

Chapter 1081 Must Return Home

Lieutenant Eloise Pelican deployed on the battered but still functional Valiant Warden in the murky space of the Dark Sphere.

What struck Ves immediately was the lack of stars. When Ves used Eloise's senses that had been patched into her mech to observe the surroundings, he only saw a great gnawing abyss in each and every direction.

It was a highly disconcerting sight! Without the stars of the galaxy and the wider cosmos to provide a soothing background, every mech pilot trapped within the Dark Sphere always risked becoming lost if they went too deep.

The Dark Sphere wasn't completely empty, though. Asteroids and planetoids occasionally fell into the Dark Sphere, only to get corrupted and consumed by the indigenous astral life that resided in this isolated pocket space.

The constant threat of Starspawn forced the Insurmountable Drakes to maintain a ready patrol of mechs around their meager ships. Even though deploying them consumed more fuel or energy, they had no choice. They learned the hard way that deploying when the Starspawn attacked was already too late.

As Eloise led a small squad of rifleman mechs of many different models, Ves reflected upon the situation he found himself in. After eavesdropping on some of the conversations and observing some of the mechs and other tech the Insurmountable Drakes used, he figured out when and where this event took place.

The mechs piloted by Eloise and the others were either lastgen or two generations back compared to Ves' current time.

This was quite recent!

If he garnered a guess, then would say he had traveled only thirty to forty years in the past.

As for their location, Ves surreptitiously dug up Eloise's galactic geography knowledge from her mind. He found out that the Silent Nomad and the Pure Wheel was thousands of light-years away from the Komodo Star Sector.

They still resided in the galactic rim, but a bit further coreward. Due to their earlier colonization, the states that emerged in the two star sectors developed much further, to the point where they set aside internal struggles in favor of competing against neighboring star sectors.

The two star sectors differed a lot, though they somewhat took after their names.

The states of the Pure Wheel Star Sector possessed a strong religious character, as the star sector had been opened up specifically to house all of the troublesome religious organizations exiled from their old star sectors.

While the Pure Wheel states fundamentally disagreed with each other due to their strong beliefs, they eventually tired of beating each other up for their beliefs. Instead of warring against each other and thereby weakening the star sector against foreign aggressors, they pragmatically decided to put down their arms to expand their state religions into other star sectors instead.

The Silent Nomad Star Sector housed fiercely independent-minded secular organizations. The star sector was notable in that it hosted a very strong mercenary tradition, with some massive mercenary corps ballooning to such a size that people there referred to them as mercenary conglomerates!

The states there possessed a long history of picking all kinds of fights with each other, thereby providing mercenaries with plenty of business.

Nonetheless, the states slowly put down their bickering when the states neighboring Pure Wheel Star Sector started making inroads into their territory.

Overall, the two star sectors were already at odds, but the appearance of the Dark Sphere around the border of the two sectors really blew up the conflict!

At this time, Eloise cared little about the conflict between the two states. She just wanted to go home to reunite with her son! For that matter, the Insurmountable Drakes and every other independent outfit trapped within the Dark Sphere also wanted to get out and go home!

Everyone wanted to go home!

To be honest, Eloise planned to only serve with the Insurmountable Drakes for a few months before her contract ran out. At that point, she intended to retire from the mercenary corps to work for a security company that allowed her to spend some time with her family.

The Dark Sphere ruined everything. This bizarre spatial anomaly hovered around the border of the two star sectors randomly popping up to swallow several ships and fleets in transit. There was no rhyme and reason for its appearances and movement patterns.

Even as Ves slowly dug up the circumstances around this mysterious Dark Sphere, he did not forget to pay attention to how Eloise skillfully piloted her space knight.

Due to its patchy, frankenstein-like repairs, her Valiant Warden no longer resembled its original model in any way. Much of the space knight's internal components had all been salvaged from other mechs when the original ones wore out or got destroyed.

The armor plating by itself looked like an awful patchwork of crudely welded and fused plates from dozens of mechs. The inconsistent plating meant that some portions of the mech withstood energy damage well, while other portions performed better against physical damage.

Eloise knew her mech so well that she was able to proficiently take advantage of these traits to allow the right sections of armor to take the blows they were able to withstand the best!

It reminded Ves of his intentions of how the polarizing module should be used. Eloise's skill in selective damage redirection resembled the skill the mech pilots of his new mech needed to master to shape most efficient polarizing fields!

"Keep chugging along, Warden." Eloise whispered affectionately as she skillfully piloted her mech in the most efficient fashion possible. "Just hold on for a week. We'll get out of the Dark Sphere within that time."

Another notable aspect about the mech was that Eloise's strong emotions affected the Warden on a spiritual level. The constant battling and piloting prompted Eloise to develop a strong affection towards her own mech. Her will to battle in order to reunite with her young son carried over to the Warden, allowing a minor X-Factor to take shape that echoed with her desires to return home!

"We have to return home!"

That phrase was being bandied about a lot among the fugitives in the Dark Sphere. Everyone wanted to exit the Dark Sphere and go home. Yet as far as they knew, none of them ever succeeded!

In truth, the outfits that all managed to survive up to now went to great lengths to keep themselves alive and combat capable. With no way to gain fuel and supplies from the dark and nebula-filled environment, they resorted to raiding isolated ships or each other!

In effect, the depraved conditions of the Dark Sphere forced every single outfit to turn pirate!

Eloise herself used to object to this behavior, but her overriding desire to return to her son had eroded her moral objections.

"We have to return home!"

This single conviction shared by many outfits trapped within the Dark Sphere all forced them to cannibalize each other for valuable supplies. Mechs didn't repair by themselves and starships needed a steady source of ship-grade fuel.

Even as Ves tried to prevent himself from becoming affected by Eloise's obsessive desire to reunite with her son, he studied her operation of her mech in greater detail.

Since it appeared that battle wouldn't break out for the time being, Eloise did not expend too much effort into piloting her mech. Nonetheless, the skill and reflexes she developed over a decade of surviving the Dark Sphere made her develop plenty of unique habits and quirks.

Ves recognized that many of the more unusual quirks served to compensate for her Valiant Warden's eccentricities and irregularities. Nonetheless, Eloise diligently maintained many good habits universal to piloting spaceborn mechs.

Many of these small rules that she learned from veteran Drakes or developed on her own seemed quite useful to Ves. This was what he aimed to learn from his Mastery experience!

Ves eagerly observed Eloise's every little trick and method. He also took note of her concerns and frustrations of her own mech.

He already learned a laundry list of issues he needed to take note of when he began to properly design his upcoming space knight! The more issues he addressed preemptively at the design phase, the less problems mech pilots faced when they finally got to pilot his new product!

However, this wasn't enough for him. He wanted to observe Eloise when she was in her best state during battle. Only when battle commenced would he be able to observe the most critical aspects that she took into account to survive!

Several days went by as the Insurmountable Drakes navigated to a rallying point provided by Mr. Drenad. While navigation was rather difficult in the Dark Sphere, the dark and foggy nebulas with their varying temperatures and mix of particles enabled them to develop a rough three-dimensional map of the Dark Sphere.

The further to the center, the warmer it got. Strange processes went on in the inner portion of the sphere. The center attracted a lot of planetoids and asteroids and swallowed them over time. New Starspawn emerged from the feeding processes which subsequently flew out to assault the human presence in order to grow!

In fact, Eloise and many of the other independents trapped in the Dark Sphere believed that the states from the Silent Nomad and Pure Wheel Star Sectors deliberately trapped them in this jar to feed the Starspawn!

Only after the Starspawn consumed a number of mechs or high-quality materials did they evolve into Alpha Starspawn. These evolved entities were not only a major threat to outfits, but their tissue also possessed very unique traits that turned them into valuable source material for certain biological processes!

What the use of Starspawn tissue actually was, none of the Drakes knew. They knew it was valuable though, so they salvaged a bunch of remains from Alpha Starspawn and stored them in the freezer, to be sold whenever they emerged out of the Dark Sphere.

When the Insurmountable Drakes finally reached the outer area of the Dark Sphere marked with pink particles, they encountered a handful of other outfits.

Everyone put up their guard. Fighting between mercenaries, treasure hunters, pirates and all manner of scoundrels long led to an intense mutual distrust against each other. Without any way of gaining supplies except for robbing each other, it was incredibly difficult to gather a great number of independents in one place without another fight breaking out!

That they somehow managed to refrain from firing their weapons showed how serious they were this time to break out!

The enigmatic Mr. Drenad from the Angel's Wing Foundation deserved much of the credit. An unmarked carrier known only as the Defiled Gene served as the glue that kept the separate outfits together.

Ves was ready to see the battle commence. This extended Mastery experience showed him many areas of interests related to spaceborn mechs and space knights that he hadn't fully considered before. In fact, he already harvested a lot more than he initially thought!

The only problem was that his continued attachment to Eloise subjecting him to her increasingly more volatile mood swings.

At some points, she functioned as a regular mech lieutenant in charge of leading a small number of mechs on patrol.

At other points, she abruptly wailed against her awful fate and longed to be reunited with her son! Her strong emotions were so disconcerting to Ves that he was getting rather impatient to see the battle commence!

This mental trip to the past already lasted a week, which meant he was absent in the present day for a week as well!

It was a good thing that he prepared the LMC for his absence, but that didn't mean that Ves liked to be gone that long!

"I see that every outfit that has received an invitation has arrived." Mr. Drenad spoke over a broadcast to every independent gathered at this site. "A half day of travel away from here lies the most vulnerable exit of the Dark Sphere. Guarded by a garrison and a range of space fortifications of Dark Nomads, it is a hard obstacle to overcome, but not an impossible one! At this time, the Defiled Gene will be enacting our stratagem which forms the key to our breakthrough. Please maintain a healthy distance from our carrier as it will exceedingly perilous for you to stray too close."

As Eloise and everyone else wondered what Mr. Drenad had in store, alarms suddenly rang from her Valiant Warden's sensors.

"Starspawn!"

A flood of dark, partially-transparent mech-sized jellyfish-like creatures emerged from the pink nebula. Even as everyone armed their weapons, Drenad forcefully commanded them to a halt!

"STOP! The Starspawn that are drawn to us are temporarily under our control!" The man spoke. "Your commanders are fully aware of our plan. The Starspawn won't be a threat as long as they are not disturbed!"

A chill went through Eloise's back. She had only ever met hostile, rabid Starspawn in the Dark Sphere. How had Mr. Drenad managed to control them? Was this the power of the Angel's Wing Foundation?

Chapter 1082 Defiled Gene

A dangerous host of Starspawn surrounded the Defiled Gene. The mysterious light carrier became the nucleus of a gathering of the most dangerous astral lifeforms in the Dark Sphere!

None of the outfits presents let their guard down. They maintained a healthy distance from the radiating orbits of the dark jellyfish-like creatures, afraid that

they would buckle out of the control of whatever means Mr. Drenad used to exert control over the astral creatures!

Even Eloise felt disconcerted by her proximity to the beasts. The Starspawn inflicted huge losses on the Insurmountable Drakes over the years.

If they succeeded in repelling the Starspawn, it quickly turned out that they were worse off due to the amount of fuel, energy and supplies they used up. There was absolutely no profit to be gained from battling the Starspawn!

Not even the increasing amount of Alpha Starspawn tissue they accumulated in their stores served to give them any satisfaction. Though they knew that the powers that be hungered for Alpha Starspawn tissue, it didn't help out the Insurmountable Drakes at all because they couldn't exchange it for critical supplies!

Despite Eloise's misgivings about this venture, Commander Pritchard went onboard with the plan, which meant the rest of the Insurmountable Drakes followed suit.

Besides, she saw the logic in the plan. By throwing the Starspawn at the defenses of the Silent Nomad forces as cannon fodder, the outfits stood a real chance at breaking through to the portal that led them back to normal space!

The Defiled Gene gathered so many Starspawn that the Silent Nomad forces needed to exert a huge amount of effort to repel their assault. This gave the remaining outfits the confidence that this risky plan might succeed. If they attacked on their own, then there was no question that they would break into pieces!

A tense half day of travel ensued. As they came closer and closer to the space fortress the Silent Nomad forces parked in front of the portal, the enemy detected their presence and readied themselves for battle.

As Eloise performed her final checks, Ves eagerly prepared to absorb a lot of insights during the upcoming battle. This was what he anticipated the most!

"Prepare for battle." Commander Pritchard broadcasted over their channel. "Don't forget who we are and what we are fighting for. Don't try to defeat the military forces of the Silent Nomad Star Sector. Instead, focus on making space so that our ships and mechs can reach the portal!"

The portal was all that mattered!

As the alliance of independents came within range, the military garrison seemed split between deciding whether to focus on repelling the Starspawn of the outfits first.

