

Mech Touch 6641

Chapter 6641 Remember His Name

Once Radagast had made his point while piloting his Auto Heretic in an extremely clumsy and embarrassing manner, he finally let the Auto Heretic bring itself to an upright position before shutting down his machine.

When the new 'mech pilot' finally exited the cockpit, Barrow and Idni immediately sought to verify Radagast's claims!

"Idni." The owner of the Auto Heretic spoke up. "Did you bring the genetic aptitude tester? I have brought one myself, but I think you prefer to make use of your own device just to be certain."

"I do. Please wait. I will retrieve it right away."

It took a few minutes for Idni Zenokon to return with a strange helmet in his possession. He had brought over a compact version of a typical genetic aptitude testing device. It lacked the spikes and other strange features, but it functioned almost just as well.

Before Idni placed the tester onto Radagast's head, he first performed a quick inspection. He wanted to make sure its settings were calibrated to measure the genetic aptitude of an older adult human and that it hadn't been tampered with in secret.

"It is ready."

"Then proceed. Place it on my head and confirm the truth with your very own eyes." When Idni placed the helmet onto Radagast's head, the scientist also activated a data feed that allowed him to receive detailed data.

The genetic aptitude tester started to beep and activate a few lights. This showed that it had entered into an active state.

Idni deliberately chose to conduct the most thorough and time-consuming test process in order to be absolutely thorough. This made the test last for over three minutes as the device needed to be thorough in exploring the data transmission and processing capabilities of various parts of Radagast's brain and parts of his spine.

The test process imposed quite a bit of strain on Radagast's central nervous system. He flinched and gritted his teeth at times as he felt as if his head was being rammed by a shuttle.

All of this was necessary in order to generate the most precise and detailed data. As a neural interface specialist, Idni was able to effectively interpret all of the readings from the device.

His expression grew more and more perplexed.

By the time the test came to an end, Radagast removed the helmet from his head on his own initiative and faced his old friend.

"Are you convinced now, Idni?"

The chief scientist remained frozen in silence.

Barrow gazed at Idni in concern. He could scarcely believe that he had come across a mech that could actually allow a norm to pilot it. The result from the genetic aptitude test was therefore of utmost importance.

"What did your tester say?"

"The genetic aptitude tester... has confirmed without shadow of a doubt that Radagast's genetic aptitude is... F-grade. It is completely unqualified to pilot a first-class mech, let alone the most basic third-class mech. The data and the result are likely not falsified. I have observed the raw data readings carefully and saw nothing that indicates that any impropriety has occurred."

Barrow tried his best to keep his increasingly restless heart under control. "...What if the genetic aptitude tester got tampered anyway? I want this to be true as much as you do, but we cannot take this information at face value."

"Do you think I am gullible, Barrow?! Of course I know that! As a scientist, it is second nature for me to verify the validity of the results! If possible, I would truly like to bring Radagast and his Auto Heretic mech back to the NMRI in order to conduct a detailed battery of tests!"

"I am afraid that I will not be able to oblige." Radagast said. "You are not the only group of mech enthusiasts that I have to meet. The Auto Heretic is a gift that must be spread to as many people as possible. Besides, you do not need my presence in order to thoroughly determine whether this mech model is the real deal."

Both Barrow and Idni widened their eyes.

"Are you saying... that we can pilot this mech ourselves?" Barrow almost whispered his question. "Perhaps... right now?"

"No."

What?!

The two NMRI leaders felt hopeful until Radagast directly shot down their suggestion! "Why?! Why are you tempting us with a mech that has apparently shattered the genetic aptitude tyranny, only for you to deny us the chance to experience it ourselves?!" Radagast remained calm in the face of two mech enthusiasts who had already become utterly consumed by their desire to pilot their own mechs!

"You misunderstand. The man calmly explained. "I am not rejecting your request because I want to. It is because it is physically impossible for you to pilot 'my' Auto Heretic. You see, the same control system that is used to allow a norm such as myself to control the mech is tied to my body and supposedly more. From the moment I piloted this mech for the first time, it has become bound to me. The blood that is circulated by the new control system has also changed to reflect my augmented physiology. Therefore, attempting to pilot it will not only cause you to fail, but also suffer a fatal

case of blood poisoning unless you have implants that can handle this condition." That caused Barrow and Idni to lose their anger. They grew confused.

"How does this new control system work exactly?" The chief scientist of the NRMI asked. "And what does it have to do with blood?"

"The new control system that defines the Auto Heretic model is called the 'Carmine System! It is named for the medium which is used to enable a norm to form a bond with the mech that allows the two to communicate with each other. Do not ask me how it

works. None of the scientists and engineers in my employ have managed to decipher anything meaningful. I eventually chalked it up to mech designer magic."

That caused Idni to feel perplexed. The revelation that this so-called Carmine System only managed to overcome the genetic aptitude tyranny due to 'mech designer magic' was disappointing to say the least.

As a conventional scientist who possessed a strong interest in mechs, Idni Zenokon had come into contact with mechs, mech designs and the metaphysical qualities that made them different from other manufactured goods.

Idni still did not understand how the whole outperformed the sum of its physical parts in such an obvious and inexplicable manner.

He had tried his best to obtain answers from many different mech designers, but they never offered any helpful information.

Eventually, one of his mech designer friends warned Idni that it was a good idea for him

to suspend his inquiry. If he continued to chase for answers, the Mech Trade Association might decide to pay him a not-so-friendly visit.

Idni wisely decided to drop the matter.

That did not mean he lost his curiosity, but he could only hold it in to prevent any

undesirable consequences.

Right now, his desire for answers had grown a lot more. If he knew that 'mech designer magic' had become powerful enough to casually make the impossible come true like this, then he would have investigated this phenomenon to the end!

"Damn." Idni cursed.

"What is the matter, my friend?"

"The Auto Heretic here is not as great as I thought. I cannot deny that it is a historic mech for allowing a norm like Radagast to pilot it, but it doesn't advance our science and technology as much as I wished." Idni sighed. "If this Carmine System can only work because of the metaphysical support from a single person's design philosophy, then I think that reverse engineering it will be a nearly impossible challenge. This was what conventional scientists and engineers hated the most about mech designers. The latter essentially cheated their way into creating stronger and groundbreaking mechs.

The worst part about it was that mech designers were so exclusive towards their chosen war platforms that they never took the initiative to share their innovations beyond their instruments of violence!

This was another reason why other combat vehicles got phased out. Even if they had good qualities that were no worse than a mech frame, the latter would still perform

better because of the support of mech designer nonsense!

The only consolation was that the biggest and most radical innovations eventually did get figured out, usually after the responsible individuals advanced to the rank of Master. While this ensured that the technological contributions of mech designers partially spread to humanity's other industries, it also meant that the development of mechs always stayed several steps ahead of the development of starships and other technological goods!

"What class?" Idni asked the most critical question that was currently on his mind.

"Class IX."

The scientist groaned. "That makes this worse. Class IX design philosophies are always the most difficult to decipher. It may take decades if not centuries to reverse engineer the Auto Heretic and its Carmine System."

"That... is at least an improvement compared to our prior situation." Barrow commented. "Look on the bright side. We not only have a mech that has broken the genetic aptitude. tyranny, but also offers us clear directions to how it is able to accomplish this. So long as the NMRI and many other research institutions keep studying the Carmine System, we may be able to develop our own

substitutes within several decades. Class IX design philosophies long held a notorious reputation for being difficult to impossible to replicate through purely standard technological means.

In truth, many scientists simply did not bother to spend their time on deciphering them

because the effort was not proportional to the reward.

This only added to the mystique of Class IX design philosophies.

This was different. The Carmine System meant far too much to many norms to give up

so easily!

It was not just the research institutions that had been looking to fulfill 'the cause' that would be interested in this endeavor.

Many other groups that previously had no interest in trying to open up mech piloting to

norms would be frantically trying to figure out the working principles of the Carmine

System as well!

The very future of mechs and its place in human society was at stake!

Until the day had come when humans had completely torn down the genetic aptitude tyranny to the point where it could never make a comeback, it became crucially important to preserve the Auto Heretic design and protect its mech designer as much

as possible!

"Who are the designers of the Auto Heretic?" Idni asked next. "And which one of them is responsible for developing the Carmine System?"

"One of the mech designers involved is a Master Mech Designer who has not been named. Surprisingly, he or she is not responsible for developing the Carmine System. It is actually the invention of a Senior Mech Designer by the name of Ves Larkinson,"

"Ves... Larkinson...?"

"That name will soon become famous across the galaxy." Radagast predicted with

certainty. "I am not surprised that you are not familiar with him. No one is. He is apparently one of the mech designers who immigrated to the Red Ocean. Despite the fact that he is no longer able to come back to the Milky Way, he has left a PP behind, so his works are still functional in this galaxy. Normally, that is of no relevance to us as his works have never spread too far beyond a star cluster in the galactic rim, but this time is different. Professor Larkinson is doing extremely well in the new frontier, so much so that he has taken advantage of the conditions to develop his Carmine System." "The people of the Red Ocean have access to these new mechs as well?!" "Yes, and they are apparently called Carmine mechs. They are already being sold over

there. Now, Professor Larkinson and his backers have generously decided to share his marvelous gift of a mech design to us, the people of the Milky Way!"

"Wait." Barrow said. "How can this Ves Larkinson release this mech to the Milky Way

when he is 50 million light-years away? Did he design this so-called Carmine mech before the Great Severing?!"

"No." Idni said. "That is definitely not the case. This Auto Heretic uses technological principles that have been developed in the current generation. It may have been upgraded from an older design, but I do not think that is likely seeing how new and fresh

it appears.

"Don't ask. I do not have all of the answers." Radagast simply said. "I am not the developer

of the Auto Heretic. I am merely a broker of sorts. I can only supply you with as much information that I have received myself. If you want more answers than that, then you are welcome to conduct your own investigation."

Ves Larkinson.

Barrow and Idni both remembered that name. They would definitely look into him and

his exploits. What sort of design philosophy did he come up with that enabled a norm like Radagast to pilot his own 'Carmine mech'?

Chapter 6642 Barely Entering the Mech Community

At this point in time, Barrow and Radagast were already convinced that the Auto Heretic mech was the real deal.

They did not think that Radagast would attempt to hoodwink them because it did not make sense.

The profits that he could earn from a possible scam was too low, and the heat he would attract would be far too high.

After all, Barrow was not only the treasurer of the NMRI, but also the CEO of a major corporation of the Genser Federation!

As long as he was willing to spend enough money, there was no way that Radagast could shake off pursuit!

While Barrow and Idni were frankly eager and impatient to to pilot their own 'Carmine mechs', they also wanted answers.

Information may be even more important than the opportunity to pilot a Carmine mech right away.

The latter would only allow them to fulfill their own long-held dreams, allowing them to die with a smile on their faces.

The former would give them the clues they needed to eventually allow the entire population of humans in the Milky Way to pilot their own mechs one day!

The two initially became a part of the NMRI in order to fill up the gaping hole in their hearts.

However, when Barrow and Idni came into continuous contact with selfless researchers who dedicated much of their lives and careers to open up mech piloting to the rest of the population, they eventually came to value the cause just as much.

Information therefore became a high priority to the pair of leaders of the NMRI!

Surprisingly enough, Radagast readily supplied all of the data and information in his possession.

"Here you go." The older man said as he transferred a series of files and documents to his guests. "I have sent you the original package that you will need to fabricate your own Auto Heretics. Mind you, the three mech designs corresponding to every tech level are only localized to the Yeina Star Cluster in the galactic rim. If you want to produce your own copies of the Auto Heretic line, you will have to design your own based on the included mech templates."

That did not come as a big surprise to Barrow and Idni. The former dealt with mech templates frequently while leading Yarad Industries. The latter had been involved in translating mech templates into region-specific mech designs in the past.

Idni already began to study the design. "The mech templates are not too bad, and the

designs they are based upon are not that complicated. Our in-house mech designers over at the NMRI should be able to rush out a localized mech design within a week, maybe two. It will take longer to develop more proper mech designs, but I do not think that anyone has enough patience to wait that long.

"Can you spot the Carmine System?" Barrow asked.

"I can. It is obvious how it starts at the cockpit and spreads across the internals of the Carmine mech. It... is not what I expected. I know my biotechnology, so I cannot see anything that is responsible for opening up a new data transmission channel between the mech pilot and Carmine mech. This... this doesn't make any sense! Why did the mech designer go out of his way to include a human-derived vascular system scaled to a mech when it doesn't do anything except circulate blood to different parts of the frame and back to the pilot?"

