmission

and rapidly skimmed through the contents.

As a businessman, Barrow did not pretend to understand the science of this research project. He instead read through the introduction and conclusion in order to gain a quick understanding of the gains.

An older gray-haired man replied with an optimistic smile. "It is the latest project that

explores whether it is possible to artificially alter the brain structure and chemistry of a norm to resemble that of a potentate. The latest set of cloned brains that had been operated upon have yet to elevate their genetic aptitudes above F, but there are slight hints in some cloned brains that their responsiveness and capacity for digital data processing have improved by up to 4.9 percent."

"4.9 percent? That is big." The treasurer answered.

It was far from the 1000's of percents that was required to meaningfully raise a person's genetic aptitude to a more acceptable level, but it was a start!

Chief Scientist. Idni Zenokon certainly saw hope of further progress with the latest

results. "I can feel it, Barrow. After 100 years of continuous research, the NMRI may finally be able to prove to the mech community that we have not been squandering billions of MTA credits worth of donations on worthless and ineffectual research. I am

becoming more convinced that Project WR-13 is on the right path to enable us to pilot a mech in our lifetimes."

"Are you not being premature in your judgment, my friend?" Barrow carefully asked. "Your predecessors formed similar opinions in the past. They diverted far too much of our limited funds on research projects that eventually went nowhere."

"This is different, Barrow!" Idni insisted! "All of our other research projects have made too little progress in comparison. The ones that investigate whether we can pilot a mech by heavily digitizing our brains have never solved the loss of humanity problem. The awful project that seeks to develop an alternate control interface involving biomechs is too terrifying for me to describe."

"Hm, you do have a point, but just because Project WR-13 has delivered slightly positive results at the start does not mean that this pattern will persist."

"It will." The older chief scientist insisted as he stared right into Barrow's eyes. "I am

willing to bet my life on it. Project WR-13 only attempts to replicate an existing phenomena, The Chosen Human has repeatedly used his God Kingdom to transform norms into mech pilots. What he can do with the power of his divine will alone, we can

do with the power of science and technology. If not for the fact that we understand way too little about what brain conditions can actually produce the phenomenon of qualified genetic aptitude, the researchers assigned to Project WR-13 will not have to resort to trial and error to randomly modify hundreds of thousands of cloned human brains." Due to humanity's inadequate understanding of genetic aptitude and how it tied to the physiology of the brain, the NMRI had no choice but conduct research in such a stupid and incredibly wasteful manner.

There was no guarantee that the same treatment on the brains that had displayed

slightly better performance than before could be replicated!

This was because the cloned brains randomly changed over time to become different.

from their exact genetic copies.

A slight change in brain chemistry or other variables could easily invalidate any potential

gains in genetic aptitude!

Barrow inwardly sighed. Though Idni sounded optimistic, the reality was that Project.

WR-13 hardly brought them any closer to developing a solution to the genetic aptitude

tyranny.

How much more money did they need to spend on fruitless research? How many more years must they wait for a research project to hit the jackpot? Would Barrow ever be able to fulfill his long-held goal of piloting a mech in an authentic manner in his lifetime?

Chapter 6638 Lifelong Obsession

"Enough is enough, Barrow! You have been spending far too much time on your hobby." A loud female voice shrieked across the halls of an opulent estate. "Now you not only demand that we donate 1.9 percent of our family's liquid funds to the least successful research institution of the Genser Federation, but now you also insist on going away for 3 months just so that you can attend a conference where you attempt to persuade like-minded fools to throw their money away as well!"

The CEO of Yarad Industries faced his wife who he had married and perpetuated his family line for over 110 years.

Elena Ensambridge had known about Barrow's extracurricular activity since the

beginning. He never hid his obsession for piloting mechs despite the fact that his genetic aptitude was abysmal.

Compared to other pursuits that a man of his status and wealth could preoccupy himself with, Barrow could be doing far worse than spending time with lots of nerds and other delusional mech enthusiasts.

