

Chapter 1121 Bombshell Prices

The moment the lights shone down on the Aurora Titans, the crowd all eagerly studied the impressive-looking machines.

They were big! Almost every person had seen numerous mechs before, and they developed a pretty good eye for how large they should be. The Aurora Titans were considerably larger and bulkier than even the most encumbered medium mechs!

The Aurora Titan was a mech that defied the conventional weight classes!

After the attendees got over the huge bulk of the mechs, they began to take in their appearance. From their marblish white coating to the partially unfolded flight systems starting to glow, the mechs immediately looked remarkable!

Ves even had the mechs run their Rescue Particle Generators in order to enhance their visual flair from behind. The light glowing clouds of golden particles made it appear that the mechs were gods in the form of machines!

Yet perhaps the most remarkable aesthetic feature of the mechs would have to be their lizard-like heads mounted on top of their titanic humanoid frames! The sight of these heads amplified the sensation that the crowd wasn't looking at a bunch of mechs, but rather a pack of living, breathing exobeasts!

A very faint thrum ran through the floor of the Grand Skyward's main hall. Ves ordered the technicians to run a heartbeat-like sensation through everyone's bodies at the moment the light shone down on the mechs.

At the time, nobody understood why Ves ordered such a thing. Such vibrations might irritate the crowd and make them feel that Ves tried too hard to make his mechs look more impressive.

Yet the reality of the situation was that the Aurora Titans already impressed the audience even without the use of tricks. The low thrum the audience felt

right now happened to resonate with the aura released by the mechs. The Shield of Samar piloted by Jannzi Larkinson felt especially more lifelike in combination with the deep vibrations!

In fact, Ves modeled the thrum to emulate Qilanxo's deep heartbeats. Back when he was involved in the beast rider project, he interacted closely with the Sacred God that the Vandals and the Swordmaidens took captive.

Aside from her bulk and her primordial appearance, Qilanxo's deep heartbeats always managed to impress upon Ves of her might!

This small trick of showmanship was enough to amplify the first impressions of the audience towards the Aurora Titans. All five mechs appeared so vivid that most of the crowd immediately felt that their design was anything but regular!

Even if they couldn't articulate what they felt, hardly anyone would be able to state that the Aurora Titan design was boring! Just its artistically-sculpted facade alone was enough wow the audience!

Each Aurora Titan appeared on stage with their broadswords and their imposing tower shields in their hands.

Jannzi moved her mech first. The Shield of Samar took one step forward, shaking the floor enough to make everyone feel that step in their bones, and held its sword with its tip pointed aloft at the high ceiling!

It looked like a triumphant lizard-headed warrior basking in the adulation of the crowd!

A roar of excitement erupted from the audience! Helped along with plants from the LMC and NORA Consolidated, the rest of the people witnessing the spectacle spontaneously joined in the jubilant roars as they showed their admiration for the new mechs!

Ves continued to smile as he calmly pet his cat like some sort of evil mastermind. Just as the Aurora Titans basked in the glory of the moment, so did their maker.

A mech designer never designed a mech for themselves. They always aimed their products to be used by others. Therefore, they worked tirelessly to design mechs that would sell well in the market!

Even though the most difficult portion was yet to come, Ves already became inordinately pleased by the effects of his showmanship.

He calmly waited for the excitement to die down. As the crowd fell silent in anticipation for what Ves had to say next, they nonetheless continued to stare up at the mechs instead of Ves. How could a human ever be as interesting to see than those fantastic-looking machines?

"The Aurora Titan is a super-medium space knight design. Yes, you've heard that right. It is not a regular medium mech. Instead, it is heavier than even the most defense-oriented medium mechs on the market. It is roughly around twenty percent larger and heavier than regular mechs."

Ves began to introduce the basic specs of his design. He described the Pisaro armor system, and put a positive spin on its practical and simple material composition. He also described the polarizing module and the alien crystals in detail and emphasized their strengths against directed energy weapons.

"The polarizing module is the defining feature of the Aurora Titan. From the start of the joint design project, I wanted to design a mech that made use of active defenses. There are several great advantages to the use of a polarizing module. In the best-case scenarios, it is able to completely negate any incoming fire through expending energy instead of armor plating. Think of the cost savings that you could achieve by employing the Aurora Titan through this fashion! One of the biggest expenses of every active outfit is the cost of

repairs. In many cases, mercenary corps always succumb due to the ludicrous repair bills they rack up after a disastrous battle!"

The Shield of Samar showcased its polarizing module right this instant. A thin field of glowing white shone on the front of its tower shield. The mech activated its polarizing module live in front of the audience and the recorders with ease!

After a few seconds of holding a polarizing field on the tower shield, Jannzi quickly deactivated it and started to light up other sections of her mech with polarizing fields.

Its chest armor, its legs, its arms, its head, its back all lit up in white in quick succession. The skillful and precise manner in which Jannzi set the parameters of the polarizing fields earned a nod of appreciation from Ves. It took a lot of skill to control the polarizing module with such speed and precision. It looked especially impressive when Jannzi maintained three or four different polarizing fields at the same time!

"In this day and age, laser weapons are already dominant in most battles between spaceborn mechs. Their ubiquity will inevitably be boosted once the next mech generation commences. In such a time, normal medium space knights might not suit your needs. A single Aurora Titan possesses such a great defensive ability to resist laser weapons that fielding one of them is the same as fielding two or even three space knights! To outfits that field carriers with limited space, every mech they carry matters. While there is something to be praised about the allround application of regular medium space knights, in some instances they can achieve better results with a more specialized solution!"

Outside of its intrinsic X-Factor and the benefits it brought, the main selling point of the Aurora Titan was that it was the right tool for the right job! The

Aurora Titan specialized in offering a solution to a problem that would only grow more prominent in the next ten to thirty years!

Now came the most difficult part of the presentation. Ves could not avoid the elephant in the room forever. One of the most important parts to any product announcement was to reveal their pricing.

After Ves finished his overview of the Aurora Titan's various qualities, he finally addressed the prices.

In order to illustrate his next points, projections of two simplified-looking Aurora Titans appeared next to the five real mechs.

Different from the physical show models, the projected mechs looked a lot more practical and less artistic.

"The Aurora Titan is principally a product of the Living Mech Corporation, so our company's three-tiered model structure applies. NORA Consolidated will soon start taking orders for the bronze label and silver label editions of the Aurora Titan. The bronze label Aurora Titans will go on sale for 100 million credits while the silver label Aurora Titans are priced at 120 million credits."

Another gasp struck the crowd, but not a welcome one this time.

100 million credits!

120 million credits!

Was Ves addled with stimulants or something?! How could he charge so much for what amounted to souped-up premium space knights?

Even so, the shocked reactions of the crowd was more muted than many experts anticipated upon hearing such ludicrous sums. Most people were still preoccupied in admiring the Shield of Samar and its sibling mechs to care about their prices!

Most people in the crowd were laymen who didn't possess the aptitude to pilot mechs. Neither did they have the funds or means at hand to buy a mech and pair them up with a mech pilot. They were just attending the product reveal for fun, so insanely high prices hardly affected them on a personal level.

The most abrupt reactions instead came from the handful of mech pilots, mech designers mech commanders and other people involved in the large and diverse mech community. They knew best what it meant to charge 100 million credits for the cheapest edition of the Aurora Titan!

Ordinary outfits could forget about fielding this luxury product! Despite the compelling auras and the imposing looks of the show models, various outfit officers and commanders bled their hearts as they thought of their modest accounts and their straining finances.

Why did Ves tease them with such a fantastic mech, only to drop a bombshell in their laps with his price announcements?!

Even so, the good impression they had already gained of the Aurora Titan simply increased the value of the design in their minds by another notch!

Humans loved expensive, high-quality products!

Just because the overwhelming number of people in the crowd could never afford an Aurora Titan didn't make their admiration for the mech lessen any bit!

Just like any luxury product, a very strong psychological effect was at play that made people admire expensive mechs like women loved expensive fashionable clothes or handbags!

Ves worked hard to present the Aurora Titan in the best light possible so that when it came time to announce their pricing, the crowd would think that every single credit was worth it to obtain such a fantastic machine!

"However, the pinnacle version of the Aurora Titan design comes in the form of our exclusive, limited edition gold label mechs that you see before you. Each gold label mech is personally handcrafted by yours truly. As the lead designer of the Aurora Titan, I can confidently state that any copies I fabricate by hand is superior to any other copy in the market, hence their exclusive status! The LMC will be responsible for taking a limited amount of orders for the gold label edition of the Aurora Titan design. They will go on sale for 150 million credits."

150 million credits!

After the shock of the previous price announcements, the drastic price difference of 50 million credits between the cheapest and most expensive edition hardly fazed the crowd. All of them subconsciously believed that the gold label Aurora Titans fully deserved to be charged so much. They were as much of a work of art as they were functional mechs!

At this time, the party pooper finally stood up. While Ves could easily order the technicians to muffle Professor Pendleton's voice and even drop a dark cloud on his body to obscure his entire body, what would be the point?

Not only would such an act be extremely disrespectful towards a Senior, Ves did not even want to avoid the confrontation in the first place!

Ves had always been aware that his mech design would arouse a lot of controversy. Rather than fighting the battle over scattered marketing campaigns and interviews, he would rather hold the debate right here and now when he had already prepped the crowd over to his side!

Perhaps Professor Pendleton was aware that Ves had worked hard to settle the battlefield in his favor. It did not matter. A Senior did not have to pay attention to such trifles when he addressed a mere Apprentice!

"Mr. Larkinson." He began. His voice was being amplified so that the entire hall could hear his words. "I can no longer maintain my silence as you are attempting to peddle your unorthodox mech design. Not even first-year mech design students have come up with a worse mech concept than your Aurora Titan!"

The crowd instantly smelled a drama was about to take place! Some of the people even drew their attention away from admiring the show models to look up at the projection of Professor Pendleton being broadcasted to the audience!

Chapter 1122 Fatal Silence

Professor Norman Pendleton was a respectable-looking Senior Mech Designer who was roughly as old as Professor Ventag. They were very close rivals to each other for that reason. Each of them tried to outdo the other for many decades now. Even when they successfully advanced to the rank of Senior, they never let up on each other!

Alongside their personal rivalry, the competition between the AUMD and the DCTI played a role as well. Senior Mech Designers never deigned to attend the press conferences of Apprentices unless they were their mentors or involved in the design project in some fashion.

This made Professor Pendleton's abrupt decision to attend this product reveal so noteworthy. As his image was being projected on the stage for everyone to hear and see, Ves knew that the fight had finally started in earnest.

"Let us not go into the many shortcomings of your design that makes it unfit for sale, let alone a passing grade in any mech design class. What in the galaxy did you injected into your bloodstream to charge a mech by almost twice its actual worth?! Young man, a little greed is fine, as everyone wants to be rewarded for their work, but the insane margins you are demanding from your customers is downright price gouging!"

"The Aurora Titan is more than worth its price, no matter the edition." Ves calmly replied. He repeated one of his earlier points. "In the right circumstances, its performance can equal that of two or three medium space knights."

The professor smiled sardonically at those words. "Two second-hand economy space knights, maybe. Yet just because you preface your claim with 'the right circumstances', doesn't mean you can get away with your deceptive statement. Battles are always messy. The right circumstances that you describe don't happen as nearly as often as you want your potential suckers to think. Mechs in space use all kinds of weapons other than lasers! Tell me honestly, how does the Aurora Titan fare against physical rounds? How well does the Aurora Titan fight against melee mechs?"

Ves had only vaguely stated that the Aurora Titan did not perform optimally under these conditions. The truth was that the mech performed downright awful in some of those scenarios!

He could never disparage his mech in public outright. That would be giving his critics ammunition to clip his admission and use it as the basis of attacks in the media!

There was hardly any argument against a mech that was more convincing than the disparaging words of their own designers!

Therefore, answering this question presented a tricky problem to Ves. Yet one point in favor to him was that there wasn't any rule that stated that he needed to respond to a question directly. There were no arbitrators or moderators like there was in a formal debate to call him out if he engaged in tricks.

This gave Ves license to resort to his favored means of resolving difficult arguments, which was to lie, cheat, misdirect and distract and misrepresent the truth!

