

### Chapter 1151 Wasted Endowments

The promised mech duel never came up again during Oliver's visit to Axelar's villa. The pair of wastrels spent several days carousing together in the prosperous and highly-populated Tyon System where Axelar lived.

If they weren't drugging themselves stupid with potent recreational stimulants, the two friends who befriended each other in their mech academy days went out and partied all day and night.

The extreme decadence the two partook in simply boggled Ves' mind. During a single casino visit, Oliver casually squandered a few million Terran dollars at the high-tech gambling tables!

As for Axelar, his losses amounted to more than thirty million T-dollars!

If they were a little bit more sober, then they could have limited their losses by making more prudent bets. Yet even when they gambled away so much money that they could have outright bought out a small state in the galactic rim, they still didn't stop injecting themselves with stimulants!

At least one benefit of their travels was that Ves witnessed how the Terrans truly lived. While the Tyon System wasn't anything special to the Streon Clan, it was far more developed than even a hundred Benteims put together!

The Terrans rearranged every planet in the Tyon System. They terraformed the terrestrial planets and shifted their orbits so that all of them fell into the goldilocks zone. They also didn't let up on the gas giants, opting to place a large amount of floating cities on them that could withstand the extreme forces of the gas giant's outer layers!

Through some arduous digging in Axelar's drug-addled mind, Ves finally managed to find out that the Tyon System alone boasted a population of over 100 billion!

And this was not even an exceptionally large figure for a Terran star system!

With such a huge population, the Tyon System alone could have easily raised more than a billion mech pilots.

Yet the truth was that the mech forces of the planet was a lot more modest than that amount.

With the high emphasis on training elite mech pilots to compete in the restricted wars between the clans, the Terrans pursued quality over quantity.

"Many potentates never get the opportunity to enter a mech academy." Ves realized.

Potentates with a genetic aptitude of D or lower could forget about becoming mech cadets!

With their incredible population base, the Terrans weren't short on talented mech pilots. With the prevailing standard of employing very complicated multipurpose mechs, lesser potentates simply wouldn't be able to keep up with the demanding curriculums.

"The complexity of the average mech in the Confederation is already straining the capacity of mech pilots with C-grade genetic aptitudes." Ves observed.

While mech pilots with C-grade genetic aptitudes barely made the cut, many Terrans looked down on them as cannon fodder. The importance of genetic aptitude played a much greater role in Terran society because the elite mech corps that every mech pilot aspired to join placed a lot of importance on this trait.

Only mech pilots with B-grade genetic aptitude and higher could apply!

In fact, if the elite mech corps had their way, they would have limited their recruitment to mech pilots with A-grade genetic aptitude. The only reason why

they stopped short of setting the bar that high was that even with their huge population base, such mech pilots were still too rare.

If Axelar's privileged birth in the Streon Clan was not enough, his genetic aptitude also reached as high as A-. As soon as the Streon Clan found out about his remarkable talent in piloting mechs, they immediately reserved a place for him in one of their elite mech corps.

Even if Axelar objected to the assignment, he had no power to resist the demands of his clan!

His buddy Oliver of the Renwald Clan was a bit worse in that regard. Oliver's genetic aptitude only reached B+, which was still a major tier lower than that of Axelar!

Strangely, the scion of the Streon clan wasn't happy about his talent. During his more coherent moments when he spent more than thirty minutes without injecting himself with a new formula, he complained about his path in life.

"I hate mechs." He wearily complained. "If my genetic aptitude was only a C, then I would have been ignored by the clan. My A-grade genetic aptitude has given me nothing but trouble!"

"At least your talent satisfies for your clan." Oliver snorted. "My parents are constantly disappointed in me for failing to live up to the Renwald elites. My genetic aptitude is better than most mech pilots in the galaxy! Yet still they treat me like an abandoned son!"

Ves wanted to palm his face. As someone who once desired to pilot mechs in his childhood years, he simply couldn't stand how these two lucky fellows moaned about their pampered lives!

"The two of you are already winners among mech pilots! What's there to complain about?!"

Both Axelar and Oliver graduated from the mech academies despite how they spent much of their mech cadets days under the influence of recreational stimulants.