Although Barrow was not a mech designer or a biologist, he knew enough to understand that this was nonsense as well.

"Are you saying that the Carmine System works by blood circulation alone? Can it be that the blood cells contain data that is transferred from one party to another and back again?"

"Absolutely not." Idni shook his head. "Such a primitive means of data exchange is incredibly slow and prone to errors. The lag time between issuing a command and having a mech execute it may be several seconds long. It is impossible to pilot a mech with so many delays! Blood is being used in a different manner that somehow allows for much faster data transmissions between the two parties.

Radagast nodded. "You are right. According to what I know, the blood does not convey data directly, but it is not redundant either. Trust me. My men have tried. Attempting to control a Carmine mech without sharing blood between the two of us is... not possible." That signified that blood still played an important role, though how remained unclear. "Tell us more about the mech designer, his design philosophy and how the Carmine System fits into his work."

"I was just about to explain that. I will give you the short version."

Radagast began to introduce the basics.

"Mechs are alive?! That is impossible!" Idni heatedly reacted. "Class IX design philosophies are known to be ridiculous, but this is beyond the norm!"

Radagast merely smiled in response. "My initial reaction was not that different from yours, but you will change your mind soon enough. From the moment I first interfaced with my personal Auto Heretic, I personally discovered that it is all true. In fact, it is exactly because the Carmine mech is alive that I can control it without a neural interface."

"How?"

"The Carmine System. It forms the conditions that are necessary to form what is called a 'Blood Pact! It is exactly what it sounds like. It is some sort of metaphysical covenant that any human, even a norm, can form with a 'living mech. Blood serves as the connecting medium between the two of us. The Carmine System is therefore especially designed to produce a form of blood that is compatible and adaptable to the physique of most humans. The Auto Heretic design does include a large amount of safety warnings that this does not apply to everyone. First-raters and certain second-raters who have undergone more extreme or alien forms of physical augmentation"

This was not a big surprise. Augmentations always came with dangers and complications. Those who committed to the pursuit of greater performance more extensively than others naturally had to pay a price for their greed.

Of course, it was not impossible for them to pilot a Carmine mech. They just had to hire the right biotech experts to modify the Carmine System of an Auto Heretic to accept the circulation of a different kind of blood.

Neither Barrow nor Idni had anything to worry about. Their augmentations were not too extreme compared to the average in the Genser Federation.

"What is the Blood Pact exactly?"

"I cannot begin to describe the science of it, but I can constantly feel its existence." Radagast replied. "From the moment I formed a Blood Pact with my mech, I can feel as if an invisible tether has formed between myself and the machine. We are truly tied to each other. The best description that I have heard is that the Blood Pact is a marriage. It is a lifelong commitment that you can never back out on. The pact will exist for as long as either of us are alive. If any of us die, the pact will become invalid, and the survivor will not be able to form a similar bond with anyone else for the rest of their lives." These words conveyed a huge amount of information. Barrow and Idni quickly managed to figure out the most important implications.

"Does that mean... we can only pilot a single Carmine mech for the rest of our lives?"

"Yes."

"If the Carmine mechs gets destroyed but the pilot survives..."

"The Carmine mech pilot has lost his only chance to pilot a machine" Radagast said in a serious voice. "I know how this sounds. It completely contradicts everything you know about mechs. The manual written by Professor Ves Larkinson is very clear about the flaws and shortcomings of his 'third generation Carmine System! Everyone who becomes a Carmine mech pilot must cherish their only machine like a treasure. You must never get involved in unnecessary battles and you must make sure to upgrade your bonded machine on a regular basis. The Auto Heretic is especially designed to make that easier."

Realization dawned on Idni's expression. "So that is why this Auto Heretic is designed as

a semi-modular mech. This mech is designed with upgradeability from the start. It is easier and less costly to upgrade individual Auto Heretics on a piecemeal basis." Barrow meanwhile found it difficult to accept the limitations of the Carmine System. "I do not know whether to be happy or disappointed. I am happy that the Carmine System allows norms that have been forgotten by the mech community to pilot a real mech, but... the gap between us and potentates still remains wide. The latter will always enjoy an advantage as neural interfaces do not come with as many restrictions." It may be ridiculous for Barrow to complain about Carmine Systems when they represented a massive leap in possibilities for norms like himself, but he was already beginning to think ahead.

The limitations of Carmine Systems all but relegated norms who were able to pilot Carmine mechs to an embarrassing status within the mech community. Even if Carmine mech pilots managed to get inside, they would still be seen as undesirables who would instantly become useless as long as they lost a single mech! Idni smiled and patted his friend's back. "Who cares what other mech pilots think? What

matters is that we can finally pilot a mech. Be grateful for that, Barrow. We need to take this step by step. It took over 4 centuries for a brilliant Senior Mech Designer to devise an alternative control system to the neural interface. It is clearly stuck in early development, so there is definitely a considerable amount of room for improvement. It is possible that Professor Larkinson is already working on the fourth generation of his Carmine System. Even if he is not, the NMRI and all of our partner institutions will definitely pick up the slack. Our descendants will be able to enjoy better options, but for now we must make do with early generation products."

He was right. They might be able to pilot better Carmine mechs in the future if they remained patient and waited for a number of years and decades, but how could they

possibly hold themselves back for so long?

Their dream was within their reach!

After waiting for over a century to achieve marginal progress in their collective quest to

open up mech piloting to the masses, now they found out that their main goal had already been completed by another mech designer!

The two couldn't wait any longer. They only managed to maintain their composure because they were pretty sure that Radagast did not invite them here for no reason.

"When... can we begin to pilot our own Carmine mechs?" Barrow asked. "Now, if you want." Radagast said as he gestured to the side.

A set of warehouse doors slid open, revealing two pristine Auto Heretics that had recently been unpacked from their containers and were currently being prepared for use by a team of trusted mech technicians!

"These are yours as long as you agree to do us a few favors."

That instantly caused Barrow to grow vigilant. He knew that there was a price for making use of the Auto Heretics. A mech like this that could turn nearly any human into

a mech pilot was indeed far more valuable than a high-tier first-class multipurpose

mech!

"What is your price?"

"Nothing unacceptable. I can assure you of that, Mr. Rakovshchik." Radagast responded

with a smile. "I represent a party that has a strong interest in spreading the Auto Heretic

across human space. In order to ensure that the Big Two and other authorities do not succeed in suppressing the proliferation of this revolutionary mech line, we must ask for the assistance of mech enthusiasts such as yourselves to help us spread the mech templates, mech designs and copies of the actual Carmine mechs to as many people as possible."

"Is that even necessary? A product like this already sells itself."

"It is not as straightforward as you think. You may think that a mech that can be piloted

by norms does not need heavy promotion, but that is only true in a society that is not governed by the Mech Trade Association. You see, there are several reasons why the

mechers may do everything in their power to ban the sale and use of the Auto Heretic models." Idni frowned. He could already deduce a few of the reasons why the MTA would seek to keep these Carmine mechs out of the hands of civilians.

Barrow did not understand. "Shouldn't the MTA be pleased that the mech community is now able to encompass everyone? No longer is it limited to mech pilots, mech designers and all of the support personnel whose work is related to mechs. Now, many more

people can enjoy the wonders of mechs. They are no longer limited by the capricious results of their genetic aptitude tests."

"That is true, but there are good reasons why this mech line is called the Auto Heretic. This is because it flagrantly defies and makes a mockery out of many of the long-standing rules and customs enforced by the MTA. Chief among them is the prohibition on autonomous mechs. Have you noticed how well I piloted my Auto Heretic at the start? That is because I let the living mech control much of the actions of the mech frame. If necessary, the living mech can even take complete control over itself. Do

you know how the mechers will react to a mech that does not necessarily need humans in order to fight?"

"...Oh. That explains why you are introducing us to the Auto Heretic at this location."

"The Auto Heretic is labeled as a High Autonomy Living Mech. Each of the three mech templates and mech designs are designed from the ground up to give a large amount of leeway to the living mechs. While I am told that they are not hackable in the conventional sense due to the metaphysical basis of their living existence, they can still be turned against their own pilots and other humans under extreme circumstances.

Accepting these Carmine mechs will mean that you openly oppose the MTA's strong

prohibition on autonomous war machines."

"That is... disappointing to hear."

In other words, the act of researching, producing or piloting the Auto Heretic was

considered a crime from the perspective of the mechers!

The rules set by the MTA left no ambiguity on this matter. Carmine System or not, so

long as the machine could control its own actions independent of a human, it had turned into a potential threat to the human order! Radagast clasped his hands. "Now that I have done my due diligence by warning you about how the mechers may respond, what is your decision?"

Idni scoffed. "Do you need to ask? The MTA has never done anything to help norms such

as ourselves. We had to struggle to raise our own funds and devote our own time to research on how to turn mech piloting into a common profession. As far as I am concerned, Professor Ves Larkinson has single-handedly done more for us than all of the Star Designers put together!"

"My dream has always been to pilot a mech no matter the circumstances." Barrow said in a voice filled with determination. "If the MTA arrives and takes me into custody by the end of the day, I will not mind at all, because to pilot a mech even once is already enough

to make this experience worth it. I agree with my friend. The MTA has done nothing to earn our respect, so why must we extend ours?"

Nothing could stand in the way to realizing their dream and fulfilling their common

cause!

They were even willing to become enemies of the Big Two if that was what it took to pilot a mech!

Chapter 6643 Another Heretic

Barlow Rakovshchik and Idni Zenokon did not fully comprehend the depth of how the Auto Heretic mech line violated the most central precepts of the Mech Trade Association.

Even if they did, their choices would have remained the same.

This was because the significance of being able to pilot a mech was too great.

Individuals who were over a century old and had labored for many years for a solution to the genetic aptitude problem were far more excited at this precious opportunity than the average mech enthusiast.

The longer their dream had been denied from them, the more they yearned for it to come true!

Now that they discovered that a strange mech designer who originated from the galactic rim not only managed to achieve a critical breakthrough in this research, but also translated his galaxy-shaking innovation into real reproducible mechs, how could the two leaders of the NMRI possibly resist?

From the moment Radagast had brought them into this warehouse, the outcome had already been set in stone!

The two mech-obsessed idiots did not even care whether they could potentially become enemies of the MTA as a consequence.

Just like many other people, they initially looked up to the Mech Trade Association for becoming the holy land for all matters related to mechs.

It was only after they suffered repeated setbacks and discovered that the MTA only truly looked out for its own interests that it had lost its aura of righteousness and

benevolence in their eyes.

Of course, that alone was not enough for Barrow and Idni to make a decision that would have made most mechers furious.

In the end, it all came down to the chance to become a real mech pilot.

While the two could argue about the semantics of whether a Carmine mech should still be considered a 'mech, they frankly didn't care whether the former had left the scope of the latter.

If a Carmine mech not only looked like a mech, but also had to be controlled in a similar enough way, then that was good enough in their opinion!

How could they possibly ask for more!

It helped that the two had developed a deep and searing hatred of neural interface technology.

Neural interfaces made mechs possible. No one could doubt that the tech opened up af

new mode of warfare that had fascinated humans since the start of the Age of Mechs. However, the fact that only 3.5 percent of the human population could use it to pilot mechs had always served as a source of pain to the other 96.5 percent!

Therefore, even if neural interfaces defined mechs, norms truly did not actually possess much attachment for this control system!

Even so, most of the researchers over at the NMRI continued to research ways to expand the pool of eligible users because they did not know any better.

All research into developing alternative control systems had yielded no better results. This led many mech enthusiasts to conclude that the only way to realistically open up mech piloting was to achieve a breakthrough in neural interface technology.

Truth to be told, they just did not know any better. They also associated mechs with neural interface technology so much that their cognition was unable to separate the two from each other anymore.

If a Senior Mech Designer who was a complete unknown to the vast majority of original humanity like Ves Larkinson had not randomly developed and released the Carmine System, then researchers such as Chief Scientist Idni Zenokon would have continued to research neural interface technology in vain.

Ves Larkinson had proven to everyone in this sphere wrong!

He showed through his own works that the true way to open up mech piloting was by developing an alternate control system all along!

In an instant, the sacred and inviolable position that neural interface technology occupied in the hearts of Barrow and Idni had collapsed.

The significance of this change in attitude was profound. For the first time in centuries, a new category of mechs had arrived that did not even include a neural interface in the

cockpit!

