

Mech Touch 6651

Chapter 6651 Retreating Order

Just as the mech pilots fighting for Herzog Kadan had discovered, Carmine mechs generally functioned a lot better if they had solid direction.

This was why Ves designed the Jacket Commander to accompany the Yellow Jackets back in the Red Ocean.

While not everyone took the Jacket Commander model seriously, those that did saw great value in using them to keep the undertrained and poorly disciplined Carmine mech pilots in line.

Unless the pilots assigned to the Yellow Jacket mechs were former veterans who had been forced to retire due to age or injury, the ones that just started out were not soldier material in the slightest!

Whether it was their piloting skills or their ability to understand what to do on the battlefield, they were largely rookies despite whatever gaming skills they possessed!

The virtual mech simulation games did a pretty decent job of giving norms the fantasy of piloting a mech, but the reality was that the simulation degree of those games were far lower than the professional simulations used by actual mech pilots!

After all, the inability for norms to interface with mechs through the neural interface was the biggest obstacle. Without overcoming this hurdle, there was no point in trying to go for realism!

Along with other limitations between games and actual battles in reality, a lot of gamers" found out the hard way that dominating their opponents across the galactic net did not mean they turned into expert pilot material as soon as they entered the cockpit of an Auto Heretic!

Of course, perhaps these gamers might be able to translate their game sense into much more valuable mech piloting competences after they received proper training.

It was too bad that virtually no Carmine mech pilot was patient enough to go through the full 10, 12 or 15-year mech academy experience!

They also did not express much interest in going through a shortened 5-year training program just to be able to learn the basics of controlling their machine without HALM assistance!

"These Carmine mech pilots are too pampered and lazy! This is exactly why the MTA prohibited or heavily discouraged high degrees of automation in legitimate mech designs. As soon as mech pilots no longer need to work so hard to become a competent. fighter, they will always take the lazy option 9 out of 10 times!"

The critics had a point. If these norms had no choice but to receive professional instruction to adequately pilot their machines, then they would reluctantly do what was necessary, as was the case in the Red Ocean.

However, because such an easy option was already available from the start, many Carmine mech pilots had already taken for granted that 'real' mech piloting should be a more equitable form of cooperation between man and machine!

The mere mention of this idea was sacrilege in the halls of the MTA. Even though they were rather heavy-handed in their enforcement of their principles, there were good reasons why they insisted on imposing their own order!

"The Auto Heretics are poisoning the space peasants by giving them all of the wrong ideas about mechs. We should have been more forceful in punishing the people who produce and make use of them. Now look at what has happened! Only a month has passed and already the norms are taking it for granted that they are supposed to control their Carmine mechs as if they are the captains of their own ship while the 'living mechs' serve as the crews that executes the commands!"

This was indeed what was taking place. While there were still Carmine mech pilots that was willing to go through the effort of learning manual operation in the hopes of being able to become equals to professional mech pilots, there was a growing majority that was too lazy to go through all of that effort and simply trusted their 'battle partners' to do all of the hard work!

"You don't understand, Charles! The old model of man unilaterally controlling the machine is outdated and will soon be relegated to the dustbin of history as far as I am concerned. The new model of man cooperating and sharing responsibilities with the living machine is the future of mech piloting!"

"How can you say such a thing, Josie!? Do you know what kind of disaster you are setting yourself up to? If you continue to let an artificial intelligence maintain control over your own weapon, it can always turn it against you and the people you care about. Have you forgotten your history lessons

already? There were many attempts in the past where people stupidly trusted in their automation to make their lives more convenient. They're all dead now because their own systems went out of control and ruined their lives! This is only the latest repeat of that horror story. Mark my words. Your Auto Heretic can never be trusted!"

"That is a lie! You don't understand at all! If you would just lower your resistance and try out an Auto Heretic yourself, you would know that your fears are overblown. These Carmine mechs are not controlled by those stupid and exploitable AIs. They aren't integrated with any advanced AI processors as far as we know. They are living mechs. They possess their own souls. They have to because without this quality, they wouldn't be able to form Blood Pacts with humans such as ourselves. It is the bond between our souls that tells me that I can utterly trust my battle partner to have my back at all times. The pact will break before he ever betrays my trust?"

"Wait a second, did you refer to your Carmine mech as 'he'? You have gone mad. You have gone utterly mad! From the moment you think of your machine as a person, it is already too late for you to return to sanity."

Discussions like this took place in both third-rate states and first-rate states.

It couldn't be helped. The suppression from the Big Two and the so-called Guardians of Peace was anything but airtight. The Auto Heretic mechs and any information about them kept slipping through one of the many different gaps.

Meanwhile, shady and underground mech manufacturers kept producing them as if there was no tomorrow.

It only took a relatively short time for the rapid proliferation of Carmine mechs to stir up trouble in every corner of human space.

They especially became a more common sight on more rural and less developed planets where the Big Two's footprint was not that great.

The Auto Heretics also became popular in private asteroid bases and grungy space stations where honest folk usually tried to stay away.

They even began to show up on planets that were used as hunting preserves! Many different hunters who used to be unable to hunt huge exobeasts due to their lack of genetic aptitude had embraced the new Carmine mechs with great joy!

Even though they lacked the skill to operate their machines skillfully, they were able to skip the learning curve and go straight into the hunt by relying on their HALMs to perform all of the complicated mech operations!

Of course, these hunters usually overestimated how effective they became and how much their young and inexperienced living mechs could actually defeat deadly exobeasts, but at least they had a chance to make their dreams come true!

The people who opposed the rise of Carmine mechs were way over their heads on this matter.

There was no way to put the cat back into the bag once it got out, especially when there were many third parties that secretly did their best to support the naughty feline in the shadows!

To their credit, the established powers adjusted their general strategy once they found it was a lost cause to prevent the rise of the Auto Heretics and the increasing number of variants released at a rapid rate by other mech designers.

The Big Two and the Guardians of Peace showed signs of no longer wanting to bother with trying to keep Auto Heretics away from rural planets and more obscure space habitats.

They simply did not have the numbers or support to enforce their own order.

Doing this allowed them to concentrate their manpower and assets in more prosperous, developed and centralized locations.

Port systems, most industrial systems and particularly large and important space stations all received much more extensive patrols and monitoring.

Public support for the Guardians of Order was also a bit higher in these places because many citizens increasingly began to hate the violence and destruction that followed

everytime Carmine mechs became a common sight in a neighborhood!

This unfortunately led to a rapid rise in incidents that only spread misery to everyone. On one ordinary day on a relatively modest and out-of-the-way planet in a third-rate state, a large estate suddenly started to get attacked by huge lasers that were powerful enough to melt through alloy walls!

The estate was owned by a local realtor that was earning well in a nearby city. However, that wealth was not enough to beef up the security of his country estate by much, and it certainly was not enough to hire mechs for security!

The security guards on foot initially attempted to make a stand by relying on the turrets to fend off the mech, but the Auto Heretic was able to deal with these inflexible defenses before they could inflict too much damage!

When the guards had nothing left that could be used to harm a mech aside from heavy one-use missile launchers, they took one more look at the tall and intimidating mech

and promptly ran away!

Not that it helped, because the mech mercilessly aimed its energy rifle at the fleeing

ants and continued to shoot in their general direction.

"Hahahaha! This is so easy!"

The Carmine mech pilot did not even have to put in the effort to aim because his living

mech would automatically correct: every time.

This was like playing a game with an auto-aim cheat, but better because he was destroying the enemies he once vowed to kill to the last man!

The mech continued its rampage and began to shoot at every employee or family

member of the man that the Carmine mech pilot loathed beyond anyone else.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The Carmine mech pilot showed no hesitation and felt no remorse about killing so many people that was not responsible for bringing him to ruin.

It was only after he managed to enter the back garden and found the realtor who forced

him from his home that the Carmine mech pilot finally paused.

"W-W-Who are you? Why did you do this?"

"Have you forgotten my name already? Figures. It was because of you that I lost my

home, my job and my dignity! Did you ever think that I would come back with an Auto Heretic and pay you back for all of the pain I have suffered?"

"You... you are mad! Even if you want to take revenge on me, why kill all of the people

who have nothing to do with your grudge! I may be guilty of what you accuse me of, but my wife and daughters are completely innocent!"

"LIES! YOU ARE ALL GUILTY! THEY HAVE TAKEN THE MONEY YOU EARNED FROM

TAKING AWAY MY HOME, SO THAT MAKES THEM GUILTY! EACH AND EVERY

PARASITE MUST DIE!"

The Carmine mech pilot did not deign to kill the culprit who was responsible for making him homeless with the energy rifle of his Auto Heretic.

Instead, his machine slowly strode forward even as his target scrambled to his feet and attempted to run away into the nearby woods.

There was no way a tiny human could outrun a massive mech.

It only took a short amount of time before red splattered all underneath the foot of the Auto Heretic.

The Carmine mech pilot felt lost after he had completed his revenge.

"What... have I done?"

Power was not always a blessing.

Chapter 6652 The Introduction of Security Zones

Human civilization in the Milky Way Galaxy occupied a vast amount of territory.

Half the galaxy encompassed a huge amount of star systems, of which only a fraction was occupied by humans,

Even so, this still amounted to an astronomical amount of planets that were populated by millions if not billions of people each!

The enormous territories occupied by humans made it so that central authorities such as the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance lacked the numbers to properly enforce their authority on every single star system and planet. Space was too big. If people truly wanted to avoid the Big Two's enforcers, they could simply travel to an out-of-the-way star system that was devoid of any permanent human occupation and play with Auto Heretics all of the time!

In fact, most people did not really bother to uproot their entire lives so that they could travel to a star system where the mechers and the fleeters were unlikely to show up one day.

They just stayed on their home planets and piloted their Auto Heretics in places such as underground mech arenas, remote lands and many other forms of private property. As long as the Big Two, the Guardians of Peace and any local authorities that cooperated with them did not hold much sway on a planet, then the locals were pretty much free to purchase and pilot their Auto Heretics without much fear of getting punished!

Even though most people still believed in the power of the MTA and CFA, they no longer respected them as much as before!

This loss of respect was extremely damaging to the Big Two because they could no longer dictate the rules anymore!

While the Big Two still held a lot of sway in most developed states and star systems, their influence continued to degrade in the poorer and more remote regions!

It couldn't be helped. Carmine mechs had become so desirable that trying to prohibit their use directly went against the will of most people.

Third-raters especially embraced them due to their long-term alienation towards the distant first-raters and their overwhelming desire to uplift themselves by any means possible.

For the first time in centuries, third-class norms were able to slightly rise above their space peasant origins and gain the power to fight and protect themselves!

The rush of power of piloting an Auto Heretic Version C might not amount to much in an absolute sense, but it caused many third-raters to gain an inflated sense of འ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་

strength and confidence.

While there were usually MTA branches on each of the planets where these violations occurred, the mechers who worked over there knew better than to act high-handed.

There were already examples where the regional managers tried to confiscate the illegal Auto Heretics from their owners!

In most cases, these attempts provoked violent reactions as the Carmine mech pilots always refused to become separated from their bonded partners!

The Blood Pact almost always caused the humans to develop unreasonably close relationships with their machines.

From the perspective of the MTA, it was perverse to see so many individuals succumb to the fallacy that the huge lump of metal was their friend, relative and maybe even another part of themselves!

As such, taking away their Carmine mechs was just as bad as taking away their spouses or their children.

Not only did the ensuing scuffles result in a lot of tragedies, but they also incensed the rest of the population of a planet!

MTA branches had already fallen, either as a direct consequence of overly repressive actions, or due to the preemptive measures taken by multiple conspirators who decided to combine their forces.