Part and parcel of his arsenal of tools was to make use of his considerably flexible Spirituality. Even though a Senior Mech Designer possessed an incomparably strong design philosophy that formed the basis of mentality and their beliefs, they were not like mech pilots who had the ability to employ their force of will on other people.

While Ves hadn't mastered this application of spirituality, he knew some of the theory behind it. He even managed to imitate the effect.

Right now, the main reason why Ves stood so close to the front edge of the stage was because he could stand as close to Professor Pendleton as possible.

It wasn't a coincidence that Ves specifically instructed the staff to seat Professor Pendleton right at the center of the front row of seats. The actual distance between the two was close enough for them to stare each other in the eyes.

This was a close enough distance for Ves to employ his weakly-imitated force of will in a direct confrontation against Professor Pendleton's mind!

Ves did not ask for much. He just wanted to make Professor Pendleton appear a little more discomfited and less sure of his arguments. This was why he emulated Venerable Foster's domineering force of will in an unrelenting aggressive pressure!

Unfortunately, it didn't appear that Pendleton noticed much of what Ves tried to do. Professor Pendleton was an old man who had seen a lot in his day. He even interacted with expert pilots a lot due to his involvement in several expert mech design projects!

Even if this spiritual attack failed to take hold on the professor, it nonetheless affected Ves as well!

Venerable Foster always seemed absolutely confident and strong. Her uniformly domineering force of will played a huge role in making her larger than life!

The same effect played out on Ves as well. He voluntarily subjected himself to a form of self-brainwashing as he let the imitated force of will suffuse his entire judgement and take root in his mind. This action not only imparting him with an aura of righteous conviction, but also fired up his fighting spirit to the maximum!

Up close and on the projection, Ves was practically on fire as he started to hit back at the Professor!

"Why are heavy mechs so bad against light mechs? Why are melee mechs constantly outgunned by ranged mechs? Why do aerial mechs always get the drop on landbound melee mechs? The guiding paradigm of the mech industry is specialization! An outfit that fields mechs that are average at everything will never be able to beat an outfit that combines several specialized mech models in a synergistic fashion!"

"I am not talking about your Aurora Titan's ability to hit back against a ranged mech. That's a completely unnecessary gimmick of your mech design that only serves to jack up its prices, by the way." Professor Pendleton quickly adjusted.

"The alien crystal technology is not a gimmick but a core addition to the Aurora Titan. A skilled mech pilot will be able to employ their strategic placement and retaliate at unexpected moments. My Crystal Lord design has already proven the viability of this tactic!"

"I'll talk about the gimmicks later." Pendleton shook his head. "First, I want to address the core function of a space knight. You seem to have the mistaken impression that their only use is to be slightly mobile barriers against massed

firepower. That is only a small part of what they do! The true purpose of a defensive space knight is to frustrate the enemy! They not only need to block enemy firepower, but also fend off aggressive mechs that are trying to run down vulnerable friendly mechs!"

"The Aurora Titan is not designed to serve those roles." Ves stated. "It is designed to do one job and do it well. Even fielding just a single Aurora Titan is enough to expand the tactical possibilities of any outfit! Sometimes, a spaceborn mech force can benefit from adding what amounts to a mobile barrier against massed firepower in their mech lineup. My new design serves as an excellent solution to this problem! Even for its price range, the value that our customers can get in return will more than makeup for the initial investment!"

The professor smiled patronizingly at Ves. "You are doing your customers, what few you have, an enormous disservice. As I've said, your grossly overpriced mech model resembles a student design project that breaks far too many rules than I could count! While its defensive prowess can exceed that of orthodox medium space knights, the tradeoffs to its mobility must be immense! Even a space snail accelerates faster this ungainly lump of alloy matched with a flight system that is far too weak for its mass!"

"Professor Pendleton, with respect, if you can design a space knight that is as agile as a light skirmisher, then you would immediately win an award from the MTA!"

Some in the audience laughed a bit at this joke, to Professor Pendleton's surprise. He had not expected them to laugh at the expense of a respected Senior!

"We are comparing space knights to space knights. Within this single classification of mechs, your Aurora Titan is merely a pretty shell compared to true space knight designs! Your Aurora Titan's agility and mobility is so slow

that even the shabbiest pirate pilot inside a 3 million credit light skirmisher can quickly turn your 100 million credit mech into scrap! I don't even know why you even bothered to pair your design with a sword seeing how ineptly it can swing the weapon!"

That argument took hold on the audience a lot better this time!

Certainly, the Aurora Titan looked like an extraordinarily capable defense mech. It had to be if it cost 100 million credits to obtain the cheapest model.

Yet to hear a Senior say that a mech that cost thirty times cheaper could quickly make short work of this expensive boondoggle was quite a serious claim! The professor's high status lent more credence to his statement!

Ves knew that his response might end up very poorly for the Aurora Titan if he botched it. He could only offer a somewhat baseless reply.

"The Aurora Titan is fundamentally a melee mech. Its fighting capabilities up close are not negligible! A skilled pilot will be able to fend off a light skirmisher, but that is not the Aurora Titan's primary job!"

The heckling professor released a disdainful snort. "A skilled pilot of your ungainly mech will only be able to fend off a light skirmisher if the latter is piloted by an autistic mech pilot who is drunk and jacked up with stimulants."

"That is besides the point." Ves quickly continued. "The scenario that you painted will never happen outside of grossly contrived mech duels! Space knights always act in unison with other mechs, some of which can't block a hundredth of the damage the Aurora Titan can tank but are deadly against light skirmishers! To compare the battle performance of different mech types against each other is a flawed comparison because most mechs are never meant to be employed in duels! There are mech models for sale that are specifically designed to compete in mech duels! Perhaps you are getting on in your years and visited the wrong exhibition hall by mistake, professor!"

Some in the crowd erupted in laughter yet again, humiliating the professor even further. When was the last time Professor Pendleton was ever subjected to ridicule?! Even though the status of high-ranking mech designers in society did not equal that of high-ranking mech pilots, a Senior was still accorded supreme status due to the benefits they brought to their states!

That did not matter as much in this particular instance. Half the crowd didn't even recognize Professor Pendleton. Those that did somehow didn't consider the Senior to be particularly impressive at the moment.

With the mighty show models of the Aurora Titan standing just behind Ves, it was as if the presence of the mechs enhanced his stature and made him a lot more credible than an average apprentice!

Ves felt that his personal attacks seemed to take hold a lot better than purely factual arguments about the performance of his mech design. The aggressive mood that took over in his mind pushed him to keep attacking!

Since he already achieved some success in turning away uncomfortable arguments by ridiculing the Senior, why not go for broke?!

"Let me ask you one thing, Professor Pendleton. Have you lived through the war like I did? Have you spent moments where you are in the thick of the fighting where your comrades in the Mech Corps are all that stands in the way of death or captivity by the Vesians?!"

The professor was momentarily caught by surprise by this off-tangent remark. "Every mech designer of the Bright Republic has done their duty. In my youth, I put my already considerable design ability at their disposal. As a Senior Mech Designer, I have aided in the design of many military mech models as well as numerous expert mechs used by famed Brighter expert pilots!"

Ves brashly laughed. "Hahaha! It doesn't sound like your wartime experiences amount to much! I don't think you've never been caught by the explosion of a

missile screaming down from the air, or been spaced out of an exploding carrier and be forced to crash land on a planet in nothing but a shabby escape pod! If you've never witnessed war so close that your very life is on the line, how can you stand there and lecture me, a true survivor of the recently-ended war, how mechs are supposed to work?! All the books you've read and theories you've developed in the comfort in your ivory tower is nothing compared to living through the most harrowing parts of the war!"

"Wartime experiences are not relevant to a mech designer's ability to design a good mech."

While this was a factual statement, it sounded extraordinary weak!

Ves smirked. "Which mech designer did the Mech Corps award the Darkness Eater? The Torchbearer? The Golden Mech? Distinguished Service Medal? The War Saint? The Frontier Service Medal? The Mech Corps Commendation? The Vermillion Heart?"

All of them were famed medals of the Mech Corps. While favors and political influence played a considerable part on who was awarded with them, they were never bestowed without basis!

For Ves to earn such a rich lineup of prestigious awards during a very short war sounded extremely impressive! Even though his bountiful recognition from the Mech Corps was already old news, repeating his distinctions at this time served as a powerful attack against the Senior!

Especially since Ves followed up with a poignant question.

"I think we all know which mech designer present here won those awards. Let me ask you, then. What about you, Professor Pendleton? What medals have you been awarded with by the Mech Corps for your valiant service in the past wars?"

A fatal silence ensued for Professor Pendleton.

Chapter 1123 Resonating Masses

"Oh yeah, I also forgot to add the Plasma Spark to my list of combat awards." Ves faked an awkward laugh. "Sorry about that. I earned that particular medal shortly before the end of the war. Please forgive my spotty memory."

The people sitting in the rows of seats took the cue and erupted into laughter, forcing Professor Pendleton to stifle his rebuttal.

The crowd loved a winner, and right now Ves radiated absolute confidence!

The effect would have been even better if he wore his medals today! While he left his actual medals and ribbons back at home in Cloudy Curtain, Ves still had a solution for that. He wasn't the first person who left his military awards behind.

He leisurely put Lucky down next to his feet and activated his comm. He inputted a few commands that caused his medals to appear on the chest of his formal clothing in the form of projections!

Even though they weren't really physical present, their splendor still managed to look impressive on his body!

Ever since Ves heard that Professor Pendleton of the Ansel University of Mech Design intended to spoil his product reveal, he read up the older man's public record.

The notation regarding his wartime service in his younger years only mentioned some brief platitudes about 'doing his duty' and 'contributing to the war effort'.

Nothing else.

What little recognition Norman Pendleton received from the Mech Corps amounted to little more than participation awards.

This was not that big of a deal to mech designers in the Bright Republic. The Mech Corps did not expect too much from their conscripted young mech designers.

Certain individuals with connections to major influences such as the AUMD even got a free pass from the Mech Corps. These mech designers would receive cushy positions in the interior of the Bright Republic so that they would never be exposed to actual danger.

Ves hadn't forgotten his half-year posting at Flashlight's Frozen Point Research Base. The young Ansel mech designers there were like flowers in a greenhouse. Their school had already arranged everything for them! Every single one of those brats would survive the war without facing a Vesian even a single time and would be able to boast about 'doing their duty' with a straight face!

No one called them out about their farcical deployment compared to the poorer and less well-connected mech designers exposed to regular danger.

This was because the average mech designers deployed to the frontlines didn't have much to boast about their service either. Their performance was average at best and cowardly at worst. It was too difficult to find a single courageous mech designer among their ranks!

However, exceptions always existed.

Ves happened to be one of the few mech designers to fall outside mold.

Some of the awards that Ves received were mere participation medals, such as the War Saint which every serviceman received. However, the top awards were very different. The Darkness Eater and the Torchbearer were both prestigious awards that could only be bestowed for performing supreme merit during a combat situation!

As for the Golden Mech, its standing among mech designers could not be overstated! Only Seniors earned this award from the Mech Corps for designing exceptional, war-winning designs!

For an Apprentice like Ves to receive one may be a bit undeserved if he was being honest. However, since he already got it, why not take advantage that he received the Golden Mech while the professor only got some lame participation awards?

Right now, Ves wanted to club Professor Pendleton's head with the weight of all of his medals! Even though it was a thuggish act for Ves to abuse his medals to belittle a Senior for his lack of valor during his wartime service, so what?!

The aggressive force of will that Ves had emulated from Venerable Foster seemed to take a life on its own, egging Ves on! The best way to fend off a Senior from haranguing him on the Aurora Titan's factual shortcomings was to keep shifting the conversation away from his design!

In the meantime, both the crowd and the journalists all became enraptured by the fierce words spat out by Ves! They loved the drama!

The ordinary respect that should have been afforded to a Senior was nowhere to be seen! Most of the crowd already unconsciously took Ves' side. Nobody rose up to lend their support to the much more superior mech designer because they could not bring themselves to side against a genuine war hero!