Although the extensive manual that came along the mech templates stated that Carmine Systems could be used concurrently alongside neural interfaces, that was of no relevance to norms such as Barrow and Idni.

The pair already got over their disappointment at the many limitations of an early generation Carmine System.

This was because it was a million times more benign compared to the extremely harsh requirements for using neural interfaces!

With this mindset, the two leaders of the NMRI entered the cockpits of the Carmine mechs that Radagast had prepared for their use.

When Barrow was about to sit down on the strange and slightly intimidating cockpit scat, he took a moment to glimpse at the emblem that was proudly applied to one of the interior walls.

The image of a downward-facing drop of blood enveloping a mech evoked a lot of

different emotions.

What did it mean?

Was it a direct reference to the Carmine System that essentially defined the Auto Heretic line?

Was it a dedication that signified that many humans had shed real blood in order for Professor Ves Larkinson to invent his radically different control system?

Or was it a prophecy that foretold that Carmine mechs like the Auto Heretic would directly and indirectly trigger bloodshed on an unprecedented scale since the start of the Age of Mechs?

As a CEO of a large first-class industrial enterprise, Barrow's vision was not small.

Although his overwhelming desire to pilot a mech had caused him to override all other concerns, that did not mean he had blinded himself to the many implications of the release and proliferation of the Auto Heretic models.

He could already foresee that if many more people suddenly gained control over their own war platforms, they would inevitably gain the urge to make use of their new

possessions.

Since Carmine mechs like the Auto Heretic were mainly designed for combat, even a fool could foresee that a lot of fights would break out in the near future!

This was especially the case if the Auto Heretic was as autonomous as Radagast and the manual suggested.

The lower the threshold to controlling a Carmine mech to an acceptable degree, the faster a new owner would feel tempted to take it out for a spin and fight another mech!

Without the years of training, experience and guidance that produced highly professional and disciplined mech pilots, many new users of Carmine mechs would

This may be another important reason why the MTA would prefer to suppress the

definitely turn into a menace to society!

spread of Carmine mechs.

Barrow sneered. "So what?"

At this point, he was not about to let anyone stop him from piloting his own personal mech!

The deterrence of the Big Two no longer held any significance to him anymore!

He would gladly pilot a Carmine mech, and he would try to make it his mission to share this opportunity to as many norms as possible.

This was because he could understand other people's pain of being unable to pilot a mech as well!

Barrow took one last look at the emblem of the Carmine mech. The image evoked a sense of forbidden glee inside his heart. It was as if piloting this mech would damn him

in the eyes of those who benefited from the status quo.

"If piloting this Carmine mech means that I will become a heretic, then I shall accept my new identity with open arms!"

The man performed a solemn salute to the symbol.

He would have preferred to make this gesture of respect to the inventor of the Carmine System in person, but he was stuck in the wrong galaxy.

Once he was ready, he took his seat and immediately felt as if his machine was trying to

analyze his body.

"Before you can interface with your Auto Heretic for the first time, it will first scan your physiology and blood type before changing its own organic makeup to increase its compatibility." Radagast explained over a transmission. "This process can take 5 to 10 minutes for most people. There is not much need to worry. One of the differences between an Auto Heretic Version A and the lesser editions is that the Carmine System is much more capable of replicating many of the common augmented blood configurations that are popular today. It can't reproduce every variation, but it is designed in a way that knowledgeable experts can easily modify the Carmine System to accommodate more exotic and unusual blood variations."

The designers of the Auto Heretic did not have to worry about this problem as much when they developed Carmine mechs for the third-class and second-class mech markets, but the first-class market was a different story!

The more prosperous the state, the more common

a multitude of genetic treatments!

became for humans to benefit from

Finally the initial adaptation process came to an end. Just as expected, neither Barrow nor Idni had augmented themselves to an extreme, so the first-class Carmine System was easily able to adapt to their physiques.

The two Auto Heretics that still remained mostly dormant had begun to produce a faint

noise.

That was the Carmine System at work. It was already synthesizing the special blood variations that should be a lot more compatible with the physiques of their respective pilots. It would do no good to anyone if the Auto Heretic accidentally killed its own pilot due to blood poisoning!

One of the screens inside the cockpit provided a helpful checklist. Once the last item got ticked, Barrow and Idni knew that there was nothing stopping them from activating

their machines.

"You are clear to go and activate your new Auto Heretics. Go ahead. Introduce yourselves to your new partners for life. It will change you forever"

When Barrow slowly pressed the button, the entire cockpit began to light up. It was as if

dawn had finally arrived on a continent that had been struggling in the dark for multiple

centuries.

As the main systems of the Auto Heretic slowly entered a more active state, Barrow uttered a soft gasp as a multitude of needles stuck into his body and precisely

connected to his blood veins.

Soon enough, he could feel the forced extraction of his own blood, only for the artificial

blood produced by the Carmine System to fill the gap.

This was a deeply uncomfortable physical experience!

Barrow felt so much terror and discomfort that he even felt tempted to jump out of his cockpit seat and tear out all of the blood channels!

It was a good thing that the straps kept him in place. He couldn't do anything aside from letting the Carmine System exchange his blood with his mech.

As human and machine began to exchange each other's blood, they gradually began to

feel each other's presence.

Barrow could not describe the sensation of getting into contact with a completely different but intelligent life form.

He understood a lot better what a living mech actually meant.

"Wonderful,"

The contact started off shallow, but steadily grew stronger and more intimate.

Both sides had already begun to introduce themselves and feel each other out. Neither

of them encountered anything that could stop them from forming a permanent bond

with each other.

In fact, they liked each other right away!

Barrow was more than willing to partner up with any Carmine mech even if it performed like a third-class machine!

The Auto Heretic already exceeded his expectations as far as he was concerned. Though young and new, the Auto Heretic already started out as a second order living

mech.

That granted the Carmine mech enough awareness and understanding of its own existence, purpose and mission.

It was a blessing for a Carmine mech to be able to partner up with a wealthy and capable

man, even if he was a little too old to become a soldier!

The Blood Pact formed without any issues or complications. The strong desire between

the pair to prosper and fall together had sped up its formation and caused it to start off a lot more solid than in most cases!

Shortly after the pact came into force, Barrow immediately became flooded by a wealth of data.

He could feel the mech and the surrounding environment with much greater detail than his augmented human senses!

"So this is what it is like to pilot a mech!"

Although his overwhelming experience with interfacing with the Carmine mech for the first time did not entirely match the descriptions on how neural interfaces worked, Barrow figured that this was by far the most superior control method!

This was because the Blood Pact gave him much of the data that was relevant to piloting his Auto Heretic, but did not exert any excessive load on his brain!

Somehow, the Blood Pact was directly able to dump data and information into his mind without exerting excessive strain on his brain cells! "How is this possible!?"

Barrow was not a neural interface specialist like his friend, so he soon set this question aside.

Instead of trying to figure out how the Blood Pact even worked, it was much more important for him to enjoy the actual experience of controlling a mech like it was his own body, but on a much larger scale!

"At least this part matches the descriptions!"

Chapter 6644 Illusionary Power

For the next 10 minutes, Barrow and Idni were practically having a religious moment. They could scarcely believe a day like this had come.

Before they arrived at this nearly empty warehouse, the two leaders of the NMRI had no idea that they would get to skip through all of the scientific effort they thought was necessary to complete their cause and directly pilot a mech on the spot!

"Hehehehe..."

Barrow was doing it. He was actually doing it. For the first time in his life, he finally became a real mech pilot!

"Hahahaha..."

It was everything he expected and more. Barrow no longer felt weak and frail in his small human body anymore.

Instead, after forming a mysterious pact with his living mech, he was able to borrow the other party's senses and gain the illusion that he was in control of a much larger and more powerful mechanical frame!

"Hahahahaha! This is all I ever wanted!"

The rush of power he gained from this experience was intoxicating. It was no wonder that mech pilots always regarded norms as weaker and more inferior than themselves. How could ordinary people ever measure up to mech pilots when the latter gained the power to topple structures and devastate landscapes in their artificial new bodies? There was no substitute to this kind of exhilaration.

Spacers who crewed warships may arguably be in control of far greater firepower, but the reality was very different from one's imagination.

The larger and more powerful the warship, the more people necessary to crew her stations.

The individual power held by a single individual was ultimately split between hundreds or thousands of officers and ratings.

Due to humanity's general paranoia against automation and hacking, these human crew members were essential to operating any warship. Mandatory human operation was baked into the designs of the ship classes from the onset, making it so that no single unhinged human could throw a weapon of mass destruction onto a city with the press of

a button.

Therefore, Barrow never thought of substituting the unique experience of piloting a mech with serving on a warship or operating other weapon platforms.

What mattered the most to people like him was to gain sole control over a responsive war machine.

The control system also had to allow for direct data transmission between human to mech.

Trying to operate a big machine through buttons and levers just did not cut it, and letting an advanced AI do all of the hard work discredited the experience.

That was rather ironic, as the only reason why the two Auto Heretics were able to walk and move their arms was because they were relying heavily on the autonomous control of the living mech!

Of course, Barrow and Idni attempted to pilot their Carmine mechs on a fully manual basis after they got tired of letting their new battle partners do all of the hard work.

They quickly found out first-hand why mech cadets needed to study for at least 10 years before they were deemed ready and able to pilot combat mechs for a living.

"This is really difficult!"

"The data is overwhelming!"

"How can I possibly keep track of so many moving parts?!"

"The differences between human and mech body structures is making me feel confused!"

Even the barest of motions was enough for the completely green Carmine mech pilots to botch their controls and cause their machines to overextend and lose their balance! Most mechs were able to maintain their balance with the help of gyroscopes and other devices on an automatic basis, but the two overconfident fools had accidentally deactivated it when they insisted on going 'full manual'!

As a result, their mechs tripped on their feet and crashed onto the warehouse floor in an undignified manner!

"Hahahaha!" Radagast laughed as he observed the clumsy Carmine mechs attempting to right themselves. "Now you have a taste of what I felt when I tried to operate my Carmine mech manually. We are still a couple of years too early to be able to move and fight with our new partners without relying so much on autonomous assistance."

"I understand now why the mech designers granted so many control rights to the living mech." Idni spoke with realization. "A living mech is not comparable to an AI at all. I know how artificial intelligences operate. I have participated in the programming of a few of them myself. A living mech is greater than an AI because it is sentient to the point of being able to feel and understand emotions. This has always been the forbidden realm of AIs. When all of those AI-oriented research institutions discover that living mechs have already exceeded their cutting-edge experiments on this front, they will eagerly purchase as many Auto Heretics as possible just to decipher Professor Larkinson's proprietary tech!"

It did not matter that Larkinson had developed a Class IX design philosophy. Those who had been working towards the holy grail of AI technology could not resist the urge to

study real examples of machines gaining enough sentience to become as smart as animals!

However, that was not the extent of what the Auto Heretics could become. Radagast smiled as he explained the essence of living mechs. "If you have studied Professor Larkinson's works and design philosophy, then you should know that living mechs are a means to a goal for him. The point of their existence is to grow alongside. mech pilots such as yourselves, thereby helping you grow faster in turn. From the moment you formed a Blood Pact with your personal Auto Heretic, it will grow stronger, smarter and more capable in many ways. They are sort of like the familiars that frequently show up in all of those magic and wizard dramas."

According to the old and horribly outdated record of Professor Larkinson within the MTA's database, his design philosophy was officially classified as Mutual Growth.

Many people did not fully understand what that meant, but once they piloted any of his living mechs, they understood.

The living mech that Barrow had partnered with was like a juvenile that was constantly soaking up information from his mind.

He felt as if he was a parent all over again. However, instead of taking years to carefully raise a child to a competent adult, he was able to accelerate this process many times over merely by relying on the Blood Pact as a direct transmission channel!

Each time Barrow piloted his living mech in the future, it would definitely absorb and digest much of what it learned. This should not only make the mech stronger, but also understand its mech pilot a lot better.

The only point he was unclear about was how Barrow exactly benefited from this relationship. He suspected that Mutual Growth pointed towards a more profound form

of progress.

Was it called that way because mech pilots who made use of living mechs broke through more frequently than others?

That shouldn't be true. If this was the case, then Professor Ves Larkinson would have become a lot more famous!

As Barrow and Idni continued to try out their mech with heavy assistance from their living mechs, they eventually had their fill and reluctantly disengaged their machines. If they had their way, they would have preferred to keep piloting their machines all day, but they could not ignore the greater implications that this subversive mech would have on the rest of human society.