The rapid loss of control and reputation of the Mech Trade Association subsequently produced a lot of ripple effects that rapidly changed society in many parts of human space.

The new Carmine mech pilots gained more courage because of this. They became more daring in their defiance towards the Big Two, thereby causing the old order to crumble even faster!

While that did not mean they all became criminals who gleefully began to employ weapons of mass destruction against each other, it was clear that their willingness to abide by the order of the Big Two had dropped to the lowest point in centuries! Fueled by both eager Carmine mech pilots and many different interest groups that had a bone to pick with the Big Two, a negative feedback loop had formed.

It was clear that the MTA and the CFA needed to change their approach, or else the current situation across the Milky Way would continue to spiral down to an unacceptable degree!

A lot of contentious discussions within the halls of the MTA, the CFA and the Guardians of Peace.

"We cannot let this stand. We must hire more personnel and expand our forces in order to properly enforce our rules onto the regions of space that are flagrantly making a mockery of us and our rules. Don't these space peasants understand that we

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are trying our best to protect them from their own mistakes?! We must reinvigorate our efforts to educate these ignorant fools and make sure to strengthen our control over all of the states."

"Pff, you drones from the Guidance Faction have always wanted to take control over all of the states. Do you even recognize how impossible it is to realize your fantasies? We do not have the funds, manpower and assets to control every single region of space claimed by our race! Besides, even if we do, your heavy-handed approach will only be met with greater resistance. Why did you think we allowed the states to exist? It is because our Association must maintain a layer of separation between ourselves and the space peasants. As soon as we take over the states, there is no one for the citizens to blame for their own suffering and misfortunes than us! If your goal is to turn us into tyrants, then congratulations, your plan will surely make that come true! It will only be a matter of time before a coalition that claims to fight for justice will rise up and try to overthrow our benevolent rule!"

"Then let us form a compromise and formalize our current approach. There are regions of space where we can enforce our rule without problem. There are also other regions of space where we cannot fully guarantee the safety and protection of every space peasant against the dangers of Carmine mechs. Then there are regions of space where we have already given up on enforcing our rules concerning the use of the Auto

Heretics and their many variants."

"What... what are you suggesting?"

"We must retrench ourselves in the first region, seek to build up our infrastructure and defenses in the second region and leave the third region alone until we are ready to bring it back into the fold. My ultimate proposal is to formally divide human space into Safe Zones where the safety of most humans can be guaranteed, Risk Zones where humans must be more on guard against the threat of violators, and Free Zones where we have graciously allowed the space peasants to make their own bed so that they can lie on it. If all goes well, the latter will descend into widespread anarchy, but we can afford this loss."

"Are you mad? That will only encourage all of the rebels and criminals! If we do anything to confirm that we have lost control over the so-called Free Zones, then our legitimacy will suffer a permanent blow! We will never be able to retake these lost territories because the population rightfully believe that we have abandoned them and left them to fend for themselves!"

"Then what would you have us do instead? We are incurring far more damage to our reputation and prestige by maintaining the fiction that we are still in control over our entire society! Wake up! Maintaining my partition will allow us to contain most of the violence and instability to the Free Zones which are the least valuable territories to us. People who desire to go against our will and become Carmine mech pilots will leave the Safe Zones and Risk Zones to emigrate to the Free Zones, thereby improving the security levels of the former two. At the same time, the Free Zones will become so dangerous that they shall serve as proof that our rules and regulations have merit." The proposal to partition human space into different 'security zones' provoked a lot of controversy, but also attracted a lot of supporters.

The Galactic Mech Council and the Grand Admiralty debated over this contentious subject for more than a week behind closed doors before they finally published a joint

statement.

The proposal had passed!

"From today onwards, the territories of human civilization in this galaxy shall be partitioned into Safe Zones, Risk Zones and Free Zones. Each may encompass parts of the regions claimed by first-rate states, second-rate states and third-rate states. The institution of security zones is not a purely administrative measure. It has real consequences to the rule of law, the degree of enforcement and the amount of leeway we grant to the people who reside in them. We strongly advise those who believe that they live in the wrong security zones to relocate to other security zones where they can enjoy all of the protection or freedom they desire."

Many people throughout the galaxy reacted with shock, happiness as well as dismay when the Big Two unveiled a new galactic map that divided all of the human territories

in different security zones!

The Big Two had made very few mistakes when drawing this map. They had largely translated the actual situation in those star systems into an officially recognized set of

boundaries.

Many people still thought it was strange for the Big Two to refer to the most dangerous and risk-prone regions as 'Free Zones'!

"Do not think that you will be able to live in a paradise if you live in Free Zones. They

are called this way because we recognize that a part of our galactic population desires to live without rules they consider excessive or undesirable. Freedom is a double-edged sword at best, and a euphemism for anarchy at worst. You may not believe us at first, but it will soon become obvious that we are correct when your homes are being crushed by the feet of unrestrained Carmine mechs and when piracy and barbarism has taken precedence over the rule of law."

"The Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance is of the opinion that people without restraint will ultimately cause disasters for themselves and the people around them, but we recognize that many of you are not convinced of this. We are therefore willing to give the largely unconvinced people of the Free Zones the opportunity to live in their desired freedom. Do not forget that you are responsible for

your own decisions. If a number of you end up developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction against each other, then do not expect us to save you and offer our aid. This is the consequence of rejecting our well-intentioned rules."

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. We are convinced that this will take place in every Free Zone. If you wish to avoid the mass murders, the

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reckless deployment of illegal weapons and the other abuses that are about to occur, then you should do your best to move to the Safe Zones where you can return to a society where order and peace is being preserved. Thank you for listening." The creation of security zones stabilized the rapidly changing situation across human

space. They increased the security levels of all Safe Zones, caused the Risk Zones to become the next battlegrounds between the Carmine Revolutionaries and the Guardians of Peace and also turned the Free Zones into magnets for wannabe Carmine mech pilots! While the Big Two

succeeded in stabilizing their own areas of control, they also showed a lot of weakness by acknowledging their widespread loss of influence! Their enemies became emboldened as a result. They took advantage of the changes and accelerated their plans to plot the demise of the faltering hegemony of human

civilization!

Chapter 6653 Mixed Reception

The establishment of security zones immediately divided human civilization in the Milky Way!

Of course, people were no stranger to division. They had a long history of dividing people by placing labels onto them. First-raters and space peasants. Big Two and the subjugated. People from the galactic center and the folk from the galactic rim. Potentate and norm. Carmine mech pilot and professional mech pilot.

Now, the Big Two introduced the humans of the Milky Way to a new category of division. This one divided people by the area in which they lived!

Many people discovered to their dismay or satisfaction that they suddenly lived in a Safe Zone, Risk Zone or Free Zone!

What stood out to many people was that Safe Zones weren't as large as many people thought.

The regions of space that the Big Two was able to ensure a high degree of control mostly amounted to numerous first-rate states and second-rate states in the galactic center.

Further away in the galactic rim, the Big Two could only guarantee their protection in the safe zones centered around capital star systems, port systems and highly industrialised star systems.

As for the galactic rim? The Big Two could hardly protect anyone aside from their own strongholds!

The MTA had taken the initiative to shut down many branches and withdraw to the sector headquarters located in every star sector.

There, they no longer did anything but observe the chaos unfolding around them while defending their only remaining presence in far-flung star sectors.

Even with the help of the Galactic Gate Network, it was too difficult for the mechers and the fleeters to send reinforcements to many places.

Therefore, the isolated enclaves left in the Free Zones that were under the control of the Big Two maintained a complete defensive and isolationist posture!

The forces stationed over there not only had to learn to become more self-sufficient, but also refrain from going on expeditions unless the need was too great.

In other words, unless the alien empires, the Cosmopolitan Movement, the Five Scrolls Compact or any other powerful enemy force overtly tried to take over and establish their own dominion, the mechers and the fleeters would not make a move!

The consequences were massive and countless. Many people, especially the ones who lived on a planet that fell under a Risk Zone or Free Zone, grew a lot more uncertain about the future.

Everyone felt the economic consequences. The long-term stability and the limited scope of warfare and other incidents throughout human space had long fostered a prosperous business environment.

Now that many companies concluded that doing business in the riskier markets was no longer as easy as before, they all adjusted their strategies.

They soon began to cease their expansion plans, lower their commitment to every business venture that came under risk and in a few cases outright pulled out of dangerous regions of space entirely!

The mass readjustments caused many markets to grow unstable. The stock markets went deep into the red while many people lost their jobs.

This exacerbated the loss of stability in the Free Zones and certain Risk Zones as a lot of unemployed people blamed their recent misfortunes on the actions of the Big Two as opposed to the introduction of the Auto Heretic!

The MTA and CFA became incredibly maligned by the people who felt abandoned by the snooty first-raters. Public opinion on the Big Two dropped even further. It became so bad that insulting the mechers and the fleeters had become a new norm!

As the weeks passed by, many people quickly adjusted to the new status quo.

The changes happened the fastest in the galactic rim. The Big Two had retreated from much of it, only maintaining their enclaves as Safe Zones and the biggest and most developed star systems as Risk Zones.

This meant that the galactic rim had effectively devolved into frontiers where law and order had taken a huge backseat!

Many residents of the Free Zones felt very mixed about their new designations.

A lot of people, mostly those with the money and the connections to acquire their own Auto Heretics, welcomed the newly gained freedom to pilot their Carmine mechs in the open.

No longer did they have to fear that the mechers or the Guardians of Peace would swoop in and confiscate their Carmine mechs by force.

Other people began to miss the stability guaranteed by the Big Two. They might not think this way at first, but after the very obvious withdrawal of the MTA and the CFA, people began to grow a lot more fearful about their future and the future of their state!

One of the Free Zones where the mood was especially tense and mixed was the Yeina Star Cluster.

Professor Ves Larkinson had become a household name in this region of space once again.

Even though he had already departed to the Red Ocean, many of his living mechs still persisted in the hands of old customers!

Due to the Yeina Star Cluster's remote location, historic low importance and the lingering influence of Professor Larkinson and the Living Mech Corporation, many of the states in this region had been among the most enthusiastic adopters of the Auto Heretic mech line!

Even if living mechs had been relegated to curiosities, display models and collection pieces, many people still thought fondly of the products designed by Ves Larkinson.

When they learned that Professor Larkinson not only introduced a brand new living mech, but also happened to upstage all of the mechers and arrogant first-raters by smashing the genetic aptitude tyranny, the people of the Yeina Star Cluster embraced Carmine mechs with great enthusiasm!

The Komodo Star Sector was no exception to this rule!

The Friday Coalition had won the Komodo War and largely eradicated the influence of the Hexadric Hegemony and Professor Larkinson.

Due to the strong influence of the Fridaymen, the Komodo Star Sector had initially become one of the rare places within the Yeina Star Clusters where the local and regional authorities strongly repelled the use of Auto Heretic mechs.

The Fridaymen did not trust any living mech designed by Professor Larkinson and tried to stamp them out whenever possible.

However, the Fridaymen underestimated the effectiveness of their enforcement measures.

The Friday Coalition may have won the war, but they had lost a huge amount of manpower and resources in the process.

The Fridaymen had already begun to rebuild, but much of their manpower and assets were tied up in the reconstruction and reorganization of the vast territories that used to be governed by the Hexadric Hegemony.

What was worse was that the Fridaymen also lost much of their investments in the Red Ocean after the Great Severing. The Friday Coalition's economy took an enormous hit and was still trying to recover before the Carmine Revolution took everyone by surprise.

As a result, the Fridaymen were unable to patrol all of the star systems claimed by third-rate states in the rest of the star sector!

Carmine mechs popped up like weeds in the periphery of the Komodo Star Sector and many other low populated star systems.