"I am Ves Larkinson of the Larkinson Family!" Ves declared exultantly, not even hesitating to involve the reputation of his family! "We Larkinsons have always served in the war! Countless Larkinsons have lost their lives over the years, but many more have distinguished themselves in battle! Benjamin Larkinson is my grandfather! Ark Larkinson is my uncle! Ghanso Larkinson is my cousin! When it comes to the war against the Vesians, there is no family in

the Republic who has contributed more to the war than my own flesh and blood!"

"Larkinson! Larkinson! Larkinson!" The audience spontaneously echoed!

The professor was just about to speak up, but Ves' shameless method of hugging his family's illustrious wartime reputation forced him to a halt again!

How could Professor Pendleton put down this personal attack on his honor? By dismissing the worth of the medals? That was political suicide! The Mech Corps was one of the most respected institutions in the Bright Republic, and their awards were not to be questioned!

At the same time, while the the Larkinson Family had its detractors, it was mostly the other military families who opposed them. For a mech designer like Professor Pendleton who never risked his life during the past wars to dismiss the Larkinson Family would definitely piss off former and active servicemen!

Every Senior Mech Designer in the Bright Republic maintained strong relations with the military. They cooperated with the Mech Corps by providing their mech regiments with mechs or helping them with designing new military mechs. They also played a vital role in the development of expert mechs!

Yet Professor Pendleton might put this cozy business relationship into jeopardy if he spoke out carelessly against either the Larkinson Family or the many medals that Ves had been awarded with! With the Mech Corps playing such a huge role in the Bright Republic, it was very taboo to publicly denounce the military!

The situation for the Ansel Senior grew more and more awkward. If the man had built up some support from the crowd, then he might have been able to weasel himself away from the attack, but the lack of any friendly sentiment around him gave him very little openings to extricate him from this difficult situation.

He shouldn't have come to confront an aberrant mech designer like Ves who showed no scruples at all in putting a Senior on the spot like this! His conduct was a major breach in etiquette among their profession!

To be frank, Ves already knew that he was definitely burning some bridges in the mech industry, but so what? It felt good to smack a hostile mech designer whose sole attended the product to tear down the Aurora Titan!

The domineering force of will that affected his conduct grew in strength as more and more of the audience sided with him. Ves suddenly realized that a force of will never acted in isolation!

An expert mech pilot might have sparked the initial fire in their minds, but the adulation of the masses truly set it ablaze!

Tens of thousands of people had entered the Grand Skyward's main hall. Through various tricks and theatrics as well as the auras exerted by the show models, Ves managed to get the crowd fully over to his side with his fiery words! No matter if they were Brighters or foreign visitors, all of them couldn't help but voice out their support to the scrappy young mech designer!

The strange interaction between the audience's adulation and the imitated force of will affecting his mind made Ves understand expert pilots a little better.

Perhaps the custom of calling high-ranking mech pilots gods was not entirely baseless after all!

Even though the spirituality of average people was weak and formless, somehow they resonated with his force of will, especially if they had become swept up by his mood!

Ves felt that if he was a real expert pilot, he might be able to strengthen his force of will and even transform it into an entirely new form!

He mentally shook his head. This was not the time to contemplate the myriad wonders of spirituality! He had a Senior to put down first!

His small distraction gave Professor Pendleton enough time to muster up a decent-sounding response.

"Your service and your family's service to the Bright Republic is very much appreciated. I have never questioned the courage of the Larkinsons." He said mildly. "Yet no matter how you distinguished yourself in the war, the lives of the mech pilots who use your mechs are at stake. Being a soldier is very different from being a mech designer! We do not exist to fight enemies directly! We instead design the tools needed for our soldiers to fight our enemies to the best of their abilities! It is this core responsibility that I believe your Aurora Titan design is failing in! Your improperly-designed mech poses a threat to its own mech pilots!"

Ves had to hand it to Professor Pendleton. He chose a great way to pivot the conversation back to the Aurora Titan. Pendleton saw that there was no way forward by questioning Ves' competence directly. Instead, the Senior framed his argument against the Aurora Titan in the context of the duty that all mech designers held towards mech pilots!

No matter how great Ves puffed himself up, if his mech designs were so bad that they actually killed their users, then none of his medals could save the Aurora Titan from ruin!

Still, the professor lacked momentum on his side. Ves was on a roll and he had plenty more ways to fend off this latest thrust!

"You've never seen the Aurora Titan in action yet and you are already ready to denounce my design?" Ves mockingly asked. "How can you make such a blanket statement about my mech just from its introduction alone? Just look at my show models!"

Ves gestured his arm towards the Shield of Samar and the four other gold label mechs. Their splendor and their aura were so impressive that hardly anyone could bring themselves to dislike them even if they watched the event through a projection from the comfort of their homes!

At the same time, Ves subtly transmitted a command to Jannzi Larkinson and the other mech pilots. In unison, they clanged their swords against their shields!

The shock of the simultaneous impacts caused the entire audience to jolt! The show models drew back their swords before clanging them against their shields yet again. They repeated the action in a slow but measured rhythm, causing them to resonate with the low thrum that emulated Qilanxo's heartbeat.

The show models somehow appeared more glorious and ready for battle than ever before!

The thunderous clanging echoed throughout the chamber. Its rhythmic pattern seemed to hypnotize the crowd into a fanatic fervor for the mechs that went well beyond mere admiration for their design!

Ves pulled out the pistol from his toolbelt. His aggressive mood took on a bit more solemnness as he wielded the Peaceful Repose.

The artful gun drew a lot of attention back to Ves. He resolutely tried to pivot the discussion away from his mech. What better than to employ more theatrics?

The biggest mistake that Professor Pendleton could make was to enter a venue that was completely under Ves' control!

Ves not only had the crowd on his side, but could also manipulate the surroundings in a way that strengthened his connection to the people!

"How many lives have you saved? How many Vesians and other enemies have you killed?"

The professor looked as if he was choking a cough. What did this have to do with mech design?!

Chapter 1124 Thuggish Conduc

Ves drew his pistol for a reason. Even though it wasn't the Amastendira, the impressive-looking gun nonetheless gave him a dangerous air that neatly complimented his aggressive demeanor.

The show models that kept bashing their swords against their tower shields resembled the rhythmic pounding of war drums. The synchronized metallic clanging sounds evoked a martial atmosphere in the main hall of the Grand Skyward that drifted their thoughts further away from Professor Pendleton's arguments.

"I killed people." Ves exclaimed in a dramatic fashion. "I killed hundreds of enemies of the Republic! Not from afar, but up close, close enough for me to shoot them with my gun. Do you know how many Vesians pointed their guns at me? Do you know how many times I barely managed to survive the encounters?"

He was exaggerating a bit here. It was mostly pirates and other scum that threatened him over the course of his romp throughout the frontier.

Yet what was the harm in embellishing some of his harrowing experiences? A bit of distortion here and there didn't hurt!

In order to play up his theatrical performance, he quickly issued a series of commands under his breath that he was sure that Gavin and the specialists in the control room could hear.

"I even faced an expert pilot in combat multiple times and survived by the skin of my teeth!"

Venerable Foster grabbed his collar and slammed him against a surface not just once, but twice! That Ves managed to escape from those confrontations with his life intact was a win in his book!

Nonetheless, despite the weak and grossly distorted foundation of his latest claim, the public ate it all up! Somehow, the sight of Ves wielding his Peaceful Repose against the backdrop of the show models made it seem as if he fought off an expert mech all by himself!

Far be it for Ves to disappoint their expectations of the crowd. He abruptly pointed his Peaceful Repose at the Shield of Samar and fired off a powerful Exil round!

A powerful crack echoed throughout the entire main hall! The sound had already been amplified by the technicians of the control room in order to make the gunshot sound more dramatic!

The Peaceful Repose hardly needed the assistance because the 1 million credit Exil round seemed to crash against the senses of the public! A corona trail almost instantly emerged from the muzzle of the Peaceful Repose and impacted against the chest plate of Jannzi's mech!

A very minute dent in the coating of mech appeared.

"I did this in order to save the lives of my comrades in arms!"

The Peaceful Repose cracked out another million credit Exil Round at the Shield of Samar!

"I have witnessed the deaths of thousands of brave and loyal soldiers of the Mech Corps!"

Ves fired off another round!

"I have seen thousands of friendly mechs fight to the very end as their mech pilots refused to go the easy way out and eject from their cockpits!"

The Peaceful Repose barked out a fourth expensive Exil round!

Whatever the merits the handcrafted rounds brought to the weapon, its dramatic trail and its powerful explosive impact against the armor plating of the Shield of Samar was already worth the ludicrous amount of money he paid for a batch!

"I know why mechs fail! I have learned what our men and women in uniform value in their mechs! With my very life and the lives of my comrades at stake, I learned exactly what mech pilots truly demand from their mechs in order to fight to the best of their ability! I wouldn't have survived the war without the lessons that mech pilots, mech technicians and other brave servicemen have taught me during the war!"

Ves fired the Peaceful Repose for one last time. The round exploded against the chest plate Shield of Samar with a powerful and vividly-colored blast!

The mechs stopped banging their swords against their shields, causing an uncomfortable silence to ensue which strengthened the desperation that Ves tried to evoke!

"For you to tell me that my judgement in mech design is lacking is completely false!" He exclaimed while forcefully engaging the safety of his Peaceful Repose and putting it back in its holster. "My mechs are designed to accommodate their mech pilots to the best of their ability! The LMC's products excel in this area! The sacrifices of thousands of servicemen underpin the innovations I have introduced into my designs!"

Professor Pendleton still hadn't given up. If he wanted to salvage his reputation, then he needed to stop acting as Ves' verbal punching bag!

"Your personal experiences aside, the Aurora Titan design is a fundamentally flawed design whose entire premise is faulty from the start! Don't try to distract

the public from its problems by talking about matters that are only tangentially related to the quality of your mechs!"

Ves would have none of it! "Are you calling my wartime service irrelevant? Are you saying that mech designers who never saw a mech in actual battle with their own eyes know better than a mech designers whose lives depend on the battles taking place mere kilometers away? To question my Aurora Titan's viability in protecting their own mech pilots is laughable! Unlike an elite mech designer like you, I didn't enjoy any special privileges when the Mech Corps drafted me! Instead, they packed me off to the Flagrant Vandals, which immediately embarked on the most daring campaigns of the war! We attacked the Vesia Kingdom in the very heart of their territory!"

Some parts about his war record weren't classified. Something as public and propagandized as the Detemen Operation could hardly remain a secret with how much the Bright Republic promoted it in order to rally everyone's morale! His attachment to the Flagrant Vandals wasn't any secret at all, which gave Ves enough license to borrow the renown they earned from their exploits!

"Have you ever crossed into Vesian territory during wartime? Have you ever went many light-years deep into their territory, surrounded on all sides by enemy Vesians who want nothing more than to tear you apart and break your mechs and starships? One of the main reasons why we survived despite the lack of supplies and safe harbour is due to the great care given to our mechs! I have seen mechs stretched beyond their breaking point due to lack of supplies and time to service them properly, but they held up admirably regardless due to their excellent design!"

Professor Pendleton wanted to get in a word, but Ves quickly opened his mouth again before the Senior could say anything!

"Have you ever seen your own mechs when they are in poor condition, Professor? Mechs are built to last twenty years, but in practice they last much

shorter than that, especially when they went through several battles. I have employed the best practices that I've picked up from the military into my own design work! While I can't claim my Aurora Titan is able to last forever, with proper maintenance it will continue to stand by its mech pilots through both the good times and bad times. They are just as dependable as the military mechs of the Mech Corps! Like actual soldiers, all of my customers will always be able to depend on my products to see them through!"

An increasing sense of doubt overcame Professor Pendleton's expression. How could he properly debate with Ves on the merits and shortcomings of the Aurora Titan design when this thuggish young mech designer kept harping back on his track record and personal experiences in the military!?

Even though Ves quite blatantly kept clubbing Professor Pendleton in the head with his medals and his military exploits, as long as it worked, Ves would keep abusing the Senior because it was the one area in which he could not be challenged!

To question Ves' military exploits was to question the Mech Corps, and that was a very bad idea regardless of whether Professor Pendleton was a Senior!

Even though resorting to this method helped Ves fend off his heckler, it did not come without a cost. Ves likely didn't endear himself very much in the eyes of mech designers and other professionals in the mech industry. The overwhelming majority of mech designers had more in common with Professor Pendleton than Ves when it came to their own time in the Mech Corps!