The Defiled Gene made that decision for them as they sent a silent command that forced the Starspawn to accelerate!

The astral monsters were closing in quick, forcing the military mechs and turrets to focus their fire upon the dangerous creatures first!

"It's working!" Commander Pritchard exulted. "Keep to the flanks and push through while they are distracted!"

The defenders did not ignore the approaching outfits. Even though they diverted most of their firepower to repel the rabid Starspawn, they allocated hundreds of mechs to hinder the advance of enemy mechs and ships.

"Come forth!" She commanded her squad. "Don't spare your energy cells! Just shoot and shoot until your mech runs out!"

Her Valiant Warden flew in front of a squad of ranged mechs as they unleashed their lasers at the approaching enemy mechs. Lasers and rounds shot back at them in return, but Eloise kept absorbing the majority of the incoming firepower with her thick shield.

The Valiant Warden long lost the shield it originally carried. The Insurmountable Drakes long substituted its need for a shield with salvaged armor plating. Over the years, the mech technicians of the Drakes learned to be creative and resourceful.

In order to provide the Valiant Warden with the best form of protection, they repurposed large chunks of bulky starship armor plating! The shield they created from salvaged starship pieces were so thick and heavy and Eloise's mech lost over eighty percent of its mobility!

The Valiant Warden's average flight system strained against all of the extra mass!

However, all of that extra bulk gave the Valiant Warden an incredible capacity to block incoming fire. Lasers, rounds and missiles kept pummeling the increasingly deforming shield, yet Eloise and her Valiant Warden bore the brunt of the aggression with confidence!

It took a lot of grit and determination to face the firepower head-on without attempting to dodge them at all!

In effect, even if Eloise was piloting a medium space knight, the burden of carrying a huge slab of repurposed ship armor plating basically forced her to pilot her machine as a heavy mech!

Ves learned a lot of useful insights from her piloting style. The best part about what he learned was that they would also be applicable to his upcoming mech design. Everything he learned was directly to his ongoing design project!

The Insurmountable Drakes and the other outfits managed to make inroads into their assault. The defenders had their hands full trying to kill off the Starspawn. This split attention forced them into retreat, but everyone knew it was only a matter of time before they killed off the bulk of the Starspawn!

"It's not enough!" Eloise gritted her teeth as her shield was starting to crack and buckle under the strain.

The surface of the Valiant Warden's shield was scorching hot from all the lasers that blasted against the surface! The kinetic rounds that impacted it chipped away chunks of protective materials while missiles left deeper impact craters.

All the while, casualties mounted against the independent mechs. There were far too few space knights to cover for everyone. The vulnerable ranged mechs malfunctioned quickly after sustaining a barrage of firepower. Years of depending on salvage and makeshift repairs to keep the mechs alive left a toll on their integrity.

The structural integrity of some of these maintenance-deprived mechs was even worse than bargain bin mechs!

Despite her efforts, Eloise failed to fully shield her comrades. The Insurmountable Drakes as a whole already lost a dozen mechs, many of which incurred fatal damage so abruptly that their mech pilots didn't have the time to eject!

Commander Pritchard continued to exhort his men! "We can't die here, Drakes! Home is just around the corner! Press on and fight no matter who is standing in our way!"

The urgency of this battle continued to pressure Eloise into exerting more and more effort into shielding her comrades. However, all the coordinated firepower the military mechs poured into her direction eventually broke the Valiant Warden's shield!

"No!" She yelled. "This is not over yet! I shall not fall here!"

The Valiant Warden endured the firepower impacting its surface as best as it could, but the volume of fire was so huge that it wouldn't last for more than a minute at most!

Eloise forcibly rotated her mech so that various portions of its frame absorbed the damage. By spreading the damage around, the Valiant Warden lasted long enough to arrive in front of a wrecked mech.

The Valiant Warden utilized its strengthened hands to grip the mech hulk in its grasp.

It was using the remnants of a wrecked mech as a makeshift shield!

Through the creative use of debris on the battlefield to serve as makeshift shields, Eloise managed to keep shielding her comrades from enemy fire. Though the mechs didn't last too long, the Valiant Warden easily discarded the spent wrecks and moved on to grab a new one.

Yet as she continued to hinder the military's attempts at repelling the independent outfits, she became increasingly more concerned at how the battle progressed.

"The Starspawn are being slaughtered!" Someone yelled in an open channel. "The stupid beasts are just charging straight into the kill zones set up by the military!"

The Starspawn were usually much more cunning in battle, preferring to employ ambush attacks to surprise their prey. An open battle where they approached the enemy in a straight line prevented from blending in with the dark nebulas and areas of murky space where they could compensate for their lackluster resilience.

Right now, whenever Eloise diverted some of her attention to the decreasing number of Starspawn, she became increasingly more alarmed at how fast time was running out!

The Insurmountable Drakes only made it halfway through. They needed to cross a lot of distance before they reached the portal that led them out of the Dark Sphere, but the resistance from the military forces were already beginning to intensify!

It was increasingly harder for the Drakes and the other outfits to push the military back!

The huge space fortress alone presented the biggest obstacle of all! As long as that defensive bulwark remained to anchor the defensive forces, they had little hope that they could fight their way past it! Yet nothing in their arsenal was powerful enough to crack such an imposing fortress!

The Drakes already lost more than half of their mechs before the battle took another turn. The Defiled Gene which flew at the center of an increasingly diminishing formation of Starspawn suddenly pulsed.

The organizers of this breakout attempt enacted their Plan B in response to the faltering assault!

"What is happening?"

"Something is happening with the Starspawn! They're breaking apart!"

"Look at the dead remains! They are becoming active again!"

Two things happened at the same time.

First, the existing Starspawn all lost cohesion as their strange tissue rebelled against their bodies. No one knew what went on. For a moment, the defenders thought that the Starspawn were beginning to self-destruct.

However, the other phenomenon happening at the same time signified that much more was afoot! The carcasses of the Starspawn that the defenders took out began to show activity again as their flesh began to roil and writhe.

Eventually, the active Starspawn tissue began to clump together around the Defiled Gene, engulfing Mr. Drenad's carrier in the middle of an abhorrent ball of alien tissue!

That ball quickly grew in size as more and more Starspawn remains merged into the ball. Eventually, its shape began to diverge from an egg and took the form of the biggest Starspawn they had ever seen!

The Super Starspawn cracked open its maw and unleashed a silent roar! Even though no sound propagated in the vacuum of space, Eloise nonetheless shuddered at the monstrous sight!

The newly-emerged creature quickly began to tear into the defensive lines of the Silent Nomad military forces! No matter what the defenders threw at the giant creature, the malleable tissue quickly reformed and returned into its original state!

Even as the Insurmountable Drakes and the other outfits gleefully pressed the advantage now that the defenders were forced to confront the giant monster, their sensors began to sound the alarm.

"Starspawn are coming from behind! They're being attracted by the battle and the Super Starspawn!"

Eloise directed her attention to the Valiant Warden's sensors as she directed it to pick up another mech wreck to serve as a shield. She saw to her alarm that hundreds of Starspawn were pouring in from their rear!

Worse, this didn't appear to be the extent of the influx as the sensors of her mech kept detecting new Starspawn!

These incoming Starspawn quickly descended on the rear of the Drakes and the other outfits!

"Damn it, these Starspawn aren't under control! They're attacking every nearby target!"

Even as the Super Starspawn made good progress in breaking through the defenses of the military forces, the feral Starspawn that emerged from the rear of the attackers wreaked havoc on their mechs and ships!

Their sluggish supply ships were the first to fall! The outfits directed so much attention to the front that they weren't able to allocate enough mechs to cover their rear. Now they paid for it as their remaining supply ships all got taken down in quick succession!

Soon enough, the advancing feral Starspawn were beginning to threaten the mech carriers. If the Insurmountable Drakes lost all of their ships, then they would lose their chance to escape!

"No!" Eloise yelled as she turned around her space knight. The Valiant Warden flew back to the Stained Salamander as fast as possible while being burdened by its makeshift shield. "I must return home! My son is waiting for me! I will not fall here!"

The strongest surge of emotion that Ves had ever felt swept through Eloise's entire mind. For a single moment, that strong maternal desire of Eloise to be reunited with her son flitted through Ves' hiding spot, momentarily disrupting his attempts to stay hidden.

"Drat! I'm found out!"

Ves instantly realized that Eloise's mind picked up his existence.

Yet before she could confront the strange entity in her mind, something even more alarming took place!

Chapter 1083 Apotheosis

Something hidden within Ves' consciousness echoed in response to that strong desire. Eloise's motherly instincts attracted a response from an entity that Ves never knew was present in the mind of his host.

A sharp mental strain suddenly wracked Ves' consciousness as Qilanxo's augmented spiritual fragment flared to life! It wanted to respond to Eloise's desperate straits!

Ves screamed as the spiritual fragment that somehow managed to hitchhike on the System's Mastery journey outputted a huge burst of spiritual energy.

All of that potent spiritual energy poured into Eloise's mind and blended into her strong desires and emotions, strengthening them and transforming them into a more spiritually active state!

Something incredibly profound went on as Qilanxo's strong spirituality reacted with Eloise's emotions. The spiritual energy from Qilanxo did not enter Eloise's mind without direction.

If that were so, the spiritual energy would have shattered Eloise's mind to pieces!

Instead, the energy moved with intelligence and direction. They avoided burning Eloise's pale spirit, instead opting to nurture it by blending in! The spiritual energy did so by voluntarily letting go of some of Qilanxo's imprint and instead made use of Eloise's strong emotions to impart her own imprint on the potent energy!

Even as Ves tried to remain coherent through the pain of being used as a funnel for Qilanxo's spiritual energy, he couldn't help but take note of some of the more important processes.

He learned that spiritual energy did not behave like neutral energy such as electricity or heat. Instead, one of the defining aspects of spiritual energy was that it always carried the imprint of its source!

For example, Ves' Spirituality consisted of a cloud of spiritual energy within his mind that was uniquely his. No one else would be able to wield his spiritual energy because of his imprint.

The same went for Qilanxo's higher quality spiritual energy. The Sacred God was an impressive creature whose spirituality definitely could be placed on par with ace pilots.

For Qilanxo's spiritual fragment to exert such precise control as to wipe away her own imprint and to blend in Eloise's strong emotions with the temporarily ownerless energy was nothing less than miraculous!

The remarkable amount of control and skill exhibited by Qilanxo's spiritual fragment aroused a suspicion within Ves. He had a feeling that something similar took place when Qilanxo first interfaced with Orfan and Dise through the man-beast connection!

The channeling kept going, putting Ves under increasing strain. Eloise somehow hadn't fully become aware of what took place within her mind. Right now, she only cared about saving the Stained Salamander so that she would be able to retain her chance of returning home!

For Eloise to be reunited with her son, the Valiant Warden must stop the ravenous feral Starspawn from destroying the carrier at all costs!

Even as her mind became increasingly more suffused with spiritual energy that truly belonged to herself, Ves felt an added drain on his mind. Somehow, the strong suction that resulted from the channeling siphoned away a portion of his own spiritual energy in the mix!

While his spiritual energy was much less potent and energetic than the energy that belonged Qilanxo, it nonetheless carried a mix of properties strongly related to his design philosophy and his understanding of mechs.

"That's my spiritual energy! Give it back!"

Instead of fulfilling request, Qilanxo's spiritual fragment exerted strong control over his stolen spiritual energy. Instead of blending them into Eloise's mind, the fragment instead directed his energy through Eloise's man-machine connection and vigorously blended it into the X-Factor of the Valiant Warden!

Although only a small portion of Ves' spiritual energy had been siphoned away, he still opposed the procedure! This Mastery experience was meant to expand his horizons on space knights. He already paid 40,000 DP for this opportunity! Why should he pay even more to help out a complete stranger?!

No one listened to his complaints.

The spiritual transformation of the mech continued. Qilanxo's spiritual fragment forcibly erased Ves' imprint on his own spiritual energy in order to empower the Valiant Warden's X-Factor. The Valiant Warden somehow came to life in a sense and began to resonate with the strengthening mind of its sole mech pilot for over ten long years!

When Ves turned his attention to Eloise's mind, he noted with alarm that her emotions and desires took on such a strong shape that it began to resemble an expert pilot's force of will!

There was no confusion in Eloise's mind. While fear hounded her from behind, it only strengthened her motherly desire to be with her son again!

Strengthened by a large amount of potent spirituality, her increasingly strong force of will become more real and substantial by the second. At some point, it reached an invisible threshold that prevented it from growing more solid!