Once they exited the cockpits and left their new partners behind for the time being, the pair of guests found themselves inside an office that was more heavily shielded and jammed than the rest of the warehouse.

"Radagast." Idni spoke to his old friend who he hadn't contacted for a long time. "Let me

thank you for giving us the opportunity to acquire and pilot these Carmine mechs so soon. How much time has passed since they have been released?"

"I am not clear about this." The host said while shaking his head. "I only received them more than a week ago from another source that you are better off not knowing. Your NMRI is among the first priority customers that I thought of introducing you to the Auto Heretic mech line. I used to consider you all fools for wasting so much of your lives on mechs that could not possibly exist. Now, even if none of your work is responsible for the successful development of the Auto Heretic, I have changed my stance. You are the people who appreciate this opportunity the best. I believe I can entrust you to help spread the new Carmine mechs without doing anything that can impede their spread." Barrow looked skeptical. "The Auto Heretic is obviously a mech that flagrantly violates several of the most important rules of mech design and human technological development in general. I do not believe the MTA is blind to the point of missing the existence or the spread of these mechs."

"You are correct." Radagast nodded. "There are many agents like myself, and more and more true believers such as the two of you who have pledged their full support towards our common goals. The mechers may have already identified many of us, but they have yet to take action on a widespread scale because they still need to form a new policy around this emerging issue. However, once the MTA has decided on its policy, you should be aware that your good days are over. If you still reside in a prosperous and highly developed star system, the mechers and any authorities they hire will be able to find you with ease. You will have to relocate to more remote locations if you want to work with Carmine mechs in the future."

"Is that the plan of our ultimate benefactor?" Barrow wondered. "You seek to overwhelm the MTA's response forces by recruiting us across the galaxy and splitting us up and having us hide on so many obscure planets that the cost does not outweigh the

benefits." "Exactly." Radagast never intended to hide such details in front of a pair of smart leaders.

"This is not a flawless plan. The mechers have already taken people into custody, though their numbers are small for the time being. Sooner or later they will come to you. Piloting the Auto Heretic makes you a heretic. Unless you find a way to join one of the forbidden organizations that openly resist the Big Two but still manage to eke out their living, your time will come to a faster end."

Barrow simply smiled as a response. "I am not unwilling to end it all if that point has arrived. I have already completed my initial life's mission. Any additional piloting sessions

that I can fit into my schedule are icing on the cake."

What a fatalistic mindset.

He truly felt this way, though.

"This is not about the two of you, but all of the other norms across the galaxy." Radagast said.

"Every norm deserves to experience sound on a different level. I will leave the

strategizing to the professionals. I alone cannot defeat the pervasive influence of the MTA, but the two of you are different. You have the research capabilities, the production facilities, an enormous relationship workshop and other favorable conditions to do what

is right for everyone."

"We will localize the Carmine mech templates and develop mech designs that we will spread to everyone free of charge." Barrow decided. "Hoarding the mech templates and mech designs is completely counterproductive. We should spread it and encourage those with starships to leave for other destinations before spilling the word." "We cannot settle for using mech templates and mech designs, my friend." Idni warned. "We need to produce large quantities of Auto Heretics. Only by giving all of the skeptics access to real Carmine mechs will it gain credibility. While several trustees have decided to start their own factories in their corner of the galaxy, the delays are too long. It is better to use existing mech factories for this purpose. The two greatest issues related to production is that the biotech components Carmine System can only be grown, and that living mechs cannot be made with the use of materialization technology?"

Idni looked mildly surprised when he heard that. "Ah! That will make it harder for large

companies to produce Auto Heretics en masse. It may actually be the smaller and independent workshops and mech companies that can proficiently produce mechs through more conventional methods."

If this was the case, then they were better off spreading the localized mech designs of the Auto Heretic to a large number of messy and chaotic workshops and other small-scale production facilities!

Chapter 6645 The Heresy Spreads

Days passed since that fateful meeting with Radagast.

While the mysterious broker left the planet in order to deliver his other batches of Auto Heretics to other groups, Barrow and Idni returned straight to the NMRI with their new Carmine mechs.

They not only brought along their personal Carmine mechs, but also transported an additional 8 Auto Heretics that were ready to bond with any willing norm.

Suffice to say, each and every executive that received an exclusive offer from Barrow and Idni agreed to form a lifelong pact with a mech that they would have looked down upon in normal cases.

Just like everyone else who formed a Blood Pact with an Auto Heretic, they did not care about its lackluster performance or the many limitations of the Carmine System.

They already got sold from the moment they heard that they could control the mech through an experience that resembled the use of a neural interface, but conveniently omitted the excessively high wear and tear on the brain!

"This is impossible!"

"How can you control a mech with your brain when there is no direct interface?"

"Is this the power of a Class IX design philosophy?"

Although the leading members of the NMRI all reacted with shock and confusion at the bizarre qualities of the Auto Heretic, that did not stop them from praising how well it substituted the function of the neural interface!

If not for the extremely inconvenient rule that they could only form a single Blood Pact with a single Carmine mech, they would have definitely regarded the Carmine System as the most perfect invention in the history of mech development!

Once the 8 remaining Carmine mechs found their new owners, Barrow and Idni subsequently called every member who was present at the NMRI facility for a general meeting and introduced the Auto Heretic.

The reactions from the hundreds of researchers and other personnel were initially skeptical, but that soon changed when all 10 leading members of the NRMI hopped into the cockpits and piloted their Carmine mechs as a demonstration!

Even though this display could easily be faked by turning the so-called Carmine mechs into battle bots, people's trust in their leaders was too high.

There was no way that ardent mech enthusiasts like Treasurer Barrow Rakovshchik would try to deceive them all like this! At most, the Carmine System may indeed be able to deliver on its astonishing promises, but do so at an unimaginably high price. Nobody really paid much attention to the latter, though.

All they thought about was how long they would have to wait until they could pilot their own Carmine mech!

Barrow smiled as he addressed the most pressing concerns of his fellow friends and like-minded mech fanatics.

"Quiet down! Be patient! While our off-world supplier has only been able to deliver 10 Carmine mechs to us, he has also supplied us with the mech templates and the original mech designs for all three versions of the Auto Heretic line. It is fully within our capability to derive a localized mech design based on the first-class version of the Auto Heretic mech template. The Carmine mechs that you see before you now are copies from a different mech design. While they can be used for reference value and other research purposes, we will not be able to reproduce their exact design due to differences in material supply!"

The Genser Federation was not only rich in valuable ore deposits, but also engaged in extensive trade and commerce.

Even so, it would be troublesome and unreasonably expensive to start producing mechs that required the NMRI and its partners to import uncommon exotics three star clusters away!

Most members of the NMRI understood the logistical constraints of trying to reproduce an unlocalized mech design.

"From today onwards, the NMRI will formally suspend all ongoing R&D projects." Barrow announced in his more officious posture that he regularly used it in his main job. "The existence of the Carmine System, the Auto Heretic mech line and the mech templates has given us all we need to start producing mechs that can enable all of us to pilot our own mechs. Since the Carmine System is leagues ahead of our own research projects, it is not worth the time and effort to try to expand the eligibility of users of neural interface technology."

Many researchers such as Idni Zenokon looked upset, but also resigned. They had already given up on the notion that their research could redeem neural interface technology.

However, there were also several other specialists who had become so invested in their research projects that they could not stand the thought that they had essentially wasted all of their years on an intellectual effort that ultimately contributed little to no value to

society!

Their self-worth was at stake!

The lead researcher of Project WR-13 raised the strongest objection.

"Just because a strange Senior Mech Designer who scurried off to the lost Red Ocean managed to give us all a way to pilot mechs does not mean that our work has become a wasted effort. Every failure or disappointing result we attain is another step towards progress. The more we learn through our repeated failures, the greater our chance of producing a successful result. We would be doing ourselves and our many predecessors

an enormous insult for abandoning our current line of research when we are only halfway to our destination."

Another researcher voiced his own objection.

"I will not deny the historic advances made by Professor Larkinson." The distinguished woman spoke with an eloquent voice. "His Carmine System has solved the most urgent problem that has plagued all of us. Yet what if his Carmine System cannot be improved past this point? What if we are forever stuck with pairing a single human to a single mech if we favor the Carmine System to the exclusion of all other options? What if the Carmine System contains hidden dangers that cause any bonded Carmine mech pilot to age prematurely and die within a decade?"

Another researcher concurred. "We cannot grow overdependent on a single solution. The Carmine System comes with too many flaws. Not only that, but the only reason it works in the first place is because it relies entirely on metaphysical phenomena as opposed to more tangible and physical phenomena. The fact that there is no direct interface between the mech and the brain is proof of that. How are we supposed to study and imitate a channel as inscrutable as this 'Blood Pact'? None of us possess the right expertise to begin to understand its principles. We would be better off if we stick to our current fields. Perhaps we can learn a number of valuable lessons from the Carmine System and apply our gains to neural interface research."

The voices in support of neural interface research started to gain more momentum, but Barrow remained unmoved.

"I am not claiming that it is a dead end or that no innovation is possible in this field. I am merely being realistic about our capabilities, and so are others, including your very own chief scientist who is one of our foremost experts in the field of neural interface technology. The fact of the matter is that the NMRI does not have the funds and talents to study the Carmine System and Carmine mechs while at the same time sustaining your current research projects. Instead of chasing after a mirage that may or may not come true in the far future, I would rather have our institute devote our budget and energy to the subjects that truly matter."

That was not good news to many of the researchers. It was clear to them that the Carmine System had little in common with neural interfaces.

Idni Zenokon actually grew angry at the reluctance of his fellow researchers. "Neural interface technology is dead to us!" He shouted, causing many of his fellow researchers to look aghast. "It is not obsolete, as potentates can still make excellent use of them, but what does it matter to us? Remember what the NMRI stands for! The New Mech Research Initiative was founded to complete the mission of developing a new kind of mech that can allow norms such as ourselves to enjoy the same power and privileges as potentates. Now that one such a new mech has arrived at our doorstep that happens to replace the cursed and narrow-minded neural interfaces entirely, why are you not welcoming it with open arms? Even if the existence of the Carmine System had directly made us all redundant, I would gladly welcome this development because the

opportunity to pilot a Carmine mech is more important than conducting research that has never produced any serious results in centuries!"

His rebuke successfully caused most researchers to reflect on themselves and recognize that they too preferred to pilot a real mech than to waste their time on tech that had become irrelevant to them

all. Now that a far better alternative had arrived, there was not strong reason anymore for them to stick to neural interfaces.

Barrow grinned at his audience. "The NMRI will shortly begin to restructure. We will devote ourselves entirely to the research and development of Carmine mechs and the Carmine System for the benefit of the Genser Federation and human civilization as a whole. Our immediate priority is to develop a localized mech design from one of the mech templates in the fastest possible time frame. I cannot state the importance of completing this priority project within a week or preferably sooner. After we have completed a reasonable design, we will use our workshop and our closest partner companies to fabricate the first batches of Carmine mechs."

"Who will get to pilot those Carmine mechs first?" A manager asked.

"You" Barrow directly pointed at the man before sweeping his hand across the gathered people. "All of you will receive the offer to take possession of a Carmine mech and pilot it first. We have made the special decision to buy an Auto Heretic from us at a discount of up to 80 percent. This discount will be applied to the estimated production cost of 800,000 MTA credits per copy. I am aware that this is still a considerable sum for many of you, but our institution is willing to extend low-interest loans to any of you whose

finances are tight."

That was great news to most of them! The volunteers worked for the NMRI out of love for mechs and a desire to contribute to the cause. Their incomes weren't entirely competitive, mostly because the institute did not wish to squander its donation money. For the NMRI to still go out of its way to supply the first batches of Auto Heretics to them was an incredibly valuable privilege, especially when many of them could foresee that demand would become so high that everyone else would have to wait much longer!

Barrow's expression suddenly turned serious.

"However, if you agree to receive one of our Carmine mechs and pilot it, you must also

be prepared to face hostility and retaliation from those who oppose what the Auto Heretic line stands for and how its availability may change our society. The MTA may decide to initiate a crackdown in as little as a day. We will never give up in our attempt to fulfill the cause, so we may become wanted criminals in a month. If you are not ready to sacrifice your life and wellbeing to open up mech piloting to every human, then you can submit your resignation letters after the conclusion of this assembly."