The only problem that Elena had with her dreamer of a husband was that now that he had reached the pinnacle of what he could accomplish as a business executive, he

diverted much more of his attention towards his hobby!

Of course, Barrow did not see it that way.

"I have much more time now that I am the CEO of Yarad Industries and managed to burnish my record by stabilizing the company during the latest crisis. I previously held myself back from involving myself further with the NMRI in order to help Yarad maintain its footing, but now that its position has grown secure, I can afford to divert more of my time to help the cause."

Elena Ensambridge rolled her eyes in a familiar manner. "Here you go again, Barrow. Have you ever considered that you have done enough for 'the cause'? You have clung to your dream of piloting a mech for too long! Most people are able to forget about their fantasies of becoming a

mech pilot by the time they enter into adolescence. At worst, norms are able to accept their inability to fight with mechs no later than their mid-thirties. The only ones who still think that they can work to make the impossible happen are the ones who have never fully grown up such as yourself!"

Barrow did not grow angry at his wife. She did not understand. This was of no fault of her own, because their entire society had long worked to make norms accept their own inferiority.

It took active effort for Barrow and his like-minded comrades to resist the status quo and fight for the right to expand their own capabilities.

The fact that people like them had to defy the majority opinion and actively spend their own time and money to fund research into opening up mech piloting to the masses was a travesty in itself!

As much as Barrow had come to respect and appreciate Elena over the last century, her opinions with regards to his personal passion had never been good.

Perhaps Elena initially assumed that Barrow's phase towards his inadequate genetic aptitude lasted a lot longer than usual.

Surely he would outgrow his unwillingness to be denied the opportunity to become a mech pilot, right?

It certainly seemed that way. Back when he was younger, he did not join clubs like the NMRI because he simply did not have the time to do so. He was too busy trying to climb up the hierarchy of Yarad Industries.

Barrow felt that he had fulfilled all of his life's expectations and obligations.

He married Elena and established an alliance with another powerful family. The two had 4 children, who in turn produced a whole host of grandchildren who were already in the process of building their own careers.

He ascended the seat of patriarch of the Rakovshchik Family. He revived his family's fortune which was previously in decline due to the lack of successors who managed to climb their way to the upper echelon of the Genser Federation. After several decades, he eventually resigned his seat and passed it onto another relative so that he could devote more time to leading Yarad Industries.

He managed to become the hand-picked successor of the previous CEO and earned the trust of the board of directors as well as the institutional investors who initially cast doubt on his qualifications.

Yet if he was being honest, none of these pursuits gave him true fulfillment. Oh, he enjoyed the challenges, and he enjoyed the recognition and rewards whenever he succeeded in an endeavor, but he constantly wondered how much more amazing he could have become if he only possessed better genetic aptitude.

If he devoted all of his energy and talent into becoming the best possible mech pilot, he may have become an expert pilot or even ace pilot by this time!

Truth to be told, Barrow would have remained perfectly happy and content with his life if he just remained an ordinary mech pilot after a century of service.

Just the experience of piloting a mech and earning recognition as a true soldier was enough to make him feel as if he had accomplished the greatest goals of his life! What gratified Barrow was that he was far from the only human who felt this way. The members of the NMRI along with the people throughout the galaxy who have joined many other clubs, associations, research institutions and so on all shared the same dream.

What was even more important was that they were willing to work to turn it into a reality.

Barrow had met many like-minded norms through his participation in the NMRI that he

was willing to call his brothers and sisters and arms.

They encompassed researchers who quit their high-paying jobs at prestigious companies and research institutions.

They included mech designers who were willing to divert valuable time away from developing their design philosophies to explore what it took to design a mech that could be piloted by norms.

They also included senior executives like himself who willingly extended their own name and reputation to their cause in order to add more legitimacy to their collective effort.

Even if they had failed to produce any meaningful progress since the Age of Mechs, the friendships he made and the camaraderie he enjoyed among people who did not care about his day job were priceless.

Elena did not understand.

She would never understand.