Even if the Fridaymen organized many patrol fleets and tried to roam around and crack down on the Auto Heretics in an attempt to deter others from adopting the latest living mechs, they suffered the same problems as the MTA!

Not only did they fail to lower the insanely high demand for Carmine mechs, but they also made themselves incredibly unpopular by attempting to take away the toys from all of those mech enthusiasts!

The problem became so bad that even the Fridaymen themselves began to get their hands on Auto Heretics in defiance of the coalition partners that opposed their existence.

With the Big Two having ceased all attempts to enforce their rules and remove the annoying Carmine mechs from people's hands in the Free Zones, many Fridaymen secretly did whatever they could to become Carmine mech pilots and take pleasure in their new machines!

These events and more had caused a lot of consternation among the leaders of the different coalition partners.

Groups such as the Carnegie Group and the Vermeer Group advocated for a more conciliatory stance towards the existence of Carmine mechs.

Other groups such as the Gauge Dynasty and the Konsu Clan opposed the use of any living mechs within the Komodo Star Sector!

What complicated the matter even further was that opinions became divided within the coalition partners themselves.

One of the many people who became troubled by the latest events was a former friend of the now-legendary senior mech designer who had become recognized as the Father of Living Mechs.

"Daddy, was Larkinson as amazing as he was in the past?"

"He was, Priscilla. I never really appreciated it back then, but he already managed to stand out as a mech designer who made a habit of challenging the status quo. If I remained loyal to him... then I would have benefited much more from his rise to greatness."

"Do you regret leaving him, father?"

"I don't. We all make good choices and bad choices in our lifetimes. Letting hindsight determine whether we have made the right choices is a short-sighted way to look back on ourselves. We are all defined by our choices. No matter whether they are good or bad, they have shaped us who we are today. I made my lot in life by defecting to the Friday Coalition. Perhaps I would have become a better mech designer if I remained at the side of my old friend Ves, but I wouldn't have met your mother and have a pair of lovely girls like you if that was the case. My love for you all trumps my desire to leech off my old friend."

Carlos Shaw had made peace with his past. He had already spent enough years looking back and agonizing over all of the right or wrong choices he had made.

He eventually realized that his successes and failures defined him. Every experience was a learning opportunity. So long as he accepted this truth, he came confident he could become a better person going forward.

His life became much better after he changed to a more positive and accepting mindset. He had done his best to forget about his life as a Brighter and embrace his new life as a Fridayman.

For whatever reason, he began to hook up and marry with Alejandra Gauge, a branch member of the powerful Gauge Dynasty.

While Carlos suspected that Alejandra only took interest in him due to his value as a former friend and employee of the infamous Ves Larkinson, he liked to believe that this was only one of the reasons why she took an interest in himself.

Whatever the case, the two became happily married and had two kids. Owing to his promotion to a Journeyman Mech Designer and the support of the Gauge Dynasty, both of his children enjoyed a good start on life as designer babies.

Right now, his lovely Priscilla was eagerly finishing her breakfast while his wife Alejandra made sure to feed their baby Mirial with a bottle filled with a special nutrient solution.

"I will be staying late at work." Carlos mentioned to his wife. "My mentor wants to keep me there in order to continue our study of the Auto Heretic mechs and to question me about my time with Ves."

The woman furrowed her brows. "You have already made repeated accounts about your past with him. The MTA and the Friday Coalition have extracted everything you know about your former friend."

"I know, but I still have to go through the process just to satisfy the curiosity of newcomers who have taken an interest in my case. Besides, it is not all that bad. My relationship with Master Huron has gotten closer due to my old friend's revenge plan. Everytime something related to Ves takes place, the Master becomes obsessed with my old friend and his works. I happen to benefit from his habit."

Yep. That was right. Due to their common association with Ves Larkinson, Carlos had managed to get hired by Master Huron!

Right now, Carlos had become a proud employee of Huron Interworks in the Warsaw Giant System.

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Chapter 6654 Old Friend

As an upstanding member of the Friday Coalition, Carlos Shaw held resemblance to his past self.

He went through several medical treatments to heal the old war wounds that hadn't been fully healed after he lived through the last Bright-Vesia War.

He also forgot about his former life as a Brighter and tried his best to integrate into the Friday Coalition.

He embraced his identity as a second-rater. He tried to become a successful mech designer in his own way. With the support he received over the years, he managed to become a qualified second-class Journeyman Mech Designer, though he struggled to keep up with the competition.

Carlos would definitely be the first one to admit that he was no Ves Larkinson. He was not even particularly excellent compared to the Journeymen of the same generation within the Friday Coalition!

However, Carlos knew first-hand what it took to stand out in the mech market. This was why he had devoted his life to promoting a vision for mechs that was at least somewhat original and uncommon.

He succeeded by developing a Class I design philosophy revolving around Triple Combination Mech Design.

It was basically an approach towards designing three separate mechs meant to operate in groups of three.

What was special was that all three mechs should be able to combine with each other and form a combination mech that was controlled by all three mech pilots!

Under certain circumstances, the power of this single large combined mech should allow it to produce results exceeding what it could have done if the mechs remained separate!

However, the conditions to realize this improvement turned out to be hard. The mech pilots either had to be siblings who lived together with each other for a long time, or they had to be veteran soldiers who were close friends with each other and served in the same unit for multiple years.

Without a great degree of understanding and camaraderie, any attempts to combine forces and form a single combined mech was bound to end up in disaster as the left hand contradicted the right hand!

It was pretty clear that Carlos Shaw clearly took a lot of inspiration from the works of Ves and Master Huron.

He did not deny the fact he got inspired by their works. Carlos took pride in his own mech designs and did not feel ashamed that he was borrowing the concepts and best practices of better and more superior mech designers in order to accomplish his goal.

It was too bad that it was hard for Carlos to gain traction in the mech market. His products mostly remained theoretical exercises as they generated little interest on the mech market.

Aside from small groups of oddball mech pilots who wanted to gain the upper hand in mech competitions by betting on his triple combination mechs, Carlos failed to establish a strong brand in the Friday Coalition and other states.

It did not really help that he used to be a third-class mech designer until recently and that he used to be associated with the infamous Devil Tongue.

This was why Carlos remained a dependent mech designer all of the time. He did not have the capital to start his own mech business and achieve rapid growth like his old friend.

Carlos did not feel jealous about this, or blame his own incompetence for failing to do the same.

One of the lessons he learned when working with Ves was that designing mechs should always be the primary occupation of a mech designer.

It sounded obvious, but way too many mech designers got distracted by business affairs or wasted a lot of time by playing politics.

This was why Carlos tried his best to keep his head down and continue to remain productive during his work hours.

He did so by studying the textbooks of the Clarion University of Mech Design and working on his assigned mech design projects under the leadership of Master Huron.

Becoming a dependent mech designer meant working for others. Carlos did not have the luxury to devote all of his time to design his own mechs.

Instead, he had to use his growing expertise to solve problems for the mech design projects led by Master Huron or one of his trusted subordinates.

Carlos did not find anything wrong with this practice. He might not be able to realize his own vision, but he continued to learn much about what it took to design a good mech by studying the good points about Master Huron's design philosophy.

When Master Huron was in a good mood, he would even set a bit of time aside to teach Carlos a few tricks of the trade!

Today was not a good day, however.

Master Huron looked troubled when Carlos arrived to start another work day.

"Is that... another Auto Heretic?" The newcomer asked as he entered one of the Master Mech Designer's well-equipped workshops.

"It is, but this one is different from the ones we have seen before." The bald older man spoke even as he continued to work on studying the lone Carmine mech. "This is not one of the many variants where third parties attempt to differentiate their own works by blending Professor Larkinson's design philosophy by addin in their own specialization."

When Carlos stepped closer, he looked up at the Auto Heretic Version B and could spot many different design quirks that he immediately recognized as Ves' work.

It was definitely him who was partially responsible for designing this mech. He may have convinced a Master Mech Designer to share the burden with him, but he dictated most of the design choices and design direction for this historic project!

To be honest, Carlos only had admiration for his old friend by being the first to solve one of the biggest problems in modern mech design.

If Ves did not mysteriously align himself with human traitors and rebels and seek to sow chaos and division within the entirety of human space of the Milky Way, Carlos would have been more open about his admiration for his old friend's work!

He still did not understand what was happening to be honest. How could a Red Ocean mech designer release a line of mech models in the Milky Way?

More importantly, why did Ves become hostile towards the Big Two and what great purpose did he try to accomplish?

Carlos was unable to answer these questions, much to the disappointment of his past interrogators.

Ves had grown too quickly. He had already made a lot of progress in forging his own legend after leaving the old galaxy behind. Carlos understood his old friend less and less with each passing year.

This was one of the reasons why he failed to figure out the Auto Heretic design.

Carlos let out a sigh and pushed this personal failure aside.

"Are you still trying to decipher the Blood Pact, Master?" He asked as he floated up to the cockpit where he found Huron studying the cockpit seat.

As the interface that was responsible for physically connecting the mech pilot to the mysterious organic components of the Carmine System, the cockpit seat with its many blood channels had been the subject of a huge amount of studies.

Many mech designers wanted to know the secret behind Blood Pacts and how it enabled a norm to control a mech!

While most never achieved anything useful, Master Huron was one of the rare exceptions.

"I am getting closer." Master Huron said. "The latest and most disruptive work of your 'old friend' is becoming more and more familiar to me. I think I am getting closer to understanding his mindset and attitude. I can see more and more parallels between his Carmine System and my lifelong experience with working on neural interface technology to achieve interconnectivity. I do not consider him to be my unofficial disciple for nothing."

"I think you should be more careful about your statements. The MTA and the leaders of the Gauge Dynasty won't be happy with you for expressing so much support to a mech designer who inflicted a lot of damage to their interests."

Master Huron nonchalantly shrugged as he continued to pick apart the cockpit seat with his manual tools.

"It doesn't matter. None of them will punish me for saying so. We are living in a Free Zone now, remember? The only Safe Zone in this star sector is the Centerpoint System. Every other star system is no longer under the regime of the Big Two. It is only a matter of time before Auto Heretics become more ubiquitous than normal mechs in this region of space. My fellow Fridaymen do not care at all about how my unofficial disciple used to be their enemy and only want to pilot their own mechs."

He was right. The Auto Heretics could not be stopped. The demand for them was so high that they even managed to inflict the most damaging blow to the Big Two since the start of the Age of Mechs!

"Even if you are correct, our leaders still need time to adjust their mentalities. You should refrain from making too many statements in support of Ves before the Gauge Dynasty and the other coalition partners finally change their policies towards living mechs."

"They're too slow, Carlos. Ever since they won the Komodo War, they have lost their competitive drive. The Hexers always made sure to keep our leaders sharp and focused. Now that we have solved this threat, the Friday Coalition is becoming more and more muddled. The setbacks we have suffered only reinforces this impression. We are not handling the problems resulting from losing access to the Friday Colonies and the uncontrolled proliferation of Carmine mechs well. Our current leaders are too prideful to admit defeat and reverse their ban on living mechs."

The ban was turning into a joke. More and more people including other Fridayman violated this rule just so that they could become Carmine mech pilots.

The Friday Coalition was pretty much the only holdout in the Yeina Star Cluster. Pretty much every other third-rate and second-rate state in the neighborhood had already embraced their new reality as occupants of a Free Zone and allowed their citizens to make use of Carmine mechs!

Of course, the states did not want these new Carmine mech pilots to use their powerful machines to pick fights with others. They were all trying to experiment with policies aimed at limiting the abuse of these powerful war machines.