In addition, Ves figured the Mech Corps wouldn't be pleased to be dragged into this acrimonious argument. The only point in his favor was that he thought that they were irritated at mech designers who pulled some strings in order to be stationed as far away from the fighting as possible.

It did not serve their interests to rebuke Ves, who distinguished himself during the last war, to support a Senior with no notable combat action in his record!

The professor's continued attempts to avoid talking about his own accomplishments during wartime was enough to brand him a coward in the eyes of the crowd.

What right did a coward have to question a war hero in public?

Such an absurd development completely went against Professor Pendleton's expectations of how this afternoon would turn out! Ves only barely stuck to the script before going completely off-rails! This turn of events was so grossly unfair that the man wanted to tear his hair out!

Sitting at a seat a short distance away, Professor Ventag continually groaned as he buried his face in his hands. The extremely aggressive means that Ves employed to counteract Professor Pendleton's criticism to the Aurora Design would lead to a storm in the mech community. How could an Apprentice be so brazen as to drag a Senior into the mud?

For a moment, Ventag regretted putting his support behind Ves! This viper-tongued young mech designer would be the death of them and their high regard in the mech industry if he continued to hammer at a fellow Senior!

He stood up, interrupting Ves' the unrelenting tirade.

"This event is reserved to introduce the Aurora Titan to the public." Professor Ventag spoke, providing a reasonable and composed counterweight to Ves.

"My fellow co-designer has a point. Rather than question the viability of the design so soon, why not let the mechs speak for themselves? This argument has gone on long enough. I think everyone would be best served if the Grand Skyward makes its way into space so that we can all witness which mech designer is right!"

The abrupt interjection by his collaborator injected a much-needed dose of rationality in Ves. Although he eagerly wanted to land some more blows on Professor Pendleton, he would only be making himself seem more unhinged if he insisted.

Ves already beat the professor black and blue in the public arena! He inflicted so much damage with his thuggish conduct that Professor Pendleton could hardly lift his head and continue his original mission to detract the quality of the Aurora Titan design!

He decided to end the first part of his presentation at this moment. He relaxed his mind and let go of the aggressive emulated force of will that affected his behavior. He instantly felt calmer and more at ease.

"Please excuse the unexpected delay." He said while smiling amiably towards his audience. "In thirty minutes, the Grand Skyward is scheduled to lift off into orbit where you will be able to witness the performance of the show models in various live-fire demonstrations. If you have other plans, please exit the exhibition hall before the time is up. You can also visit the restroom before the Grand Skyward flies up in orbit as you will need to be strapped into your seats during the ascent for safety reasons. That is all!"

The curtains closed the view to the stage, obscuring both Ves and the show models from view.

The first half of the product reveal finally came to an end!

Ketis immediately ran up to Ves and smacked her palm against his back.

"Looks like you haven't lost any of your fire! You sure roasted that old mech designer really bad!"

"I sure did." Ves awkwardly chuckled. "I don't know whether the price is worth it, though. I can't imagine what my reputation will look like once the public hears of what just took place!"

Chapter 1125 Unwelcome Attention

After the dramatic events at the main hall, Ves retreated to his backstage room to have some time to himself. Getting caught up in the fever of the moment, no doubt aided by the emulated force of will that he imposed on himself, drained a lot of energy and spirit!

In fact, summoning up the courage to confront and berate a Senior directly was probably responsible for at least half of drained state!

"The event is not over."

Ves still needed to put up a good front when the show models exhibited some of their capabilities. He also needed to be present as the first wave of customers approached the sales representatives to register their first orders of the new mech model!

As for Professor Pendleton? With all the bashing he received from Ves, why would the heckler ever subject himself to more abuse?

According to security, the Senior from Ansel quietly scurried to the exit the instant the curtains closed!

"At least that problem is dealt with." Ves momentarily smirked. "Still, if Ansel is only mildly irritated with me before, they'll definitely be out on the warpath after today!"

Attacking one Ansel mech designer was the same as attacking all of them! The school's considerably powerful alumni network would definitely close ranks around their wounded comrade and hit back at Ves and the Aurora Titan in other ways!

The only way to blunt the inevitable counterattack from Ansel was to ensure the show models delivered their best performance in the following hours!

"Only if my mechs perform impressively enough will they be able to endure the storm of criticism!"

Any mech model that sold more than a negligible amount of copies per year would inevitably be faced with criticism. Customers either judged the mech by themselves or listened to experts who earned their living from reviewing mechs.

A whole cottage industry of mech reviewers existed that provided mech publications with countless evaluations!

Both mech fanatics, mech pilots and professionals in the mech industry eagerly read these reviews as a favored past time. The influence of these reviews on the sales of the mech models in question was quite considerable!

The Blackbeak and the Crystal Lord may not have been covered by many mech publications, but they generally received somewhat positive reviews.

Back when Ves released his first two mech designs, he hardly stood out from the crowd of other Apprentice Mech Designers. He was a nobody, frankly.

This time would be different. Not only had his public profile risen in multiple occasions, but the news about his fiery confrontation was already spreading over the galactic net like wildfire!

While this would definitely do a lot of favors to the Aurora Titan's exposure to the mech market, it also cemented Ves as a firespitter who wasn't afraid to savage Seniors!

Ves switched on his comm and skimmed through a couple of news portals. He quickly groaned once he read the headlines and quickly shut his device off.

"The good news is I'm famous again. The bad news is I'm famous again for the wrong reasons!"

Even the non-mech publications started to report on the developing controversy!

"Meow."

Only Lucky was by his side for the moment. The cat attempted to offer Ves some support by brushing his head against his body.

"Haha, it's not so bad, Lucky. Professor Ventag is right that my mechs ought to speak for themselves. I'm very certain that they'll be able to impress the public today. In fact, my mechs will definitely exceed their expectations as long as I employ my backup plan!"

Ves already developed a plan to be used in emergencies like this. The current situation definitely called for something extra to spice up the performance of the Aurora Titan!

Just as he contemplated whether he should commit to his backup plan, Lucky suddenly yowled and hissed from his lap.

"What's wrong, Lucky?"

"Meow meow meow!"

"There's someone here?"

"Your cat is right." A familiar-sounding voice emerged from the corner of the room as someone in an infiltrator suit revealed his presence. "We meet again, Ves."

Ves recognized the unassuming young man and his deceptively mild voice!

"Leland Toll! What are you doing here?!"

"Why can't I be here? Flashlight has a stake in your company as well, or have you already forgotten who is standing behind Sibilant Asset Management? Since we own twenty-one percent of your company, we want to make sure our investment is paying dividends."

The sudden appearance of Leland should not be a coincidence! Flashlight never did anything without a good reason!

"Somehow, I don't believe the dividends you're talking about is in the form of money."

"Correct." Leland grinned. "I'm sure you can guess that I'm here for a different reason than that. We have been observing you and the LMC for a time now. To your credit, this is harder than it sounds like. That blasted security company from the Konsu Clan is very good at spotting any irregularities. In any case, the glimpses we've received and the trials of the prototypes that we've managed to observe have impressed us very much."

"I'm glad to hear you are supportive of the Aurora Titan. Now why are you really here, Leland?"

"I'm getting to that. After analyzing the metrics, our evaluation of you and your company has grown by another notch. Despite the events of today, we believe that you will definitely be able to reach greater heights. Flashlight wants to take advantage of that. As long as you are in a position to advance our objectives, we don't mind lending you a hand every now and then."

Ves sardonically smiled at Leland. "Of course you wouldn't lend a hand out of the goodness of your heart. Do you still even have one by the way? So what exactly do you want to pass on to me that you had to show up in my backstage room in person with this ridiculous getup of yours?"

"Well, I was planning to make a more impressive entrance, but that remarkable cat of yours has a more impressive ant-stealth detection system than I thought." Leland said with a frown while giving Lucky the stink eye.

"Meow!"

For his part, Lucky belligerently eyed the spy with vigilance.

"Alright. I've come to pass on two messages from the agency. First, we've deployed agents in and around the Grand Skyward and intercepted several potential troublemakers. By troublemakers, we don't mean the likes of

Professor Pendleton. Instead, I'm talking about the armed and murderous kind of troublemakers."

"I know I have a 50 million credit bounty on my head. I'm not too concerned." Ves nonchalantly shrugged while stroking Lucky's back in order to calm down his pet. "I'm sure the Grand Skyward's existing security arrangements are sufficient to stop the assassins."

"That may be true, but that may happen too late. A deadly firefight and bodies dropping to the ground is a sure way of ruining your big moment. Our agents took the liberty of intercepting these troublemakers the instant they strayed close to the Grand Skyward. A thank you would be nice, Ves."

"Thank you, Flashlight, for halting the entry of intruders." Ves sarcastically said with a snort.

"The other message that I want to pass on is that while we do not approve of your methods, we will cover your back when it comes to your vendetta against Ansel. The AUMD is way too powerful for their own good and they could use some humbling. We'll make sure that Ansel won't be able to exert an undue influence on the government in order to retaliate against you. The LMC should still be able to do business without any significant hindrance from the government."

"Well, thank you for that as well."

This time, Ves sounded a bit more sincere, because he knew the LMC could have definitely landed itself in more trouble without the cover of a government organization.

"We expect you to repay our generosity in time." Leland said. "When the LMC gets over this bump and manages to grow to another extent, expect us to return in case we have need of you or your company's services. Even if the

war against the Vesians is over, the Bright Republic is constantly facing threats."

With those words, Leland waved goodbye and faded out of view after he reengaged his infiltrator suit.

Ves had to press Lucky into his lap in order to prevent his cat from jumping out and clawing the agent from Flashlight.

The unexpected appearance of Leland at this time was anything but normal. Evidently, Flashlight held him in a higher regard than before, which many not entirely be a bad thing. The more value that Ves brought to the military intelligence agency, the more effort they put into protecting him and the LMC. However, thinking about his past collaborations with the Flashlight put Ves ill at ease.

Leland himself ordered Ves to be shot through the heart just because it strengthened the case against the KNG!

With this kind of track record, Ves felt extremely leery about any future collaborations with Flashlight and Leland specifically.

"Why did Flashlight send Leland of all people? Has he been assigned to supervise me and my company?"

He did not have the time to think on the implications of the short meeting with Leland. The Grand Skyward would be lifting off very soon.

"I've spent enough time recuperating. Let's go, Lucky."

Sometime later, Ves entered the central control room and walked up to Gavin.

"The Grand Skyward has already finished its final checks. It's about to lift off in the air!" His executive assistant said with excitement. "This is my first time riding such an enormous flying structure!"

"Let's enjoy the show."

Everyone who wanted to leave had already left. It did not matter much as someone else filled their seats. In fact, due to the explosive news of what took place here, a lot of Bentheimers grew curious and traveled to the Grand Skyward as quickly as they could!

The seats in the main hall were filled to capacity at the moment! Their thick seats which had been partially configured into crash seats started to lock down their occupants by strapping them in. This ensured that they wouldn't be flung in every direction in the event that the inertial dampeners shut off.

"Three, two, one, go! Initiate the ascent!"

The massive Grand Skyward Exhibition Hall rumbled to life as enormous thrusters began to burn! Massive structure-grade antigrav modules worked over the entire hall, causing it to weigh much lighter than usual at the cost of expending a lot of energy.

With practiced ease, the workers of the Grand Skyward neatly manipulated its controls and assured that the massive reinforced structure rose into the air in an even and stable fashion!

More thrusters came online as the Grand Skyward had reached beyond the skyline of Dorum. The moving structure accelerated its approach to space!

Ves could not imagine the amount of energy and fuel it took to lift this gigantic structure up!

Even though it wasn't safe for anyone to be walking about at this time, Ves ignored the safety rules and walked off from the control room. He followed the directions down into a hall built to accommodate the mechs.

He came here because he wanted to take some steps to insure the success of the upcoming trials. While he couldn't do anything to improve all five show

models on short notice, he could still find some ways to improve the Shield of Samar.

"The success of the Aurora Titan and the LMC hinges on what will happen next!"