Nonetheless, Qilanxo's spiritual fragment appeared to be a bottomless well of spiritual energy. It continued to feed more of her potent energy into Eloise's mind, freely wiping out Qilanxo's imprint and before blending into Eloise's force of will.

It was as if Eloise's mind became increasingly more crowded with spiritual energy. As Ves was present in her mind, he became alarmed at the proceedings! Would Eloise's mind blow up from the flood of energy?!

He also started to note some signs of instability at the edges of Eloise's mind! Eloise mind and spirit were struggling to cope with the influx of energy. It was eating away at herself!

Yet before her mind reached the point of breaking, Eloise's force of will eventually broke through an invisible threshold! It grew past the barrier that held it back and rapidly gained strength as various inexplicable processes happened at the same time!

The rapidly-strengthening force of will swept through Eloise's mind, transforming it on a fundamental level! As an unwitting bystander of this event, Ves' consciousness rolled with the tides, giving him no chance to regain his wits!

The transformation of Eloise's force of will resulted in immediate effects. Not only had her mindspace expanded significantly, but the explosion in strength also spilled beyond the boundaries of her mind!

Her spiritual energy started to bleed over into realspace!

Out in space, only half a minute went by, though it felt like longer to Ves. A sheen started to surround the increasingly more lively Valiant Warden. Some of her colleagues who were trying to race back towards the Stained Salamander quickly noticed the strange phenomenon.

"Lieutenant Pelican! Your mech! It's glowing!"

"That.. that's forced resonance!"

"What?!"

"She's broken through to expert pilot!"

The increasingly strengthening glow around the Valiant Warden grew stronger, signifying that it was definitely not an illusion!

Eloise had reached apotheosis!

Right now, Eloise's newly-developed force of will was so strong that countless transformations went through in her mind.

To Ves, the main good thing about her breakthrough to expert pilot was that Qilanxo's spiritual fragment finally stopped intervening and drew back its influence. This allowed him to observe some of the changes in her mind, though he understood nothing what he observed.

Strangely enough, Eloise's force of will ignored Ves' presence in her mind entirely. Her overarching desire was to go home and reunite with her son. To do that she had to save the Stained Salamander.

How could she spare any attention to the strange entity in her mind? As long as it didn't stand in her way of her goals, she could deal with it later!

"Get back, you Starspawn!" She yelled as her Valiant Warden accelerated beyond what it was capable of due to the forced resonance elevating its parameters!

Even though the Valiant Warden would never be able to perform on par with an actual expert mech, the boost in performance due to the forced resonance was enough to Eloise!

The Valiant Warden used the wreckage of a downed mech as a shield as it bashed into the nearest approach Starspawn. The creature practically exploded into chunks of semi-solid tissue upon impact!

The glowing mech held the wreck of a mech in one hand and unsheathed its sword with the other hand. After drawing its weapon, the Valiant Warden dove straight into the crowd of the advancing Starspawn!

A massacre ensued! The forced resonance gripping the entire mech also extended to its sword, causing it to sear away at the Starspawn's weak minds at the same time as their flesh parted along the edge!

"I must return home!"

This overarching desire to return home and see her son again drove Eloise to insane heights! Her force of will kept squeezing out its potential, strengthening and sustaining the forced resonance effect that empowered her Valiant Warden!

More than that, the improvements that her force of will continued to bring to her mind elevated many aspects related to piloting mechs. Her mental processing power ballooned, allowing her to take in a lot more input from her mech and enabling her to react faster with better decisions than ever before!

Her current mech piloting ability had reached beyond the level of a normal human mech pilot and went straight into superhuman territory! Ves' consciousness could no longer keep up with the sheer volume of thoughts that went through Eloise's mind as she piloted her mech with inhuman skill!

The amazing battle performance of Eloise's Valiant Warden lifted everyone's morale. The Insurmountable Drakes fought back with ferocious fervor as they were being taken in by the exultation of seeing an expert pilot emerge from their own ranks!

The other outfits fought more vigorously as well as they took advantage of the stalling Starspawn. The astral creatures didn't seem to know what to do against the powerful mech that glowed, and eventually their instincts led them to retreat!

Even as everyone began to cheer in the communication channels, Eloise admonished them. "We haven't escaped yet! This isn't the time to celebrate! Now that our rear is safe, we must continue to break through!"

Commander Pritchard instantly concurred. "Lieutenant— no, Venerable Pelican is right! I don't know what the hell Mr. Drenad and the Defiled Gene has done, but if they think they are the only ones who will be able to leave the Dark Sphere, they have another thing coming! Everyone! Follow Venerable Pelican!"

The surviving mechs and starships of the Insurmountable Drakes and the other outfits all rallied around Venerable Eloise Pelican and the inspiring sight of her Valiant Warden.

Their worship for Eloise invigorated her force of will. While she didn't care too much about the other independents, she strongly cared about the Insurmountable Drakes. As her force of will carried a very protective quality, her strength continued to increase!

"Go forth! Let me lead you into safety!"

As the giant Super Starspawn started to grapple with the space fortification, the independents followed the lead of the glowing Valiant Warden as it streaked across space like a comet!

The defenders, already flailing due to the rampage of the Super Starspawn, were poorly equipped to deal with the latest variable that approached. The sight of a newly-emerged expert pilot coming straight at the military mechs caused the mech pilots inside to waver!

The force of will emanating from the Valiant Warden not only boosted the spirits of her comrades and allies, but also pressed down upon the minds of the mech pilots about to face them in battle!

The military developed many tactics to cope with expert pilots. As long as they spread themselves out and kited the Valiant Warden, they'd be able to pelt it down with superior firepower over time.

Yet if the military mech pilots employed their anti-expert formations, they would become vulnerable to the mob of regular mechs that backed the Valiant Warden up!

For a moment, the Super Starspawn assault and the emergence of a new expert pilot caused the chain of command of the Silent Nomad military forces to break down. Conflicting orders caused them to be paralyzed as the intimidating expert pilot approached!

Eventually, the Valiant Warden collided in the midst of the foremost formation of military mechs! Half-a-dozen mechs instantly perished while the remainder of the formation scattered like flies!

The ensuing chaos led to a chain reaction where most of the military mechs began to retreat in response to their comrades retreating as well! With all of the formations breaking apart, no one felt safe anymore!

"The exit is within reach! Keep pushing! Our escape is almost upon us!" Venerable Pelican yelled.

Yet as the hardy mechs and ships neared the portal that represented their only way out, they also came closer to the half-destroyed space fortress and the heavily-injured Super Starspawn that bit entire chunks out of the structure!

Some of the turrets of the fortress that couldn't bear on the Super Starspawn began to bombard the approaching tide of independents!

Not only that, but the massive Super Starspawn paused in its attack of the fortress and instead moved to attack the Valiant Warden for some reason!

"That monster is coming for us!"

Against a giant astral creature formed out of hundreds of Starspawn, how could the Valiant Warden ever stand a chance?!

Chapter 1084 Unity of Man and Machine

Ves encountered several expert pilots in his life. What he always found remarkable was that they possessed a strong sense of confidence and certainty in their values.

Naturally, they had cause to be confident, but now he knew the exact mechanics behind the secret to advance to expert pilot.

As Ves expected, a mech pilot needed to possess spirituality before they could even be eligible to advance! Of all the mech pilots he met in his life, practically none of them possessed spirituality in any appreciable amounts, causing their chances to go beyond advanced pilot to be a pipedream.

Eloise Pelican should have been one of them. No matter how many battles she went through, no matter how much she piloted the Valiant Warden to the point of developing an organic bond with it, no matter how much she practiced to learn every single nuance and idiosyncrasy of her frankenstein mech, there was no way for her to ever ascend beyond her mortal limits!

Yet that iron rule did not take external factors into account.

The decisive intervention of Qilanxo's spiritual fragment that somehow rode along the System's Mastery experience changed Eloise's fate!

The strong motherly and protective emotions of Eloise meshed particularly well with Qilanxo's spiritual energy. Even shed of the Sacred God's imprint, the energy would never have merged so well with Eloise's desires if they didn't possess similar traits.

To Ves, spiritual energy seemed to be made of condensed meaning. Shaped by the personalities of the entities who formed them, some spiritual energy,

such as that of Venerable Foster, possessed an aggressive bent, while others leaned more towards love or protectiveness.

What he found the most remarkable was that Qilanxo's spiritual fragment seemed adept at changing the personal imprint of spiritual energy. It was as if it specialized in this aspect of applying her spirituality!

"Perhaps that is why the locals of Aeon Corona VII regarded her species as Sacred Gods. This must be the principal reason why they are worshipped." Ves mentally murmured in the back of Eloise's increasingly more active mind.

In fact, his stay in her mind was becoming increasingly uncomfortable! It was one thing to inhabit the mind of a regular pilot, but the strengthening force of will was like a forcefield that repelled any foreign influences!

If not because Eloise was in the midst of battle, Ves would have been kicked back in his own time and space!

Right now, a huge Super Starspawn half the size of the Silent Nomad space fortress bore down on Eloise's Valiant Warden!

The old and patchy space knight already bore an incredible amount of strain during the battle. While Eloise's fighting spirit continued to increase despite landing in the crosshairs the monstrous astral creature, her mech might not be able to keep up with her moves!

Eloise knew it too. She could feel it breaking apart due to the forced resonance exerting it beyond its physical limitations. "NO! My Valiant Warden, fight for me! You must not fall here!"

Surprisingly enough, the Valiant Warden responded! Its nascent X-Factor that had slowly developed over years of continuous use by Eloise had recently been magnified by Ves' stolen spiritual energy!

Whatever attribute this special spiritual energy possessed, it seemed to be highly compatible with mechs!

The man-machine connection became empowered by Eloise's force of will, deepening her bond with the Valiant Warden and unearthing its newly invigorated X-Factor.

They resonated with each other!

Something incredibly marvelous happened. Ves mentally became astonished as the X-Factor of the Valiant Warden somehow supercharged itself! The feeling of protectiveness that it gained from Eloise's influence made it incredibly compatible with the force of will it came into touch!

The only way for Ves to describe the phenomenon was to call it a unity between man and machine!

For a single instant, the boundary between mech pilot and mech blurred!

In the depths of his mind, Ves recognized the phenomenon that took place. This was the legendary complete resonance!

Although often depicted in action dramas broadcasted throughout the galaxy, complete resonance was extremely hard to come by! Let alone expert pilots, even ace pilots and god pilots never managed to replicate the feat.

Yet Venerable Eloise Pelican seemed poised to do the impossible yet again! Her harmony with her own mech caused her force of will and the Valiant Warden's X-Factor, empowering the combination to ludicrous heights!

Even though Ves noted with alarm that the strain on the mech abruptly magnified, that single burst of complete resonance caused the resonating glow around the Valiant Warden to grow in size until it matched the size of the Super Starspawn!

As the strange fused astral creature centered around the Defiled Gene tried to engulf the Valiant Warden whole, it instead bumped into a shield composed completely of energy, bashing the monster to a halt in space!

The giant energy projection of the Valiant Warden echoed the physical mech's every move! After shield bashing the enormous monster back, the energy mech flew forward and chopped its sword over the Super Starspawn's head!

The giant energy sword possessed an intense corrosive effect on the astral creature, parting and burning its flesh along with giving it an incredible amount of pain from its very spirit!

Ves could sense the echoes of agony radiating from the Super Starspawn's distorted spirit! The giant energy sword formed by the combination of Eloise's force of will and her Valiant Warden's X-Factor was a weapon that repelled all evil towards her family and comrades!

"You shall not stand in my way, foul beast!"

Although the giant energy mech already started to fizzle and fade, Eloise and her mech called upon their strength once more to thrust the giant energy sword straight through the Super Starspawn's damaged maw!

The sword cut straight through the monster's gullet and sheared straight through the starship residing in the very center of the Super Starspawn!

The Defiled Gene instantly cut apart into half! The catastrophic damage to the light carrier's structure and volatile power reactors caused her to be engulfed by numerous secondary explosions, obliterating Mr. Drenad's flagship and causing the Super Starspawn to lose cohesion!

"The astral beast is dead! Venerable Pelican slayed the monster!"

The morale of the surviving independents cheered, yet Eloise finally couldn't bear the strain any longer. The sustaining the complete resonance effect with

her mech drained her force of will almost entirely! The X-Factor of the Valiant Warden, just recently empowered, faded away entirely as the mech itself broke apart into scattered components!

"Venerable Pelican!" Commander Pritchard yelled over the communication channel. "We've got you!"

His personal mech flew to Eloise's cockpit and gently took hold of it. A number of mechs from the Insurmountable Drakes moved to flank and surround the cockpit as it was being returned to the Stained Salamander.