A tense atmosphere had fallen over the previously jubilant members of the NMRI. Many

of them had just begun to realize that their work at this institute had become a lot

graver than before!

They could suffer real adverse consequences if they continued to devote their work on a variation of a mech that contained multiple forbidden features!

The treasurer of the NMRI summed up their new reality if they chose to stay and fight.

"We are no longer engaged in a hopeless technological goose chase. We are turning from researchers who explored the limits of neural interfaces to fighters and agitators who must do everything in our power to help the Auto Heretic mechs spread across the Genser Federation and beyond, even if it costs us our life! Only then shall we be able to repay our gratitude towards Professor Larkinson for gifting us this miracle without expecting any remuneration!"

Though the members of the NMRI weren't soldiers, they gradually got caught up in the

excitement of the moment.

Compared to everything else in their lives, nothing mattered more than to pilot a mech themselves, and share this precious opportunity to others! Barrow abruptly raised his fist in a martial manner!

"The Carmine Revolution has begun!"

Chapter 6646 The Calm Before the Storm

Events accelerated quickly after the NMRI got introduced to the Auto Heretic line.

Many neural interface specialists and related researchers reluctantly or decisively abandoned their ongoing research projects.

As much as they hated to admit it, if their entire discipline failed to improve the usability and accessibility of neural interface technology in the last 4 centuries in a meaningful way, then how probable was it that they could attain a breakthrough in the next 4 centuries?

A few scientists argued that they had accumulated so many theories and experimental data over the years that they were on the cusp of a major breakthrough. If they just kept mining dirt in the same direction, they would definitely stumble upon a rich ore vein within the next decade!

Of course, these voices held little credibility. They were clearly trying to preserve their own jobs and importance within the organization. They had also become too attached to neural interface technology to refuse that it had utterly failed the population of norms throughout human society.

Compared to this incredibly fussy and sensitive old tech that had been explored to death, many members of the NMRI had quickly developed a fascination for Carmine Technology.

When the researchers began to examine the 10 copies of the Auto Heretic that was currently in the NMRI's possession, they found far more questions than answers. They did not have a single clue how living mechs worked. They did not possess the expertise to understand the phenomenon and lacked the instruments to collect any relevant data about them. What was worse was that they found it difficult to find any relevant academic literature.

The only useful references they could find on the galactic net were old articles and interviews related to Professor Ves Larkinson and his works.

The problem was that much of his own words only offered surface level knowledge on living mechs. Even if he had been quite frank about his own mindset when he worked on his living mech designs, his guidance was devoid of specific instructions.

A more serious problem was that the galactic net of the Milky Way also lacked any publications related to the Father of Carmine Mechs after the Great Severing had occurred.

This was an even greater problem!

Since the Auto Heretic line had clearly been devised within the last year, Professor Larkinson must have made a major breakthrough during the period that the Red Ocean got cut off from humanity's home galaxy.

Certain circles soon found out that Professor Larkinson actually taught an introductory course on mech design at a Terran university!

Unfortunately, there was no way to obtain his lesson material. He advanced to Senior shortly before the Great Severing. Any students he taught were all humans stuck in the Red Ocean.

If any of his lesson material ended up on the galactic net or in the possession of certain groups, then it was virtually impossible to obtain any of it due to the separation of communication networks between the two galaxies.

Although there were persistent rumors that certain parties, such as the Big Two, still maintained secret lines of communication with their Red Ocean cousins, the NMRI did not have access to such exclusive information channels.

They could only start to research the operation of Carmine mechs from the basics. While they could not physically detect the presence of the Blood Pact and directly observe its operation, they could still measure the activity on both the Carmine System as well as the brain of the Carmine mech pilot.

Their initial studies confirmed that the Carmine System was truly responsible for allowing a human to control a machine in a similar nature to what could be

accomplished with neural interface technology.

However, there were definitely differences between the two control systems.

"We should have reserved at least one of the Auto Heretics for a potentate." Chief Scientist Idni Zenokon complained. "It would have been great if we could obtain the input of a genuine mech pilot on how exactly his piloting experience differs."

"Can professional mech pilots make use of Carmine mechs as well?" Barrow raised his eyebrow and asked.

"They can." The other man smiled. "The Carmine System does not care about genetic aptitude and neural interface technology. It is an independent control system that operates through an entirely different set of principles. There is a mention in the manual that the Carmine System actually complements a neural interface when used at the same time. This has massive implications for mech pilots who suffer from brain damage or possesses a low genetic aptitude. Using the two control systems at the same time is ostensibly an excellent means to raise the 'effective' genetic aptitude of a mech pilot by varying degrees. A C-grade mech pilot may be able to perform as a B-grade mech

pilot, therefore earning the qualifications to pilot first-class multipurpose mechs." These were huge implications that had enormous value to potentates with genetic aptitudes ranging from E to B.

It was a pity that Barrow Rakovshchik was no such individual. He was just a norm, so he had little sympathy for the difficulties that mech pilots who lacked the coveted A-grade genetic aptitude endured.

"Is it possible to design a variant of the Auto Heretic that includes a neural interface?"

The businessman asked.

"It is, though the variant should only be of interest to disabled veterans and so on." Idni responded. "It is not worth our time and effort to cater to this special segment. We should stick to serving the customers we know the best, which is the citizens of the Genser Federation and our neighboring states. I have already made contact with other partner institutions. Only a third of them have received copies of the Auto Heretic, but they have already obtained the virtual data packages containing the most crucial mech templates and accompanying documentation. We are all working to serve our own populations by giving them access to localized variants of the Auto Heretic Version A and Version B."

It might sound strange for first-class institutions to devote manpower and resources to developing localized variants of the first-class as well as second-class versions of the Auto Heretic line, but it was quite a shrewd choice.

Most ordinary citizens of a first-rate state did not have the income to pay for a 800,000 MTA credit Carmine mech.

They weren't even able to obtain enough credit to pay for a first-class mech that cost as much as an apartment in a decent city district!

The Version B therefore became a much more attractive choice. Even if the second-class Auto Heretic was completely useless in first-class combat situations, it didn't matter so long as ordinary civilians only wanted to obtain the experience of

piloting a mech!

It was also a lot cheaper for mech factories to produce and distribute Auto Heretic B mechs on a massive scale.

Since everyone who signed up to the Carmine Revolution already gained the awareness that the MTA was looking to crack down on the new machines, it became more

important than ever to make the jobs of the mechers as difficult as possible!

By making the Auto Heretic B mechs so cheap and easy to produce, the 'revolutionaries' could sell a second-class Carmine mech to any first-class citizen!

Of course, the elevated price levels of a first-rate state like the Genser Federation meant that the production cost of a single copy of the Auto Heretic B was at least twice as much as the estimated default cost of 1.5 MTA credits.

Other costs came into the picture as well. Barrow estimated that distribution, insurance, sales and so on would all cause the final sales price to hover at around 8 to 10 MTA

credits.

Even so, most citizens were still able to scrounge up 10 MTA credits with relative ease. They might not be able to last a second when confronting a genuine first-class mech, but if they truly wanted to make a career out of mech piloting, they could choose to emigrate to a second-rate state if they wanted!

"How soon will our designs be ready?" Barrow asked.

Idni raised three fingers. "Three days. This is longer than our initial estimate because we wanted to put our own stamp onto the localized mech designs. Our mech designers found that there is enough leeway for the lead designers of the projects to apply their own design philosophies to their variants without compromising the functioning of the Carmine System. They are not quite certain about the threshold, so they are keeping their own contributions modest for the time being. This will help to differentiate our early mech designs from others, and also prove that the Auto Heretic mech line is inherently open to change."

"Didn't the unnamed Master Mech Designer who assisted in the design of the original Auto Heretics apply Wild Modularity to the mech templates? Every customer should be able to request their own upgrades on an incremental basis."

"That is true, Barrow, but we do not think every customer will make use of this service. It is costly and it takes time. There is a market for variants that are a little more different from the more authentic variants of the Auto Heretic. In our case, we are making sure that we implement changes and tweaks to the modular systems and standards to conform to what is popular in our region. This way, customers will be able to slot existing compatible mech parts to their personal Auto Heretics."

The two talked a bit more about their efforts to bring more Carmine mechs to norms.

Though time was of the essence, the NMRI still had an obligation to release proper

products. While news about the Auto Heretics had already begun to spread among certain circles, human civilization had remained mostly quiet for the time being.

Tension built up every day. The calm before the storm could only last for so long.

Neither the mechers nor the fleeters had taken any overt actions, though they were

most certainly aware of what was taking place.

It was not until one day was left before the NMRI completed its localized variants of the Auto Heretic line that the secret had been shattered!

A pre-recorded announcement made by a god pilot known as the Beast of Fear had

spread across human space!

This was no ordinary transmission! While the short but incredibly significant video file

had initially spread through the galactic net at breakneck speed, the Comm Consortium rapidly clamped down on this activity.

The organization that controlled the galactic net of the Milky Way had been ready to

intervene from the start!

Since the Comm Consortium danced to the tune of the Big Two, it was almost certain that it had done this at the direction of the MTA or CFA!

It didn't matter. Many mysterious agents such as Radagast had already traveled to numerous different

star systems and set up the arrangements to spread and broadcast the announcement among the local populations.

With the use of data chips, encryption and local collaborators, a vast conspiracy had sprung forth to spread the message of the god pilot as extensively as possible! Even if only 10 to 20 percent of human-occupied planets manage to hear the announcement, its contents would most definitely spread to the rest of human society.

There was no way to stop all humans from traveling to other destinations and spreading

the news by themselves!

The galactic net also became filled with talk about this hot subject. There was no way to

stop so many people from spreading the message.

The Comm Consortium would practically have to shut down the galactic net in its entirety if it wanted to block the news!

The major players understood that the Big Two had clearly been caught off-guard.

If a random nobody made this announcement, then it would have been a lot easier to

suppress the news, at least on a temporary basis. However, the mechers apparently failed to anticipate that one of their vaunted god pilots was a part of this conspiracy!

Even if the Beast of Fear was one of the most notorious and least respected god pilots in the Milky Way, a huge amount of people still possessed a high desire to hear anything related to such an incredibly powerful figure.

The fact that his announcement was being suppressed by the Big Two only egged people

on. They became more and more enticed by the latest taboo. They wanted to know what the fuss was about!

Chapter 6647 Spreading Wildfire

The public announcement made by the Beast of Fear was pretty easy to obtain for most people.

Even if they did not actively try to seek it out, some of their family, friends and co-workers would definitely try to secure the video file in one way or another. Sales of data chips and other cheap data storage devices had skyrocketed!

In fact, people could still download the file across the galactic net as long as they explored its darker corners and were willing to put up with convoluted encryption and other safety measures.

Once they received the file, they could easily play the video by themselves.

The Beast of Fear did not appear by showing off his monstrous, tentacled and wolf-shaped biomech frame.

He instead used his God Kingdom to display a more photogenic human avatar. Of course, the silhouette of his god mech still loomed in the background. "Humans of the Milky Way. I bring you both good tidings and bad tidings. In the past year, the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance has learned of a new development in the Red Ocean. Those of you who believe we no longer maintain any communications with our displaced brothers and sisters are mistaken. All of the press statements released by the MTA on this subject are filled with lies. What is important is the development in question. A famous Senior Mech Designer called Ves Larkinson has released the first Carmine mech to the public of the Red Ocean."

"Some of you may already know what a Carmine mech does. A Carmine mech is equipped with Professor Larkinson's innovative Carmine System. This is an alternative control system that works completely differently from traditional neural interfaces. Carmine Systems come with their own limitations, but are free of other limitations as well. One of the most important implications is that norms, humans who do not possess adequate genetic aptitudes that are suitable for piloting mechs, can also pilot a Carmine mech. You should understand how much Carmine mechs can change our entire society forever."

"I, the Beast of Fear, have come to admire Larkinson's Carmine mechs. I have contributed what little aid I can to import his unique take on mechs and spread our own version of a Carmine mech in the Milky Way Galaxy. I have done so knowing that the resulting Auto Heretic line will exist in defiance against the MTA and the CFA. The initial responses from the Big Two have only vindicated my assumptions of their attitudes." Copies of all three versions of the Auto Heretic appeared by his side. The mechs did not look impressive when placed alongside a god pilot, but they still held a lot more meaning to all of the norms that dreamt about piloting their own machines!

The human avatar of the Beast of Fear shook his head in disappointment.