"I am not asking you." He said. "I am informing you. The Rakovshchik Family is more than wealthy enough to make a charitable contribution to the NMRI. One of our research teams has recently made a notable advancement and requires a much greater infusion of cash in order to conduct large-scale follow-up experiments. As low as the chance of success may be, if our research has managed to produce real results, then our return on investment will be so enormous that we can buy out Arad Industries outright."

"You are insane if you think your investment can earn a profit at all. All of that money is lost as soon as you transfer it over."

"I am not in it for the profit." Barrow admitted. "Whether our latest research project succeeds or fails, I can accept both outcomes. Our goal has always been a longshot. I am fully prepared to suffer a near-guaranteed loss. This is why it is a donation. Do not question my right on how to spend the funds of our family. I may not be the patriarch anymore, but I can still persuade the current one to allocate our money under my

direction."

"That is the family's money! How can you be so brazen to spend it on a personal project that is doomed to fail just as is the case for the ones that came before."

Barrow's expression hardened as he stared back at his wife.

"I am responsible for more than 80 percent of the earnings of our family. I did not have to enrich the coffers of the Rakovshchik Family, but I did so in order to promote solidarity with our less successful family members.

But now that the NMRI was in need of more funding, Barrow could only ask for solidarity

with the rest of his family.

If the other Rakovshchik were too greedy and shortsighted to accept his proposal, then he would be willing to leave his family and help with funding the NMRI through his own efforts!

Hopefully, it should not come to that.

While Elena still objected to her husband's stubborn decisions, the pair no longer argued against each other.

They had done so many times in the past that they just grew tired of rehashing the same arguments.

Instead, Elena decided to take this conversation elsewhere and tried to pry open his head to see what was inside.

"You are nearing 150 years of life, Barrow. Why must you continue to persist in your unrealistic fantasy? Even if a mech appears that can allow norms such as yourself to pilot it, what then? Will you attend the mech academy and become surrounded by boisterous teenagers? Have you already made plans to enter the military of the Genser Federation as a mech officer and accept tours that take place in far-flung locations where you can experience actual combat?"

Barrow released a low chuckle. "It is too late for me to become a soldier. That does not stop me from working in the NMRI and solve the problem that has denied me the opportunities to grow stronger as a soldier. The younger generations of norms who have grown up at a later date but under the exact same regime with regards to mech piloting deserve a chance. Our cause is too important. If we do not invest our time, money and effort into these research initiatives, children who grow up

500 or 1000 years from now may still be deprived of the chance to pilot mechs due to their lack of genetic aptitude!"

"This is madness. Please wake up and realize what you are missing out on. You have done more than enough to contribute to the cause that has denied you all of these years. Let it rest. Enjoy the life you have actually lived rather than the life that can only exist in

your fantasy."

"I cannot. The life I have lived is merely a means to spend my time and help me become useful enough to the community that I am a part of. The life that exists in my fantasy is my true goal and passion. To give up this dream is to rip out my heart from my chest. I

cannot live anymore if you separate me from the cause."

Elena simply looked at him with incomprehension.

This was an extreme degree of altruism. Was the cause so attractive to them? There were there magnates who had not hesitated to donate all of their properties and other sources of wealth to the coffers of the NMRI!

Elena was even afraid that Barrow might pledge to donate a much greater share of the

wealth accrued by the Rakovshchik Family to his centuries-long effort to deny his own inability to pilot mechs!

The two had lived alongside each other long enough to read what the other was

thinking. Eventually, Barrow shook his head and turned his back to his life partner. "Enough. Going forward, I will be spending less time at Yarad Industries and more time at the

NMRI, I have already made the appropriate arrangements to cover for my reduced

commitments at the company."

"The board of directors will not like that, Barrow. You have fought so hard to become the

chief executive officer, I thought that you would continue to fight until you have been appointed as the chairman of the board."

"It will not make much of a difference to me anymore. I have had enough of climbing the corporate ladder. The only satisfaction that I look forward to in my life is to pilot a mech rather than watching other lucky potentates do so in my stead."