"What are you waiting for?!" Pritchard exhorted the members of the independent outfits who were still gaping at the astonishing events that took place. "The monsters are dead or in retreat and the defenders are in total disarray! Let us cross the portal before either of them regain their wits and resume the fight!"

That caused every independent mech pilot into action! Buoyed by Venerable Pelican's heroic and transcendent feats, the morale of the survivors surged, causing them to fly forward with a single purpose!

The defenders on the other hand were still reeling from the disasters that took place. Not only had the space fortress sustained such massive damage that it lost most of its power and firepower, the military mechs lost most of their cohesion and fighting will.

The garrison only threw up a meager amount of resistance. The shock of witnessing the birth of an expert pilot only for her to display the legendary phenomenon of complete resonance shortly afterwards completely put an end to any serious fighting!

As Eloise suffered the aftermath of her wild transformations, she noted with distinct relief that the Insurmountable Drakes and the others were about to pass through the portal!

Due to the volatile position of the Dark Sphere in realspace, no one knew where they would end up after they exited the portal. Each different portal led to different destinations that fluctuated frequently.

That itself guaranteed their safety because there was no chance that the Silent Nomad military forces stationed a guard force at the other side of the portal!

Even as Commander Pritchard mech's placed her cockpit on the deck of the Stained Salamander's hangar bay, Eloise struggled to stay awake.

She needed to see if the portal took them back out!

As the Stained Salamander finally crossed the portal, a moment of non-existence took place before the ship and its escorting mechs emerged back into empty space!

"The stars! The stars have returned!"

"We've succeeded! We're back in the galaxy!"

"Don't celebrate yet! Let's kick our long-dormant FTL drives online and get the hell out of here?!"

None of the independent outfits that used to be trapped in the Dark Sphere wanted to linger any longer than they had to! The military forces at the other side of the portal could still cross over as well in order to pursue the escapees!

The mechs of the Insurmountable Drakes returned to the Stained Salamander as rapidly as possible while the carrier slowly spooled up her FTL drive.

Although the FTL drive had long remained dormant within the Dark Sphere, the engineers always prioritized its maintenance in the event of escape!

"Where to, Commander Pritchard?!"

"Doesn't matter! Just point the ship at the easiest star system you can dial in and bring us away!"

"Roger that, commander!"

Only until the Stained Salamander successfully transitioned into FTL did Eloise finally let go of her insistence of staying awake. The physical, mental and spiritual fatigue she accumulated during her short burst of ascended performance simultaneously hit her like a crashing shuttle!

She quickly lost consciousness as her entire being urgently craved rest in order to recuperate from her ordeal.

Before she lost consciousness though, she swept her much-weakened force of will towards Ves' consciousness one last time.

Ves felt as if Eloise definitely took notice of him! Despite his attempts to hide his presence, the mind of an expert pilot was much more formidable than that of a regular pilot! There was no hiding in her own mental sanctum!

WHO ARE YOU?

"I'm just a mech designer." Ves mentally replied.

Just as Eloise faded to sleep, the System finally ended this lengthy Mastery session!

Ves felt as if a hook grabbed his consciousness yet again and dragged him straight through a portal. The wild ride that ensued was still enormously vague to Ves, and he only returned to his own mind and body an indeterminate amount of time later.

"That was some Mastery experience." He sighed as his dormant body awoke from the isolated chamber within the Mech Nursery's lab floor. "It was worth every single DP I spent on it, that's for sure."

Due to the happy accidents that took place during the battle, Ves gained much more than a first-hand perspective on piloting space knights. While the information he gathered to that nature was certainly abundant enough for him

to overhaul large portions of his current draft design, it did not beat the other events he witnessed!

By residing right inside Eloise's mind as she underwent both apotheosis and complete resonance, Ves gained an unprecedented amount of understanding on both phenomena!

So many mech pilots dreamt of becoming expert pilots! Many more expert pilots aimed to achieve a complete union with their mechs during battle!

Yet both remained out of reach to the vast majority of mech pilots. No matter how hard some mech pilots trained and fought, they would never be able to transcend their mortal limits in their lives!

"Ordinarily, they can't." Ves whispered to himself with his parched throat. "Yet nothing is impossible! Qilanxo showed me the way to circumvent the limitations stopping most mech pilots from advancing!"

More than a week went by while his mind took a mental trip into the past. While his massively enhanced physique allowed him to sustain his week-long dormancy, it still left him craving for food and water!

Ves wearily chuckled to himself. "I'll have to hook myself up to life support the next time I undergo a Mastery! Otherwise, my body might starve to death if I take too long to return!"

THE MECH TOUCH

Chapter 1085 Another Application

Before Ves did anything, he first addressed the consequences of his week-long fasting session.

Once he drank a lot of water and filled his belly with the contents of a nutrient pack, Ves took stock of his gains from this Mastery experience.

"I gained far more than I expected." He concluded.

First, he fulfilled his primary objective. Witnessing Eloise Pelican piloting the Valiant Warden space knight extensively gave Ves an incredible amount of small insights about the rigors of piloting a mech in space.

What Ves appreciated the most was that he watched Eloise pilot her space knight during uneventful patrols and an incredibly pitched battle. The contrast between both of them gave Ves a strong learning experience. Some features were much more important during battle!

The second benefit did not need any repeating. Learning some of the actual mechanics behind apotheosis and complete resonance changed Ves' perspective on expert pilots forever. They no longer posed a mystery to them now that he understood where their force of will emerged from!

"I was right! Spirituality is the key!"

Ves also advanced his fundamental understanding of spirituality by a substantial degree. He learned that spiritual energy consisted of meaning and possesses all kinds of attributes and imprints.

This was important, because learning that these properties existed meant that Ves could one day manipulate them just like Qilanxo's spiritual fragment aptly demonstrated!

What did that mean? As long as he found a source of compatible spiritual energy, he could infuse that into the emotions and desires of a mech pilot that aligned with the attribute of the spiritual energy!

As long as the fusion succeeded, the force of will that emerged would be enough to elevate that mech pilot into an expert candidate or expert pilot!

"If I can replicate the process myself, I can produce artificial expert pilots!"

The magnitude of this astounding ability could not be overstated! Such a secret was so explosive that everyone would fight for it! The weight of this

secret surpassed even that of the Mech Designer System because the latter only benefited a small number of people while the theories that Ves developed could potentially empower every mech pilot in the galaxy!

"I shouldn't be too eager to apply what I've learned." Ves instantly decided.

While he wanted to experiment with what he learned in order to elevate the likes of Melkor, Melinda and Raella Larkinson to expert pilots, it would be too conspicuous for them to advance to experts all of a sudden!

Ves could not afford to give anyone reason to suspect he possessed the secret to elevating mech pilots into expert pilots!

"This ability doesn't only come with galaxy-spanning implications, it's also exceedingly dangerous!"

He readily admitted that he could not come close to replicating the feat. The skill and precision demonstrated by Qilanxo's spiritual fragment showed a mastery of manipulating spiritual energy that Ves didn't even know was possible!

Even though he understood the basic mechanisms of what he witnessed, it was like seeing a musician play an instrument up close. Just because he knew how it worked in theory didn't mean he could pick up an instrument and play it like a master of the craft!

"This is yet another possible application of spirituality in the galaxy that I can learn one day!"

Until that happened, Ves did not intend to mess with it carelessly. If he recklessly inserted foreign spiritual energy into the mind of a random mech pilot, there was a great chance that the spiritual energy would fail to take hold and disappear into the imaginary realm.

If Ves forced the merger of incorrectly attributed spiritual energy with the emotions and desires of a mech pilot, then he might even inflict major harm!

"There's so much still that I don't know." Ves muttered to himself as he sought out Lucky. "What makes spiritual energy capable of affecting reality so strongly? How is it generated and where can I find it? Can the attributes of spiritual energy be converted to other attributes in the same way that their personal imprints can be exchanged?"

So many new questions emerged from his mind. The uncertainties that popped up would keep him busy for a very long time, he guessed.

In any case, it appeared that Ves had not been the only beneficiary of the Mastery experience. He concentrated his mind and turned his mental focus inward.

Resting in the center of his mind space, Qilanxo's spiritual fragment pulsed and glowed with strength. While Ves noted that its activity level had diminished a bit due to its donation of spiritual energy, what remained took on an even more complex and multifaceted quality than before!

Aside from the miniscule influence of Ves' base model and the remnants of Venerable Fontain's stolen spiritual energy, the fragment gained two more influences!

Ves immediately recognized the additional flavors. It seemed that Ves was not the only entity who harvested benefits from his Mastery experience this time!

The strong protectiveness and maternal love of Venerable Eloise Pelican almost entirely displaced the influence of Venerable Fontain. It gained a lot of prominence because it shared much in common with Qilanxo's own spirituality!

Underneath this notable influence, the echoes of the Valiant Warden also resided. Its presence gave the spiritual fragment a much greater fit with space knights!

For a moment, Ves didn't know whether he should celebrate this new development. The spiritual fragment had become more complex, but that also meant it became more muddled and less focused. Only the sheer might of Qilanxo's overpowering imprint on the powerful spiritual fragment kept the pieces together.

"You intervened for a reason, right?" Ves asked the fragment. "Why did you decide to make a move?"

The fragment pulsed once but remained dormant afterwards. It was as if the previous exertion exhausted it quite a bit, forcing it to enter a period of hibernation in order to recuperate.

Ves eventually shrugged. There was no way he could force the powerful spiritual fragment to open its mouth.

For a moment, he doubted whether he was dealing with an isolated, apportioned piece of Qilanxo's spirituality. Was the fragment still in sync with the original Qilanxo? The initiative and ability it previously showed off was quite sophisticated to come from a mere fragment!

"Well, whatever. You'll probably be an even better asset for my upcoming mech design!"

To be honest, the prospect of housing Qilanxo's augmented spiritual fragment in his upcoming mech design frightened him a bit. What would result from such a fusion? Ves almost shivered at the possibilities.

"My mech won't design itself. I have to get back to work." Ves shook his head.

Despite the surprises he encountered along the way, acquiring Space Knight Mastery I served to fill up the gaps in his knowledge base when it came to designing space knights.

In fact, the benefits he gained went beyond understanding space knights from the perspective of a mech pilot. Many of the insights he picked up could be applied to many other spaceborn mechs, giving Ves a high degree of proficiency in designing any kind of mech that operated in space!

"I'm not just a mech designer who is only limited to designing landbound mechs anymore!"

Before Ves emerged from his lab to check up on his company before he went back to resuming his design work, he first grew curious at the events that took place at the Dark Sphere.

The overarching question that popped up in his mind was whether the System actually caused history to change. Was it actually capable of time travel or not?

While the phenomenon of time travel wasn't entirely unheard of, most of the galaxy believed that only the first-rate superstates and the Big Two possessed the ability to artificially replicate the feat. Even then, their applications were likely limited, or else their effects would have been much widely felt by now!

Of course, the conspiracy theorists trawling in the underbelly of the galactic net offered another explanation. They speculated that there was some sort of time police among humanity that kept time travel under the radar.

Whatever the case, Ves first wanted to find out if the System truly possessed the ability to manipulate time. He activated his comm and browsed the galactic net. He searched for any news about the Dark Sphere in relation to the Silent Nomad and Pure Wheel Star Sectors.

"It actually exists!"

Not only did it exist, but the involvement of Venerable Eloise Pelican led to some explosive developments!

As retaliation for exposing the Dark Sphere to the public, the rulers of the Silent Nomad Star Sector kidnapped Venerable Pelican's young son!

This led to a series of dramatic events that sent the Silent Nomad Star Sector in complete disarray! What exactly happened over the past thirty years, Ves couldn't tell, because by then both sides published completely opposite narratives.

Even so, by all accounts, Venerable Pelican not only lived to this very day, but she had also become the figurehead of a huge insurgency. The insurgents that followed her banner aimed to reform the disparate powers of the Silent Nomad Star Sector into a single unified state!

"Has she reunited with her son or not?"

Nobody knew for sure. It wouldn't have been easy to rescue Pelican's son from a conspiracy of states. Ves somewhat sympathised with Venerable Pelican's difficulties to reunite with her family. Through no fault of her own, she had been separated from her son and was constantly being hunted down to this very day.

Above all else, Eloise Pelican originally did not possess the spirituality required to develop a force of will. Without an empowered force of will, there was no way for her to advance straight to expert pilot.

All the historical accounts of the Dark Sphere that Ves found on the internet matched his own observations. The descriptions of the titanic battle at the portal and the amazing occurrence of complete resonance put most of his doubts to rest!

"The System actually traveled back in time and changed history!"

Instantly, several questions popped up in his mind. Was this Mastery experience predetermined? If Ves suddenly decided to abort, would Venerable Pelican still exist as an expert pilot who survived the Dark Sphere?