Leland's visit had been a wakeup call to Ves. Although the spy did not mention too much about Ansel, the fact that Flashlight constantly concerned themselves about the AUMD's pervasive influence in the mech industry signified that Ves should take them more seriously as well!

Despite Professor Pendleton's pathetic performance as a heckler, the Senior would definitely find a way to his back at Ves somehow!

Chapter 1126 Mech Continuity

The first step in his plan would be to make use of his long-neglected Special Upgrade Voucher.

[Special Upgrade Voucher (Machine)]

This voucher can be applied to any object that fits the definition 'machine' and will comprehensively upgrade them to a higher rank. The smaller the machine, the more extensive the upgrade. This voucher is less effective on advanced and complex machines.

His intuition faintly approved of this course of action. Ves felt that something very good might result from the use of his voucher on Jannzi's mech.

The only regret was that he would be wasting his voucher on a mech that likely wouldn't be useful forever. The Avatars of Myth could not keep making use of outdated mechs as time went by. There would come a time when the Shield of Samar lost its relevance in the changing battlefields.

Yet Ves was still determined to use up his voucher. The Shield of Samar was such an impressive mech that elevating it even marginally could lead to substantial improvements in its performance.

"The Shield of Samar will probably be in use for at least ten years under normal conditions. That's not a lot of time in the overall scheme of things, but I am still in a very vulnerable position right now."

Yet who said a mech needed to adhere to its original design throughout its lifetime? Ves knew that a mech could always change and morph into a different form over time.

The field of customizing existing mechs was a deep and extremely extensive field. Some mech designers wholly abandoned designing new mechs in favor of customizing and tuning existing ones.

These mechanics earned a prominent place in the crews of mech athletes. They took existing commercial mechs and transformed them into mechs that were exquisitely tuned to suit a single mech pilot.

Every competent mech designer could work as mechanics, particularly when it came to their own mechs.

"Mechs don't have to have a finite lifespan." Ves realized.

The parts and frame that made up a mech could each be updated over time. As long as Ves wanted to, he could keep the Shield of Samar relevant on a continual basis by replacing older tech with newer tech.

In addition, if he ever updated the Aurora Titan into a Mark II version, then as long as he preserved the essence of its vision, then it would retain the same X-Factor and the spiritual qualities!

This was vitally important to Ves because it would be a waste to discard the qualities that a mech and mech design built up over the course of their use. Could he extend the lifespan of the Shield of Samar to a century?

Very much so. Perhaps almost none of its original parts would be retained, but as long as the change happened gradually, the Shield of Samar would be able to continue to serve as Jannzi's partner!

"Living Mechs. Partners for Life."

The company motto never sounded more relevant up until now!

Hardly any mech designer put any special emphasis on preserving the continuity of a mech design. However, it was customary for mech designers to update their old mech designs to incorporate the new technology of the times, particularly if the mech designs in question were bestsellers or staple products in their mech catalog.

Some mech designers even went to great extremes and devote their entire mech design careers into perfecting a single mech design! They were almost always obsessive about their precious mech design, and some even managed to advance to Star Designers with this ideology!

"These single-design fanatics may be onto something."

Ves contemplated whether he should update the Blackbeak and the Crystal Lord. Their X-Factor wasn't the strongest, but their mech concepts should still remain relevant in the future.

Perhaps Ves could even bolster their X-Factor by blending in some spiritual fragments!

"Well, I'll consider that for later. For now, the Aurora Titan should definitely deserve this treatment!"

The Aurora Titan design held special meaning to Ves. It was his first mech which reached an A-grade X-Factor and incorporated the spiritual fragment of a very special exobeast friend. These valuable qualities made the design

extremely valuable to Ves. It was worth keeping this design up to date with periodic updates!

"If the design deserves to be updated, then the Shield of Samar deserves to keep up as well!"

Afraid that the voucher might arouse a visual spectacle, Ves ordered the Shield of Samar to be moved into a small workshop in the Grand Skyward.

As an overall rule, exhibition halls generally afforded mech designers some privacy in their workshops, but Ves knew better than that.

He activated his Privacy Shield, though that was only enough to cover a two-meter radius around him. The System did offer some upgrades to it, but to increase its radius by twenty-five meters already cost Ves a whopping 1,000,000 DP!

Instead, Ves made use of a simpler solution. He turned to Lucky who he held in his arms. "You ate all of the communications systems of my CFA shuttle and CFA officer-grade comm right? Go work your magic. Block out any electronic surveillance in the workshop. While you're at it, see if there are any invisible sneaky bastards like Leland around and hunt for any loose spy bugs."

Although Ves believed his Privacy Shield worked far more effectively than CFA jamming tech, they worked equally well against the prevailing sensor technology of the Bright Republic.

"Meow!"

Lucky eagerly showed off its capabilities. A jarring wave emanated from the mechanical cat and easily encompassed the entire workshop. Ves rated CFA tech very highly, and if it didn't work on the monitoring system in the workshop then Lucky would have informed him. The cat meowed a few times to indicate that no one was currently present in the workshop.

"Okay then. Here goes nothing."

He mentally navigated towards his Inventory and activated the voucher, applying it on the Shield of Samar before his sight.

As Ves envisioned the voucher tearing itself in half from his Inventory, the Shield of Samar started to glow in green. It did not change form, nor did its materials upgrade into anything better. From all outward appearances, the voucher hadn't seemed to change the mech very much!

"Is that all?" Ves disappointedly asked.

The voucher did claim that it worked less effectively on larger and more advanced objects. Without deep scanning the mech, Ves wouldn't be able to figure out what exactly changed about the Shield of Samar.

The luminescent green glow eventually subsided as the voucher finished its transformation process. To all intents and purposes, the Shield of Samar remained roughly the same, so much so that no outside observer would be able to tell the difference.

Ves still didn't regret using the voucher. It wasn't as if he had any other device on hand which desperately needed an upgrade.

Investing in the Shield of Samar seemed like a worthwhile effort to him. In fact, to strengthen its performance in the upcoming demonstrations, Ves did not intend to upgrade mech alone.

He wanted to upgrade the mech pilot as well!

Although Ves knew he could work his Spirituality in some ways to effect such a change, he was far too unpracticed in it. Instead of trying to fumble around with something extremely dangerous by himself, why not employ an expert instead?

This expert happened to be the Aurora Titan's spiritual identity that lay at the heart of its X-Factor!

Ves had never communicated much with his images after he finished designing a mech. Doing this was a new experience for him, and he wasn't entirely sure if it would even work.

"It ought to work."

Qilanxo's spiritual fragment integrated into the design, but did not lose its own distinct identity during the process. Instead, it simply took on a new job as it settled into its new home in the imaginary realm!

Ves needed a new name for the images and spiritual fragments that integrated into a design. He decided to call them design spirits, because the words succinctly described their roles.

They were living spirits which animated lifeless designs and mechs! This especially applied to what Qilanxo's spiritual fragment turned into! As Ves stepped closer and closer to the Shield of Samar, he could feel its radiant spiritual fluctuations.

The mech was very much alive in his senses. Ves could not help but repeatedly admire the strong effects of A-grade X-Factor. Most of all, its spirituality still carried the strong imprint of Qilanxo's spiritual fragment!

"It's a bit different since last time."

The spiritual flavor took on a little bit more mech and a little bit less exobeast. Being attached to a mech design would inevitably cause the design spirit to assimilate a bit more from its immediate surroundings. Perhaps this transformation would gradually continue over time until hardly anything would be left of its roots!

"Is this a good transformation or a bad one?"

Ves didn't know. While he was glad to see the design spirit develop and evolve based on its circumstances, he did not wish for it to forget its roots.

Right now, there wasn't much for him to be concerned about, but that might change in the future.

For the moment, Ves concluded that there should still be enough of Qilanxo left to bargain with the design spirit.

"It's just a matter of making contact."

Ves concentrated his mind. He called up his Spirituality and extended an invisible and intangible tentacle of spirituality from his mind. He gently moved it over to the dormant Shield of Samar and tried to poke it into the cockpit that served as the heart of the mech.

A connection had been formed!

Strong sensations traveled through the tentacle! A confused jumble of thoughts and minutiae flooded his mind, causing Ves to utter a scream!

It had been a bad idea to make a direct connection with such a strong design spirit!

Ves barely lasted a few seconds as he desperately tried to convey his meaning before he forcefully retracted his spiritual tentacle!

"Damn! That hurts!" Ves winced as he rubbed his head.

Although the contact only lasted for a short time, Ves felt as if his entire mind had been burned by the raw exposure to the Aurora Titan's design spirit!

"I can only hope it got the message." He muttered wearily. "Okay, Lucky! My work is done! You can deactivate your ECM now!"

Sometime later, the mech technicians moved the Shield of Samar back in the hangar bay in order to be prepped for launch. Jannzi reunited with her mech

again and was just about to hop into its cockpit in order to ready herself for the big demonstration.

The success of the Aurora Titan in the market depended upon her upcoming performance!

Ves deemed this event to be so vital that he couldn't help but give out some hints. If he wanted the Shield of Samar to perform at its best, then he shouldn't be too stingy with his secrets.

He took Jannzi to the side and activated his Privacy Shield yet again in order to have a private conversation.

"What did you bring me here for, Ves?"

"I wanted to tell you something that will help you interface deeper with the Shield of Samar. Have you ever felt as if there was something special about your mental connection with your mech?"

"I.. have." She frowned. "I'm not sure what's going on with that, but your Shield of Samar is unlike any other mech I've piloted before. I've even sat in the cockpits of the other mechs of the Avatars of Myth, and I've noticed that the Blackbeak and the Crystal Lord are different as well. We've all known you are doing something different in your mechs."

Since the Avatars of Myth worked the most with his products, they would have been fools if they hadn't sensed something distinct in the Blackbeak, Crystal Lord and Aurora Titan models.

"Since you already know this, let me fill you in on a secret that will help you form an even more intimate connection with your mech. You see, while I'm not allowed to say so, I did some research on neural interfaces and the man-machine connection during my service time."

The dwarves who died due to his research had not sacrificed their lives in vain!

Jannzi looked at Ves with a rapt expression. She believed in him! How could she not? He was a very capable mech designer! He had to be in order to design a mech as amazing as the Aurora Titan!

"What's the secret?" She asked. She could barely contain her excitement!

"How can I form a better connection with my mech?"

Chapter 1127 Adaptive Mechs

When it came to family members who joined the Avatars of Myth, Ves was willing to set aside some of his rules.

He never told the customers of his mech how to best use their mechs. Mech pilots and the owners of his products all had their own way of doing things. It would be far too intrusive for the mech designer to butt into their midst and force them to listen to his advice.

The only place where he could exert such control was with the Avatars of Myth, but even then Ves felt leery about enlightening the hired help with hints that alluded to the secrets related to spirituality.

Out of all the people he wanted to succeed, he wanted his family to reap the greatest benefits!

Therefore, Ves made an informed decision to slowly elucidate the likes of Melkor and Jannzi to how they could draw upon the hidden potential of their mechs!

The only challenge was that Ves did not want to be too direct in the event the secret might leak out. Just like describing his design philosophy and the LMC's founding principles, he needed to take an indirect approach in order to set Jannzi on the right path.

He began by repeating the company motto.

"Living Mechs. Partners for Life. You've heard of it, yes? Before you do anything else, just think over those words. Do you think they apply your bond with the Shield of Samar?"

His cousin furrowed her brows. "I'm not a deep thinker, Ves. I'm not sure what you're getting at. I thought that phrase is just a clever marketing slogan."

"The company motto functions as that, but more. It describes the essence of what I'm trying to accomplish with my mech designs. Think about the Aurora Titan design. Each and every copy is exceptional. Yours is in fact the most special because it's not only the first production mech, but also because I showered it with a bit more attention."

"So what exactly is so different about the Shield of Samar that can help me pilot it better?"

Ves hesitated for a moment before he decided on the best way to approach the issue. "My mechs are designed to be.. Adaptive."

"Adaptive? You mean they change?"

"Yes, but not on a purely technical or hardware level. Instead, the man-machine connection between you and your mech can change in response to your attitude towards your mech. This automatically happens to each of my mechs regardless of who is piloting them, but there are certain methods you can employ to hasten the changes and quickly deepen your connection with your mech."