Chapter 6639 Artificial Glory

How could a man like Barrow Rakovshchik willingly diminish the worth of all of his accomplishments in the business sector for a dream that was not only unobtainable, but also false?

A successful first-class chief executive that had managed to climb high enough on the corporate ladder to understand the truths of many matters should have known better. Mech piloting may have become a glamorous profession in this day and age, but a significant part of that was due to the unceasing propaganda efforts of the Mech Trade Association.

The MTA had successfully reshaped human culture and much of its institutions to revolve around mechs.

The mechers worked so hard to elevate their favored war platforms that they worked hard to suppress everything else.

Infantry? Too small and weak.

Warships? Too big and destructive.

Tanks? Too inflexible and easy to defeat by mechs.

Aeroplanes? Too one-dimensional and not cool enough.

Starfighters? Same as aeroplanes but in space.

It only took several generations for the entire population of the human race to treat these assumptions as gospel.

Yet the truth was much more nuanced. It was not always the case that mechs outperformed other war platforms. The main reason why mechs had remained so dominant was because too many economies of scale had formed around their development and production.

Even if mechs became less efficient than starfighters, the former was a lot cheaper to design and mass produce due to the huge amount of existing infrastructure and trained personnel!

If other combat machines such as starfighters enjoyed similar advantages, then mechs would face an uphill battle trying to dethrone the dominance of cheaper, simpler and less demanding small craft.

Perhaps the people living in the lower layers of society were unable to discern these truths, but Barrow Rakovshchik had to know better.

Mech piloting had become a galactic obsession by design. It was only due to the will of powerful leaders at the start of the current age that mechs completely displaced the position of warships, starfighters and other war machines.

Being a mech pilot was also not as glamorous and enjoyable as it sounded. Mech cadets

had to forgo other studies that could allow them to become a useful addition to the normal workforce.

Instead, they largely had to spend their years learning how to fight and study the theory that would help them do so more effectively.

Once they entered the workforce, most mech pilots would never participate in any serious combat for their entire careers.

This was partially because signing up to work as a guard or other civilian duty offered little exposure to true combat.

Those who joined militaries or outfits that saw combat on a more frequent basis weren't paradises either.

Most people remembered the heroes who survived the battlefield and managed to thrive under the circumstances.

They hardly paid any attention to the many mech pilots that suffered untimely deaths and turned into forgotten statistics.

Only those who survived continuous challenges and managed to showcase special talents would have the capital to turn into true celebrated heroes!

Yet how many mech pilots could earn this coveted status? Breakthroughs were few and far in between. The vast majority of ordinary mech pilots never received the opportunity to step onto the path of godhood for the first time, thereby causing them to feel increasingly inadequate over time.

Becoming an expert pilot was as rare as people developing good genetic aptitude if not rarer.

A human essentially had to win the lottery twice in a row in order to be able to trigger apotheosis and become a demigod!

The vast majority of mech pilots eventually recognized their own mediocrity and ceased to pursue a breakthrough that became increasingly more fleeting as they aged and started their own families.

Mech piloting had lost much of its glamour by that time. The veterans who managed to persist at this point mostly recognized that their jobs were not so special anymore.

They were glorified soldiers who risked their life and limb to wage war on behalf of distant leaders and politicians.

They suffered all of the hardships of combat yet earned almost none of the rewards. Their higher social status granted them a bit of satisfaction, but it did not necessarily make them or their descendants rich or famous.

Even if only a fraction of the human population was eligible to pilot mechs, there were still too many mech pilots for all of them to become famous enough for many people to know by name!

Far more mech pilots ended their careers without the glory that they imagined back

when they were optimistic youths.

To sum it all up, to become a mech pilot was nothing more than to become another pawn in the conflicts of this day and age.

Only the rare few possessed the strength, skill, courage and luck to promote to more powerful chess pieces.

Yet it was unrealistic to invest so much of your life in a pursuit based on a

low-probability event.