Some policies were more successful than others. The ones that saw more success were usually the ones that did not outright ban conflicts involving Carmine mechs, but instead sought to divert the fighting away from populated areas to minimize collateral damage.

The competitive mech scene suddenly experienced a huge resurgence as a result.

Many Carmine mech pilots wanted to test their skills against each other. A huge demand had emerged for relatively safe and controlled ways for Carmine mechs to clash against each other without going for the kill.

Rather than risk their lives and Blood Pacts in real wars, the Carmine mech pilots strongly preferred to become mech athletes and earn fame and fortune in the mech games!

Whether the states succeeded in diverting the energies of a lot of enthusiastic Carmine mech pilots by organizing a lot of new mech competitions remained unclear.

Carlos had a feeling that these efforts might not be as successful as most people hoped.

As one of the people who used to know Ves on a personal basis, Carlos had always known that he could bear a grudge.

Ves also had an awful habit of resorting to extremes if he ever had a chance to retaliate.

Though Carlos had already broken off with his old friend at this point, he still paid close attention when Ves appeared in the Smiling Samuel Star Sector one day and used his works to trigger the collapse of the Vulcan Empire!

Somehow, Carlos had a strong suspicion that Ves repeated his old playbook, but at a much larger scale than before!

Chapter 6655 The Existential Threat to Neural Interface Technology

Professor Ves Larkinson was playing at a completely different level from most mech designers.

While the Devil Tongue's work single-handedly reshaped the existing order in the Milky Way Galaxy in a matter of months, Carlos Shaw was still struggling to gain traction in the Friday Coalition's mech market!

The gap between the two mech designers from the Bright Republic was too fast!

There was no possible way that Carlos dared to compare himself against his former friend and employer!

Fortunately, he had grown older and wiser by this time. He no longer felt any strong surge of jealousy or envy. It was silly for him to even think that he could become as brilliant as Ves.

That did not necessarily mean Carlos was always content to remain inferior to him. No one doubted that Ves was a prodigy who ramped up quickly and grew at an insane rate not seen since the explosive rise of the Polymath.

No. Carlos made the same decision as many other mech designers who found themselves bereft of early opportunities and successes.

He planned for the long game.

As long as he worked diligently and never gave up no matter what setbacks he suffered, he would surely make steady progress.

There was no need for him to plan for becoming a Master Mech Designer so soon. He should take this step by step. He should first worry about becoming a Senior Mech Designer.

It didn't matter if it took a century or two centuries for him to become a Master Mech Designer.

So long as he could afford the life-prolonging treatments, he should be able to do okay. Carlos threw most of his concerns related to the enormous changes taking place across the galaxy. He recognized that he was far different from Ves in that he possessed virtually no agency in these affairs.

He should just work like an honest Journeyman Mech Designer and focus on improving his own work and design philosophy.

Right now, the Auto Heretic design offered plenty of insights to mech designers like Carlos.

Though there were signs that the design was a bit rushed, the application of tech and components was exquisite. The mech industry had already deduced that Ves had

partnered up with one highly skilled rational Master Mech Designer. The latter was so precise and calculated in her work that it seemed as if she was already getting rather close to bridging the mythical gap to the next and ultimate rank!

Of course, the unspoken implication of this analysis was that the Master in question likely hailed from the Mech Trade Association. Only the mechers themselves trained rational mech designers in large numbers.

"Carlos."

"Yes, Master?"

"Come here and study this cockpit seat for me. Do you recognize anything that may be responsible for producing a metaphysical bond between man and machine?"

"I am not sure, but I do not think so. Nothing about these parts suggest that they are doing anything aside from what they are supposed to do on the surface. The seat is designed to comfortably hold a pilot and cushion him when exposed to other forces. The straps are designed to hold the pilot in place. The parts related to this strange blood interface doesn't have much electronics or other systems at all. At the very least, I have not identified anything that remotely resembles a neural interface. It is clear that whatever mechanisms Ves uses to establish the Blood Pact, it does not rely on a direct physical vessel."

The pair had actually established this before when they first got their hands on a recovered Auto Heretic Version B mech. The lack of a direct physical interface of any kind perplexed not only Master Huron, but pretty much every other mech designer in the Milky Way!

The Fridayman Master should have known he wouldn't find anything different in this machine, but his obsession drove him to deny the reality before his eyes.

For the first time in his life and career, he encountered a mech that did not bother to include a neural interface.

It was possible for Auto Heretics to add neural interfaces. Many enterprising mech designers had already developed their own variants where they slotted one in, and as far as their experiments showed, the Carmine mechs performed even better when paired with potentates.

Of course, norms had no use for the neural interfaces. They would only burn out their brains if they forced themselves to use this old tech.

Perhaps that was why Master Huron couldn't stop himself from spending his valuable time on picking the Auto Heretic mechs apart. As a neural interface specialist, he felt as if he and all of the other mech designers in the same sub-community failed in their jobs. While neural interfaces were still safe due to their superior benefits to potentates, they had undoubtedly been upstaged by the brand new Carmine System introduced by the Auto Heretic designs!

The reason why Master Huron had dropped or suspended a lot of projects in order to spend more time with these Carmine mechs was because he felt an existential threat. Neural interface technology was old and extremely mature. It had existed long before the use of mechs, but it was only after the start of the Age of Mechs that its potential was truly being tapped.

While the MTA imposed many restrictions on the development of neural interface technology, many specialists had developed incremental upgrades and improvements

over the years.

However, no matter how hard they tried, they failed to make any serious breakthroughs, the most important of which was to make them compatible with norms.

With each passing generation, the upgrades became more and more marginal. Nowadays, the neural interfaces developed by most specialists such as Master Huron amounted to sidegrades rather than upgrades.

It basically meant that their tech performed better in a few areas at the cost of decreasing their performance in other areas.

Every neural interface specialist knew what this meant. If they failed to develop any major breakthroughs or created a new technological paradigm, it was likely that neural interface technology would reach the substitution phase of the technology life cycle! What this meant was that the persistent weaknesses and lack of innovation in neural interface technology opened it up for a superior replacement!

Of course, the Carmine System was nowhere close to threatening the dominance of neural interface among regular mech pilots, but this was just the start. Contrary to the tried and true neural interfaces, Carmine Systems were brand new. There were rumors on the galactic net that Professor Larkinson 'accidentally' developed his very first Carmine System when he designed and fabricated the Bastion! The expert heavy space knight sounded like the perfect prototype for a Carmine mech.

If this was the case, then the Carmine System had been invented just before the Great

Severing!

Nobody possessed any depth of understanding of Carmine Systems, but even a Novice Mech Designer could guess that Professor Larkinson had only scratched the surface of this amazing new branch of technology.

Even if it was mostly based on metaphysics as opposed to conventional technology, the Carmine System was just beginning to be commercialized, which meant that there was definitely a lot of untapped potential within this research direction!

Professor Larkinson and many scientists in both galaxies were probably working hard to improve and optimize the implementation of the Carmine System in any way they could. While the bizarre nature of the Carmine System and the Blood Pact prevented most third parties from developing major upgrades, they should at least be able to develop indirect improvements, such as improving the compatibility and reducing the rejection

rate of the blood production and transfusion instruments.

The greater threat was when Professor Larkinson released more modern Carmine mech designs that featured a new generation of Carmine Systems.

The moment he solved the critical shortcoming that limited a single Carmine mech pilot

to a single Carmine mech, it was over for the neural interface industry. Rather than keep using an old and stale piece of tech that only 3.5 percent of the population could use, most people would rather turn to a substitute that was applicable to nearly 100 percent of the population!

This was why Master Toqueman Huron could never rest. The only way to prevent his specialization from fading away into irrelevance was to develop a design application that broke the current limitations of this tech!

Several hours went by as Master Huron continued to obsess over a brand new control system that he could not figure out. Even though he was able to make a few more clever observations due to the few similarities between the two different techs, he still failed to understand the essence of Carmine Technology.

Carlos was not as optimistic as Master Huron, but then again, his specialization was not

at stake. While it would be inconvenient for Carlos to learn how to integrate a new control system that had to be organic for whatever reason, his design philosophy should still be compatible with Carmine mechs.

As their work session came to an end, Master Huron and Carlos carefully put the disassembled parts back together in a better state than when the Auto Heretic left the mech factory.

The older of the two actually looked optimistic. "I am making progress."

"In what way, Master?" Carlos carefully asked.

"It is not what you think. I am no closer to deciphering the working principles of the

Carmine System. It is clear that I lack the essential new theories that must have been developed in the Red Ocean after its displacement to another galactic supercluster. I along with many other mech designers initially suspected that these theories only apply in the new environment, but the fact that the Carmine System is able to work well in our current galaxy suggests that the new theories are not as exclusive as we thought."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that we are missing a vital branch of metaphysics in our overall understanding of science and technology." Master Huron said. "I have a good idea of what that might be. When you promote to the rank of Senior Mech Designer and subsequently Master Mech Designer, you are privileged to learn a number of remarkable secrets about certain truths, many of which are related to metaphysics. I believe that the MTA knows far more about it than ordinary galactic citizens such as ourselves. If the mechers insist on denying the secrets that may be able to help us understand the essence of the

Carmine System, then they are doing us all a great disservice."

Carlos was reluctant to talk about any subject that maligned the MTA, but he wanted to

know what the mechers were hiding as well.

"Isn't that good, in a way? The MTA are the masters of technology. Even if they keep expertise on metaphysics to themselves, they should surely be able to improve neural interfaces on the basis of the unconventional tech used in Carmine Systems." Master Huron sneered in response. "You are putting too much trust in a group of first-class incompetents. Just look at how much effective territory they lost in a short amount of time! Rather than putting our faith in an institution that has egregiously failed us multiple times, it is better to take matters into our own hands!"

"What.... what are you talking about, Master?"

"I am talking about seeking out contacts that may hold the secrets we desire. The Fridayman Master grinned. "Before the start of the Carmine Revolution, any attempt to do so will invite sanction from the MTA. Now that nearly the entire Komodo Star Sector

has been designated as a Free Zone, we no longer have to abide by the Big Two's patronizing taboos and restrictions. We can seek any knowledge we desire and develop

any technology we want!"

Carlos took a few steps back. He had a feeling that Master Huron might not be so restrained in his own research anymore from this point onwards.

"Do you even know who to contact to borrow the expertise you need to advance your research?"

Master Huron briefly frowned. "I do not, but perhaps others in the Gauge Dynasty might have a better idea. If not, then I still have a last resort.""

"And what is that?"

"We may have to enter the Nyxian Gap." "What do you mean 'we', Master?!"

Chapter 6656 Gains and Losses in the Carmine Revolution

Many historians and other experts predicted that the Carmine Revolution may be the crisis that may put an end to the Age of Mechs in the Milky Way.

The Big Two would definitely be the first ones to refute this theory!

The Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance may have been caught off-guard by a crisis nobody saw coming, but they managed to stabilize the situation in the galaxy and prevent their reach and authority from crumbling even further.

When people looked at a map of the Milky Way Galaxy, they would see that the Big Two had lost a huge amount of territory.

If the galaxy was shaped like a pizza, then human space encompassed half of it. Of that half, the crust and much of the outer ring had been cut away from the direct control of the MTA and CFA!

At most, miniscule pieces of sauce and toppings had been left behind that somewhat proved that the Big Two still maintained a light and mostly nominal presence in the star sectors that they had left behind.

However, the wealth and resources of the Milky Way Galaxy was not evenly distributed like a proper pizza.

Much of the delicious toppings were sprinkled at and around the center of the pizza. Cutting away the outer ring might look like the Big Two lost a huge amount of territories, but they all happened to be largely devoid of toppings anyway, so it was not as if the MTA and CFA lost a lot of wealth and power!