Strictly speaking, both of them should have been spending their time at the elite mech corps their clans assigned them to. Yet neither of them ever considered their duties even once!

Resting deep in Axelar's mind, Ves began to lose patience with his host. This dummy from the Streon Clan never came close to piloting a mech! What was the point of a Mastery experience if Ves never got to witness a mech pilot in action even once?

Even as Oliver finally said goodbye and left, Axelar resumed his decadent ways. He spent entire days lying on his luxurious sofa with his brains turned to mush!

The pharmaceutical company he bought out constantly came up with new formulas for Axelar to try out. Every single day, Axelar experienced a new variation of euphoric highs and coma-inducing trances.

Due to his genetically optimized and improved physique as well as some powerful biological implants, Axelar was able to tolerate a huge concentration of chemicals without overdosing. It galled Ves that Axelar enjoyed so many genetic enhancements throughout his life.

All of these advanced treatments were meant to turn him into the best human and mech pilot. Yet instead of using his endowments in a productive manner, Axelar instead abused his gifts to inject more potent cocktails of stimulants in his body!

If Ves possessed a physical body, he wanted to grab Axelar's neck and shake the druggie's body back and forth until he wrung out all of the drugs from the Terran's blood stream!

Axelar's chief bodyguard and attendant didn't help much either. Rather than restraining his charge, Benny instead went along with every crazy idea that Axelar came up with. No matter how ridiculous the request, Benny did his best to fulfill them even if it wasted tons of Terran dollars!

After investigating more into Axelar's background, Ves speculated whether his parents and his clan cared about him at all. Even though Axelar boasted a high genetic aptitude, the staff around him never imposed any restraints.

What Axelar wanted, Axelar got!

Even if Axelar put out an impossible request like buying out Old Earth, Benny would just smile and agree to take care of the matter. Axelar would forget about his orders only minutes later as stimulants blanketed his entire short-term memory.

If there was anything redeeming about Axelar, it was that he did not seem inclined to abuse his staff or other people. Still, the only reason why the druggie restrained himself in that manner was that Benny would never allow his charge to tarnish the reputation of the Streon Clan.

Benny also stopped Axelar from leaving the Tyon System. The druggie could visit any planet, moon or space station that he wanted, but leaving the star system was never a possibility.

Witnessing the way his closest bodyguard and attendant keep Axelar in this state made Ves very angry.

"Why are you letting Axelar ruin his entire life with a constant supply of stimulants? Why are you preventing him from leaving the star system so that he wouldn't have ready access to an unlimited amount of drugs?"

After digging a bit in Axelar's mind, he figured that it was unlikely that there was some sort of conspiracy afoot.

Clan members simply held an extremely high status in Terran society. They were pretty much nobles in all but name, and spent millenia in indoctrinating their own citizens to revere the ancient clans!

Nobody dared to affront a clan member like Axelar. Even Benny never failed to appear dutiful despite ignoring some of the orders from his charge.

"Maybe the Rubarthans have a point." Ves mentally concluded. "The Terran clans are so arrogant, complacent and out-of-touch with reality that they don't deserve to be the masters of humanity anymore."

That was a bit of an unfair statement to make. While Axelar's entire conduct was deplorable, nearly every other Terran were much more decent people. Some of the members of high society that Axelar occasionally interacted with were very sharp.

Still, the fact that every Terran tolerated Axelar's excesses was a massive failure. The Greater Terran United Confederation possessed so much wealth and power, but could not fully make use of both as long as parasites like Axelar continued to drain the resources of the superstate.

"If I even had a fraction of your wealth and power, I could have founded the greatest mech company in the Komodo Star Sector!"

Ves began to grow increasingly more concerned as Axelar continued to waste his days in drug-addled dazes.

"It's been an entire week since I entered your mind and you still haven't done anything productive."

It began to dawn on Ves that he could not maintain his stance of hiding his presence anymore. That might have worked with mech pilots stuck on a battlefield and who were already motivated to fight, but someone like Axelar obviously needed to be pushed into piloting a mech.

"If I wait for you to enter the cockpit of a mech on your own volition, I'll probably have to wait for months!"

That was why Ves dropped his conservative stance and prepared to take a more active role in the mind of his host. He extended some of his Spirituality and tried to manipulate the mind of his host.