"So what are these methods?"

"Well, first, you should think about the core purpose of the Aurora Titan. Why does it exist? What is it meant to do?"

"It's a defensive space knight. It exists to defend friendly mechs, ships and other assets in space." Jannzi stated the obvious.

Ves nodded. "That's correct. The Aurora Titan does that but to a greater extreme. It is an obsession for mech, in fact. If you can adopt a similarly single-minded focus towards its core purposes, then you are moving closer to its essence of existence. The closer the two of you are aligned, the deeper your connection with your mech and the more responsive the piloting experience will become. Do you understand me up to this point?"

"I guess." She frowned. "What does this have to do with the adaptiveness of my mech? It sounds like I'm trying to make myself more suitable for my mech instead of the other way around."

"That's a fair point to make, but the closer your mindset matches to the core purpose of the Shield of Samar, the less the mech has to exert itself to adapt to your presence. Think of it as an intimate relationship. Both you and your mech are trying to get closer to each other in order to form a strong and enduring bond. This isn't something without a consequence because it can definitely affect your performance with your mech!"

Jannzi scratched her head. "So you're basically saying I should marry my mech?"

"If that is how you understand it, then sure. If you love your mech, your mech will love you back. Not directly, mind you, but the Shield of Samar will definitely be able to unearth your full potential if you are of one mind with your machine!"

All of this vague advice confused Jannzi a bit. She understood the sentiment that Ves tried to convey, but she simply couldn't wrap her head around how all of this would even be possible.

Was the mech governed by an extremely sophisticated AI that constantly tweaked the software of the mech to respond more readily to her thought patterns?

She understood too little about the technical side of mechs. She could only take Ves at his word and try out some of his advice.

"I'll give it a try. Is there anything else I can do to help me pilot my mech better?"

The next bit of advice came a bit closer to the secret concerning expert pilots. However, the Larkinson Family was not completely clueless about it. They often emphasized the instillment of a core set of family values to every mech pilot in order to facilitate a coherent belief that would serve as the core of their force of will.

The only flaw with that approach was that the force of will needed to adapt to the specialty of the mech pilot.

"This will sound a bit esoteric, but I need you to pilot the mech with a strongly focused mindset. Don't worry too much about the company, our family and all the people that are watching your performance. Just try and dedicate most of your mental concentration to the core values of your mech. The purer your thoughts, the more closely you will mesh with your mech."

"That's very dangerous, Ves." She said. "A mech pilot constantly needs to extend their awareness in each direction. What if I become so focused on showing off that I won't be able to spot the space debris about to crash into my machine?"

"I'm not telling you to be so immersed that you lose your situational awareness." Ves shook his head. "My research on the man-machine connection has taught me that mech pilots will generally achieve better results if they didn't share so many irrelevant thoughts with their mechs. I've designed my mechs to react better to mech pilots who are strongly focused with values aligned to their design."

"This is a little hard for me to wrap around." His younger cousin frowned. "Can you give me an example?"

"Sure. Let's take an aggressive mech pilot like Raella Larkinson. You've heard of her, right?"

"Yeah. She quit the family a few years ago."

"She's a very aggressive person and that plays well with her mech specialty and fighting style. Raella is eminently suited to pilot to pilot light skirmishers. Now think about what would happen if she piloted the Shield of Samar instead? Let's leave skill out of the equation and just assume that she can pilot a space knight just as well as a landbound light skirmisher. Would she be able to muster up as much potential with the Shield of Samar as you?"

Jannzi answered back with another question that expressed her doubt. "A mech is just a mech, right? Why is it so picky about their mech pilots?"

Ves sighed and shook his head. "Jannzi. After spending several months with the LMC and the Avatars of Myth, I would have thought you would have learned that mechs are more than just machines. Try considering them as living machines that have their own thoughts and emotions. You've sensed some of that with the Shield of Samar, right?"

"Right.."

"Treat your mechs right, and they will back you up. The more you open your mind to your mech and the closer you align yourself to its purpose, the more responsive the mech will become to you. This is what makes my mechs stand out from the machines designed by other mech designers. They regard mechs as disposable tools. I'm different. All of my mechs are designed to be more than tools. They are designed to be partners!"

The overall message that Ves wanted to convey to Jannzi was to treat her mech like a partner rather than a machine. This went against the general lessons that mech pilots received in their mech academy days.

Mech pilots were taught not to get attached to their assigned mechs. They learned to take care of the mechs, but only to the extent of avoiding unnecessary wear-and-tear.

According to the mech academies, mech pilots needed to be adaptable enough to pilot several different mechs when the situation called for it! This did not only entail piloting an identical copy of the same mech model. A versatile mech pilot should be able to jump into the cockpit of a different mech model without requiring any adjustment period!

Ves knew that his advice went against the grain of what the mech academies tried to instill, and Jannzi knew that as well.

She raised her eyebrows. "So essentially, you want me to focus completely on mastering the Shield of Samar?"

"In a way. That doesn't sound so bad to you, right?"

"The Shield of Samar is a great mech." She nodded. She finally came around to his advice. "I think.. if you will allow me to, I'd like to stick with the Shield of Samar for the long haul."

This was what Ves wanted to hear. "As long as you perform well enough with the Shield of Samar, the mech will continue to be assigned to you. I'll make sure Melkor knows what to do. Just keep my advice in mind when you pilot the mech. If you aren't using the Shield of Samar to its full potential, then I won't hesitate to take it back and assign it to a more promising space knight specialist."

This finally caused Jannzi to panic and widen her eyes in alarm. "Don't take away my mech, Ves!"

With how attached Jannzi had become to her new mech, the threat of taking it away from her would make sure she stayed on her toes!

Ves clapped his hands and deactivated his Privacy Shield. "Alright! That's all I wanted to pass on to you. Get ready to board your mech. The Grand Skyward will still take some time to move into position, but try and apply some of the advice I've imparted to you while you are warming up your mech. I think you'll be able to achieve some immediate results as long as you adopt the proper mindset."

"I'll keep that in mind, Ves."

"One more thing. Don't tell anyone about what I just said, alright?"

"Why? Shouldn't more people hear your advice so they can pilot your mechs better?"

"They're not exactly applicable to everyone in every situation. I don't want to cause any trouble to my mech pilots that can get them killed. The LMC will have to pay billions of credits in legal fees to fend off all of the lawsuits that will ensue."

Jannzi nodded in understanding, accepting the excuse that Ves had casually thrown out.

To be fair, a non-mech pilot really shouldn't be giving advice to a mech pilot on how to do her job. People had gotten in trouble before by giving out improper advice to mech pilots that caused them to make stupid moves that risked not only their own lives, but the lives of their comrades as well!

Even mech designers had to be careful on the advice they gave out. Just because they knew how to design a mech didn't mean they knew how to pilot them to the best effect!

As Jannzi began to climb into the cockpit of the recently-enhanced Shield of Samar, Ves made his way back to the stage where the audience would soon be allowed to witness the show models in action!

Chapter 1128 Demonstration

At the appointed time, Ves made his way back to the main hall of the Grand Skyward. Right now, the flying exhibition hall had risen far above Bentheim's surface and entered into space.

Specialized towing ships latched on to the Grand Skyward's superstructure and carefully moved it further away from orbit and the busy traffic in the vicinity.

Ves picked up Lucky and held his pet in his grasp as the pair became the center of attention once again. He walked forward with confident steps. He tried to convey the belief that he was absolutely assured that his new mechs would exceed everyone's expectations!

The extraordinary measures he resorted to should make sure that the Shield of Samar would definitely be able to make a splash!

"I've given you plenty of chances to elevate your performance, Jannzi. It's up to you now to see whether you understood the gist of what I've been trying to impart."

He could have given her some more advice. Ves hadn't mentioned anything about the exobeast the Aurora Titan had been partially based upon. If Jannzi became fully aware of the Sacred God known as Qilaxo, then she would have been able to align herself much closer to her mech!

Yet how could Ves explain something like that without exposing his secrets? As much as he liked Jannzi, he still reserved his judgement with regards to her commitment to Ves, the LMC and the Avatars of Myth. Just because she was family did not mean that Ves trusted her unconditionally.

The example of Raella running off to join the Blood Claws came to mind. While she hadn't specifically betrayed Ves, she willfully abandoned her responsibilities in order to pursue her own passion.

Giving Jannzi the mistaken impression that Ves had employed advanced technological means to make his mechs adaptable should be sufficient for now.

If a true mech designer heard this story, they would definitely dismiss it as nonsense if they had access to the full design schematics. Instead, they'd likely guess that the special quality that Ves imparted to his mechs came from his design philosophy, which came awfully close to the truth.

Ves would have to explain his design philosophy more clearly to mech designers some day, especially if he wanted to collaborate with them. He had already tasted the benefits of collaborating with a competent mech designer and wanted to do more projects like this in the future.

He quickly put that thought out of his mind as he walked up the middle of the stage. He took a deep breath and centered himself again. He could not afford any distractions from this point onwards.

"Thank you for your patience. I know the ride into space can take a rather long time, but the wait is almost over! We have almost reached the asteroid which will provide the venue to demonstrate the capabilities of the Aurora Titan!"

The crowd responded more enthusiastically when the backdrop of the enormous wall behind Ves turned transparent.

The main hall had turned into a giant observation chamber!

The instant the wall turned transparent, five Aurora Titans flew into sight and performed a couple of fancy, synchronized maneuvers!

The white mechs made for a mesmerizing sight that instantly attracted the attention from the audience. Their golden, glowing wings and the golden aftertrail emanating from their Rescue Particle Generator that only faded away after a couple of seconds made them look incredibly radiant!

Various projections appeared as well in order to provide a better view of the mechs. The Shield of Samar took the lead position in the 5-mech V-shaped formation. Ves only regretted that he hadn't customized its appearance to reflect its special status.

He could only remedy that issue afterwards.

As the crowd became distracted by the slow but smooth coordinated space maneuvers of the show models, the towing vessels placed the Grand Skyward relative to the nearby asteroid that had been towed all the way to Bentheim's high orbit.

The Grand Skyward hosted many mech trials in space. They were more than aware of the dangers of discharging an improperly aimed weapon.

It would be disastrous if a mech armed with a kinetic rifle fired a slug at a mech, only for the projectile to miss and travel onwards towards the surface of the planet!

Although some projectiles would burn up and vaporize during their violent descent into Bentheim's atmosphere, the tougher ones retained enough mass to pose a deadly threat to any vehicles and people at the end of their trajectories!

Therefore, the local government mandated that all space trials in the vicinity of Bentheim would either have to use a moon or an asteroid as a backstop to block all lasers and rounds from projecting into deep space!

Although the chance that these projectiles would travel onwards until they hit a starship or a mech that happened to be in the way was miniscule, it could not be ruled out!

Therefore, only until the Grand Skyward and the mechs traveled fairly close to the asteroid could they proceed with the demonstrations.

One of the Aurora Titans moved forward until it stood in front of a dummy that stood for a friendly rifleman mech.

"The Aurora Titan is entirely focused around defense, so the upcoming demonstrations will fully showcase their defensive ability. The first demonstration will showcase the resilience of its thick tower shield and its Pisaro armor system. No other defensive method will be employed for now, and the weapons used against the Aurora Titan will be a mixture of the three most common ranged weapons used by mechs in space."

Three mechs appeared a distance away. One of them wielded a laser rifle. Another one wielded a kinetic rifle. The last one wielded a handheld missile launcher.

All three mechs began to fire at the dummy mech, only for the Aurora Titan to block the incoming firepower! Though no sound propagated in space, the audience could feel the powerful impact and the damage the weapons inflicted!

The attacking mechs were using real mech weapons that hadn't been weakened from their standard parameters!

If Ves wasn't absolutely confident about the Aurora Titan's defensive prowess, he would have never approved of this demonstration so easily!

"As you can see, the tower shield is slowly being whittled away." Ves narrated the proceedings. "By default, the Aurora Titan is supplied with a thick tower shield made of uncompressed alloy. While not as resilient to damage as a

shield made of compressed alloy, it is much more convenient and affordable to replace and repair in the field. Its sheer thickness ensured that it will take a lot of firepower to break through this barrier!"

Eventually, the shield succumbed, but not after withstanding several minutes of focused attacks!