As a businessman who worked in various different positions at Yarad Industries, Barrow clearly understood how to perform a rational risk-benefit analysis.

He could clearly understand that it was completely stupid to devote so much of his life to a profession that wasn't even as great as everyone thought.

Yet Barrow could not help himself. His obsession had rooted itself too deep into his

psyche. Common sense no longer held any sway over him on this matter. His adoration and his desire for mechs had grown too strong during his youth, and had never faded over the years as was the case for many other norms.

Medical professionals had already categorized this phenomenon as a mental disorder. In other words, people like Barrow were actually sick in their minds!

The only reason why most people did not take it so seriously was because every other norm suffered from this mental affliction at one point in their lives.

The only difference was that they recovered from it sooner or later.

In the case of outliers like Barrow, that 'later' would probably stretch on until he had breathed his last breath!

Barrow did not deny that he may be suffering from a mental disorder.

He just did not think that there was anything wrong with it. His compatriots over at the

NMRI agreed.

When the CEO commiserated with the chief scientist over his latest discussion with his wife, Idni Zenokon made a dismissive scoff.

"This is why you either marry a person who shares the same dream as yours, or just tolerate your spouse for a few decades before filing for divorce. It is much more pleasant and much less disruptive if you fulfill your obligations towards your parents and your family and raise your children to adulthood before ending your marital relationship. I do not understand why you continue to tolerate the presence of that woman." Barrow crossed his arms as a response. "That is because I do love her, you know. She is more than a means to continue my family line to me. We merely do not see eye to eye on

this subject."

"It is your loss." The chief scientist shrugged. "Are you at least able to transfer the funds

in time? We have already begun to make preparations to begin Project WR-14, but we are short on liquidity. The sooner we have the cash in hand, the sooner we can begin our large-scale experiments."

"The monetary transfer will take place within the week." Barrow promised. "I cannot speed up the process any further. Our family still has rules."

"Understood." Idni pressed his lips. "We can use the additional days to perfect our experimental design. Even if my objective analysis indicates that the results from Project WR-13 are not significant enough to prove that we can produce a better result, Project WRW-14 still gives me hope. Any progress is better than no progress. If we run out of time, we can entrust the completion of our great undertaking to our successors. The NMRI must always persist so long as we have yet to complete our cause."

"For the cause." Barrow intoned with utter seriousness.

The two proceeded to split up and handle their separate affairs.

Chief Scientist Idni Zenokon had to prep the research labs for Project WR-14. Treasurer Barrow Rakovshchik had to handle all of the financial paperwork.

By the time the evening arrived on this side of the planet, the workers and researchers either left the complex or stayed behind in order to have a drink and continue to share their fantasies about achieving a breakthrough in their research.

Even though everyone understood that the probability that they would actually be able

to succeed was virtually nil, none of the members of the NMRI expressed any skepticism.

They literally couldn't. To deny the possibility that they could pilot mechs was no different from stabbing them in the heart!

Just as Barrow was about to say goodnight to Idni and return to his estate, the chief

scientist suddenly received a surprise call.

Idni raised his eyebrow, but listened to the private call. Once it ended, the researcher

continued to frown.

"Who contacted you at this hour?" Barrow softly asked.

"An old... friend." Idni replied. "He used to be one of us, but he... became involved with

the wrong sort of people. That is all I can say about this subject."

"Oh? There must be an important reason why he chose to resume contact with you.

What did he want?"

Idni shifted his gaze and took note of the emptying lounge. "My old friend did not convey

too many specifics. He only shared a few code words that we established many decades ago. I cannot confirm whether he is being truthful or whether he is still deserving of my trust. However, if his claims turn out to be credible... then I truly cannot afford to miss this reunion even if he hinted that we should not bring a security detail. You should come as well. I can guarantee that you will be just as interested. Do you have

the guts to accompany me to a clandestine meeting?"

"Do you have to ask?" Barrow grinned as he finished his rice wine. "If this is a plot to

kidnap us, then we deserve it. I have enough of a life without mechs.

"Then stay over for the night."