Although Ves didn't entirely know what he was doing, he nonetheless attempted to encourage Axelar to pilot a mech.

Ves utterly failed.

Right now, Axelar was so smashed that someone could walk up to him and punch his face without eliciting a response!

Any subtle impulses from Ves instantly got washed away by the highs that Axelar constantly subjected himself to on an hourly basis. Even during his sleep, Axelar hooked himself to a sophisticated auto-injector that constantly pumped his unconscious mind with delirious stimulants.

There was not a single moment where Ves ever witnessed Axelar in a sober state. As long as this wastrel continued to let Benny inject his body with formulas, Ves would never be able to steer his host into piloting a mech!

Ves came to the unfortunate conclusion that he needed to take more direct action.

"Subtlety won't work here. Even firmer action isn't enough to overpower the chemicals that suffuse your mind."

The problem with influencing a genetically enhanced human like Axelar was that he was fairly resistant to mental manipulation. This was partially by design as the ancient clans didn't want to make it easy for nefarious parties to brainwash their descendants.

This basically meant that Ves needed to take a stronger and more direct approach. Instead of tickling Axelar's mind with a feather, he should instead employ a hammer!

"Even a hammer is not enough to overcome all of the chemicals and intoxicants in this wastrel's brains! I'll have to bring a mech to crack it open!"

Ves readied himself for action. Normally, he would never dare to do something as drastic as the intervention he was about to do, but any sympathy for Axelar had already evaporated.

Even if Ves was a little too rough and inflicted permanent brain damage on Axelar, that was hardly worse than his existing state!

#### Chapter 1152 Mentally Displaced

Ves struck when Axelar was asleep. While his resting mind still reveled in the cocktail of chemicals that continuously entered his blood stream, the drugs he tended to take during his sleep were fairly mellow.

With Axelar asleep and sedated with his sleep-inducing stimulants, Ves stopped hiding his presence.

After a lengthy pause, he stopped hesitating on what he was about to do. Whether it worked or not, there was no harm in trying. The only way that Axelar would stop partaking in drugs and do something productive in his life was if Ves intervened directly!

To that end, Ves decided to see if he could take over Axelar's body.

"I'm a Journeyman now. My Spirituality and consciousness is much stronger than before!"

While Axelar was a very talented mech pilot, his mind was constantly in a mush. Even if he was sober, he could never contend against Ves on a spiritual level.



While normally Ves would never think that something like this would work on other people, it was different when he directly shared the same space as Axelar's consciousness.

"I'm already within the fortress of his mind."

Taking over a castle from within! Many of the constraints that made it impossible for Ves to affect the minds of other people no longer applied in this case.

"Let's see if my guess is right."

Ves concentrated his consciousness and exerted his considerable Spirituality. He extended his spiritual energy and formed them into numerous tentacles.

He then spread them outwards from his consciousness and attached them to various points in Axelar's largely empty mind.

"Let me take over your body!" Ves mentally cried.

His method was very rough and unrefined. As soon as his tentacles connected to Axelar's mind and body, an overwhelming amount of unconscious stimuli and impulses overwhelmed Ves' consciousness!

"Damn it! It's too much!"

Even if Ves drew back on the connections he formed with Axelar's mind, he still couldn't cope with the intense flood of irrelevant data! It was as if every single cell in Axelar's body cried out for his personal attention!

"Damn it, this isn't working!"

Ves didn't give up, though. He refined the connections and filtered more and more useless data from entering his consciousness.

The goal of his efforts was to establish something akin to the man-machine connection between a mech pilot and a mech!

Yet the man-man connection that Ves sloppily tried to form did not take shape.

"Is it because my brain isn't wired right?" He wondered.

Perhaps if Ves was a mech pilot, then he would have been able to succeed in this method. As it was, no matter how much Ves restricted the data, he couldn't filter out nearly enough to exert any control on Axelar.

The first method failed.

"I guess it'll never work as long as I'm not a mech pilot."

He tried the second method next. Instead of forming a connection with Axelar's mind and body in an attempt to 'pilot' him like a mech, Ves instead decided to take a more dangerous course of action.