"The initial groups of people who received the copies as well as the files necessary to reproduce the Auto Heretic line welcomed the chance to make a difference by making mech piloting available to norms. However, the same cannot be said for the god pilots, Star Designers and galactic mech councilors of the MTA. The admirals of the CFA are likewise dismissive of the notion to allow common humans without special brain conditions access to mechs."

"As a formerly proud member and leader of the Mech Trade Association myself, I am sickened by the elitist attitudes of my supposed peers. This is why they regard me as a pariah and seek to belittle me every chance they have. They regard the Auto Heretic mechs as threats to public safety and order because it would give more than 3.5 percent of our population access to mechs that can be used to fight. The Big Two prefers that you remain civilians and victims because you are easier to control that way. The mechers and fleeters have never been interested in letting space peasants such as yourselves pilot your own war machines. As far as they are concerned, their perfect order will remain pristine and unchanged as long as only potentates are allowed to pilot mechs." How slanderous!

His words would definitely shock a lot of people!

Since he was a god pilot, many listeners would definitely assume that he was being completely truthful in his characterization of the MTA!

"Are you content with the Big Two's policies towards your state? Are you willing to let the mechers and fleeters deprive your state of its sovereignty, its independence and even the right to choose its own arms? Then do not let the MTA and CFA force you into their web of stifling and overly restrictive rules! Break your shackles and take control over your own future! Do not let the mechers and the fleeters succeed in their attempts to erase the Auto Heretic and all other Carmine mechs from the public domain. Rise up, brothers and sisters! Take control over your own destiny and fight to retain the right to pilot your own mech. Only when every human can pilot his or her own mech will we be able to unleash the true potential of our race! Let the Carmine Revolution sweep across our galaxy!"

As the recordings of the Beast of Fear continued to spread like wildfire, everyone knew that the cat was out of the bag.

News of the Auto Heretic mech line and its Carmine System could no longer be hidden from the masses anymore.

Perhaps the Big Two recognized the reality that no secret could be kept forever, but they certainly would have certainly appreciated more time to adapt to the immense changes that this epochal invention could unleash upon a severely unprepared society. An additional week of preparation would have made a huge difference. The sector headquarters spread throughout human space had already begun to mobilize their forces and other personnel in order to undertake large actions.

However, it still took a lot of time for those forces to get into place and make the right preparations. Relying on the planetary branches alone was not enough to suppress a much larger population, of which many of them were in favor of embracing Carmine mechs!

Although the Big Two anticipated various different possibilities, they never judged that a god pilot of all people was not only directly involved in this scheme, but also chose to step out of the shadows and make a public stand!

"The Beast of Fear has gone too far!"

"I always warned you that we should have never tolerated the MTA Unbound Humanity Faction! They are all rebels who want nothing less than to tear down our Association and other institutions! Your misguided strategy of appeasing them and pretending that we are listening to their concerns has cost us our only chance to nip this crisis in the bud!" "You are a genetic degenerate if you think the fleeters and us can suppress the spread of this 'Auto Heretic. Human space is too big, and our numbers are too few! No matter how many monitoring systems we use and no matter how much personnel we send, there will always be space peasants that slip through the cracks and spread the

data on the mech templates, mech designs and other files necessary to reproduce their own 'Carmine mechs."

"I agree. If we mobilize all of the forces that we can spare and activate all of the forces under the control of our associates, we may be able to keep the Auto Heretics from appearing inside first-rate and second-rate states. As for third-rate states? Impossible! There are too many of them that are spread out across vast regions of space. We do not have the first-class multipurpose mechs and starships to dispatch forces to every dirtball with a human settlement on it. The planetary branches that we have established on them may be able to handle the local situation without requiring reinforcements, but do you know how many people will begin to hate us for it? Those branches are not as impregnable as you think. They have much better hardware at their disposal, but they cannot resist the might of a planetary uprising!"

"The third-class space peasants may have the numbers, but they do not have the wealth and resources to threaten our reign. At most, we can retreat from their space and let them fend for themselves. Then they shall discover how much they have taken their peace and stability for granted."

"That will completely destroy our legitimacy!"

"You are paying attention to the wrong states. The real threat lies within the Greater Terran United Confederation and the New Rubarth Empire. The existence of the Auto Heretic line has different implications for them. We must pay closer attention to their actions. If my calculations are correct, then they will certainly do their best to spread the Auto Heretics and fan the flames in the shadows. In fact, they may have already begun to do so. If the Terrans and the Rubarthans make widespread use of Carmine mechs, then other first-raters will make the same demands."

"Then what do we do? Are you suggesting that we must admit our defeat and allow the Auto Heretic to spread completely out of our control? Anarchy will quickly follow, especially considering that Professor Larkinson has helpfully turned his works into 'High Autonomy Living Mechs'!"

"We prioritize stability and security over other priorities. Forget about banning the Auto Heretics. We should merely ensure that any use of these Carmine mechs should take place well outside of populated locations. The owners of Auto Heretics will never agree to relinquish their machines, but they will reluctantly agree to any reasonable request to practice and fight at locations where collateral damage can be reduced to the minimum." "That will make us look weak in a period where we must show strength." "We have already lost our image of strength when a Senior Mech Designer and a young one at that has made mech piloting available to norms. Make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen. Our reputation which we have built and maintained over the course of centuries is about to experience its first historical plunge. If we do not engage in actions that generate positive PR

right away, the public may soon crucify us. I shouldn't have to warn you of the consequences of losing our legitimacy"

For the first time since the start of the Age of Mechs, the hegemony of the Mech Trade Association was at stake!

There were plenty of Star Designers and other extremely clever people within the Association.

As soon as they gained access to the data and information about the Auto Heretic, they quickly realized the magnitude of the threat it posed.

The fact that Professor Ves Larkinson, who was doing extremely well in the Red Ocean, had deliberately designed a Carmine mech for the Milky Way and used vast networks of shady brokers and scummy smugglers to spread the mech templates everywhere was a strong indication of a vast conspiracy against the MTA!

The Star Designers whose comprehension of mechs had reached the ceiling in this galaxy set aside their critical work and devoted all of their time to investigating the mech that solved a problem that even they couldn't solve.

"This is a mech designed with ill intentions." The Lord of the Skies concluded. "From the

moment of conception, the Auto Heretic was designed to not only violate the taboos of our industry, but break them so thoroughly that it will change our industry forever, and not for the better."

Apollo voiced his own opinion. "As much as I admire the ingenuity of this Carmine System and the bold decision to make the 'living mech' autonomous, the mech designers responsible have flagrantly ignored the very real risks that their works can backfire on the humans they are meant to serve. If our tools are able to outgrow their dependence on us, then it is only a matter of time before they break out of our control and seek their own independence. The only reason that may restrain them for a time is

if they have formed a Blood Pact with a human mech pilot. What happens if the Auto Heretic survives but the mech pilot has perished?"

The Lady of Motion looked irritated. "It is regrettable that Professor Larkinson has already anticipated the possibility that we could shut down his Auto Heretic mechs through the Kingdom of Mechs. I am surprised that the 'Red Kingdom' has recovered and grown so quickly after being cast away. Red humanity is doing better in their dangerous dwarf galaxy than we initially expected."

"Red humanity, or at least a small group of red humans, have also launched a deliberate attack onto the present order that we are safeguarding. The Auto Heretic mech templates may appear as a magnificent gift to our branch of humanity, but we know that it is nothing less than a Trojan horse. We are under attack. The humans that have become isolated from us in only three years have already begun to plot against us, and I

may have discovered their true purpose."

"What have you discovered?"

"Demonic cultivation."

Every Star Designer gathered in the meeting went still at that mention.

There was hardly a greater taboo within the upper levels of the MTA than cultivation!

Demonic cultivation especially evoked alarm among the leaders of an organization that previously dethroned their cultivator masters!

"If this is the case, then the threat level of this line of mechs must immediately be raised. What is the Five Scrolls Compact doing at this time?"

Chapter 6648 The Big Two Strikes Back

When everyone and their mother had seen the Beast of Fear's announcement, the Carmine Revolution had begun in earnest!

While the Red Ocean had already kicked off its own Carmine Revolution, the biggest difference with the revolution in the Milky Way was that it commenced in spite of the opposition from the Big Two!

As the dominant rulers and hegemonies of human space, the MTA and CFA experienced their first true challenge to their reign since the start of the Age of Mechs.

The Big Two had been on guard against potential threats and challenges from the first-rate superstates and the surviving alien empires that had been licking their wounds on the other side of the galaxy.

They never expected that their first and potentially fatal challenge would come from a red human of all possibilities!

Perhaps a number of far-sighted thinkers may have predicted that as red humanity continues to diverge from original humanity, the two would eventually grow so far apart that they would constitute two separate species and civilizations.

In the long-term, that might cause the two branches of humanity to come into conflict with each other, but that was supposed to happen many years later, not a few years after the Great Severing!

This meant that the Carmine Revolution unfolded in two completely different ways. The Carmine Revolution of the Red Ocean was bloodless among humans as the Red Three fully supported the rollout of the Yellow Jackets.

The Carmine Revolution of the Milky Way had not yet led to large scale outbreaks, but hidden fights and conflicts had already broken out behind the scenes.

If the fighting among the warring groups and factions continued to escalate, then it was only a matter of time before the revolution turned bloody!

Shortly after the spread of the Beast of Fear's message had spread too wide for there to be any hope of suppressing it further, the MTA and the CFA moved unusually quickly and began to take more overt actions.

One of them was to order the Comm Consortium to tighten communications across the stars!

Long considered a mostly free and unrestrained communications network, the galactic net began to experience an unprecedented degree of crackdowns, blockades and service denials!

Due to the highly centralized nature of the quantum entanglement nodes that make the galactic net possible, the Comm Consortium was able to exert widespread control over remote communications.

Many people found that it had become a lot harder to talk about the new Auto Heretics and the implications of the Carmine System!

Of course, the more tech and computer-savvy individuals could always find clever ways to circumvent the censure on this subject, but the Comm Consortium was not incompetent.

The organization became a lot more aggressive in its enforcement of the new rules. It expanded its workforce and employed more proactive AIs to keep the galactic net relatively clean of any talk about the latest taboos.

It was especially forbidden to spread around any mech templates or mech designs based on the Auto Heretic line!

The sudden and overt repression from the Comm Consortium did not go unnoticed. Many people grew dissatisfied and outright angry at the organization.

For the first time in centuries, the people felt as if the galactic net had lost its purpose as a free information source.

While it was not unusual for the Comm Consortium to scrub freely available information about confidential secrets, restricted technology and other forms of paid and exclusive content, many people disagreed with the decision to treat Carmine mechs in the same way!

A lot of those individuals began to circumvent the galactic net entirely and focused on more primitive means of information transmission,

They held more in-person meetings. They traveled around across the surface of a planet. or to an entirely different star system.

The Milky Way Galactic Gate Network ironically promoted this sort of activity to a huge extent.

For the first time in recent times, people were able to travel from one end of human space to the other end without wasting decades on travel time!

In fact, the existence of lesser beyonder gates made it possible for the Auto Heretic mechs to spread from the Yeina Star Cluster to practically every other star cluster in a matter of weeks or months!

Now, the same network that was responsible for revitalizing commerce and tourism across human space now began to be used to smuggle all kinds of people, data chips and other matters related to Carmine mechs!

Even if the Gate Consortium quickly responded by banning the transportation of Auto Heretics and imposing mandatory checks on all data carrying devices, there was no way the inspection methods could stop the transmission of all forms of data and information! For example, there was nothing the Gate Consortium could do to stop people who literally memorized the mech designs or other forms of information of the Auto Heretics!

It was such a hopeless endeavor that the inspectors responsible for fulfilling this burden did not even try anymore.

For one, the delays imposed by all of the strict inspections could easily grind all of the gate transfers to a virtual standstill. That would massively reduce the Gate Consortium's revenue and make it unsustainable to fund the entire gate network and surrounding infrastructure.

Another problem was that the people who worked at the Gate Consortium did not necessarily agree with the stance taken by the Big Two.

Even though the MTA made vague promises that it needed a lot of time to thoroughly inspect the Auto Heretic design and either 'improve' it so that it became a lot more harmless, or design their own version of a Carmine mech that was supposedly safer, nobody believed in the MTA!

The Beast of Fear had already instilled a huge amount of distrust and suspicion towards the mechers. The human population was no longer willing to take them at their word. The era in which the MTA could publish practically any information and assume that the space peasants would eat it all up without complaint was gone!