The night came and went without incident.

The next morning, both men boarded a shuttle that flew to a smaller and less developed city.

Once the vehicle entered an underground warehouse, Barrow and Idni stepped out and noticed that they had entered an isolated and shielded location.

What was strange was that hardly any personnel were stationed at this facility. Only a

dozen or so black-clad individuals were spread across the main storage floor. Each of them were holding scanners and used them to check the conditions of the cargo containers that were occupying a small part of the warehouse space.

The only individual who moved closer to the parked shuttle was a black-clad man with a disturbingly calm bearing. "Idni. You have brought a friend."

"I have, Radagast. Do you object?"

"No. Mr. Rakovshchik is known to us. Besides, we never intended to keep our cargo confidential for long. Your friend may be able to help us deliver our new goods to the right hands without getting intercepted in advance."

Both Barrow and Idni began to frown.

"What have you brought to us, exactly?" The chief scientist of the NRMI asked.

The man known as Radagast grinned while raising his arm. "You will love this, old friend."

He snapped his fingers, causing a sharp noise to echo across the mostly empty warehouse.

At the same time, a cloaking device shut off, exposing a mech that was positioned a dozen or so meters away from the new arrivals!

Both Barrow and Idni initially did not look too impressed. They had seen thousands of mechs in their lifetimes. Many of them were much more impressive than the rather generic and cheap first-class mech that Radagast revealed.

The only noteworthy distinction was the decorative third eye symbol placed on the

forehead of the mech. It exuded a mysterious vibe that caused the two to suspect that there may be more to this seemingly plain mech than what was obvious on th service. "What is this mech?"

"This, my old friend, is the Auto Heretic Version A, and you have no idea what that

means."

Chapter 6640 Blood Demonstration

From the moment Barrow and Idni beheld the so-called Auto Heretic mech, they had no idea their lives would change forever on this day.

Aside from the unusual vibe, the generic-looking first-class mech did not look all that special. Its uncoated gunmetal gray surface did not express any sort of message or personality aside from direct utilitarianism.

Though the mech was clearly designed and built according to first-class standards, the Auto Heretic clearly comprised fairly basic materials.

It did not show off any outward displays of advanced or high-end technologies. It did not. even feature any integrated weapon systems. This meant that the combat performance of this machine was far from matching the seemingly omnipotent capabilities of a first-class multipurpose mech.

The only noteworthy aspect about the machine was that it showed signs of being modular or semi-modular in nature. The mech was currently configured in a swordsman mech loadout given that it carried a shield and a sword on its back.

"Why did you bring us over to show off an economy mech based on outdated technologies and mech doctrines?" Chief Scientist Idni Zenokon asked in a grumpy manner. "I do not recognize most of the materials used to fabricate this mech, but I know enough to see that it will not hold up in a serious battle involving true first-class multipurpose mechs. The tech that I can observe is also rather basic and outdated even though it also includes a few modern implementations. Such a chaotic and inconsistent approach makes me think the mech designers responsible for developing it are all mad." Treasurer Barrow Rakovshchik agreed with his companion. "I hope that this mech If you are asking us to distribute or sell a machine that has no apparent advantages compared to what you can already buy on the market, then I can tell you that it is a waste of time and money. There is no profit to be made from selling a primitive modular mech when the market already has countless specialized as well as modular products that not only perform better, but also have access to much more extensive support structures."

Neither Idni nor Barrow were mech designers, but as life-long mech enthusiasts, their mech literacy actually ranked pretty high.

Idni understood much of the science and engineering that was used to develop a mech. If he did not choose to dedicate his life to specializing in the fields of human neurology and neural interface technology, he could have become a serious mech designer!

As for Barrow, it was necessary for him to understand the market dynamics of mechs since Yarad Industries was involved in the production and sale of mechs. Even if it was not one of the biggest players on the market and was mostly engaged in OEM production, it was easy to suffer losses ranging in the billions of MTA credits if he made the wrong bet on a new mech line or mech designer!