All of the paradoxes involved with time travel already started to give Ves headaches. "There's no point speculating on this matter."

The simple fact of the matter was that he traveled back in time somehow and affected a real change in history. If he could do it once, he could do it again!

"It will be difficult to take advantage of this when the System just chucks me halfway across the galaxy all the time." Ves muttered.

The substantial difference in time and space prevented him from taking actions that directly benefited him in his current time.

Even though this was the first time that Ves gained the option of reconnecting with the host of his Mastery experience, he was leery of doing so. Even though his entry into her mind drastically elevated her life and allowed her to escape the Dark Sphere, who knew what she would do when Ves came up to her and said hello.

He shook his head. "There's no reason for me to reconnect with her. I don't think I'll gain anything aside from increasing the chance of exposing my secrets!"

He decisively set aside any notion of contacting Venerable Pelican. He wouldn't be able to get in touch with her anyway considering her current preoccupation.

When Ves finally exited the vault and returned to his penthouse office to catch up on what he missed during the last week, Gavin stopped by as soon as he heard that his boss returned.

"Ves! We received word that the representatives of a number of esteemed individuals are on their way to Cloudy Curtain!" The newly-appointed executive assistant stated with alarm.

"Ah." Ves smiled in a sly manner. "So they accepted my invitation. Good. Please keep an eye on their arrival and prepare some accommodations for them in Freslin. Make sure to keep our guests separate and unaware of each other. It wouldn't do for them to mingle and band together."

Gavin frowned at the strange instructions. "What's this all about, Ves? Those representatives are all standing in for powerful businessmen and officials from numerous partners of the Friday Coalition!"

"I know."

Chapter 1086 Distinguished Buyers

"It is almost sinful to partake in this bounty." The representative uttered as Ves carefully opened a vintage nutrient pack and took out a sample for the man to try. "Yet don't mind if I do."

As soon as the foreigner from the Friday Coalition took a bite, he went into an instant ecstasy! "How divine! It is indeed as you claimed!"

Ves smiled as the representative took another bite and savored the sublime flavor. Thousands of years of fermenting had done the contents of the nutrient pack a lot of good!

"This isn't just any kind of regular nutrient pack." He boasted as he entered into salesman mode. "Look at the markings and serial numbers of the nutrient pack. Not only are they of genuine CFA stock, but they are also dated from before the Age of Mechs! If that isn't enough, they also originate from the long lost Starlight Megalodon!"

The representative studied the markings of the nutrient himself. "I was doubtful of your claims that you have somehow obtained the nutrient packs of

a long-lost battleship of the CFA. The disappearance of the Starlight Megalodon is wracked with secrets. How could you possibly come into the possession of some of her nutrient pack supply?"

"I have my ways." Ves replied vaguely. "Due to some circumstances that I am not allowed to explain, I spent some time in the frontier. You can connect the dots from there."

"Very well. I'll take your entire supply. How much do you have?"

"With the opened pack included, I only have fifty-three nutrient packs left." Ves stated as he slapped his palm against the open crate in the vault.

"I am prepared to purchase all of them for 100,000 coalition credits each. That is a princely sum for a Brighter like you who came into possession of such a treasure."

"100,000 cols? Do you think I am mad!? As a connoisseur of nutrient packs, I know quite well that these vintage nutrient packs are worth much more than that! You should pay 100 million cols for them per pack! I'll even throw you a ten percent bulk discount if you buy all fifty-three of them at once!"

"Oh, please. Don't insult my intelligence, Mr. Larkinson. Aged nutrient packs are not impossible to acquire. 200,000 cols."

"Those are fake goods you are talking about. Nutrient packs that have undergone artificial time acceleration might be able to offer similar complex flavor profiles, but they are equivalent to mass-produced goods! My nutrient packs are different! They are exceedingly rare goods with a special origin and story behind them. If your patron adds them to their collection, they can show them off with pride that they own a piece of the Starlight Megalodon! Where else can you find such a treasure that your patron can comfortably display without attracting the attention of the CFA? 90 million cols!"

"That is a ludicrous amount for mere nutrient packs. No matter their age or history, nutrient packs serve as an economic way to supply ships and colonies with long-lasting survival food. They consists entirely of synthetic ingredients mushed together in an approximation of organic food! There are limits to how much one should pay for hem! 300,000 cols!"

Ves chuckled. "You and I both know that we are not talking about trading a bunch of nutrient packs here. Regardless of their original form, their meaning is completely different now due to their aging and their remarkable origin. These nutrient packs are valuable specifically due to those reasons and those reasons alone! This is your chance to buy a piece of history! And I will only charge 80 million cols each!"

The two nutrient pack connoisseurs continued to haggle back and forth for a while. Eventually, they came to an agreement to sell all fifty-three nutrient packs for the low price of 2.7 million cols.

Once they shook hands and signed a contract, the representative commanded a lifter bot to pick up the crate and depart the vault.

Before he left, the representative turned around. "These are the only nutrient packs from the Starlight Megalodon that you possess, correct?"

"I've left a couple for my own collection." Ves lied. "I can completely guarantee that you have obtained the remainder."

"Very well."

Once the representative left, he stepped outside the vault area and reached a position where he regained his connection to the LMC's internal network. He sent a call to Gavin.

"Gavin, please send in the next representative down to the vault."

"Okay, Ves." Gavin replied dubiously over the feed. "Why all of this song and dance? Why not meet them all at once?"

"I have my reasons." Ves replied before shutting off the connection.

He quickly returned to vault and entered another area where a single crate stood in the middle. Ves awaited for the next guest to be escorted to the vault by an attendant.

"Ah, Mr. Larkinson." The newcomer said, a woman this time. "From the drab decor of this underground area, I suppose you are about to show me your goods."

Ves smiled and opened the crate, revealing a number of nutrient packs. "You presume correctly, miss. Forty-six vintage nutrient packs, excavated straight from the missing Starlight Megalodon! As far as I am aware of, they are the only goods to have emerged from that legendary CFA battleship! Would you like to have a taste?"

"Please. How else will I be able to verify your claims? I am familiar with all of the historical CFA nutrient pack flavors, so don't think you can bamboozle me with counterfeits."

"I would never dream of doing so, miss."

Like a sleazy salesman, Ves repeated the same routine that happened a moment earlier. He hyped up the historical value of the nutrient packs. They were not mere vintage nutrient packs, but relics of the CFA!

Ves fared a little worse during the haggling that ensued. The woman was a shrewd negotiator and they only shook hands when they arrived at a price of 2.2 million cols per nutrient pack.

After waving the female representative off with her newly-purchased crate, Ves smiled sardonically to himself. "Well, I have four more chances to do better."

Now that he gained more confidence in the value of his vintage nutrient packs, Ves continued to meet representative after representative. Even though he outright lied about the fact that they received his entire supply of vintage nutrient packs from the Starlight Megalodon, Ves didn't think much of the consequences.

All he cared about right now was ripping off the representatives of profligate nutrient pack collectors from the Friday Coalition!

After completing six trades, each of which involved around fifty nutrient packs each, Ves completely traded away his entire stash!

Although it pained him a bit to say goodbye to those valuable nutrient packs, they only served to satisfy his vanity while they remained in his possession.

As a mech designer and the head of a company that was mired in debt, Ves needed money more than he needed to retain ownership of nutrient packs that served no practical use other than to serve as souvenirs of his last great adventure!

Aware of the value of the nutrient packs should Ves ever sell them to someone interested in them, he made the rational choice of converting his ownership of the nutrient packs into cold hard cash.

His heart still ached at the loss, though. His dismay was so obvious that Lucky floated down from his head and clung to his shoulders as if to soothe his pain.

"Meow."

"I know. They're just nutrient packs, but they're also a piece of history, you know? The Starlight Megalodon doesn't exist anymore, so there is no way that I can ever obtain more vintage nutrient packs from the ship."

"Meow!"

"Pff, is that what you care about? You want me to spend all of my earnings from these trades on rare exotics for you to stuff your face with? I still haven't entirely gotten over the fact that you ate away my CFA gear!"

"Meow-meow!"

"Even if you gained some fantastic new abilities, it's not cost-effective for me to feed you high-quality exotics just so that I can gain some couple of super gems!"

"Meooooow!"

Ves ignored Lucky's admonishment in favor of tallying his gains. Overall, by selling around three-hundred vintage nutrient packs in total at an average price of 2.9 million cols each, Ves earned 870 million cols in a single day!

Simply speaking, that was roughly worth around 87 billion bright credits! Even though Ves would lose a chunk of money from that massive sum due to transaction costs and fluctuating exchange rates that reflected the weakening of the bright credit, Ves still believed he would be able to supplement the LMC's coffers by at least 80 billion credits!

"The company's debt is a thing of the past once the money arrives!"

Not only that, but the LMC would also be sitting on a healthy surplus that it could spend on improving its security, expanding the Mech Nursery, setting up branch offices and subsidiaries in other states or apportion them to the future marketing campaign of his upcoming design!

"Worthless, heh?" Ves chuckled. "Maybe they're worthless to people like Lieutenant Stimmons. As for others, they are worth as much as the Barracuda!"

In fact, ever since he first cracked open a nutrient pack from the battleship during his stay on the Starlight Megalodon, he instantly realized their value. Not only would many individuals in the galaxy pay good money for them, they were also inconspicuous enough that no one in the CFA would care enough to take them away!

This was why Ves expressly prepared to smuggle out a bunch of vintage nutrient packs from the Starlight megalodon well in advance!

Ves laughed in exultation. "Hahaha! It all paid off!"

If Ves wanted to maximize his earnings, he would have put them up for offer at some auction house in the Friday Coalition. By inviting all the wealthy nutrient pack connoisseurs of the Friday Coalition to participate in the auction, it might have been possible to jack up the price for each vintage nutrient pack all the way to 1 million cols!

"That would have been far too conspicuous, though." Ves shook his head in regret.

Such a public auction might attract the attention of the CFA to him again. The last thing that Ves wanted to do was to give the powerful trans-galaction organization a reason to investigate him thoroughly!

In addition, by selling nutrient packs from a lost CFA battleship so blatantly, Ves would also be violating his obligation to keep the details of the Aeon Corona Mission a secret. While he didn't fear the Mech Corps all that much, it was an entirely different problem once Flashlight entered the fray!

"I should never get on the bad side of Flashlight!" Ves shuddered.

Perhaps Ves could have earned more money if he sought out more discerning buyers. Yet the longer he waited and the more potential buyers he sounded out, the greater the risk that some of them might take more direct action to obtain the nutrient packs!

It wasn't out of the question for them to send an overwhelmingly powerful force of mechs to Cloudy Curtain in order to rob Ves of his stash of vintage nutrient packs!

Although it sounded ludicrous for someone to go through so much effort for a bunch of nutrient packs, Ves knew that such incidents actually took place!

"The sooner I got rid of them, the better. They're hot goods as long as they remained in my vault."

In any case, earning almost a billion cols lifted a huge burden off his shoulders. It cost money to borrow money, so the LMC constantly troubled itself by trying to pay back all the interest from their loans.

While it wasn't exactly a disaster for Ves and the company if those loans continued to remain on the company's books, if Ves gained the ability to pay them back wholesale, why shouldn't he go for it? In any case, Ves did not plan for his company to embark in any major investments in the foreseeable future.

"Now that I've received a quota for the services offered by the BV alliance, I no longer need to save up a lot of money to prepare for the next mech generation."

Now that he secured the future of the LMC, Ves finally felt free to focus his main priorities.

Right now, that meant taking the next step in designing his mech!

"I'm almost done with overhauling my draft design. Once that's complete, I'll have to solicit feedback from Professor Ventag and others. I wonder how they will react to my vision?"

Chapter 1087 Economical Design

Ves gained an entirely new conception of spaceborn mechs after acquiring Space Knight Mastery I. Riding in the mind of a veteran space knight taught him that space knights constantly worried about being able to cover their colleagues.

While mobility was important to do their jobs, it was their ability to endure damage that really mattered. If they wished, they would rather give up the former in order to enhance their ability to do the latter.

"It's a constant struggle. Without sufficient mobility, they can't keep up with their colleagues. Without enough tanking ability, they won't last long enough to provide meaningful protection."

Nonetheless, riding in the mind of Eloise Pelican also taught him that a mech like his would appeal to mech pilots like her. His upcoming super-medium space knight offered substantially more protection without compromising its mobility entirely.

Of course, the huge learning curve associated with using polarizing module effectively might hinder their adoption. However, polarizing modules and shield modules were not entirely strange to mech pilots of the Bright Republic considering their more widespread use in second-rate states.

"As long as their ability to withstand damage is big enough, all the other costs are worth it from their perspective!"