As a result, a large number of ordinary workers at many different organizations actually started to resist the measures taken to stop the proliferation of Carmine mechs.

The workers of the Gate Consortium only made a token effort to scan for any

'contraband'

The employees of the Comm Consortium did not work too hard to check whether people were secretly transmitting forbidden data across the galactic net.

There were even people within the Mech Trade Association itself that openly or secretly opposed the measures taken against Carmine mechs!

"We are making the wrong decisions! We should embrace mech innovation, not stifle it! The arguments you have made against the potential dangers of Carmine mechs are valid, but I am not hearing any solutions from you! The best way to deal with an innovative but flawed mech such as the Auto Heretic is to go all-out to design a superior version of it! No matter what, the norms of our galaxy should not be denied. They have a right to pilot

mechs!"

"And we have a right to protect them from their own shortsightedness and lack of discipline. Do you understand how quickly these highly inexperienced pilots will enter into conflict? Without the necessary training, how can you expect them to show any discipline?! We are part of the Mech Trade Association. One of its mandates is to protect our civilization from the threats and abuses posed by mechs. This is why we set standards and enforce them to the strictest degree. As soon as we begin to slip even once, all hell will break loose!"

Debates continued to rage within the halls of the MTA as many different factions and individuals became divided from each other.

Naturally, the old guard was generally a lot more hesitant towards allowing the Auto

Heretics to proliferate.

The new guard comprising the younger generations were a lot more open-minded about

it, though they still had their fair share of contrarians.

As the supporters of the so-called Carmine Revolution became more ardent in their stance, so did their detractors!

The Big Two and especially the MTA might have lost a lot of respect all of a sudden, but there were still a lot of people who continued to hold it in high esteem!

The proponents of the MTA's stance towards Carmine mechs truly believed that letting more humans gain access to mechs was a recipe for disaster, especially if it happened at a fast pace.

They began to organize themselves and generate more effective opposition. They had even begun to call themselves the Guardians of Peace, as their mission was to protect

the current stable order.

One of the consequences of keeping states in a permanently modest state of militarization was that wars never escalated beyond a point.

This was the brilliance of the Big Two's policies towards mechs and warfare. The proliferation of the Auto Heretic and possibly other Carmine mech models threatened to completely upend this order!

This was not just because states could become a lot more militarized, but also because the people's diminishing respect towards the MTA and its overly restrictive rules threatened to turn human space into a more lawless society!

The Guardians of Peace actually began to gain a lot of support. The active support from the Big Two played a large role in this, but there were genuinely a lot of people who

preferred to remain in a society where dangerous mechs that could kill hundreds of minute could be found everywhere!

people within Not everyone adored mechs.

The more proactive among the Guardians of Peace had even begun to infiltrate the inner

circles of the so-called Carmine Revolutionaries for the purpose of feeding information

back to the MTA. The crackdowns intensified, and so did the animosity between the two sides!

As the Carmine Revolution continued to burn across human space, the Auto Heretics

quickly became available to a lot of people!

While nobody dared to sell them in places where the Big Two, the Guardians of Peace

and their many lackeys held sway, there were still a lot of places where they could not

exert effective control!

Rural planets, underground tunnel complexes, barren moons, asteroid belts and so on all offered suitable places for the Carmine Revolutionaries to come together and share

their enthusiasm towards the Auto Heretic mechs!

"We have just received a batch of 16 Auto Heretic mechs of the Ice Hunter Version 1.2

variant! Come pick them up while our stock still lasts. The Ice Hunters are optimized for

ranged warfare and feature a more effective heat management system that pairs well with energy weapons."

"Our design studio seeks three Journeyman Mech Designers to assist us in designing a new variant of the Auto Heretic. We are looking to take on mech designers with Class II design philosophies with a special focus on armor systems, preferably of the heavier

variety." "Our new arena tournament starts tomorrow! The deadline to sign up ends in 4 hours. Be aware that the fights will be brutal. If you want to earn our extravagant prize pool, then you will need to overcome 7 successive Carmine mechs. Each fight will not end unless one Carmine mech has become combat ineffective. If you fail to surrender before your Blood Pact breaks, then it's over for you, so make sure you have what it takes

before you participate!"

A huge amount of norms suddenly entered a parallel mech community and immediately became flooded by experiences that were previously reserved for true mech pilots.

It was too much for many of them, but there were still plenty of Carmine Revolutionaries that embraced all of the fun and excitement!

Yet the joy occasionally did not last long as the Guardians of Peace came to break up the new communities!

"ALERT! HOSTILE FLEET INCOMING! 60 first-class multipurpose mechs have deployed from their respective carriers! It's the slaves of the Big Two!"

"It is too late to run away! Once the Guardians of Peace gain control of our base, they will

destroy each and every Auto Heretic, thereby ruining our only chance of piloting a mech. Rather than let them take away one of our fundamental rights, we should make

our stand and fight to the end!" "LET US FIGHT TO THE END!"

Chapter 6649 Herzog Kadan vs Macky Incorporated

While the Carmine Revolutionaries and the Guardians of Peace began to clash against each other at an increasing frequency, the truth was that their scale of conflict was still relatively contained.

Most fights involving Auto Heretics were actually conflicts that pitted one group of Carmine mech pilots against another group of Carmine mech pilots!

The Big Two's fears towards the potential damage and chaos caused by the uncontrolled proliferation of Auto Heretic mechs were not unfounded.

Many of their predictions came true!

On a rural third-class planet in the galactic rim, a conflict had broken out between two rivaling companies.

Both of them maintained a range of commercial interests on the surface, ranging from banking services to groceries.

Herzog Kadan was an old and established tyrant. The company was founded on the planet and managed to gain dominance over multiple sectors due to its explicitly local focus.

By prioritizing the hiring of local employees and constantly emphasizing the pride that customers gained by actively supporting their planetary champion, Herzog Kadan had long been able to repel off-world competitors that sought to chip away at its market share.

However, all of that changed over twenty years ago when Macky Incorporated arrived and exploded onto the scene.

Different from other off-world competitors, Macky Incorporated was founded by a group of entrepreneurs who originated from the planet but moved to more developed star systems in order to receive more advanced education.

Now, a bunch of these young but successful graduates had decided to team up and return to their home planet in order to introduce the local population to more advanced and modern goods and services!

Relying on the identity of the founders, Macky Incorporated managed to overcome the typical xenophobia that local consumers expressed towards foreign companies.

Even though Macky Incorporated still employed a large proportion of foreign workers, their superior education and qualifications elevated the fresh new company and enabled them to win over a customer base that was tired of the lack of competitiveness of the Herzog Kadan.

Naturally, both companies soon began to generate friction. Even if the profits that could be earned from a rural planet was only a fraction of that on an industrial planet, the latter typically featured a lot more competition!

As long as Macky Incorporated could successfully diminish Herzog Kadan, the former would be able to earn a steady stream of profits for multiple generations!

Unfortunately, Macky Incorporated failed to make enough progress in their plan to conquer the local markets.

While the upstart company managed to gain superiority in certain sectors, it lost out in other sectors!

In the end, Herzog Kadan's home ground advantage proved to be too strong to overcome in a short amount of time.

Due to the intense and growing rivalry between the two companies, there were times when they came to blows against each other.

Incidents ranging from escort forces bumping into each other and covert raids onto facilities took place from time to time.

As mechs clashed against each other, the damage they inflicted on each other and their surroundings was considerable.

Transportation vehicles, factories and even public infrastructure suffered from the constant fighting.

While the planetary government was fairly weak, its leaders had managed to negotiate a secret agreement between the two sides.

It was impossible to prevent either companies from ceasing to resort to violence. It was an inherent part of the arsenal of any firm with ambitions.

However, both sides at least agreed that it would be better if they limited the scope of engagements in more populated areas.

They also agreed to limit the quantity of mechs and other military hardware used in an engagement.

If they kept bringing more mechs to a fight, the cost of engagements would continue to escalate to unsustainable levels.

There was no way both companies would be able to remain profitable after diverting so much income to violent activities!

Years passed by in relative peace and stability.

Neither Herzog Kadan nor Macky Incorporated were stupid enough to assume that his gentleman's agreement would last forever.

Both sides secretly prepared for the big fight that could cripple one of the sides and cause their business war to decide a victor.

It just so happened that the time had finally come!

Macky Incorporated surprised everyone on the planet by launching an all-out attack on Herzog Kadan's headquarters, main manufacturing complexes and other strategic sites!

Though the defenses of those sites were not light, they already incurred significant damage due to the surprise factor.

What surprised Herzog Kadan was that Macky Incorporated not only employed all of the hidden reserve units that it had built up over the years, but also hired a mercenary outfit that arrived from afar and immediately began its operations upon landfall!

Herzog Kadan may have anticipated the former, but had not been able to plan for the latter!

The cost of hiring mercenaries for this kind of raiding operation was high due to the risks and the potential to suffer significant losses. Macky Incorporated definitely had to go deeper into debt to afford all of the expenses.

It would all be worth it so long as Macky Incorporated won this war!

What was even more remarkable was that Macky Incorporated also fielded a dozen or so of the newfangled Auto Heretic Version C's!

While the third-class version of the infamous Carmine mech was by far the weakest one, that didn't matter to the third-raters who couldn't afford anything better.

Since the Auto Heretic Version C was designed to be affordable to third-raters, Macky Incorporated could still squeeze out the budget to purchase a batch of them from the rapidly growing grey market.

One of the benefits of deploying Auto Heretics was that practically anyone could pilot them and immediately become combat effective.

There was no need to hire skilled mech pilots that were typically expensive to hire and troublesome to keep happy. The good ones knew how much they were worth, and typically charged quite a sum for jobs that required them to initiate hostilities against

other parties.

In contrast, norms would be happy to pilot a Carmine mech for free!

Since Auto Heretics were High Autonomy Living Mechs, there was no need for norms to train their piloting and combat skills over a long period of time.

As long as they could follow orders and possess enough battle sense to know what they were doing on the battlefield, the Carmine mech pilots could still make contributions. Most of the burden of piloting the mech frame could be passed on to the living mech itself. Even though the skill and precision of the autonomous machines was anything but remarkable, it was at least serviceable!

The appearance of Auto Heretics on the side of Macky Incorporated did not shake the battle all that much.

The norms may be enthused about 'piloting' their HALMs, but not all of them possessed the guts to confront genuine mechs controlled by professional mech pilots.

For this reason, the modular Carmine mechs mostly assumed ranged loadouts, allowing the machines to take potshots at enemy positions from afar.

So long as they weren't careless enough to fire their weapons onto the backs of friendly mechs, they could still add a bit more pressure to the fight!

Yet when the counterattack from Herzog Kadan commenced, the leaders and soldiers of Macky Incorporated were taken completely by surprise!

That was because Herzog Kadan not only deployed the modest amount of mechs they still held in reserve, but also sent out over 200 copies of the Auto Heretic!

"How could they have acquired so many Auto Heretics?!"

Macky Incorporated clearly made a major intelligence blunder as it had failed to detect the clues related to Herzog Kadan's secret buildup of Carmine mechs! Given how many Auto Heretic Version C's the old tyrant deployed at once, it was clear that the company had been planning to take Macky Incorporated by surprise!

It was a pity that this plan fell through when their archrival commenced its attack first,

but Herzog Kadan still saw an opportunity to turn the ongoing battle around!

The conflict took place at night when there was less chance of causing civilian

casualties.

The lack of light did not bother the mechs too much as each of them were able to observe their opponents well enough by employing their sensor suites.

Even so, the complete lack of real combat experience from all of the Carmine mech pilots led to a lot of messy situations!

Whenever a Carmine mech confronted a conventional mech, the latter won out at least.

9 out of 10 times due to the huge disparity in skills, tactics and decision-making. This disparity became even worse when the numbers on both sides increased. Although Herzog Kadan made sure to pair their new Auto Heretics with amateur players of virtual mech simulation games in order to make sure they understood the fundamentals of mech combat, real combat was much scarier!

The realization that they could die or at least lose their qualifications to pilot their bonded mech forever caused them to exhibit a lot of fear and hesitation at first.

"What are you dallying around for?! Remember who gave you those mechs and what we are fighting for! Are you going to let these off-worlders take over our planet and drain the wealth from our economy? Besides, Herzog Kadan goes down, you and your newfangled Auto Heretics will go down as well! Fight! Fight for your home planet! Fight

for your right to pilot a mech!"

With that encouragement, the inexperienced Carmine mech pilots quickly got their act together and started to fight more vigorously.