Laser beams, kinetic rounds and errant missiles soon began impact against the surface of the mech.

This was a very dangerous situation for the mech pilot in the Aurora Titan! If the design possessed any critical flaws, the mech pilot might inadvertently suffer injuries in case of an accident!

Ves did not allow any of his doubts affect his confident facade. He could only hope the demonstrations would succeed in giving his Aurora Titans a moment to shine.

"As you can see, its Pisaro armor system is able to hold out well against all types of damage. The Aurora Titan is larger than regular medium knights, which means it has more surface area to disperse any incoming damage. Its armor is able to provide excellent protection from the front and decent protection from the rear as long as the Aurora Titan retracts its semi-foldable flight system."

The incoming fire eventually led to serious-looking breaches as individual armor plating finally began to buckle! Ves suppressed his wince as best as he could as he imagined the serious internal damage the mech was suffering as some of the firepower spilled into the internals of the mech.

Yet Ves kept reminding himself that all of this had been planned beforehand! The mech under fire ought to be able to hold against this much damage!

The audience didn't think that much. Instead, they felt pain for such a beautiful and compelling mech being marred and ruined by all of the incoming fire!

Wasn't Ves concerned about killing the mech pilot?! Some of the breaches were very close to the cockpit!

"There is nothing to be concerned about! The Aurora Titan's exquisite internal design incorporates extensive damage control measures added by Professor Corus Ventag! His work ensures that even if the mech suffers breaches in its armor, the machine will still be able to maintain its core functionality through the use of redundant channels and parts and compartmentalizing them into separate internal chambers!"

The attacking mechs eventually stopped firing, sparing the beaten-up Aurora Titan from becoming completely ruined.

Seconds later, the Aurora Titan unfolded its mostly-intact flight system and began to fly around like a triumphant survivor!

The audience oohed and awed at the remarkable sight! The mech withstood so much damage but could still muster up the ability to fly back to the Grand Skyward's hangar bay!

"This is just the start." Ves grinned. "The next test will showcase its other defensive means."

Subsequent Aurora Titans began to showcase its polarizing modules. Glowing white fields covered various sections of their shields and armor. The large amount of laser beams they blocked while leaving very few signs of damage to the mechs themselves impressed the crowd yet again.

The polarizing fields also performed decently against ballistic shells and missiles, but buckled fairly quickly against kinetic rounds.

The next Aurora Titan showcased its ability to employ its alien crystals to absorb laser fire retaliate by firing radiant light beams from the charged crystals!

The accuracy of the retaliatory light beams were very poor as the Aurora Titan had never been designed to accommodate ranged weaponry. This was also why the Aurora Titan hit a large dummy target only a few hundred meters away. Such a target was so close that even the most inept marksman mech pilot would be able to land a hit!

The unexpected lightshow emanating from the mech drew a considerable amount of fascination from the enraptured audience. This was exactly what Ves wanted to achieve.

All of the demonstrations had meticulously been planned weeks beforehand in order to provide the best impression of the mechs without coming off as inauthentic.

This came into play when an Aurora Titan flew forward with its broadsword ready to strike against an opposing swordsman mech.

Normally, the Aurora Titan would not be able to beat a melee mech in equal combat.

However, it was a very different case this time because the opposing mech pilots were very familiar with each other! They already practiced the choreography in the simulators until they memorized the moves by heart!

The Aurora Titan in question entered into a measured duel against the swordsman mech. While the swordman mech was lighter and swifter with its sword, the Aurora Titan easily showed off its ability to withstand errant sword blows while dishing out powerful counterattacks with its strong limbs!

The message that Ves tried to convey here was that the Aurora Titan was not useless in melee combat! It merely had to employ specialized fighting styles developed specifically for slow-moving mechs!

Once the fourth Aurora Titan 'convincingly' won the duel by sacrificing portions of its armor, the time for the Shield of Samar step had arrived!

As Jannzi maneuvered her mech into place in front of a dummy mech, Ves worked up the crowd.

"The next and final demonstration will showcase all of the capabilities of the Aurora Titan shown thus far when used in unison! My cousin, Jannzi Larkinson, will be facing against ten ranged mechs and one melee mech! As the opposing force will do their best to destroy the dummy mech behind her, Jannzi will use every means possible to hold out as long as she can against the onslaught! Even outnumbered by eleven-to-one, the Aurora Titan will still stand strong!"

This was it. While the choreographed demonstrations up to this point had excited the crowd, Ves wanted to achieve more. The audience may have developed a good impression of the Aurora Titan's capabilities, but that was far from convincing potential mech buyers to order the mechs!

Only by showcasing all of the Aurora Titan's capabilities at once during an extremely arduous demonstration would the mech be able to bloom in full splendor!

Chapter 1129 Jannzi Larkinson

Jannzi Larkinson breathed deeply as she brought out the Shield of Samar out into space and towards the demonstration site.

She brushed her shoulder-length raven hair back as she continuously explored how she could better connect to her mech.

Strangely enough, some of the strange advice that Ves had given her actually seemed to work!

Her experience with the Shield of Samar was unlike any other mech she piloted before. As a younger Larkinson, she mostly piloted various training mechs used by many other mech cadets.

Training mechs had been designed to be as easy to interface as possible with as many people as possible. The space knights that she used to pilot felt like docile horses in her mind. The mech responded fairly easily to her commands.

She had never been an exceptional Larkinson. Born to a Larkinson mother at a common planet in the Rittersberg region, she enjoyed a fairly normal childhood. The lengthy visits to the Larkinson Estate every now and end brightened up her days as she got to play with many little Larkinsons.

As she grew up on the stories of her grandparents, her aunts and her uncles, she hoped she would be lucky enough to possess the genetic aptitude to pilot mechs!

Her wish came true when the test results came in! Her genetic aptitude had been graded as C+!

While her genetic aptitude didn't attract too much promise among the Larkinsons, it was still above average compared to mech pilots in the Bright Republic.

As she took her first classes at the mech academy, the question that came to her next was her specialty.

The decision to specialize in a certain domain of mechs came up early. Many mech cadets couldn't decide in their first few years at the mech academy. Not Jannzi.

The basic mech academies only focused on teaching the fundamentals of piloting landbound mechs. Young mech cadets would occasionally go on a field trip in space to try out various spaceborn mechs, but their complexity made them unsuitable for most mech cadets to start with. This gave Jannzi very little opportunity to pilot spaceborn mechs in her early teens.

Yet as soon as she entered the cockpit of her first spaceborn training mech, she instantly fell in love with flying free in space.

There was something very fascinating about space. Humanity thrived in it. In the Age of Mechs, the ceaseless expansion of human civilization in the galaxy may have stalled, but it had cemented its rule over countless star sectors.

How could she turn her eyes to the ground when there was so much to explore in space? Planets only made up a miniscule portion in the vast gulf that was space!

She developed a fascination for spaceborn mechs early on, and enjoyed the few times she got to pilot them for real.

Her regular forays to the Larkinsons and the training she received from her family allowed her to explore spaceborn mechs much more often than regular mech pilots. She eagerly learned the basics of piloting spaceborn mechs even before she fully mastered the basics of piloting landbound mechs!

The moment she could choose which advanced mech academy to attend, she immediately chose a famed spaceborn mech academy based in the New Foundation System!

Upon arrival, she eagerly explored the range of possibilities available.

Although she enjoyed almost every spaceborn mech she laid her hands upon, her lack of skill in marksmanship made her unsuitable to specialize in ranged mechs.

Of the melee mechs that remained in her consideration, she eventually chose to go for a very uncommon specialty.

She decided to dedicate herself to piloting space knights.

Why space knights?

"Because my friends and comrades need protecting."

Although she enjoyed piloting agile light skirmishers, she found it burdensome to keep up with the rapid decision-making required to make the most of these

machines. Other melee mechs were easier for her to pilot, but she just constantly felt vulnerable while piloting those offense-oriented mechs.

Space knights gave her the feeling of piloting a mobile bulwark. They meshed well with her because she felt useful just by being there. A space knight's main task was to shield more vulnerable mechs from damage, and while it was not a glamorous job, it was a very vital one that Jannzi didn't mind fulfilling.

Whereas most mech cadets thought dismissively of space knights as clunky mechs that flew like pigs with wings, Jannzi enjoyed the responsibility she took upon piloting this type of mechs.

Everyone looked up to their space knights when they needed cover! Jannzi always felt gratified when she managed to gain the appreciation of her fellow mech cadets for performing this vital role.

The only regret she had was that she wished she had been born a few years earlier. The war already broke out when she attended the advanced mech academy. Although all the advanced mech academies accelerated their training programs in order to hasten the supply of new mech pilots, the war had already ended before she even finished graduating!

To the Larkinson potentates, missing out on the war just before they graduated was one of the most painful moments in their lives!

The worst part about it was that the war ended too early! If the war had lasted five years as usual, then Jannzi would have had enough time to get settled into her new mech regiment. A year should have been enough for her to see real action and become a real Larkinson!

This regret haunted her endlessly after the outbreak of peace. Even if she graduated from the advanced mech academy with honors, she felt utterly listless at the thought of spending twenty to thirty years of endless training,

boring patrols and feeble skirmishes before she could finally live up to her family name.

She was so envious at the likes of Ghanso and Porellia Larkinson for being able to bloom during the war!

While Jannzi didn't have much hope of advancing to expert candidate due to her aptitude, had she been born at the same time as the latest stars of the family, she would have been able to go home with her head held high!

As it was, the war was over and nothing could be done about it. Jannzi completely felt as if she had suddenly gone adrift. What was there to do for her? The Mech Corps which she long hoped to enlist in would never engage in any action that could equal any major battle during the war. How could she find any fulfillment in her duties in those times?

She initially regarded the family's decision to assign her to the care of Ves Larkinson and his thriving business as a moment for her to reflect. She did not think too much of the mech business that one of her richest cousins in the family had founded. To her, the Larkinsons were never that short of money, and Ves had only designed a couple of landbound mechs so far which didn't spark her interest.

All of that changed when Ves came up with the Aurora Titan. From the moment she first heard of its conception, she found the design to be fascinating in so many ways.

"The Aurora Titan a space knight taken to an extreme!"

While the developing design was not as sturdy as a genuine heavy space knight, it nonetheless offered a lot of defensive power. The lack of mobility was a sore point, but Jannzi had already become accustomed to piloting sluggish mechs.

Even then, she never realized the full potential of this design until she finally came face-to-face with the Shield of Samar.

It was the most impressive mech she'd ever seen. The same compelling quality that was present in all of Ves' mechs pulled her in immediately and never let her go! As she interfaced with the mech for the very first time, she felt she entered a state of nirvana as she felt as if her mind elevated into a higher at that moment!

As Jannzi practiced more and more with her mech, she developed a strong affection for the Shield of Samar!

Despite its many flaws and shortcomings, piloting the mech was such a joy that she had completely forgotten about her earlier regrets!

Even then, she never considered the Aurora Titan to be more than just a mech. She loved the Shield of Samar like she loved a favored tool or weapon.

Yet did she adopt the right approach to her mechs?

The Shield of Samar already felt responsive to Jannzi. Could she really achieve an even greater connection with her mech?

"Is Ves really on to something?"

It didn't hurt to try. She tried to follow Ves' instructions the moment she entered the cockpit and turned the mech into standby mode. This kept the mech active but with all of its functions locked down.

With her safety and the safety of her surroundings assured, she tried to put her mind into a deeper connection with her mech.

What was the role of a space knight? To defend, to shield and to protect. The Aurora Titan design exemplified these ideals to an even greater degree than regular medium space knights!

Jannzi already adhered to these ideals herself, but this was the first time she actually invoked them in her mind while she interfaced with her mech!

She followed the other advice that Ves gave her as well. She cast aside as many distractions as possible and tried to embody the other traits the Shield of Samar was supposed to embody.

"What is Samar anyway?" She idly wondered.

The moment this distracting thought passed through her mind, she felt a distinct pulse of feedback from her mech!

The strange reaction creeped her out, at least at first.

"Who's there?!"

As Jannzi explored the strange landscape of her man-machine connection with her mech, she found nothing else besides the soothing presence of her mech.