This realization gave him confidence as he reimagined his upcoming space knight design. He expressly worked to accommodate some of the features

that space knight pilots like Eloise Pelican eagerly demanded from their mechs.

Perhaps unconsciously, Ves included a couple of touches from the Valiant Warden's design into his own work. He admired the bond that Eloise developed with her mech. No matter how much damage the machine sustained, with care and attention it always stood back up to fight another day.

It was the greatest expression of one of his ideals. Though forced by circumstances, the Insurmountable Drakes did their best to treat their mechs right and to value them as priceless assets.

"Many knight mechs are expected to endure an incredible amount of punishment over their lifespans. Suchs mechs need to be incredibly robust and enduring, far more than the average mech."

Ves already learned this lesson with his first Mastery, Yet living alongside the rigors that Eloise endured as she tried everything to extend the lifespan of her mech underscored this aspect.

Space knights struggled to last ten years of constant use! If not for the resourcefulness of the Insurmountable Drakes, the Valiant Warden would have long been scrapped and dismantled for parts.

"It's a sad affair when mechs are used beyond their capacity."

The new draft of the space knight that took shape undeniably carried the influence of his latest Mastery experience. When Ves revised the sketches, he allowed Qilanxo's spiritual fragment to guide some of his design choices as usual.

Perhaps due to the influence of Eloise and the Valiant Warden in its spiritual makeup, the fragment favored different choices this time. More endurance. More resilience. More longevity.

All of this didn't come without a price. The additional structural integrity and armor plating that Ves added to his draft slowed it down even further. The first draft of the mech already suggested that it would move rather sluggish, but this time it leaned even further towards the ineffectual mobility of a heavy mech.

In essence, the new design choices showed a distinct lack of care towards mobility. His draft design possessed nearly the same mobility as a heavy space knight but without the sheer amount of damage absorbing capacity of one.

"What is the advantage of such a mech?"

Perhaps theoretically, his space knight did not offer any distinct advantages over a regular heavy space knight.

"Yet in fact there are two major advantages. First, it is much cheaper than a genuine heavy mech. Second, it demands much less maintenance."

Only well-funded, highly-organized mech forces such as military mech regiments made use of heavy mechs. This was because operating them was very expensive and demanding in resources. Not only was acquiring them upfront ludicrously expensive, they also required a lot of servicing. Any major damage incurred to its high-quality but expensive armor plating quite literally cost hundreds of millions of credits to repair!

"It's simply not economical for private outfits to operate a heavy mech, certainly not one that is expressly designed to take damage and require regular repairs to keep running!"

If there was one important advantage that Ves brought to the table with his new design, it was that it had been designed to be as cost-efficient as possible when performing its singular most important role.

Ves estimated that he would be able to contain the price of his space knight to under 100 million credits. It was not as large as a heavy mech and did not require nearly enough metal to fabricate a copy.

More importantly, a large portion of its defensive capability came from the polarizing module. By covering a section of armor with a special polarizing field, the only damage the mech sustained was draining its energy cells a lot faster.

As long as the mech did not withstand too much damage at once, it would theoretically be able to offload all of the incoming firepower to its polarizing field!

Even though that would drain his space knight's energy reserves rather quickly, it was a lot cheaper to recharge spent energy cells than to replace damaged armor plating!

"Energy is cheap. High-quality materials, especially those used in armor plating, are very expensive to come by. It's a reality that mercenary corps and many other private outfits spend much of their earnings from their missions to repair the damage their mechs have incurred. Many times, the cost of repairs can even exceed the payment they received from their employers!"

Many mercenary corps in fact incorporated provisions in their contracts that stated that their employers would compensate for their repairs.

Yet how many employers would agree to such a clause? What if the mercenary corps deliberately piloted their mechs recklessly in order to get rid of their old and malfunctioning machines? Their employer would be on the hook for all of the replacement costs!

In practice, the two sides always negotiated the extent to which an employer would cover the repairs of the mercenary corps. This usually ended up somewhere around the tune of fifty percent or less.

Usually, employers held a bit more leverage during these negotiations because they could easily offer the assignment to another, more desperate mercenary corps.

The economics of running a mercenary corps aside, what Ves really wanted to play into was their demand on acquiring mechs that demanded less repairs!

Part of the reason why mercenary commanders disliked knight mechs was because they were money pits!

"Even so, operating a couple of knight mechs is better than to let their more vulnerable mechs incur all that damage instead."

Yet that did not feel like much of a consolation to the mercenary commanders when they studied the accounts. How would they feel about their defensive mechs when they occupied at least seventy to ninety percent of the money allocated to maintenance and repairs?

"This disparity in costs is exactly why the polarizing module matters a lot. If it can save my space knight from incurring a lot of material damage during battles, then the cost savings it provides over its lifespan has paid for its acquisition in spades!"

Due to the larger size of his space knight, Ves could not avoid putting a high price tag on his upcoming mech model. Yet he hoped that some mech buyers would be smart enough to realize that the total cost of operating his new mech was a lot more generous over its entire lifespan!

"Well, not everyone is smart enough to take the entire lifetime cost of a mech into account. It also doesn't help much if the mech gets destroyed during its first few fights."

This was why many mercenary corps still resorted to budget knight mechs. They were easier to buy and easier to replace if they broke. Even though

outfits expended a lot more money due to the frequent replacements, it felt a lot better than buying one very expensive mech.

Would they even dare to commit such an expensive mech in battle?

All of these psychological considerations sounded a bit stupid, but Ves knew it was part of human behavior. The mech commanders in charge of leading private outfits always came from the ranks of mech pilots.

Mech pilots generally attended mech academies once they found out about their genetic aptitude when they reached ten-years old. The curriculum of a mech academy largely consisted of mech piloting-related courses.

This meant that mech cadets predominantly spent their time on studying how to pilot knight mechs, how to improve their marksmanship, how to employ rudimentary tactics and so on. Learning all of this took up the majority of their time and energy.

As for other topics like math, history, science and humanities? Please. As long as a mech pilot could figure out the answer of two plus two, they really didn't need to know more in order to be a good soldier on the battlefield!

This lopsided education system led to the unfortunate circumstance that mech commanders were almost always awful administrators. They lacked the required administrative and business acumen to run a profitable outfit!

"The smarter commanders are prudent enough to delegate these matters to competent managers. The more conceited ones believe that all of their decisions are right regardless of their actual competence in these areas!"

From all the industry publications that Ves had read over the years, the latter occurred far more frequently than they should!

"Mech pilots are rather stupid in that way." Ves shook his head.

The important implication of this reality was that his space knight might not be able to catch on to the mech market. Ves had to take the unfortunate possibility into account that mech commanders were too short-sighted to appreciate his upcoming design!

"Not every mech commander is that stupid, though. I'm sure that my mech will be able to sell as long as NORA Consolidated is involved."

The marketing prowess of one of the premier mech companies in the Bright Republic dwarfed anything that the LMC or Marcella Bollinger could accomplish! As long as Professor Ventag put his entire support behind the joint design, then it was not impossible for their first cooperative design to become a success!

"I'm not resigned to design a technical masterpiece that flops on the market!"

Just like Eloise Pelican, his fighting spirit surged despite the many odds against him. Regardless of whether they were mech pilots or mech designers, both of them shared something in common!

Mech pilots struggled against threats on the battlefield.

Mech designers fought to earn the mech market's recognition for their mech designs.

Although the latter didn't put their lives on the line, their battles were just as arduous!

With these economical considerations in the back of his mind, Ves completed his second draft of upcoming mech design.

"It's time to see what other people think of my design."

Ves decided to invite all of his confidants as well as the three little chicks that recently joined the Avatars of Myth.

All of them entered his imposing penthouse office shortly afterwards. While people like Calsie and Gavin had already become used to the impressive decor of his office, the three little chicks were practically wide-eyed as they became affected by the atmosphere their surroundings conveyed.

"Please take a seat, everyone." Ves gestured them to the comfortable couches at the corner of the office in order to ease the tensions.

They first chatted a little. Ves found out that Melkor already ordered a decent landbound striker mech from Bentheim in order to provide Rhode Larkinson with a new machine.

As for Chette and Jannzi Larkinson, they would be forced to stick to the simulators for a while longer. It took a lot more time, planning and organization to supplement the Avatars of Myth with their first spaceborn mech company.

"How soon do you think we'll have our first spaceborn mechs?" Ves asked.

"A couple of months at the very least." Melkor answered. "The biggest problem we are facing right now is that we need to find a capable and experienced spaceborn mech officer to lead the new company. It's very hard to attract mech officers of that caliber to join a completely unknown personal mech force like ours. Despite our impressive-sounding name, we haven't accomplished much to earn a famed reputation."

Ves learned in the frontier that reputation was very important to every outfit! Reputation not only deterred troublemakers and opportunists, but also attracted skilled, experienced and capable mech pilots.

In this regard, despite their midrange and premium mech roster, the Avatars of Myth hadn't been tested enough in battle to enjoy the regard they ought to deserve!

"Do you think the Avatars of Myth need a bit more seasoning, Melkor?"

"It helps if you grant us permission to accept small mercenary contracts. Some of our men are getting bored by the constant training."

"Do so. I trust your judgement in this matter."

Chapter 1088 Homage

Before Ves underwent military service, he wouldn't have agreed to let the Avatars of Myth work as mercenaries so easily.

Yet his experiences during the war showed Ves the importance of both reputation and actual battle experience!

Aside from recognizing the importance of acquiring a good reputation, Ves also wanted his Avatars of Myth to become battle tested. Only at that point would he be able to truly put his life in their hands.

"They can't be like the Honored Ones of the Reinald Republic." Ves stated to the people he invited. "From my experiences during the war, they are just as well-funded as the other mech militaries, but in practice they constantly drop the ball during actual battles because their lack of fighting experience has made them too complacent!"

Real battles always served to teach the forces involved some brutal lessons. Every flaw and inefficiency in their operation painfully magnified their losses, prompting the outfits to address them in order to prevent the same from occurring again!

Though this decision would inevitably lead to larger expenses and even loss of life, Ves stoically accepted these consequences as the price he needed to pay to raise a competent mech force.

In any case, after quickly offloading his vintage nutrient packs from the Starlight Megalodon, Ves wasn't hurting for money right now! Regardless of how many Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords or other mechs got trashed, Ves would not hesitate to sign off on any replacements.

"Maybe a mercenary corps will bleed if they lose such expensive mechs, but a personal troop is very different." He grinned to Melkor. "The LMC will continue to expand in the future, so it is a given that it requires more protection. I don't want to rely on SASS forever, you know that. The sooner we can bring the Avatars of Myth up, the better."

Melkor nodded, though Ves had difficulty of figuring out what he truly thought due to his habit of wearing a large over his face. Even on a spiritual level his cousin was hard to read. It was as if Melkor constantly obscured his real self.

It kind of reminded Ves of some of the people who worked for Flashlight, actually.

Still, even with his murky and ambiguous background, what could Melkor really do? Both the LMC and the Avatars of Myth relied upon Ves to bankroll them both. Without his innovative design work, he would never be able to earn the money to keep them running!

After getting up to speed on the Avatars of Myth, Ves moved on to the main reason why he called them together. He activated a projector that showed off his draft design in full splendor!

"It's time for you to introduce a draft for my upcoming mech design! Some of you may be unaware of this, but I'm not working on this mech design alone! The truth is that I'm collaborating on a joint design project with the esteemed Professor Corus Ventag of the DCTI! In fact, NORA Consolidated will be responsible for most of the production of this new mech!"

The news that Ves managed to score an opportunity to collaborate with a Senior Mech Designer stunned everyone present. Ves had kept the news close to his chest for all the time, so it satisfied him immensely to see the surprise in their faces.

"Are you actually working with a Senior, Ves? How much are you responsible for in this new design?"

"I am responsible for roughly 75 percent of its design. I came up with the mech concept on my own and it will largely be considered my own design. Professor Ventag is mainly responsible for adding some sophisticated touches to the internal architecture of the design!"

This meant that the design would largely conform to his own vision!

Once they got over the shock that Ves had already reached a stage where he managed to score a cooperative venture with a Senior, they moved on to studying the draft. The rough estimates of the mech design's spec sheet helped offer the mech pilots present a vague glimpse of its performance.

Melkor quickly frowned as he studied the contours of the draft design and inspected some of the core specs. "This is a space knight design, right? Why is it so.. hefty?"

"That's because a significant portion of its internal volume is taken up by the polarizing module that I managed to squeeze into the design."

"It kind of looks fat for a humanoid mech design." Jannzi commented, looking a bit put out at the prospect of piloting such an ungainly mech.

As a space knight specialist, Ves valued her opinion the most out of the people present!