In fact, there were those among the mechers and fleeters that actually preferred the new status quo. They always thought of the galactic rim and the more remote parts of the galactic heartland to be a burden.

They were not entirely wrong, as it usually cost significantly more funding and resources to keep the vast and sparse regions of the outer half of the galaxy under control.

Now that the Big Two had gotten rid of this useless burden, they not only shed the obligation to patrol and pacify all of those low-value regions of space, but they could also concentrate their armed forces!

Logistics became a lot simpler for them and they were able to significantly increase the security levels in the territory they still held under their grip.

The Big Two were already taking advantage of their tactical withdrawal from the outer half of the Milky Way Galaxy and relied on the concentration of force to pacify several Risk Zones at a time!

The Carmine Revolutionaries were steadily losing ground that they did not have time to properly secure.

While they had managed to earn a huge initial victory by making the MTA and CFA look weak and forcing them to give up a huge chunk of territory, that did not necessarily translate into a big strategic advantage.

The Big Two possessed immense forces at its disposal. The MTA's mighty god pilots and most of the CFA's uncountable battleships had not yet even mobilized to put down the Carmine Revolution!

The mechers and fleeters still cared for their reputation. It would not look or sound good if they used their most powerful military assets that were meant to crush alien opposition to terrorize human citizens instead!

If not for that, the MTA and CFA would have been able to speed up their reconquest of the Risk Zones and ultimately the Free Zones several times faster!

Perhaps it was not bad for the mechers and fleeters to take their time. Too much had changed in a short amount of time. Many of its leaders were still stuck in the past. Their insistence on returning everything to pre-Carmine Revolution conditions was causing a lot of arguments within their ranks. They needed to clarify their new direction and unite most of their members before they were ready to launch a full counterattack.

In the meantime, the 'Carmine Revolutionaries' were gearing up to defend their gains and make sure the Big Two did not regain what they lost.

This was easier said than done because most of the so-called revolutionaries consisted of disorganized rabble and opportunistic troublemakers!

All sorts of messy people had taken up the mantle of a revolutionary for a variety of ulterior motives.

While there were definitely a lot of strong believers in Carmine mechs among them, it could not be denied that plenty of other folk had sought to take advantage of their momentum!

Already, the galactic net was rife with rumors and sightings of unwelcome visitors from the Cosmopolitan Movement and other known terrorist organizations.

Plenty of other threatening people and groups had mixed in as well! They were just a lot better at hiding their nefarious origins.

The empowerment of gangs, criminals, anarchists, would-be warlords and other unsavory groups led to a deterioration of prosperity and happiness throughout the outer galaxy.

The Free Zones weren't wealthy in the first place. Now that a lot of groups felt unconstrained enough to act on their darker impulses, the lives of many common citizens took a turn for the worse!

Those who lived in weaker states suffered a lot more from this than those who lived in stronger states.

Fortunately, the common folk were not as defenseless as before. So long as they could

acquire Auto Heretic mechs, they were quickly able to organize basic militias and defense forces that allowed them to fight against many adversaries that sought to exploit the population of a city or a planet!

Naturally, all of this fighting inevitably led to a lot of collateral damage. The words of the Big Two appeared prescient as the dramatic uptick in mech-scaled violence led to a lot more killing than had ever taken place in recent times!

The Komodo Star Sector was no exception to this rule.

As the star sector where the Father of Carmine Mechs originated, it was home to the strongest. Carmine mech fanatics in the Milky Way.

No matter how much the Fridaymen tried to suppress the proliferation of Auto Heretic mechs, the third-raters secretly produced them in great numbers and distributed them everywhere they could.

The Auto Heretic Version C was originally designed with the use of materials that were commonly available in the Yeina Star Cluster, so production of this dirt-cheap model had begun several weeks sooner than in other parts of the Milky Way.

This meant that the Fridaymen were already behind the curve once they noticed the Carmine mechs popping up here and there!

The rapid spread of Auto Heretic Version C's had done what the Hexadric Hegemony could never accomplish.

The attraction of the Carmine mechs had caused much of the third-class population of the Komodo Star Sector to turn against the Friday Coalition!

While it was still too soon for any major uprisings to occur, a lot of people purposefully ignored the Friday Coalition's prohibition against living mechs and the Auto Heretic

mechs in particular.

So many third-raters had become Carmine mech pilots in a short amount of time that they were already beginning to harbor greater ambitions!

One region of space where the common folk were gearing up for a fight as the Bright

Republic.

The third-rate state would have been forgotten by nearly everyone if not for the fact that it was the birthplace of Professor Ves Larkinson!

It had received vastly greater attention with many Carmine mech pilots and other assorted fans choosing to go on a pilgrimage to the humble planet of Cloudy Curtain.

Cloudy Curtain had already changed beyond recognition. The Sand War that had devastated many third-rate states more than a decade ago had culminated in the scouring of Bentheim.

Once the Bright Republic had been savaged by the sandmen to the point where it lost its main economic engine, the Friday Coalition had reduced it to a client state under the joint management of the Ylvaine Protectorate and the Vesia Kingdom.

This essentially meant that the Bright Republic had become a puppet state to the two third-class lackeys of the Fridaymen!

While the state still existed on paper, everyone knew that the Ylvainans and the Vesians were slowly gobbling up more and more star systems that should have belonged to the

Bright Republic.

It was a slow-motion conquest that none of the Brighters believed could be stopped. After all, the Fridaymen were negatively disposed towards the Bright Republic due to all of the losses caused by Ves Larkinson and the Larkinson Clan.

The Brighters were not willing to lose the state that they and their predecessors had fought to defend for many generations.

However, the losses they suffered during the Sand War and the lack of recovery due to the deliberate manipulations by the Ylvainans and the Vesians had left them with little

recourse.

The diaspora of Brighters that had moved to other states were doing their best to make

a comeback, but there was only so much they could do with the limited number of people that were forced to uproot their lives and move elsewhere. They lacked the capital and manpower to build up a powerful mech force that could take back their

state.

Besides, even if they did succeed in their unlikely rebellion, the Friday Coalition had many ways to sabotage the effort to restore the independence of the Bright Republic!

The Carmine Revolution changed everything.

The Friday Coalition had become distracted and overwhelmed by the uncontrolled proliferation of Auto Heretic mechs.

The Bright Republic had become famous throughout the Milky Way! Every fan of the newly introduced concept of Carmine mechs had taken the time to learn where Ves came from, thereby causing the state to attract a lot of attention. When people learned of the effort to restore the Bright Republic, a small proportion of them grew sympathetic enough to lend their aid.

The Bright Liberation Movement, which used to be known as the Bentheim Liberation Movement, suddenly received a lot of donations and other forms of support from all kinds of random third parties across the galaxy!

With the help of the Galactic Gate Network, these benefactors were not only able to donate hard cash which the BLM could use to fund the acquisition of more conventional mechs as well as Auto Heretics, but they were also able to supply serious hardware! This included surplus starships, heavy industrial equipment and a huge amount of supplies, enough to fight 10 wars!

This not only allowed the BLM to rapidly expand its expatriate mech forces by adding in

a large amount of Auto Heretics, but the rebel organization also welcomed the arrival of

a lot of sympathetic foreigners!

While the influx of cash, war materiel and 'tourists' also caused the Bright Liberation Movement to become a lot more disorganized, the huge increase in strength and other forms of support had given the rebels a lot of confidence!

"We need to strike while the iron is hot!" A former senior military officer of the Mech Corps argued. "Just say the word, and my men and I will return to the Bright Republic with raised flags. If can blitz the Protectors of the Faith and the Mech Legion, they will be forced to give up a huge amount of ground, thereby allowing us to gain an immediate foothold into our state. Just say the word, senator, and we can commence our operation right away!"

Former senator Camden Tovar shook his head in disapproval. "Patience. It is not time

yet. Time is on our side. Our people have waited years for liberation. They can wait a couple of months longer. The longer we wait, the more support we receive." Senator Tovar had come a long way since the last time the Tovar Family and the other founding families held the reins of power in the Bright Republic.

After the Ylvaine Protectorate and the Vesia Kingdom took over, the founding families suffered greatly as the foreign occupants sought to dismantle the old power structures!

Senator for Life Camden Tovar found himself stripped of his position and was forced to flee lest he got arrested for trumped up charges.

Not everyone from the Tovar Family managed to get away before they got swept up. This

had always been one of the senator's regrets. This was part of the reason why he agreed to become one of the leaders of the BLM and work towards liberating the Bright Republic from its current state of occupation!

Chapter 6657 Bright Liberation Movement

The Bright Liberation Movement possessed a checkered past in its previous incarnation. Back when the Bentheim Liberation Movement fought for the independence of the state's only port system, it had largely been regarded as a band of terrorists.

The BLM never managed to gain traction across much of the population because few people thought it was a good idea to separate Bentheim from the Bright Republic.

If the port system and possibly a number of surrounding star systems declared independence, then the neighboring Vesia Kingdom would just swoop in and swallow up the much more vulnerable port system in an instant!

However, the one good thing about the Bentheim Liberation Movement was that its deplorable actions at least restrained the actions of the central government.

The government officials who resided in Rittersburg did not dare to divert too much wealth from the port system to many of the other provinces of the Bright Republic for fear of boosting the support of the rebels.

This proved that the BLM's leadership actually possessed a degree of shrewdness and pragmatism that Senator Tovar could respect.

Now that he became one of the leading figures of its direct successor, he truly found that the BLM certainly knew how to keep its act together.

The only problem that Tovar had with the past and current incarnation of the rebel organization was that its lower ranks were severely lacking in discipline. They were a far cry from the professional soldiers of the Mech Corps.

If not for the fact that a lot of deserters from the Mech Corps had left the Bright Republic and hooked up with the Bright Liberation Movement, Senator Tovar would have doubted whether it was worth it for him to spend his years trying to wrangle the rabble.

Fortunately for him and many other Brighters, the Carmine Revolution vastly improved the BLM's prospects.

The discussion on the strategic steps that the BLM needed to take continued to rage on. There were multiple leaders who advocated for immediate action.

"We cannot waste too much of our time on troop building! We are losing momentum the longer we sit on our thumbs! If we take too long to begin our offensive, many of the tourists will get bored and leave."

"Most of them are not that useful to us to begin with in their current state, Metcalf." Senator Tovar calmly retorted. "Many of them are Carmine mech pilots with more false bravado than skill. They need more training in order to fight more effectively."

"They don't need to fight." Metcalf Larkinson contemptuously said. "They are already making themselves useful by volunteering to serve as our cannon fodder. If they survive

the initial battles, then we may decide to train them more seriously, but first they need to prove they have the guts to fight in a real war."

Metcalf Larkinson was not a mech officer. He was just a resentful 60-year old veteran mech pilot who managed to escape the Bright Republic when the Larkinsons suddenly became wanted.

Unlike most of the relatives that managed to get away, Metcalf Larkinson did not answer the rallying call of Ark Larkinson and refused to join the Larkinson Family or Larkinson Clan.

He was one of the few who wanted to continue to do his duty to the Bright Republic even if it had turned hostile to him and the Larkinsons!

He was not really a qualified leader, but he managed to gain more prominence by making use of his Larkinson name.

These days, his influence had grown by a considerable extent, especially since he was a blood relative to the legendary Father of Carmine Mechs!

Senator Tovar would not be able to dismiss the aggressive suggestions of Metcalf Larkinson as easily as he wished. He needed to engage the stubborn soldier with proper arguments.