In short, the two knew their way around mechs.

Right now, both Idni and Barrow had the impression that they were being fooled.

The mysterious older man known as Radagast simply responded with a smile that conveyed his absolute confidence.

If he wanted to sucker the NMRI into a scam, then he certainly possessed the confidence and demeanor to pull off such a scheme!

Then why did he choose to base his scheme off a mech that was obviously characterized with inferior performance?

Barrow refused to believe that this Radagast fellow was that stupid. No one in a first-rate state who managed to become an entrepreneur, even a shady one, could exhibit so many obvious flaws.

The logical answer was that there had to be a selling point to this Auto Heretic that likely made up for all of its obvious disadvantages.

What could it be? The name of the mech model suggested that it came equipped with

an advanced AI, possibly one that offered stronger performance than usual.

Was this a mech that was especially designed for first-class mech pilots with sub-standard genetic aptitudes?

Those who developed E and D-grade aptitudes occupied an awkward position in first-class society. While they could technically pilot simple mechs, the reality was that most states and organizations disdained to make use of them. There were still enough C-grade mech pilots that were more than willing to pilot a relatively decent first-class combat or support mech.

There were only so many job offerings for guard or support functions.

Most first-raters who were determined to make a career out of mech piloting had little choice but to rely on specialized solutions or immigrate to a second-rate or even third-rate state!

"Do not be too quick to judge the Auto Heretic." Radagast said as he turned around and moved closer to the stationary mech. "The mech model is not perfect, but for people like the two of you, it is more valuable than a high-tier first-class multipurpose mech. If you have the choice to own a mech used by the armed forces of the Terrans or a simple Auto Heretic like this one, you will always choose the latter without exception."

That was a bold claim!

The two NMRI leaders suspected more and more that the special mech model included special features that were not seen elsewhere.

What could it be? How could this simple mech that did not look like it could beat any of the standard offerings on the mech market possess value exceeding that of the top first-class standard mechs?

Radagast only chose to keep his guests in suspense for so long. His expression finally turned serious as he floated up in the air and moved towards the opened cockpit

entrance.

"At this point, seeing is believing. Nothing I say will convince you that my claims are true. Only by seeing it with your own eyes will you begin to understand that everything has

already changed."

Both Barrow and Idni took a few steps back and watched as Radagast entered the cockpit and began to activate the Auto Heretic.

As a relatively simple machine, the boot-up process happened quickly, especially if the power reactor and mech engine had been put in a standby state in advance.

A projection soon appeared above the head of the Auto Heretic that displayed the cockpit of the machine.

Different from the relatively plain exterior, the interior of the cockpit was covered by metal moulded into symbols and strange depictions of mechs undertaking different

actions.

The artwork likely conveyed multiple profound meanings and messages.

The most profound and central one was an emblem that consisted of a downward-facing red drop of blood that enveloped a metallic gray mech.

Although the symbol merely looked good, its size and prominence inside the cockpit. meant that it may be central to the mysterious mech's identity.

What did it signify?

The two observers did not have to wonder for long, because what they saw when they directed their attention to the cockpit shocked them both!

"Is that blood?!"

Radagast had taken his place on the cockpit seat. The straps that bound him in place were fairly routine.

What was anything but normal was the transparent blood channels that extended from the cockpit seat and stuck their needled ends into various points of the man's body!

A distinctive red-coloured liquid circulated in and out of those transparent channels, and not small amount either. It was clear that Radagast's body was not being drained, so that meant that was hooked up to a much larger external supply of blood! What was the purpose of this bizarre and seemingly useless function?

Did Radagast suffer a rare medical condition that forced him to rely on circulating external blood through his body in order to stay alive?

If that was the case, he could easily rely on an internal implant or an external device that he could strap on his back or the side of his body.

Why must he go as far as to let an entire mech serve as his medical instrument?

While Barrow was still trying to figure out the mystery behind this strange blood circulation system, Idni stood frozen in shock as soon as realization began to dawn on his eyes.