"It's not fat. It's large and in charge." Ves replied, putting a positive spin on his draft design's imposing bulk. "My new design isn't meant to look pretty. It's meant to offer the maximum amount of protection for its size. Let me explain to you all what the polarizing module brings to the table."

He had already run his draft design through some rough simulations to display its strengths to his audience. As he ran several simulations in succession, the skepticism in their eyes faded a little.

"So the polarizing module you added work just like the polarizing modules found in some second-class designs?"

Ves nodded. "Correct. The only problem is that due to cost reasons it's not realistic for me to incorporate a miniaturized version of the polarizing module into my mechs. That's why my mechs exceeds the medium weight class. There is no possible way for me to mount the polarizing module component onto a lighter mech."

"Why bother with the polarizing module at all, then?"

"Because I believe that with the correct use, it can make up for my design's admittedly plentiful shortcomings."

The simulations already demonstrated the potential of his designs. Against energy weapons and against lower volumes of incoming fire, his space knight design performed admirably!

Yet Melkor instantly noted two major flaws to the concept that Ves adopted for his mech design.

"No offense, Ves, but your space knight only really excels in only a handful of battle scenarios. While a lot of battles amount to long-ranged slugging fests where lasers reign supreme, sometimes the fighting is up close and personal. Does your mech possess the flexibility and mobility required to fend off melee mechs?"

Melkor exposed one of the biggest flaws of the mech design in question. A generic medium space knight presented a well-rounded package that could shield friendly mechs from ranged fire as well as marauding melee mechs attempting the take them out up close!

This was because regular medium space knights possessed enough agility and acceleration to be able to put up a decent fight against swordsman mechs and the like. Even if they wouldn't be able to win the confrontation, the space knights would still be able to block their enemies so that their comrades could come and flank the enemy!

"My mech.. does not perform very well in melee battle. It doesn't have the mobility to keep up with enemy melee mechs and the polarizing fields don't work great against the physical damage their melee weapons inflict." Ves admitted. "My mech is purely designed for low and medium-intensity space battles where the enemy doesn't dare to commit to a destructive all-in battle."

Everyone present could see the appeal of his mech in these circumstances. Yet their suboptimal performance in melee combat enormously weakened the appeal of his design!

Of all the people present, Ketis expressed the most disdain. "This fatty mech is only really good for acting as a barely movable wall against lasers. As soon as one single agile light skirmisher comes close, it will easily be able to cripple this expensive mech by outflanking it and taking out its vulnerable flight system from the rear!"

By now, Ketis fully recovered from her candy binge and already began to flex her increased cognitive abilities. When Ves checked up on her progress, he witnessed her devouring the textbooks in the company's library. Her learning speed was off-the-charts, and the enormous boost in concentration enabled her to stick to her studies for days on end without getting bored!

"My mech is not designed to be passable in every situation. It is a special machine that excels in one aspect. That should be sufficient enough to slot it into a larger and well-rounded spaceborn mech force. Other mechs that are much more capable in melee combat can cover for its weaknesses."

Surprisingly, Jannzi concurred with Ves. "I think that's a good point. When it comes to fending off raids, a mech with these qualities can be very useful. Laser weapons are used almost everywhere in space. There won't be many battles where a mech like this is useless."

Though Jannzi was a bit intimidated by the rough edges that Ketis still retained of her pirate heritage, she was confident in her judgement of space knights.

As the feedback session went on, it became clear that the new mech design did not completely catch on. To some, its singular strength did not make up for its many weaknesses and shortcomings. Only a true space knight specialist like Jannzi were able to appreciate what the mech design brought to the table.

Ves distinctly designed his mech to appeal to space knight specialists. For Jannzi to express her support for the mech design meant that at least some of the market would be able to see the value in his design.

That was enough for him to gain the confidence to go ahead with his current direction! As for the skepticism expressed by Ketis, Melkor and the others, there was little Ves could do to address their points.

In order to improve his super-medium space knight's ability to fight up close, he needed to boost its mobility closer to that of a normal medium space knight. That simply wasn't possible without removing the polarizing module entirely, but why would Ves do that?

The polarizing module served as a defining characteristic of his mech design! To remove its most important gimmick meant that his space knight became indistinguishable to the generic space knight models that had already flooded the mech market!

"There's one other thing I'm wondering about." Ketis said. "What is this mech design called?"

Ah. The name. Ves thought long and hard on it ever since he first conceived its concept. Names imparted meaning to mech designs and defined their unique identity.

He did not want everyone to start calling it the fatty mech. If that name stuck to his design, then the imposing manner of his product would forever be ruined in the public!

In order to reinforce its positive aspects and downplay its negative aspects, Ves wanted to bestow his super-medium space knight with an imposing name. It could even be a grandiose one as long as it increased the stature of his product in the market!

Lately, whenever he tried to figure out a dignified name for his mech, he couldn't help but harken back to the events he witnessed during his latest Mastery experience.

Witnessing the legendary unity between man and machine in Eloise's mind was a completely mind-bending sight!

Through accomplishing complete resonance for a short instant, Venerable Eloise Pelican and her Valiant Warden manifested a colossal energy mech that glittered like stars in the murky space of the Dark Sphere!

The energy mech was powerful enough to slay a giant astral creature and cut an entire light carrier in half!

How could Ves not pay homage to that unforgettable event that he had inadvertently enabled with his presence in Eloise's mind?

"My new design.. is called the Aurora Titan."

It was a simple but imposing name, so much so that everyone present was taken aback by the sheer daring to call it so. This was a name that ought to be bestowed upon a heavy mech!

To them, they thought that Ves must be trying to add some of the majesty of heavy mechs into his super-medium mech design.

Ves had no such intentions in mind when he named his space knight this way. He used the word titan because it reflected the enormous size of the energy mech. He used the word aurora to describe the glittering lights radiated by the expression of resonance in its most complete form!

The Aurora Titan. It was a name filled with meaning to Ves, and one he felt comfortable calling his upcoming mech design.

Chapter 1089 Pricing Conundrum

The Aurora Titan held two meanings to Ves. He did not plan on explaining to anyone of the deeper meaning that came from his heart.

The memory of witnessing and facilitating complete resonance was his and only his to enjoy in the comfort of his mind.

As to the others, Aurora Titan was simply a fancy and exaggerated way to describe his super-medium space knight. The word titan stood for his mech's larger size while the word aurora alluded to the visual glow that polarizing fields emanated when they became active.

Aurora Titan. A name that came with two entirely separate meanings.

It satisfied both the emotional and descriptive requirements for an appropriate name for his new mech design.

Eventually, someone started to ask a very important question. "So.. how much do you expect to charge for this Aurora Titan? It looks like a really expensive mech."

Ves constantly tried to figure that out himself. The added size and bulk increased its cost substantially, and the polarizing module itself wasn't cheap by any means.

He could not afford to underprice the Aurora Titan.

At the same time, he also couldn't overprice the Aurora Titan either. If he charged 100 million credits or more, he would break through a psychological price barrier that would instantly deter the vast majority of buyers in the market looking to supplement their outfits with a sturdy space knight!

Right now, Ves had not fleshed out his draft design into an exact set of schematics that fully outlined its component and material usage. He still possessed some freedom to adjust the final cost of his mech in his subsequent design work.

Nevertheless, it would be better if he defined its pricing beforehand so that he could plan around it from the very start. It was better than to name a price at the end where he had little choice in the matter.

"I think the base price of the Aurora Titan will not be less than 80 million credits." Ves finally announced.

A lot of people held their breaths. Sure, a real heavy mech cost at least three or four times as much. Yet compared to the cheapest edition of the Blackbeak, the Aurora Titan demanded at least 20 million credits more!

By setting his target at designing a mech that people would be willing to fork out 80 million credits to buy a copy, Ves determined that his actual design should not cost more than 60 million credits to produce.

This cost limit not only included the cost of exotics and raw materials, but also the capital and labor required to produce it. In addition, Ves also needed to take into account the various royalties each copy bequeathed to the licensors of the components used in the Aurora Titan design.

Designing and producing a mech was expensive business! The figures only racked up even higher as the size, bulk and quality of the design increased!

For an instant, Ves considered whether he should design a light skirmisher instead. He wouldn't have to deal with such insanely high prices when he designed a smaller and thinner mech.

Ves quickly shook his head. It wasn't in his nature to give up on a mech design before he even completed it. To charge 80 million credits for his super-medium space knight was a fair price to ask considering its strengths.

Even so, he wasn't ignorant of the challenges. Neither was Gavin, who looked troubled at the prospect of trying to market a weird mech that cost so much.

"It will be a hard sell." Gavin said. "It's one thing if you're a Journeyman. The market is more willing to trust your design ability that they won't automatically scoff at such a high price. The problem is that you aren't one. Not yet. For an Apprentice to dabble so much in the premium price segment as you makes you seem rather greedy. Publishing an even more expensive mech design than the last two will only reinforce your reputation as a money grubber."

"Quality comes at a price." Ves stated. "The Aurora Titan is very capable as a defensive space knight. It is worth every credit as long as their owners and mech pilots employ them correctly."

"Even with the support of Professor Ventag and NORA Consolidated, I don't foresee that we can capture any significant market share for your mech. A lot of people don't like the idea of super-medium mechs in the first place. Your mech design will attract a lot of negative comments due to that factor alone."

"I'm already aware of the consequences. Innovation is not without its bumps. Even if the Aurora Titan flops on the market, I still won't regret designing it due to all of the lessons I've learned in the design process. If I ever design another space knight, I'll be able to take all of the pitfalls I've encountered previously into account."

This was a form of hedging usually employed by mech designers. So what if one of their mech designs flopped? They could easily attempt to design another mech of the same type but with a concept to see whether their second attempt succeeded.

In fact, design studios turned this practice into the core part of their business model. They pumped out design after design, many of which consisted of variants of their base model designs in order to offer any company in need of a mech design to round out their mech catalog an enormous amount of choice.

It didn't matter if ninety-nine percent of their mech designs never got licensed. Just a single success made up for all of the effort spent on designing the flops!

This also illustrated that designing a mech did not cost a mech designer all that much. Perhaps the most valuable resource they wasted was time. All those months or years spent on designing a failed mech design that would never see any use could have been used to design a better mech.

Regarding time, younger mech designers often possessed a lackadaisical attitude towards it. Since they were so young, they had all the time in the world to explore their design capabilities and to experiment with their developing design philosophies.

Only until they reached middle age or older would they begin to feel the press of time. All that time wasted on designing failures could have been used to design successful mech designs that earned them lots of money or pushed their advancement forward!

After a hearty and honest discussion, Ves dismissed the gathering, satisfied with the feedback he received. None of his confidants held back in expressing

their honest thoughts. To them, Ves was still Ves instead of some mythical figure as he was sometimes portrayed in the news.

"That's still a flaw of mine." Ves shook his head.

With his advancement to Journeyman near, he needed to get used to adopting the demeanor of a leader and someone of importance. He was not a young mech designer anymore who just took his first steps in the mech industry.

The problem was that his advancement was so rapid that Ves simply did not have the time to get rid of his folksy, middle-class demeanor.

Although his Larkinson background offered him a lot more privileges in his upbringing compared to other people of his generation, there were so many Larkinsons that he never felt he was special in any way.

"Besides, it's not in the nature of the Larkinsons to pamper any of their offspring with an abundant amount of wealth and luxury."

At least, that used to be the custom. The holdings of the Larkinson Estate only earned the family enough money to provide a comfortable retirement to its elders, orphans, widows and widowers.

Now that they had tasted the benefits of receiving billions of credits in dividends, who knew if their attitude towards raising future Larkinsons remained as restrained and sober as before. The introduction of a mech designer like Ves to the family may have forever caused future generations of Larkinsons to become spoiled and pampered brats!

"My grandfather and the other elders know better than that." Ves shook his head, unwilling to believe the principle Larkinsons would be corrupted so easily by money. "Good mech pilots don't come about by flooding them with money and abundance. Not according to the own lessons our family has learned in raising mech pilots."

The Larkinson Family enjoyed a four-hundred year track record of consistently raising lots of very skilled mech pilots. The expert pilots that constantly emerged from their ranks in every generation enshrined their current practices!

The only concern that Ves still harbored was whether his influence along with the influence of the LMC would begin to displace the original focus of the Larkinson Family. For four centuries, they dedicated themselves to military service. What if the younger generations of Larkinsons instead preferred to work for the Avatars of Myth instead of the Mech Corps?

Would the family lose its military identity one day?

"Everything will change one day." He whispered to himself. "Whether this particular change will be better for the family or not, I don't see any way to stop this trend."