The only difference was that she felt as if her mind had come significantly closer to her mech than before!

More than that, her mental proximity to her mech allowed her to sense that the Shield of Samar was more than a cold machine that ran on processor logic!

The mech somehow felt warm and welcoming to Jannzi, as if it was an affectionate pet like Ves' mechanical cat!

Somehow, equating the Shield of Samar as something similar to Lucky rather than a regular mech helped Jannzi gain an even closer connection to her mech!

Was Ves truly right in that she could do much more with her mech if she regarded it as a living partner? Was the company's motto truly applicable to its products?

A sea of change went through her mind. Jannzi became immersed in deepening her connection with her mech. Although the mech instructors at the academies always warned of the dangers of diving in too deep into the man-machine connection, she took no notice of this warning at this moment!

She felt as if she had found a wonderful partner in her mech! She no longer felt as if the other end of the man-machine connection was a lifeless puppet for her to inhabit. Instead, she felt like she had developed an intimate bond with a mech-sized pet!

Jannzi became so immersed in this wondrous state that she almost missed the moment of her launch!

Even though she drew back her immersion in order to focus on her performance during the upcoming demonstration, the mech nonetheless continued to accompany her! It was as if the Shield of Samar was as eager to show off its full capabilities to the public as Jannzi!

The moment she positioned the Shield of Samar in front of the dummy mech, she had entered into her highest state of focus! The importance of her performance to the success of the Aurora Titan model and the company made it critical that she piloted the Shield of Samar as flamboyantly as possible!

Though it seemed like an illusion, Jannzi somehow believed that her mech would do its utmost to assist her in giving the audience a great show!

The moment the laser beams struck her mech, she already entered into an invigorated state! She no longer fought alone! She had her partner to back her up this time!

Chapter 1130 A Great Show

The Shield of Samar immediately caused the audience to gasp in admiration as it intercepted several simultaneous laser beams at once with its polarized shield.

The mech's tower shield covered a very expansive surface area. To polarize the entire surface of the shield was very wasteful and would quickly drain the energy cells of the mech.

Jannzi did not employ the polarizing module in such a crude fashion. Instead, small square fields of light covered all of the sections of the shield about to be struck by lasers.

While she didn't manage to intercept every laser in this fashion, the fact that she managed to block at least half of them from damaging the surface of the shield was impressive enough in itself!

Lasers traveled at the speed of light! It was impossible for any human or machine to perceive the trajectory of the deadly beam of energy as it propagated through space!

The only way to predict their trajectory was to keep a close eye on where the enemy mechs pointed their muzzles at! The difficulty of doing so to a mech pilot already burdened with multitasking various functions was immense!

Yet Jannzi somehow managed to make it seem almost effortless!

Ves continued to stand on the stage as he watched the proceedings while stroking Lucky's back.

"Meow."

"I know. Jannzi is going all-out this time! It seems like she has taken some of my advice to heart!"

Although the distance between him and the Shield of Samar was too great for him to sense the spiritual strength emanating from the impressive mech, its splendor had become even greater than before!

If the previous Aurora Titans looked good during their individual demonstrations, then the Shield of Samar fought like a beast!

Under Jannzi's proficient direction, the Shield of Samar began to absorb the incoming firepower in a measured way. Even as small missiles and kinetic weaponry impacted her mech as well, she rapidly configured the shield of her mech to only absorb the energy damage.

By blocking all the lasers with its polarizing fields and blocking the physical damage with the mass of its tower shield, the Shield of Samar withstood the incoming fire as efficiently as possible!

All the mech pilots and more knowledgeable mech enthusiasts in the crowd recognized the incredible mental effort required to direct the polarizing module with so much alacrity!

However, even as Jannzi proficiently intercepted all the ranged firepower coming in her direction, a swordsman mech approach the Shield of Samar from an angle.

The Shield of Samar was about to get entangled in close-quarters combat while continually being bombarded by ranged fire!

Jannzi couldn't move her mech out of the way. Aside from exposing the mech dummy she was supposed to protect, her mech simply didn't have the mobility worth mentioning to dodge most of the incoming fire anyway.

She needed to stand her ground!

The moment the swordsman mech came into range, the two mechs entered into a showy duel. Even though her opponent made exaggerated attacks, they nonetheless hit at full force!

The Shield of Samar couldn't stand still and let the swordsman mech beat them up. Due to the diverging angles of attack, the tower shield could not block both sources of damage at once!

As previously planned, she fended off the swordsman mech with the Shield of Samar's broadsword while continuing to employ its tower shield to block the rain of fire.

The mech did so splendidly! Not only was it able to continuously employ its polarizing field to mitigate the lasers, it also wielded its broadsword sufficiently enough to block and parry the swordsman mech's powerful slashes!

Even though the mech insiders among the crowd that such a silly situation would never arise in an actual battlefield, the Aurora Titan model never looked as impressive as now!

Nobody questioned why the swordsman mech didn't simply bypass the Shield of Samar in order to strike the dummy mech behind it. They all became enthralled in the impressive way the mech continued to hold out against overwhelming odds!

The searing beams of lasers and the kinetic rounds impacting the surface of the shield looked impressive, especially considering that it could do some serious damage if the Shield of Samar showed any weakness!

Nonetheless, Jannzi never even once indicated any alarm. She continued to fend off the swordsman mech with her sweeping sword moves while her shield slowly chipped away.

Against so many ranged mech attacking the Shield of Samar at once, its tower shield lasted for a respectably long time, especially considering that it was made up of conventional uncompressed armor!

However, nothing lasted forever, and the audience groaned as the shield finally snapped in half due to the horrendous-looking breaches inflicted by the kinetic rounds and explosive missiles!

The mech had lost its shield!

A torrent of fire immediately poured onto the surface of the Shield of Samar. Even as the mech looked like it was being baptized in fire, the mech amazingly held out without suffering much damage!

Its Pisaro armor system resisted much of the damage! Not only did it fare well against physical damage, the polarizing fields that Jannzi called into being resisted most of the energy damage as well!

Jannzi managed to do all of this while at the same time becoming burdened by fending off a swordsman mech up close!

The performance up to this point had already surpassed her best results in the simulators. Even as she directed the Shield of Samar to employ her polarizing fields in the most efficient fashion, she also started to allow some lasers to strike the alien crystals embedded on the surface of her mech!

As laser fire occasionally hit in the vicinity of the crystals, they absorbed most of the energy from the lasers. After a minute of charging up, the crystals then began to fire a radiant white beam back at the ranged mechs!

The moment this happened, the entire crowd peaked in their excitement!

Even though they already witnessed this reaction at an earlier demonstration, to see it employed in such an arduous scenario impressed everyone! While the Shield of Samar's unexpected counterattack hadn't taken out any enemy mechs, the light beams nonetheless caused them to enter into disarray!

The broadsword, the Pisaro armor system, the alien crystals and the polarizing module all formed an impeccable combination that showcased the Aurora Titan design to the fullest!

Even though the armor of Jannzi's mech slowly started to chip away, the mech still lasted for a very respectable amount of time! A midrange medium space knight would have already succumbed at this point, but the Shield of Samar still endured!

Ves knew that the end was close, though. While he contemplated manipulating the battle scenario in a way that allowed the Shield of Samar to take out some enemy mechs, such an outcome would be too contrived.

He made the decision that it was better to focus on showcasing the Aurora Titan's defensive capabilities and leave the question of offense up in the air.

"Jannzi should be sending the signal to end the demonstration at any moment now." Ves muttered to himself.

Even though she employed the polarizing module as efficiently as possible, the energy reserves of the Shield of Samar would definitely be hitting below twenty or thirty percent by now. Once Jannzi was forced to abandon the use of her polarizing module, the damage incurred by the mech would quickly escalate, thereby necessitating a stop.

Yet even as the Shield of Samar continued to sustain more damage to its armor plating, the radiant mech still held its ground!

What was Jannzi thinking?!

The mech did not draw back from the demonstration as planned. Instead, it grew increasingly more active! Even as it endured the incredible amount of fire pouring in its way, the mech aggressively attacked the swordman mech that had been harrassing it all this time!

Through a display of unexpected zero-g acrobatics, the Shield of Samar engaged its flight system to rotate its orientation so that its legs faced the enemy melee mech just as it had finished launching an attack!

The legs grappled with the sword and somehow caught it in a way that allowed the Shield of Samar to rip it off the grasp of its wielder!

The swordsman mech was disarmed!

Jannzi reacted instantly on this development! Not only did she control the Shield of Samar to fling the sword off into the asteroid behind her mech, she also surprised the weapon-less swordsman mech with three simultaneous light beams from the charged alien crystals she held in reserve!

The light beams struck fairly hard at close range! Not only that, but they had been aimed in the most strategic weakpoints of the enemy mechs!

One light beam struck the head and blinded its main sensors!

Another light beam hit a critical joint in the left wing of the swordsman mech's flight system, causing a portion to detach! This caused the mech to spin unevenly for a moment!

The third light beam struck the chest of the mech during its spin! While the chest plating easily resisted the damage, the particular position Jannzi had struck happened to be aimed directly at the cockpit of the mech pilot!

All of these attacks gave the Shield of Samar enough opportunity to engage its flight system into another rotation that allowed it to chop at the unbalanced swordsman mech with a powerful half-moon chop!

The crowd went absolutely bonkers as the swordsman mech lost both of its forearms! Like a fish on the chopping block, Jannzi's powerful attack managed to cleave straight through the two limbs!

Another attack struck at the swordsman mech's unbalanced flight system, destroying it utterly from its base!

The melee mech lost all of its mobility in space! It spun helplessly as the mech's feeble legs couldn't find any footing in empty space!

As Ves wondered what the hell Jannzi was doing, she decided to go on the attack!

The Shield of Samar gripped the spinning mech with its free arm that used to hold the tower shield and used the swordsman mech as a makeshift shield!

This immediately forced the ranged mechs in the distance to stop shooting! How could they fire on their own comrade, and in an exhibition battle at that?!

Yet Jannzi ignored all of those considerations and willfully used the immobilized mech as a shield to bring the Shield of Samar closer to the ranged mechs!

While the Shield of Samar accelerated rather slowly with the added burden, the distance to the ranged mechs wasn't all that far!

The mech pilots of the ranged mechs were so shocked at the unplanned turn of events that they only reacted when the Shield of Samar reached halfway! They quickly flew their mechs backwards in order to avoid getting entangled in a battle up close, but Jannzi made a surprising move during this time!

Her mech arced her sword arm back before flinging the broadsword forward!

It spun unerringly in space at the fleeing ranged mechs before managing to clip one of the flight systems of the mech! The mech instantly lost half of its maneuvering power! Not only that, but the uneven damage caused the mech a lot of difficulties in adjusting its trajectory!

All of these problems allowed the Shield of Samar to come close enough to let go of the mech it used as a shield to wrestle with the ranged mech!

The Shield of Samar used its considerable bulk and strength to crush the ranged mech's flight system and break the joints of its arms and legs!

The mech had been crippled in an instant!

Even then, Jannzi still hadn't gotten enough! The Shield of Samar picked up the disabled ranged mech as a makeshift shield and continued to accelerate towards the other fleeing ranged mechs.

Though the super-medium space knight could never catch up to its swifter opponents, the mere absurdity of the situation had stunned the audience before gaining their full support!

The entire crowd cheered Jannzi Larkinson on! Strong waves of enthusiasm and admiration emanated from the audience as even the non-mech fanatics got caught up in all of the excitement!

Even though Ves wanted to excite the crowd, this battle scenario had completely gone off the rails! The mech pilots involved might have gotten seriously injured, which would inevitably result in a major scandal for the LMC and NORA Consolidated!

Just as Ves tried to figure out a way to rein in his berserk cousin from causing an even greater scene, the Shield of Samar faintly flickered as a strange field minutely flickered around the mech!

Although the field only lasted for an instant, Ves widened his eyes as he recognized the effect!

A veteran mech pilot sitting at the front seat suddenly stood up!

"I recognize the flicker that happened back then! That's the precursor to forced resonance! The mech pilot of that Aurora Titan has just broken through to expert candidate!"

A lot of people nearby heard the veteran's words. The news instantly spread like wildfire among the audience!

"Jannzi Larkinson broke through!"