He bunched up his consciousness and concentrated his thoughts. He tried to emulate Venerable Foster's domineering force of will.

It was a bit more difficult than Ves expected. His advancement to Journeyman transformed much of his spiritual energy from a malleable gaseous state into a fixed crystalline design seed.

Even if his total spiritual strength had increased, the proportion that he could mold in other shapes was limited!

"It's as if my spiritual development is fixed ever since I advanced to Journeyman!"

That was an unwelcome piece of news to him. His dreams of imitating the full range of abilities of high-ranking mech pilots had been dashed.

A human can only be a mech pilot or a mech designer, but not both.

Perhaps this rule was not as rigid in the lower ranks, but once someone advanced to expert pilot or Journeyman Mech Designer, their development trajectory no longer deviated!

"Nothing is impossible in the galaxy, though." Ves cautioned himself. "There's probably at least one exception to the rule, though I've never heard about it before."

In any case, Ves did not fall under these rare exceptions, so his ability to emulate Venerable Foster's force of will was a bit weaker than before.

"Even if it's weaker, it should still be strong enough for my purposes."

Ves doubted his chances if he was up against a genuine expert pilot, but Axelar was far from matching the mental fortitude of a demigod.

In fact, Axelar's mind couldn't be anymore weaker! All the recreational stimulants and decadence that the scion of the Streon clan partook him wore away any semblance of discipline. The only strong belief that this wastrel possessed was his desire to perpetually try out more and more formulas!

"A consciousness as weak as yours is begging to be taken advantage of! You can't blame anyone but yourself for what I'm about to do!"

Ves surrounded his consciousness with his emulated force of will. It kind of resembled an expert that surrounded itself with a resonating energy field.

He then slowly moved his consciousness closer to the depths of Axelar's mind. He did so until his consciousness brushed up against the core consciousness of his host.

What Ves was about to do at this point was very dangerous!

"Let's see if this works!"

With a violent mental heave, Ves' consciousness dove against Axelar's core consciousness and tried to bump it aside!

It didn't budge!

"Damn it, it's anchored somehow."

While the violent collision didn't result in the desired effect, Axelar's core consciousness did seem to get close to shaking loose.

"Maybe I need to exert more force."

Ves pulled back his protected consciousness and tried again!

His progress became more evident this time!

"Again!"

After more than a dozen collisions, Ves finally achieved the result he wanted to see! Axelar's core consciousness lost its anchor and went flying off into the corner of his empty mind!

The displacement left a gaping hole behind which Ves's consciousness quickly occupied!

Success!

A mass of strange and confusing sensations overcame Ves' consciousness as he suddenly felt as if he was partially taking over Axelar's body. While his integration was far from perfect, the connection was deep and stable enough to effect some real change!

Perhaps the only problem was that Axelar's core consciousness flew back to the place that it belonged and bumped against the intruder that took its place.

It was as if it was whining to Ves that it took over its rightful place.

"Shut up and sit down, you dolt! You've been doing nothing with your body for all this time. It's high time for you to straighten up your life!"

Axelar's core consciousness was like a cleaning bot that kept bumping into the same obstacle over and over again. It wasn't really in a conscious state, but it possessed a very strong instinct that it needed to return to its place!

This caused Axelar's core consciousness to continuously bump against Ves' spiritually-active consciousness. While the weak collisions didn't do much damage, Ves felt as if his spiritual strength was slowly being expended.

"It seems I'm on a time limit. I'll exhaust myself if I keep this up for more than a couple of days."

That meant that Ves needed to hurry up with his plans.

He moved on with the first step, which was taking over Axelar's body.

Ves needed to exert a sufficient amount of control over it. If his control wasn't high enough, then Benny or the other staff might sense something amiss!

"I can't arouse too much suspicion from Benny."

Even if Axelar acted a little differently, Benny probably wouldn't take too much notice. Axelar often changed his mood depending on the cocktail of stimulants currently in effect.

A full half hour after Ves took over, he began to get the hang of puppeting a foreign body. Ves tentatively managed to take control of Axelar's body, but the problem was that his fine control was anything but ideal!

As Axelar's body opened its eyes in the early morning, a very different gaze looked out. The numb and cloudy consciousness that previously controlled the body was nowhere present now!