"You should not treat our foreign volunteers in such a callous manner. They are our guests. They have shown their goodwill to us, so we must show them the respect they deserve. We need to pay more attention to our reputation. All of our actions and decisions will reflect onto Professor Larkinson one way or another. As a Larkinson yourself, you should know that his name and your name has always stood for honor and duty. Do you truly wish to forsake the reputation that your predecessors had fought with their lives by throwing away the lives and ruining the piloting careers of so many foreign Carmine mech pilots? We still need their support and the support of their backers to keep the Bright Republic after we have taken it back. Let us not disgrace our war heroes by painting our state and its citizens in a negative light"

The BLM was in the public spotlight now. These short-sighted rebel leaders had always suffered from myopia. They were unable to understand the greater diplomatic context that they were operating under.

"Our movement is not a platform for an old man like you to springboard your way into galactic politics!" Metcalf Larkinson complained in lieu of a better counterargument. Senator Tovar rapped his knuckles against the table. "I wouldn't be here if I did not love the Bright Republic. My family was one of its original founders. We have a duty to restore what is ours. I am merely cautioning you to pay attention to diplomacy. You may not like it, but we need outside support to retake the Bright

Republic and keep it out of the hands of our enemies. Do you not realize that the Friday Coalition can resort to any measure up to and including direct military intervention to erase all of our gains?"

That caught numerous leaders by surprise.

Not all of them had thought far enough.

The old man shook his head in disappointment.

"We are living in a Free Zone now. The Big Two's rules no longer apply anymore. Aside from the common consensus that we should not try to acquire and make use of warships and superweapons, we are allowed to do almost everything else. That includes second-rate states directly intervening in third-rate states. Now that the mechers and the fleeters no longer impose any invisible restraints, the Fridaymen will no longer face sanction if they directly deploy their vastly superior second-class mechs on a third-class battlefield."

This scenario sounded a lot more realistic now that the leaders processed the greater implications of living in a Free Zone.

"Shouldn't the Fridaymen have their hands full with the Hexers?"

"Perhaps in the future, but not to the same extent." Senator Tovar replied. "Unlike our BLM, the Hexer cause is much more extreme. Too extreme for most people, in fact. They also require vastly greater funding and support in order to reclaim their former territories in the Komodo Star Sector. While the Hexer expatriates may still be able to muster several powerful armored forces in the next year, their poor diplomacy will continue to hamper their attempts to build a coalition. In summary, do not expect the Hexers to keep the Fridaymen busy in the short term. We must find a way to deter the Fridaymen from invading our fragile and recovering third-rate state with overwhelming force. The only viable way to do so is to borrow a page from their book"

"What do you mean by that, senator?"

"Have you forgotten how the Friday Coalition won the Komodo War? The Fridaymen leveraged their diplomacy to invite a large amount of foreign military support to help them in the war against the Hexers. The Fridaymen also 'borrowed' the expert pilots of third-rate states in our star sector to stack the deck against their archenemies. Their strategy worked, simply because the Hexers were not able to match the Fridayman's efforts. Never ignore the power of making friends with other states."

That caused a lot of other leaders in the meeting to rethink their own approaches. They never really appealed to foreign aid in the past, but that was mostly because no one really cared about the Bright Republic.

It was different now that the historic deeds of one of its former citizens had put a galactic spotlight on the state.

"The Friday Coalition is not in a good place as far as diplomacy goes." Another BLM leader said. "It is the only major state in the Yeina Star Cluster that is continuing to prohibit the production and use of Carmine mechs. Everyone and their mother knows that Professor Larkinson used to be enemies with the Fridaymen. That has definitely

caused many Carmine mech pilots and the people around them to develop a bad impression of the second-rate state. The Fridaymen tried to kidnap or kill him multiple times. If they succeeded, every Carmine mech pilot right now would still be stuck as powerless norms who would never be able to pilot a machine in their lifetime." That was also a good argument. It was difficult to gauge how much the Friday Coalition lost support and whether it would lead to more serious retaliatory actions, but for now no one was willing to offer any military aid!

Part of that was because many states were too concerned about the deteriorating security situation to spare much forces elsewhere.

Senator Tovar possessed a much better picture of what the Friday Coalition might be

going through in the future, but he doubted the others were interested at the moment. "It is true that the Friday Coalition is in a weak position at the moment. That makes the second-rate state dangerous. Its leaders may decide that they need a show of strength in order to repair the confidence of its citizens and demonstrate to everyone else that they are still in charge of the Komodo Star Sector. If we start our operation to take back the Bright Republic too soon, we will become the nail that the Fridaymen will seek to hammer down."

The faces of many BLM leaders turned ugly after hearing that. They were not stupid enough to reject this possibility.

"If that is the case, how long do we need to wait?" Metcalf Larkinson asked in a more

subdued tone.

"Half a year to a year." Senator Tovar estimated. "Events are still developing quickly, so

you do not need to wait longer than that. The Friday Coalition will continue to grow more and more unstable as it is struggling with an unsolvable dilemma. In the meantime, foreign donations and volunteers keep coming in from the other parts of human space. Many may feel discouraged and decide to leave, but I believe that you can compensate for their absence with other newcomers. What is important is that you must give them enough time to learn how to fight as a unit in an organized mech force. Carmine mech pilots are not soldiers, so you must work to correct that shortcoming so that they have a

good chance of surviving the coming battles."

The meeting continued as the leaders of the Bright Liberation Movement continued to address a range of other topics.

The former senator mostly took a backseat on these discussions. He was not directly involved in matters relating to officer promotions, logistics and so on. He also attracted enough of the limelight for himself. If he kept attracting so much attention, then he would eventually come across as a usurper rather than a contributor.

There were already too many rebels who harbored a lot of suspicion about Camden Tovar's motives within the BLM. He was not the sort of person who was traditionally associated with the previous incarnation of the rebel movement. In truth, some of their accusations were correct.

Senator Tovar was already thinking about the next step of his career. He did not intend

to dedicate the rest of his life to the Bright Republic. It was too small and

inconsequential for his current appetite.

As long as he wrangled the BLM into a successful reconquest of the Bright Republic and

managed to earn a good reputation while doing so, he was confident he could insert himself into a larger political organization!

After all, since Ves Larkinson and his fellow soldiers of the Flagrant Vandals had fought

so hard to extend his lifespan by a century, he may as well make better use of his additional years!

Chapter 6658 Pariahs

The Yeina Star Cluster was undergoing a huge amount of change.

It had already been subject to a lot of changes.

The Komodo War completely reshaped the relevant star sector while the short-lasting but incredibly disruptive Crown Uprising seemed to have a certain relationship with the mysterious Nyxian Gap!

Now, the Carmine Revolution had put the hazardous region in the spotlight once again. Master Huron was not the only mech designer who thought about entering the Nyxian Gap.

As suicidal as it sounded, those in the know learned that a brand new power was on the rise.

The existence of the Oblivion Empire was not publicly known, but it was pretty much an open secret among high society.

Very few people knew that the Oblivion Empress was actually a woman called Cynthia Larkinson. Those that did generally tried to avoid any mention of it for various reasons.

It was doubtful whether this secret could be kept for long, but for now the Oblivion Empress remained a mysterious figure who already held sway over her own warlord state before the start of the Carmine Revolution!

One reason why many people began to pay a lot of attention was due to a secret that was better known.

Those in the know learned that the Oblivion Empire was the origin of the Auto Heretic mech line!

The clues were already obvious. Not only was it located particularly close to the star sector that Professor Ves Larkinson originated from, but the original mech designs of the Version B and

Version C variants were also based on exotics that were commonly available in the Yeina Star Cluster.

What truly added more credence to this suspicion was that the Oblivion Empire not only fielded actual Auto Heretic mechs before anyone else, but also began to distribute and sell them at a rapid pace!

The Oblivion Empire was the main reason why the Yeina Star Cluster already featured the highest density of Carmine mechs in human space!

Although the more productive and developed star clusters located in the free zones in the galactic heartland were about to overtake the Yeina Star Cluster, this was still an impressive feat considering its remoteness!

The population's extensive familiarity and brand awareness of LMC mechs and living mechs also contributed to the extraordinarily fast adoption of the Auto Heretic mechs.

This caused many observers to develop the assumption that if they wanted to seek the origin of Carmine mechs, they needed to flock to the hazardous region known as the Nyxian Gap.

Despite the many dangers and warnings associated with this asteroid-filled anomalous space, visitors kept pouring in with increasing frequency.

Few of them returned. Whether this was because they ran into an accident, got killed by pirates or successfully joined the Oblivion Empire, nobody knew for certain.

The likely truth was a mix of the three possibilities. Entering the Nyxian Gap without guidance was perilous, but as long as the daring newcomers managed to survive the natural hazards produced by the anomalous region, they usually had an opportunity to encounter one of the Oblivion Empire's patrols.

Who knows what kind of treatment they received. Despite the lack of information coming out of the Nyxian Gap, that did not deter people from seeking out the Oblivion Empire.

Even before the start of the Carmine Revolution, rumors had already spread that it offered unique benefits to people who desired to become stronger.

Mech pilots who had no hope of attaining a breakthrough in regular space fearlessly ventured into the Nyxian Gap in pursuit of a promotion through less conventional

means.

Those who grew bored with the mundane qualities of their boring lives sought out the Oblivion Empire for a chance to get in touch with forbidden magic.

The multiple taboos surrounding the Oblivion Empire most certainly deterred a lot of people from casually seeking it out, but the ones with the greatest desire for change and enough courage to go through with it were excellent recruits!

People such as Master Huron did not think the Oblivion Empire would reject them. They were smart, clever and highly productive workers that could contribute to the rogue state in many different ways.

While Master Toqueman Huron was still hesitating whether he should go ahead and pull the trigger before the Friday Coalition changed for the worse, another Fridayman Mech Designer had already made the decision to take a chance!

"Are you sure about this, Master Olson? Not everyone who goes inside makes it out alive. Nothing can save us when an unexplainable anomaly swallows up our starship."

The charming woman wearing a multi-layered midnight blue dress smirked at her direct disciple.

"That is where you are wrong. I have already made a secret arrangement with an old acquaintance who has already joined the Oblivion Empire. With her assistance, we can rendez-vous with a patrol dispatched by the Oblivion Mech Army and safely journey deeper inside."

"You already have a way in?!" Oleg Vorn reacted with surprise.

"I do. I know the Master who designed the Auto Heretic designs. You may have met her once. It is difficult to maintain contact with each other under the current circumstances, but I am glad that she still paid attention to a few communication channels."

Oleg began to frown. "Even if you have managed to secure safe passage to the Oblivion Empire, is this truly the right course of action for us? We are doing better than ever. Many people have begun to know you and your work due to being Ves' nominal Master. Our sales has quadrupled and many people have begun to request commissions from you. Not only that, but the Grand Loxic Republic has relaxed a few of its policies towards foreign Master Mech Designers such as you. We may finally be able to construct a large manufacturing complex in the capital star system like you always wanted."

Life had not been great for Master Carmin Olson and her direct disciple.

Despite her contributions to the Komodo War, the stigma of being the first. Fridayman to notice Ves' talents and accept him as a nominal disciple proved too much.

She could no longer stay in the Friday Coalition, especially after the state continued to deteriorate in several ways.

Setbacks such as the catastrophic Battle of Pima Prime that led to the death of Saint Jeremiah Gauge had caused a lot of Fridaymen to channel their anger towards Ves

Larkinson to the nearest available scapegoat!

Master Olson became that scapegoat.

By giving Ves Larkinson a chance to rise up in society and receive the support he needed

to quickly grow out of the early stage of his career, The Master Mech Designer bore the undeniable responsibility of enabling one of the single most damaging enemies the

Friday Coalition had fought against.

The problem became so bad that Fridaymen were even blaming much of the losses incurred by the Great Severing to her name!