After initially getting their butts kicked by the much more experienced and disciplined mercenaries and retainers of Macky Incorporated, the Carmine mech pilots of Herzog Kadan soon discovered the correct approaches.

One tactic that worked was to accompany a bunch of conventional mechs piloted by

professionals who knew what they were doing.

The latter not only provided direction and leadership to the Carmine mech pilots, but also took away the pressure from the most dangerous enemy units.

Another tactic that proved useful was to simply rely on their numbers to heavily

outnumber the enemy troops!

One of the consequences to Macky Incorporated's blitz attack was that it had to spread its combat assets across multiple different locations. Even the addition of a mercenary

force did not alleviate this problem all that much.

This meant that before the mechs of Macky Incorporated could converge again, Herzog Kadan was able to outnumber some of the isolated enemy troops with its Auto Heretics! If the numbers on both sides were equal, then the Carmine mechs would definitely suffer a horrendous loss. This was not just due to their inferior mech pilots, but also due to their weak and outdated tech and materials. However, the Auto Heretic was never designed to fight in equal numbers against the

enemy.

Herzog Kadan discovered this first-hand as their Carmine mechs easily began to overrun troops of conventional mechs by relying on their vastly greater numbers!

For example, a swordsman mech piloted by a skilled mech officer got mobbed by 5 Auto

Heretics attacking from different directions.

While the swordsman mech managed to hack down two of the annoying Carmine mechs in quick succession by relying on his superior weapon skills and clever maneuvering, it was unable to fend off the repeated strikes coming from behind and the flanks!

The mech went down just after the mech pilot decisively chose to eject his cockpit!

"This is a travesty! How can I get beaten by a handful of amateurs who rely on their Als to fight?! Fight me fairly next time if you dare!"

"Hah! Fat chance! We're not stupid enough to accept your challenge, mercenary! If you want a rematch, then you are welcome to fight 10 of us next time!" Compared to the professional mech pilots who took honor and discipline seriously, the

Carmine mech pilots distinctly lacked these qualities!

From their perspective, there was nothing wrong with relying on their HALMs to do

most of the fighting and ganging up on outnumbered enemy mech units! "We can win this battle if we keep going! Let us eliminate as many of these raiding forces while they are still spread across the planet!"

Chapter 6650 Carmine Mech and Conventional Mech Cooperation

"Hahaha! This is so much fun! So this is what it is like to be a mech pilot! It is so much fun! It is as if I am fighting with a supersized version of my body! There is no comparison between piloting a mech and piloting a shuttle. My Auto Heretic has truly become my second body!"

"Damn, these mercenaries are too good. They can take down two or three of our own before they finally go down. We are losing Carmine mechs left and right. Will we have any left by the time this battle is over?"

"Don't get cold feet! If we lose, you will lose your Auto Heretics anyway, so we might as well go all-out!"

The losses suffered by the haphazardly organized and poorly coordinated Auto Heretics were considerable.

Nonetheless, the locals enlisted by Herzog Kadan possessed a lot of enthusiasm, and enjoyed the process of piloting an actual mech in an actual battle.

Their performance was terrible when they were fighting on even numbers.

What was worse was that they outright collapsed within a minute if they were ever caught outnumbered by their opponents!

However, as long as they concentrated their numbers, the mob of Carmine mechs seemed to gain courage from each other's presence. The greater the amount of mechs, the more encouragement the amateurs gained!

Greater numbers placed much less attention on the qualities of each individual mech. The rookie Carmine mech pilots felt much less embarrassed about their bad to mediocre performance if it was hardly noticeable among a crowd of similar mechs.

The Carmine mech pilots also derived more confidence from each other when there were many friendly mechs by their side. The chances that the enemy forces would focus any individual down had become much smaller, thereby giving the Carmine mech pilots the reasonable belief that they wouldn't be targeted first.

All-in-all, the Carmine mech pilots fighting for Herzog Kadan were so new at this that they were forced to invent a range of new mech doctrines on the fly!

After the mob of Auto Heretics had mopped up a number of isolated enemy troops, the mech pilots fighting for Macky Incorporated wised up quickly.

They no longer focused on attacking many dispersed targets at once and rapidly congregated together in order to hold a decisive battle.

The ensuing fighting no longer took place in any populated areas, but this only caused both sides to become a lot more unscrupulous when fighting against each other!

The mercenaries hired by Macky Incorporated performed much better during this final engagement. Having been taken by surprise by the large quantity of Auto Heretics, they

quickly adjusted their formations and tactics to prevent themselves from getting swarmed by a mass of inferior mechs.

That did not deter the Auto Heretics too much. The ones with ranged configurations simply maintained their distances and took potshots at their distant end foes while hoping they would not get attacked in turn.

As for the ones with melee weapon configurations, they did not fight by themselves but gathered together around squads of conventional mechs piloted by the employees and retainers of Herzog Kadan.

Many of the latter weren't even full-time employees of the established company. They were private mech pilots who only agreed to answer the call and fight when Herzog Kadan truly needed their services.

Though these contractors were reluctant to commit their lives to such a serious battle, they still had an obligation to abide by their contracts.

Besides, they didn't like the upstarts of Macky Incorporated at all! There were many retainers that fought in order to keep their planet devoid from too much off-world influence.

The problem was that all of these local mech pilots were inferior in skill and real combat experience compared to the high-priced mercenaries hired by Macky Incorporated. Not only that, the mechs used by the off-world soldiers of fortune were also better!

"If we can't win by quality, then we can only win by quantity!"

The forces fighting for Herzog Kadan ultimately decided to take a bold risk and go on the offensive!

If they maintained a defensive posture, they might be able to entrench themselves, but they would also cede all of the initiative to their much more experienced opponents. Staying in a single place and letting the enemy dictate the timing of its attacks was a good way to wear down the morale of low-quality mech pilots.

The mental fortitude and the willingness to fight off complete amateurs who used to be civilians a few weeks ago were very questionable.

Instead of letting them stew in place and lose their fighting spirit when the enemy sought to pressure them, it was better to whip the Carmine mech pilots into a frenzy and dispatch them in an all-out attack!

"Charge, you sorry excuses for mech pilots! Conquer your fears and fight for your right to pilot your own mech! Herzog Kadan promises to you now that as long as we win this battle, we shall

transfer ownership of the Auto Heretics to their bonded Carmine mech pilots! If you have lost your Carmine mech in battle, then we will deposit 50 percent of what your machine is worth directly into your account, but only if we win. If you want to earn your Auto Heretics, then you better fight like your life depends on it! Victory or

death!"

Though the amateurs lost confidence quickly as soon as they realized that they were at a disadvantage, they were also remarkably easy to drive mad as long as they were given the right words and incentives!

A large amount of Auto Heretics strode forth without much of a semblance for formations.

The only sign that proved that they were at least somewhat able to coordinate with each other was that many of the cannon fodder machines actually held up large slabs of

cheaply fabricated alloy in front of their mech frames.

These were makeshift shields repurposed from spare materials and industrial scrap!

While their quality left anything to be desired, they were still somewhat useful in soaking up enemy fire.

As makeshift shield after makeshift shield shattered, the exposed Carmine mechs rapidly backed off and used other mechs as cover!

While this was a rather shameless and desperate tactic, it actually worked to stem the losses and prevent Carmine mech pilots from turning back into powerless norms!

Due to the heroic effort of these Carmine mechs, the stronger and more well-equipped conventional mechs of Herzog Kadan were able to advance to the enemy positions with minimal exposure!

Aside from intermittent artillery fire, the enemy failed to handle the real threat!

The fighters of Herzog Kadan did not know it at the time, but they had become part of a much greater movement to formulate entirely new mech doctrines surrounding the use of Carmine mechs.

By relying on the superior numbers of Carmine mechs to provide cover and support to a smaller core of conventional mechs, the two types of mechs generated an incredibly degree of synergy!

They were able to cover for each other's weaknesses to an extent while also amplifying their strengths.

This became evident on this seemingly inconsequential battlefield as the two sides began to meet each other at close range.

While the off-world mercenaries hired by Macky Incorporated still retained their superiority in individual martial might, the mechs fighting for Herzog Kadan exerted a huge amount of pressure!

Part of that was because the surviving Carmine mech pilots were still hyped by the latest

pep talk. Both fear and excitement warred in their minds, but so long as there were enough friendly mechs by their side, they still possessed just enough courage to commit to their

attacks!

Different from before, the amateurs cooperated a bit better with their professional

colleagues.

Having learned plenty of lessons from the initial clashes, the Auto Heretics no longer took the lead and confronted the mercenary mechs.

Instead, several Auto Heretics had been attached to a single friendly conventional mech. The latter took the lead and issued instructions to the amateurs when necessary.

The latter only really needed to do two things.

First, they needed to follow their assigned leader unit!

Second, they should spread out and assist in attacking any enemy mech attacked by their leader unit!

While it was possible to make better use of the Carmine mechs if they employed more sophisticated formations or engaged in more convoluted flanking maneuvers, there was no way a bunch of amateurs, even ones that had played a lot of mech piloting simulation games, to be able to follow such complex instructions!

Issuing simple orders to them had been the right decision. While their actions and decision-making were distressingly inconsistent, they still managed to help out their leader unit by removing pressure and launching opportunistic attacks that always

inflicted at least a decent amount of damage!

"Hah!"

Many of the melee Carmine mechs wielded spears as opposed to swords.

Spears were much simpler to operate and execute as the Carmine mechs only really

needed to stab their weapons forward. The extended range was also nice as it kept the flightful amateur mech pilots out of trouble for the most part.

One Herzog Kadan mech resolutely marched forward and confronted a pair of mercenary mechs.

While the former stood no chance against the latter, the story was different when the Herzog Kadan mech was accompanied by 4 additional Auto Heretics!

The mech pilots of the Carmine mechs might not really know what they were doing, but they were already doing more than enough by repeatedly stabbing their spears forward! By relying on the basic skills of their own living mechs, each spear strike posed a considerable threat that could not be ignored. The HALMS may not be able to outfight any conventional mech anytime soon, but they at least did not make any egregious mistakes that a clever enemy could exploit.

This was enough!

By repeatedly stabbing their spears while avoiding any obvious mistakes, the Carmine mechs successfully kept the two enemy melee mechs busy while the Herzog Kadan was finally able to gain the upper hand!

With several spears striking out at one of the mercenary mechs, the latter was unable to fend off all of the attacks from the local mech pilot.

Once a sword managed to cut off one of the arms of the mercenary mech, it found itself unable to fend off much of the follow-up attacks.

The two adjacent Carmine mechs took advantage of the damaged enemy mech's weakness and rapidly stabbed their spears forward!

Even though none of the attacks inflicted any heavy damage, they nonetheless managed to pierce through the armor and damaged nearby internals.

What was worse was that the Herzog Kadan mech took advantage of the pressure exerted by the Carmine mechs and went in for the kill!

With a single stab through the chest and into the cockpit, the swordsman mech pilot managed to inflict a fatal blow!

"Die, you mercenary scum! Serves you right for trying to invade our planet!" Other teams of Carmine mechs following a single conventional mech employed much of

the same tactics across the battlefield.

Though the Carmine mechs eventually suffered elevated losses due to their inability to cope with flanking and enemy mech pilots who were skilled enough to outplay the HALMs, ultimately the numbers were against the mechs fighting on behalf of Macky

Incorporated!

This proved decisive. Many norms who were lucky enough to be among the first. Carmine mech pilots on their planet had already lost their precious opportunities as their living machines got crushed.

However, there were still enough surviving Carmine mechs left to provide adequate

support to the regular units of Herzog Kadan.

Ultimately, the battle reached a tipping point.

"The mercenaries... they are pulling out. They are fleeing back to their combat carriers! They don't think this battle is worth fighting for anymore!"

"Now let's finish off the mechs owned by Macky Incorporated and teach these upstarts

the consequences of consorting with off-worlders!"

"We've won, hurrah!"

The war between Herzog Kadan vs Macky Incorporated had come to an explosive end!

Macky Incorporated held most of the advantages and should have won the battle for economic dominance on the rural planet.

However, because the former made a much larger bet on Carmine mechs, Herzog Kadan

ultimately defended its throne and completely managed to drive Macky Incorporated away from its planet.

"These Auto Heretics are much more useful than I thought! Sure, they are individually

awful, but the best part about them is that a mech pilots needs virtually no training to

become useful on the battlefield. As long as there are professionals around who can give them direction, their threat level becomes much greater!"