The LMC at its current scale hadn't grown to the point where the Larkinson Family needed to place too much importance to it. But what about the future? What if his company became as large, wealthy and influential as the KNG? What if the LMC began to match a huge company like NORA Consolidated?

Would the family still be able to remain composed when they realized that they owned a 25 percent stake in such a massive cash cow?

"Well, that won't happen for quite a few years."

Ves picked up Lucky lounging on the couch and moved over to his desk. As he petted Lucky's back, he decided to bite the bullet and contact Professor Ventag.

His comm call came through a few minutes later after going through his secretary.

"Ves. Looks like you have been acclimatizing well upon your return." The professor said. "How far are you on your design work?"

"I've recently finished a complete draft design. Let me show it to you and explain my thought processes."

Ves held nothing back as he showcased the Aurora Titan. He explained the theory and considerations behind each of his design choices, some of which earned some modest praise from the professor.

After twenty minutes of outlining the reasoning behind the draft design, Professor Ventag sat back on his chair somewhere in Bentheim.

"Hmmm. Interesting. All of your reasoning is sound. Although I don't fully agree with all of your design choices, it's good that you've stuck to the same logic behind most of your decisions. That kind of consistency is often lacking among younger mech designers who simply want to achieve the 'coolest' mech designs."

"The Aurora Titan is anything but 'cool'." Ves smiled sardonically. "It doesn't even follow any of the current trends aside from designing a mech that is specialized against resisting laser weapons."

"The value of mech design is rather ambiguous in the current generation. However, once the next generation rolls in, the Aurora Titan will doubtlessly be able to shine more brightly with all the laser weapons being used."

Ves intended to design a mech that straddled multiple generations. It was fine if it didn't sell well in the first few years. As long as the MTA finally decided to announce the next mech generation, the Aurora Titan would certainly gain a lot of prominence!

The only problem was that Ves would have to cut its price by at least 10 million credits or more due to its lastgen nature.

"Do you think that 80 million credits is a good price to ask for the base model?" Ves asked.

The question put Professor Ventag on the spot. "That's a difficult question to answer even for a Senior, Ves. We are not omnipotent, and trying to gauge an acceptable price for a mech model that is as controversial and complex as yours is incredibly challenging. Nonetheless, I think you are being too restrained in your asking price."

"What price would you suggest for the Aurora Titan, professor?"

"100 million credits. Go for broke."

Ves truly didn't know how to respond to that suggestion. Would it really be acceptable to charge so much? For 100 million credits, Ves could buy at least three medium space knights that could do a much better job collectively than one single Aurora Titan!

Chapter 1090 Customer Feedback

As Ves gathered a round of feedback from his subordinates, his friends and his acquaintances, Phase 2 continued to transform the entire makeup of the company.

Aside from the disruptive organizational changes, the company also underwent a metamorphosis in terms of values. Every single person underwent some form of indoctrination through a series of department-wide or company-wide indoctrination sessions masquerading as company events.

Although the employees spent a significant time away from actual work due to these sessions, Ves considered it to be worth it because uniting the workforce around a single set of ideals mattered a lot in the future.

The larger his company grew, the more people he employed, the harder it would be to effect a change in his workforce's shared identity.

Right now, the vast majority of the LMC centered the headquarters and the underground manufacturing operation at the Mech Nursery. It was a lot easier to shift the direction of the entire company when it still operated from a single location.

The various company events that gathered various workers of the company together slowly raised the importance of the LMC in their lives. Ves wanted them to be proud of working for the LMC. Being able to be a part of the LMC should be an honor!

Aside from trying to establish a strong corporate culture, Ves also aimed to bond them together. He envied the shared camaraderie of the Flagrant Vandals and Lydia's Swordmaidens and wanted to establish something similar with the workers of his own company.

"If a fellow worker from the LMC is in trouble, then his colleagues should do everything in their power to help! If the company is being thrown in the mud in the media, then my subordinates should enthusiastically express their support! The company takes care of its people and its people take care of its company!"

That was harder said than done. At the end of the day, most people worked for a company simply so that they can earn a living. Trying to foster a shared identity that bonded different workers of a company together no matter their origin could not be forced.

Yet that didn't mean there wasn't any means to encourage it from developing in the first place.

What Ves picked up from his time with the Flagrant Vandals and Lydia's Swordmaidens was that they both sustained their existence around a single overarching mission.

The Vandals fought for much modest aims. They merely wanted to become appreciated by the Mech Corps again. The neglect and lack of care by headquarters obviously stung the Vandals rather deeply. Their collective grievances oddly bonded them together around a single shared purpose to give the Vandals a better name and clear their sordid reputation in the military!

As for the Swordmaidens, their female-focused development lent itself to carrying the banner of elevating the status of women in the frontier! While hardly anyone cared about gender in civilized space due to technology acting as the great equalizer, the frontier was not so bountiful.

The lack of development and prosperity outside civilized space set back the status of women among the rough societies that emerged from there. The Swordmaidens gathered a bunch of deprived young women, raised them up in a brutal fashion and turned them into warrior maidens who all fought for the same cause, which was to empower every woman!

Although Ves did not think they accomplished all that much for women in the Faris Star Region, the high-sounding goal did succeed in glueing the Swordmaidens even tighter together.

Ves thought long and hard on which mission his LMC should carry as it continued to do business.

"It's not very inspiring to say that the main mission of the LMC is to make a lot of money selling war machines."

Even though it pretty much encapsulated the truth, Ves was not so crass to say so openly. Every company needed to dress up its purpose with something that sounded much more nobler in order to make its workers feel good about their jobs.

Therefore, the company adopted a mission centered around its motto and core principles. Its goal was to provide every mech pilot a machine that they

could depend upon. To Ves, the company's motto carried an even more special meaning after his latest Mastery experience.

The bond between Eloise and her Valiant Warden had reached the penultimate state of complete resonance! The massive energy mech that they conjured up out of pure resonance was the truest expression of a living mech that Ves had ever seen!

"They are true partners for life."

Ves wanted to share the satisfaction that he gained from encountering a mech pilot who possessed a strong affection for her mech. Therefore, aside from the company events that sought to validate the contributions made by the company's employees, they also organized several live customer feedback sessions.

At this point into Phase 2, the LMC had just begun to conduct these sessions. Hundreds of workers gathered at the corporate auditorium that the company had recently erected at its complex at a time.

They attended these mandatory sessions because Ves personally stressed the importance of connecting directly with their customers.

"It's not enough to receive a thank-you note on their comms or to hear some platitudes from a projection." He said when he decided to push for these expensive sessions. "I want every worker from the LMC to meet a mech pilot or mech buyer in person who had a good experience with our products."

With over ten-thousand mechs sold since its founding, the LMC gained a firm footing in the mech community. A significant amount of Blackbeaks and Crystal Lords in the Bright Republic saw battle throughout the shortened war as their outfits encountered several raids during their missions.

Although not every battle ended favorably, the amount of good stories that emerged from the war gave the company more than enough options to reunite

with. The LMC issued a lot of invitations to its customers to send their mechs and mech pilots to Cloudy Curtain to talk about their experiences with the LMC's products.

Not every mercenary corps or security company agreed to do so even after the LMC offered to compensate for their time. Still, enough outfits accepted the invitations to give every employee the opportunity to attend a customer feedback session.

Ves brought Ketis along to attend the very first session. They entered the corporate auditorium early and sat in an enclosed space that looked above the main hall. Various company employees from every department slowly filed in and took their assigned seats. From senior managers to cleaning bot technicians, from locals who grew up in Cloudy Curtain to highly-skilled mech technicians who studied at Bentheim, the audience reflected the diverse makeup of the company.

"Why did you take me to your so-called customer feedback session, Ves?" Ketis asked a bit grumpily.

"You need to get out more. There's more to designing mechs than to study by yourself. There is a whole community out there that revolves around mechs. Now that you're away from the Swordmaidens, you are no longer benefiting from exposure to mech pilots. Attending these sessions will remind you what our profession is really about."

Lately, Ketis had been fully taken in by her vastly-improved learning capacity. With her old flighty tendencies suppressed by her improved concentration, she fully began to appreciate the benefits of absorbing huge amounts of knowledge.

She was growing smarter and more knowledgeable by the day!

As someone who had also been taken in by the pleasure of acquiring lots of knowledge rapidly, Ves knew how hard it was for a mech designer to resist its allure.

While knowledge always played a central role to mech designers, it was a mistake to neglect the other facets of the profession. Designing mechs never revolved around the mech designer. Instead, their fundamental role in society had always been to serve the mech pilots by providing them with the best mechs for the job!

Ves believed that mech designers who locked themselves up in a lab or library all day became wholly out of touch with the customer side of their profession. He did not wish for Ketis to develop into a mech designer who only spent her days locked up in her ivory tower.

Once everyone arrived, the doors to the auditorium closed up. The obscuring screen that blocked the view of the stage at the front slowly faded away, revealing a pair of iconic-looking mechs!

"It's a Blackbeak and a Crystal Lord!"

Yes! How could his employees not feel the weight of their own efforts if they didn't reunite with some of the company's products? The sight of the Blackbeak and Crystal Lord, each of which had been recoated to adopt the colors and markings of their respective outfits, made an instant impression on their audience.

The sighs and gasps of astonishment reflected the unique personality the mechs acquired after several years of intensive use. Every mech and mech pilot the LMC invited had all seen real action!

The mech pilot of the Blackbeak stepped forward first with a confident gait. "My name is Raymond Costa. I am a mech lieutenant of the Distant Pholons, a renowned mercenary corps based in the Green Nebula region. I've been

assigned to pilot a gold label Blackbeak for three years. Let me talk about my experiences with my Blackbeak."

Of all the Blackbeaks out in the wild, the gold label Blackbeaks handcrafted by Ves exhibited the strongest X-Factor right out of the box! Paired with a steady mech pilot who worked for an active mercenary corps during a war, this Blackbeak gained several opportunities to make a difference!

"I love my Blackbeak." Raymond declared emphatically. "It is the best knight mech that I've piloted by far. Even though many of my colleagues initially faulted our mercenary commander for purchasing such an expensive machine, I can tell you right now that the Distant Pholons did not waste a single credit!"

With the impressive aura of the gold label Blackbeak washing over the audience, Raymond began to share some of his war stories. Everyone became enthralled by his tales as they unconsciously experienced the complex flavors that the mech radiated.

To Ves' spiritual senses, the gold label Blackbeak's X-Factor had already started to develop into its own unique direction. Each experience it went through with Raymond Costa left another mark on its spiritual existence, fostering its growth and strengthening it in a manner that benefited its mech pilot as well.

"Perhaps the most harrowing battle during the war was when the Distant Pholons accepted a mission from the Mech Corps to defend a strategic fuel refinery in the Bentheim region. The Vesians sent a detachment of mechs to raid the entire star system! Even as the system's spaceborn assets were being trashed, the Vesians also landed four companies of mechs onto the main planet to raid its local industries. The fuel refinery that we were tasked with guarding was one of their main targets!"

A large projector started streaming footage of the battle in the background. Raymond's Blackbeak played a central role in this recording!

"What happened?" Someone in the audience asked.

"We're lucky that we weren't alone." Raymond grinned. "The Mech Corps stationed a couple of mech companies at the cities, but once they saw the Vesians go straight for the fuel refinery, they needed at least an hour to reinforce us! Outnumbered two-to-one, our mercenary corps stood alone while outnumbered three-to-two against the Mech Legion!"

Military mechs and mech pilots always held the edge over commercial mechs and mercenary pilots. The disparity in strength was a lot larger than the disparity in numbers!

Raymond straightened his back and patted the foot of his Blackbeak. "We are the Distant Pholons! We aren't cowed so easily! We are better than that! We stood our ground and resisted the Vesian assault. Even so, the Vesians employed their coordination to deathly effect, forcing my buddies to eject again and again as their mechs got torn apart. The situation seemed dire and it appeared almost certain that we would be defeated before reinforcements managed to arrive."

"What did you do?"

"Since our defenses were being torn apart, we decided to abandon our static posture. We decided to go on the attack!" Raymond grinned. "My Blackbeak and I led the charge! At that moment, I felt more alive and connected to my mech than ever before! With unrestrained ferocity, we slammed against the Vesians mechs! Perhaps we took out one of their officers early, because they were far too slow to react to our sudden assault!"

"Did you manage to win?"

"It cost us a lot, but we succeeded in halting the Vesians long enough for reinforcements to arrive. The Vesian attackers had no choice but to cut their losses and run back to their combat carriers!"

The battle footage running behind his back corroborated his story. The Blackbeak aggressively led the charge and endured a substantial amount of punishment in order to carry the Distant Pholons forward!

Sitting besides Ves, even Ketis became engrossed with the story.