Though Master Olson had weathered multiple storms in the past, her deteriorating situation in the Friday Coalition made her continued presence untenable. Neither the Vermeer Group where she hailed from or the Carnegie Group where she worked for a long time offered any support in a time

where she needed it the most. Her allies deserted her over time. Her friends no longer accepted her calls. Her commercial ventures were going bust. Her access to confidential databases got revoked. She was no longer able to use special procurement channels to acquire rare materials that she needed to conduct her research.

Master Olson did not consider herself to be an ungrateful mech designer. She still felt

she owed her loyalty to the Friday Coalition, or at least the Vermeer Group for giving her the opportunities she needed to become a Master when she became a century old.

Though she used to hate the grueling training and competition that broke many of her fellow candidates, she now understood that this was one of the few ways to set herself up for enduring success.

Yet as she became more and more isolated, Master Olson eventually reached a point where she had to conclude that she no longer had a future in the Friday Coalition. Her status and her previous contributions at least ensured that she would not get arrested in a short amount of time, but she feared that lingering goodwill would run out sooner than later.

She left before any ugly incidents could pass.

Unfortunately, in order to remain discrete and prevent the Fridaymen from tracking her down and taking her back so that she could continue to serve as their scapegoat to blame all of their misfortunes on, Master Olson had to sacrifice much of her business

empire and her fixed assets.

She abandoned the expensive Titanium Garden that she used to take pride in. She abandoned all of her remaining employees without giving them a proper farewell speech. She was also unable to clue in her remaining friends who still expressed their support for her such as Master Meredith Katzenberg.

Master Olson only took away her direct disciple Oleg and enough luggage and assets that could fit aboard a small and speedy stealth courier vessel.

She had made the right decision to prepare this emergency evacuation plan ahead of

time.

Master Katzenberg informed Master Olson later on that the Fridaymen and especially the Gaugers had grown quite upset that she managed to slip the noose just as they had gathered enough 'evidence' to bring her to trial!

Losing the foundation that she built up in the Friday Coalition over the course of multiple decades caused her to lose a lot of wealth and business opportunities. She was only able to retain her most valued treasures and her liquid assets. Master Olson decided to settle in the Winged Serenade Star Sector. It was located in the center of the Yeina Star Cluster and boasted considerably higher economic activity. Of course, the mech industry was already saturated with many different competitors. It

was difficult for Master Olson to start from scratch and build a new foothold in the local

mech market.

Things were looking up, though.

Oleg was right that her past association with the Father of Carmine Mechs revived her

fortunes.

So why did she decide to abandon her efforts to get herself established in the Grand Loxic Republic and uproot her life yet again?

"My old friend inside the Oblivion Empire encouraged me to join her side. She did not.

dare to convey anything concrete, but she dropped certain hints and code words that

stimulated my imagination." Master Olson cryptically said. "And that was enough for you to decide to leave?"

"There are more factors at play, Oleg. To be honest, I do not welcome the renewed

attention. People are paying attention to us for the wrong reason. Just as is the case in the Friday Coalition, certain parties may decide that the best way they can strike at Ves

and his works is by targeting his former Master instead."

"That..."

"There are other reasons why I have decided to leave." Master Olson calmly said. "I

cannot share them with you. If you follow me into the Nyxian Gap, then I will let you know at that time. You may choose to remain here or depart to another destination if you want. You have spent enough time under my wing. It is time for you to become more independent and start your own ventures. Your relationship with Ves is much vaguer and less well-known, so you will not receive too much attention."

Oleg was also still a Journeyman Mech Designer, which automatically made him inconsequential to all of the bigshots.

The man paused for a few seconds before making up his mind.

"If you choose to leave, then I choose to go with you. I agree with you that it may be

better for me to go independent, but I can do that while also becoming a part of the Oblivion Empire. I think the rogue state is big enough to accommodate the both of us as

we are working on separate research and design projects." Master Olson looked slightly disapproving. "Do not be in a hurry to make a decision. Take your time to consider the pros and cons. I am not ready to depart right away, so think

about your goals and how you can best fulfill them. The mech industry in a Free Zone is undergoing rapid changes. The rules are being rewritten as we speak. Even so, your work conditions will likely be much different if you decide to become a part of the Oblivion

Empire."

This was a life changing decision that could have far-reaching consequences for their career progression!

Chapter 6659 The Importance of Restraint

The Carmine Revolution in the Milky Way led to enormous disruptions. The lives of virtually every human had been impacted by it one way or another.freewebnovel.com

While the lives of many people had become brighter and more colorful now that they had an opportunity to become Carmine mech pilots and wield greater personal power than ever before, the lives of many others came to a premature end!

Original humanity therefore became awfully divided over whether Ves deserved to be praised or condemned.

The Carmine Revolutionaries and other supporters praised him to the heavens. They respectfully called him the Father of Carmine Mechs and already looked forward to the release of his next Carmine mech line.

The Big Two and the Guardians of Peace predictably maligned him as the Devil Tongue. Ves Larkinson had become the model of a mech designer who possessed no ethics and recklessly broke the rules for his selfish desires!

Even if his Carmine System granted norms a benefit that no one had ever managed to provide in the past, there were much better ways to introduce it than to dump it onto the galactic mech market all at once!

Supporters and haters argued against each other nearly every day. This led to a lot of breakups in families and friendships as people who used to be close to each other found themselves at opposite ends.

Those living in Safe Zones tended to respond a lot better to Big Two propaganda and gradually started to fall in line. There were many of them that were no doubt secretly eager to pilot Auto Heretics, but they understood that uncontrolled access to them would make it much more likely that their homes would get destroyed.

Those living in the Free Zones held no goodwill towards the Big Two anymore. The 'space peasants' believed that the mechers and fleters abandoned them. Now that they had become a lot more

vulnerable than in the past, they eagerly sought protection, and piloting one of the Auto Heretics sounded like a good way to improve their security in a new and more uncertain period of time.

This turned the so-called Risk Zones into the most acute battlegrounds of the Carmine Revolution.

These were areas of relative stability where Carmine mechs made an advance, but had yet to trigger enough changes to shake off the yoke of the Big Two.

The mechers and the fleeters made a more concerted effort to maintain an active presence in the Risk Zones. The Guardians of Peace organized their own efforts to preserve as much of the old order as possible.

However, the Carmine Revolutionaries were not content with staying in the periphery of the galaxy. They sought to increase their footprint in the galactic heartland and pry

away the more prosperous territories from the established powers.

Their success was mixed. As long as they did not face highly organized opposition from the Big Two, they were usually able to use the allure of the Auto Heretic mechs to

convert lots of people into supporters or even volunteer fighters!

The biggest reason why the Carmine Revolutionaries had not been able to make as much progress as they wished was because of their inherent disorganization.

There was no single organization leading the uprising fueled by the availability of Auto Heretics.

Anyone who was willing to make a stand and publicly oppose the Big Two's regime could claim the identity of a Carmine Revolutionary.

This meant that a lot of messy people with diverse and occasionally murky origins were able to ride the wave and gain power for other purposes than just fighting for Carmine mechs.

The lack of coordination and the absence of a central authority made it difficult for the Carmine Revolutionaries to organize effective defenses or counterattacks against the Guardians of Peace.

However, their passion and enthusiasm amplified their fighting spirit and allowed them to fight a lot harder than their opponents!

This alone was not enough to overcome the problems related to coordination, but certain parties were already beginning to rectify this particular problem.

While it was nearly impossible to completely centralize all operations conducted by the Carmine Revolutionaries, certain parties in the dark were already beginning to rectify the problem.

"So it's true. The first-rate superstates are taking our side." A rebel leader said. "Which one do you come from, sir?"

The impeccably well-dressed man entering the isolated chamber with a pair of armored guards in tow.

The first-rater did not answer immediately. He instead strode towards the center and took a seat at the plain metal table. He did not show any disgust or irritation at the lack of furnishings or the slight onset of rust due to lack of maintenance.

Only after he had taken his seat did he begin to respond.

"I represent the interests of one of the numerous ancient clans of the Greater Terran United Confederation. That is all you need to know for the time being."

That was informative, but not as much as the rebel leader wanted.

It was all he could expect to get from this mysterious Terran envoy.

"Are you Terrans still trying to pretend you support the Big Two even though everyone knows that you would be the first ones to cheer their downfall?"

"All in good time, Commander Arton. The time is not right, and the consequences of taking action are much greater for our superstate. Think for a moment what will happen if the Greater Terran United Confederation and most probably the New Rubarth Empire publicly announce their

withdrawal from the treaties imposed on them by the MTA and the CFA. Unlike small and scattered rebel movements such as yours, our defection and open defiance cannot possibly be allowed to take place without an immediate counterreaction from the Big Two. Declining to retaliate will truly prove to everyone that they have grown too weak and are no longer fit to reign over human civilization."

"Wait, are you truly suggesting that...."

The Terran envoy steepled his hands and nodded with a grim expression. "The MTA and the CFA will send out their warfleets. It is anyone's guess how many they will send. No matter whether their response is light or heavy, we cannot stand by and allow the mechers and fleeters intimidate us into backtracking. We will send out our own armed forces, but we expect them to be at a significant disadvantage. That will necessitate us to mobilize our strongest assets."

The rebel commander immediately understood what the Terrans and the Rubarthans had to rely upon to defend their border regions against a retaliatory attack by the Big

Two.

"God pilots."

"Not entirely, but it is an adequate answer." The envoy responded. "No one can predict what might happen at that time. The MTA alone is able to mobilize enough god pilots to outnumber the god pilots that have pledged to protect our superstate and the Rubarthan superstate. However, we believe the actual number of god pilots that the mechers can mobilize is substantially less. There are those at the top of your profession that disapprove of repressive measures, belong to a faction that is ideologically opposed to the MTA's recent policy decisions or hold sympathy for star nations that long to be

free."

That made the numbers game a lot murkier. It may be possible that very few god pilots would choose to mobilize in order to bring the first-rate superstates back into

compliance.

Many theorists believe that this may be one of the driving reasons why the MTA had yet

to mobilize its god pilots.

So long as it remained unclear how many of them supported the old order to the point where they were willing to fight to preserve it, the Carmine Revolutionaries and other opponents wouldn't be able to anticipate how much opposition they would face! Holding the god pilots back also gave the mechers who wanted to protect the old order more time to convince the less reliable powerhouses to take their side! "What if the Big Two fails to gain enough support among the god pilots?" The rebel leader curiously asked.

"Then that will not reduce the danger too much. You have to know that the CFA can

deploy an abundance of battleships. These ships may be inferior to god pilots in every way, but they can be deployed alongside friendly god pilots. So long as they enjoy enough protection from a God Kingdom, they can still play a role in a fight of this level. Other than that, the CFA can completely overwhelm our border fleets and raze our planets with brutal bombardment campaigns. Our territories are vast, so it is impossible for our limited number of god pilots to cover every border. Many lives will be lost depending on how many enemy god pilots participate and how ruthless they can be towards their

fellow humans."

"That... that sounds far too extreme, sir."

The Terran envoy shook his head. "The Big Two are desperate. They will pay less

attention to their image and put greater emphasis on results. The fleeters will eventually turn into hypocrites and have come to resemble the enemies they once rebelled against, but their brutal campaign will effectively deter other states from declaring their own

return to nationhood."

"Shouldn't your state be strong enough to defend most of your star systems against such an offensive?" The rebel leader doubtfully asked. "There have always been rumors that you and the Rubarthans have secretly amassed a large number of warships of your own. This would be a good time to unveil them and show that the Big Two are not the only ones who have them anymore."