"Radagast...!" The chief scientist struggled to make a sound. "You... how... since when..."

"What is the matter, Idni?" Barrow asked.

Idni turned to Barrow to convey his utter shock and bafflement.

"I may have lost touch with Radagast, but... I am very certain that he used to be a norm

like us. He wasn't a mech pilot back then. It is impossible for him to control a machine! Either we are looking at a battle bot that is controlled by an advanced piloting AI, or we are looking at a mech that is controlled by a man who was not a potentate by the time he reached 10 years old, but became one at a later date!" "Seriously?!" Barrow finally understood why Idni reacted in such a way! "Is Radagast one of the few lucky norms who managed to gain an audience with the Chosen Human and received the blessing of a qualified genetic aptitude?!"

A surge of jealousy sprung from his mind. If the second possibility was true, then

Radagast received a boon that the NMRI struggled to replicate for decades if not centuries.

So many people who were part of the same community had also sought to replicate what the Chosen Human could accomplish with a miracle.

Alas, none of them had made any meaningful progress. Barrow himself did not really believe that the upcoming Project WR-14 would change the status quo, but what could they do? The New Mech Research Initiative could not afford to give up the collective

dream of all of its members and supporters.

Therefore, the sign of Radagast apparently piloting a mech did not evoke much joy, but instead caused the two guests to feel both jealousy and despair!

They felt jealous because there was no way that the two of them could ever gain an audience with a god pilot as high and mighty as the Chosen Human.

They also felt despair because the endeavor to replicate this miracle through the power of technology would probably take hundreds if not thousands of years to develop! "Ragadast." Idni asked as soon as he regained a bit of his composure. "Who, or what, is controlling your machine at the moment? I see traces of both human and artificial movement characteristics in the motion of your Auto Heretic. Are you in control, or is an AI pulling all of its strings?"

Despite being hooked up to a lot of blood channels, Ragadast was still able to smile.

"Why not both? The Auto Heretic does indeed possess a lot of autonomy. I will explain that later. What is important to know is that I am not riding a battle bot. I am only letting the Auto Heretic control much of its own movement because I am unskilled in total manual control. How can you expect a norm such as myself to control a first-class war machine with the proficiency of an academy-trained mech pilot? Let me show you

what I mean."

Radagast deactivated all of the autonomous assistance from his machine, and the difference became obvious right away.

The Auto Heretic's previous movements became jerky and unstable. The mech's footing not only became more inconsistent, but the machine was clearly having trouble

maintaining its balance.

At one point, it had overstretched its foot, causing it to botch its walking motion and topple over until it fell sideways onto the warehouse floor!

The air became filled with a loud crashing noise as the machine clumsily found itself in

an undignified posture!

If not for the fact that the mech was made out of first-class alloys, its fall might have

actually dented or damaged the mech frame.

Radagast attempted to use his highly flawed control over his Auto Heretic to lift it up to

its feet, but the jerky and clumsy movement of its arms and legs made that an impossible challenge!

"My sincere apologies for the display. I only bonded with it recently and did not have

time yet to master its basic movement operation." "Radagast." Barrow took the initiative to ask a very pertinent question. "Earlier, you referred to yourself as a norm. Is that... is that still true?"

"It is." The mysterious man replied with a smirk. "Did you think an individual like myself can ever enjoy the privilege of visiting the Chosen Human in person? Please. I am a nobody to His Holiness! I do not rely on any god pilot to gain the ability to pilot this Auto Heretic. I am not relying on any cranial implants, genetic treatments or other weird transformations either. I am still a norm for all intents and purposes. If you do not

believe me, I am ready to conduct a genetic aptitude test as soon as I exit from the

cockpit."

"If you are not a potentate... then how..."

"Isn't the answer clear to you now, old friend? Why do you think this Auto Heretic has

connected my blood circulation to its mech frame? I can assure you that none of this is for show. It is part of an amazing new control system, one that can allow a norm such as

myself to pilot a mech without relying on neural interface technology!" "IMPOSSIBLE!"