"Even if we did build a secret armada of armed starships, we will never expose them so easily. As I have said, there are many complicated political considerations that we need to take into account. The wrong decisions can easily plunge this entire galaxy into all-out warfare and ultimately lead to the downfall of humanity as the dominant race. We cannot allow ourselves to be weakened to the point that the aliens will begin to take back the territories they once claimed as their own."

That sounded as if this standoff would continue to remain stuck in stalemate for a long time.

The Big Two did not want to mobilize all its god pilots, fearing that much fewer than would choose to answer the call.

The god pilots of the first-rate superstates were generally a lot more united. They would definitely fight for the independence of their Terran or Rubarthan polities.

Even so, there were far too few of them to cover enough border regions to prevent widespread raids and incursions!

The Greater Terran United Confederation and the New Rubarth Empire would definitely burn as a result.

This may incense the Terran and Rubarthan god pilots and push them into fighting harder!

Perhaps they may go on a destruction spree on their own in order to take revenge!

The humans on both sides wanted to avoid triggering such a spiral, so they were not

above making implicit agreements with their enemies.

For now, the conflicts between the two sides were mostly confined in the Risk Zones.

The combatants also only made use of mechs. The fleeters may have begun to deploy a

few warships here and there, but most of them amounted to armed scout and courier

vessels. The CFA had kept most of their cruisers and battleships at the border of human space where they could do more good.

This was especially the case when it became more important than ever for the fleeters to patrol the borders and prevent alien infiltrators from slipping inside!

The rebel leader roughly understood the reason for all of the hesitation by this time.

He never thought that the Carmine Revolution would have brought the Big Two and the first-rate superstates so close to the brink of total annihilation.

As long as either side made the wrong move, the situation could easily spiral out of

control!

Lots of people would die and a huge amount of assets would get destroyed! Warships would make a rapid return across human space as many people demanded

protection against the CFA's unbridled use of its own battleships to sow death and destruction upon populated planets.

The worst consequence of all was that god pilots may end up fighting against other god

pilots!

The death of a single one already represented a massive loss to the human race. If multiple of them died, then that would directly weaken the overall strength of human civilization, thereby emboldening external enemies!

Faced with these disastrous consequences, the best decision the top players could make was to maintain restraint and allow lesser forces to wage war in their stead. The rebel leader suddenly understood his own place in the grand scheme of things.

Chapter 6660 The Arrival of the Amaranto Mark III

The Carmine Revolution had two completely different meanings to different people.

To the humans of the Milky Way, the Carmine Revolution evoked a mixed response. The very topic of Carmine mechs provoked a lot of controversy and polarized a lot of opinionated individuals.

The Carmine Revolution was responsible for fulfilling the dreams of billions if not trillions of people, but it also amplified the existing fault lines in human society and created new ones in record time!

Compared to the intensive division caused by the sudden introduction of Carmine mechs in the Milky Way, the people of the Red Ocean remained remarkably well-behaved when faced with the prospect of allowing norms to pilot mechs!

The much smaller size of human-occupied space in the Red Ocean, the extensive cooperation between Ves and several factions of the Red Association, the differences between the Yellow Jackets, the Auto Heretics and the institution of martial law and the alternative means of self-empowerment through systematic cultivation all contributed to a remarkably low incident rate among red humanity.

However, the biggest reason why Carmine mechs hadn't resulted in so much chaos and instability was because the Red War loomed over everyone's heads.

Every norm that decided to bond with a Yellow Jacket would automatically get drafted. There was no way that states would allow these civilians to play around with Carmine mechs in their backyards when they could make a material difference in the war effort after a few years of rushed training!

Therefore, those who wanted to fulfill their childhood dreams of becoming a mech pilot would be able to do so, but only with the realization that they would soon get marched into a training camp and be forced to become a soldier if they wanted to keep piloting their Carmine mechs!

These reasons and more were why the Yellow Jackets generated much less of a buzz among red humans.

Still, people's attitudes towards Ves' invention was a lot more uniformly positive. He had torn down the genetic aptitude tyranny and given everyone the option to become a dignified soldier.

The only question now was whether the native aliens would give them enough time to complete their basic training.

That appeared less and less likely as the fourth defensive band was on the verge of collapsing!

It only took a short amount of time for the situation in the Viola Magnifica System to become much more dire than before.

The native aliens had already overrun other adjacent strategic locations across the Torald Middle Zone. The recent departure of ace pilots across every middle zone had caused gaps to form in the defenses of many fortified star systems.

Despite the efforts of the Red Three to compensate for these defensive loopholes, it was too late to stop the native aliens from launching concerted attacks led by formidable phase lords.

In the face of the native gods of the Red Ocean, massed firepower and the desperate resistance of expert mechs could only do so much to slow them down!

As the fortified star systems around Viola Magnifica crumbled within a matter of weeks, the mood within the fortified star system where the expeditionary fleet as well as the 77th Warborn were stationed had turned grim.

Preliminary evacuations had already begun. The Red Three along with many other forces transferred away much of their non-essential personnel that they could spare.

This had a significant effect on the recovery rates of damaged mechs and hardware. The departure of many mech technicians, engineers, electricians and so on meant that the mechs and defensive installations would not be able to get back into fighting condition in a short amount of time.

Not that it mattered all that much. The alien presence in the Viola Magnifica System was constantly growing with every passing day.

Now that many other points on the fourth defensive band had fallen into enemy hands, the aliens were able to divert spare assault fleets to this location in order to remove the final obstacle before they could safely begin their attack on the fifth and final defensive band.

There was no question anymore that red humanity would lose control over Viola Magnifica.

The only question was how much the defenders who remained at the key planet and stronghold were willing to make the invading aliens bleed before they finally beat a

retreat.

Both sides already had plenty of experience of how bloody these takeover battles could become.

As the defending side, the red humans enjoyed an inherent advantage, but they were bound to suffer a lot of losses while getting beaten back time and time again.

The native aliens had to be more proactive and purposefully send their phasefighters and warships into killboxes where they would have to endure massed firepower from multiple angles at a time.

However, as long as their accompanying phase lords were willing to lead the charge, they could rapidly destroy a lot of vulnerable hardware, thereby creating gaps in the human defensive lines which they could use to create more space for subsequent attack runs.

This was one of the reasons why the adjacent fortified star systems collapsed so quickly in the past few weeks!

The remaining defenders all knew what they had to do. It was impossible to defend Viola Magnifica to the death, so they did not even bother to aim for this result.

Instead, they needed to stall the native alien advances long enough for all of the defensive guns to do their work and demolish a lot of alien hardware.

The more phasefighters and starships they managed to destroy, the fewer the enemy would have left to assault the fifth defensive band, at least for a time!

Killing lots of native aliens also helped to slow down the Red Tide Offensive.

While most of the aliens drafted into the war possessed very little individual agency and power, major setbacks and losses always caused their fleets to become more reluctant to engage in further attacks.

The alien commanders could not treat their subordinates like emotionless pawns. They had to pay attention to morale and give the troops enough time to recover,

With that in mind, the Larkinsons along with many other soldiers geared themselves up

for a grueling fight.

They would most definitely get pressured in the decisive battle that everyone knew was coming. Many of their comrades and fellow clansmen may end up dead by the time the expeditionary fleet withdrew from this doomed star system, but at least their sacrifice had made a difference, however small.

Very few soldiers who were still stationed in Viola Magnifica had lost their nerve. Most of the mech pilots and other servicemen had gone through enough fighting to adopt a

veteran mindset towards the conflict.

They all knew what they were fighting for. They risked their lives and exposed themselves to the attacks of phase lords and warships so that their families and their fellow humans in the rear could remain protected against these threats.

As the remaining forces made their final preparations, the champions that were left to put up a final stand against their alien counterparts geared themselves up for their greatest challenge since the start of the Red Tide Offensive.

"Welcome back, Davia."

The woman who many people expected to experience a breakthrough in the near future

made a curt nod towards Joshua and Ketis.

"I came back just in time, I see." The guest pilot of the Larkinson Clan remarked. "What is the progress of the alien buildup?"

"You're better off asking Commander Casella Ingvar or one of the many other senior officers." Joshua shrugged. "I don't pay attention to the intelligence reports anymore. Knowing how many alien warships and phase lords have arrived from afar is unsettling. I am better off if I am focusing on my own game. I need to work towards my

breakthrough. My wife here has offered a huge amount of help with that, though I wonder whether she has gifted me a blessing or a curse."

Venerable Davia Stark slightly smirked in amusement. "I heard. You have gained an unruly new sword or shall I say scimitar. An expensive one as well." "That's an understatement." Joshua let out an exasperated sigh. "Did you know that if I want to charge up the blade, the Bitter Scimitar burns through at least 100 grams per activation?! You don't know how many people complained when I got so excited about cutting through transphasic alloys like a hot knife through butter that I activated it

three times in a row!"

Ketis dramatically shook her head in disapproval. "We did not choose to augment the Bitter Scimitar with phasewater-charged technology just so that you can single-handedly drain all of our phasewater reserves within a matter of days." Though Joshua had definitely become convinced by the power of the new Bitter Scimitar to the point where he was willing to put up with its evil and hostile personality, he still suffered regular complaints about his profligate resource wastage!

At least he and his battle partner learned first-hand how easy they could cut through obstacles that they normally considered impregnable or difficult to assail.

"Can I take a look at your new weapon?"

"Sure, but it is currently stored in a safe container. I will show it to you next time I

deploy into the field. I want to take a look at your newly upgraded expert mech. So this is the Amaranto Mark III, huh?"

"Yes. She has definitely undergone a metamorphosis. I always knew that my decision to

serve your clan and its patriarch would pay off. I do not think a finer expert marksman mech exists that can compliment my lethality even further." Venerable Davia Stark

smiled with pride.

The Amaranto still retained her slender dark red-coated mech frame, but

received a lot of obvious improvements, from the switch to a special combination of archemetal to the huge reinvention of the Instrument of Vengeance.

Compared to the first iteration of the iconic marksman rifle, the current iteration looked like a much bigger and more formidable crystalline beast!

It was larger, thicker and most importantly featured a considerably longer barrel than

the original Instrument of Vengeance.

The application of luminar crystal technology reached greater heights as Ves and Harry Kaikkonen utilized their combined expertise to elevate the tangible and intangible qualities of the formidable weapon.

"I heard that your new weapon received an Ultimate Module in the form of an internal chamber." Joshua said with evident curiosity in his voice.

"That is correct. The Two-Step Execution Crystal is amazing, but I have yet to test it out

in a serious capacity. I want to keep its true capabilities a secret against the native aliens. Their lack of preparation against its capabilities may give me a large advantage in the upcoming battle. I will make sure to use it to strike a decisive blow when the aliens think they are safe from my sights."

The grin on her face suggested that she intended to make a very loud statement with

her newly upgraded expert mech!

As Joshua and Ketis admired the much more powerful rendition of the extreme

firepower concept, the former asked another question.

"I don't see the Instrument of Doom around here. Did it get upgraded as well?"

"Sadly, that is not the case." Stark responded. "The Design Department didn't have time

or something. I am fine with that. The Instrument of Doom may be more suited against our current foes, but the Instrument of Vengeance is the original firearm that Ves has paired with my Amaranto. The two are designed to work perfectly in tune with each other. I do not believe my performance will be any inferior if I only make use of this rifle.

The upgrades have improved firepower so much that I do not think there is any need to bring out the outdated Instrument of Doom."

While Venerable Joshua certainly admired the Instrument of Vengeance, he was pretty

sure about one thing.

The Bitter Scimitar that his wife had mysteriously forged and presented to him all of a sudden was probably a lot more lethal than the Instrument of Vengeance! How could he tell? Joshua couldn't feel a strong but intensely hostile life inside the extreme luminar crystal rifle!