The first thing Ves did was to reach out a hand and press a button on his comm.

"You called, Master Axelar?" Benny's voice sounded out from the comm channel.

"Yeah. Please flush my body. I'm in the mood for something different."

"Pardon me, Master Axelar, but it isn't time for your scheduled flushing yet."

"Just do what I say, Benny!" Ves yelled back in Axelar's voice. "I'm tired of experiencing the same old highs!"

Although the order that Ves had given was a departure from the norm, Benny still did as ordered.

After moving Axelar's body to his villa's treatment center, the doctors on staff began to flush it of most intoxicating chemicals. After that, they put the body into a submerged tank and activated some processes that repaired most of the damage the stimulants had wrought.

From a purely physical perspective, Axelar's body had been reverted into a state to before he became addicted to stimulants!

Normally, Axelar would immediately inject himself with a host of drugs in order to experience the same highs over again.

Ves was different. When Benny walked up to Axelar with a syringe in hand, Axelar's body raised its palm.

"Stop. No more for now."

Benny frowned. This command was extremely odd and completely unlike the old Axelar! "Pardon, Master Axelar?"

"Tell me, which high is better? The rush of experiencing the thirty-seventh formula's high, or the adrenaline rush of putting my life on the line on the battlefield?"

"I can't say, Master Axelar."

"There's no comparison between the two! All the formulas have gone stale. There's nothing new for me to enjoy anymore now that I've taken every

possible stimulant that exists. I think I have a better idea where I can get my dose of excitement! I should go into battle!"

Benny appeared speechless for a moment. "That is.. a very bold sentiment."

"The first step is to sell my pharmaceutical company. I no longer need my formulas. Please get rid of all of my stash."

"Are you certain, Master Axelar?"

"How else am I going to be able to push myself into battle when there are easier solutions within reach! From now on, I don't want you to get rid of all of my stimulants, but prevent me from taking a single dose! Even if I beg and scream for a hit, don't give in no matter what, alright?!"

"...Understood, Master Axelar. We will carry out your orders to the best of our ability."

Whether Benny would actually abide by the orders or not did not matter too much. Ves just wanted to sell the excuse that Axelar was pursuing a different kind of high now. That Axelar might possibly be prevented from injecting a stimulant into his body from now on was a vindictive form of revenge from Ves.

As Ves mentally snickered at the thought of Axelar crawling on his knees for another hit, he returned to his instructions.

"Secondly, please prepare my application to the Trail of Tears elite training program."

This time, Benny looked at his charge with alarm. "Master Axelar! I urge you to think through. The Trail of Tears is one of the Terran Confederation's toughest training programs for mech pilots! Last year, only a single mech pilot out of a cohort of thousands managed to break through to expert candidate!

One in four participants died while half of the survivors returned broken and traumatized!"

"I've already made my decision!" Ves yelled in Axelar's voice. "I don't fear the Trail of Tears at all! I'm too good to fail this training program! Prepare an application for me immediately!"

"Very well, Master Axelar. I shall make the arrangements."

Ves recognized the pliant tone that Benny used whenever he faced an order he did not intend to fulfill. It was going to be difficult to register Axelar to the infamous Trail of Tears, but Ves had his ways.

A devious grin appeared on Axelar's hijacked face.

#### **Chapter 1153 Gatekeeper Benny**

As 'Master Axelar' began to make decisions that fell firmly outside the mold of the real Master Axelar, Benny naturally grew a bit suspicious.

While Axelar often flirted with dubious pursuits, that was when he was in the middle of a drug-fueled haze.

This time was different! Axelar went by for hours without asking Benny for an injection, which was practically a galactic record!

Ves, who momentarily hijacked Axelar's body, knew he was arousing more and more suspicions from Axelar's erstwhile bodyguard, minder and personal attendant. Even the rest of his staff felt there was something amiss about their uncharacteristically sober master!

The relationship between Axelar and Benny resembled the one between Ves and Gavin.

There was a very major difference, however.

In his capacity as the boss of the LMC, Ves firmly held on to his power and authority. Gavin only executed the decisions that Ves had made. At best,



Gavin only provided some advice and selected a range of options to influence the decision-making process.

After more than a week of riding in Axelar's mind, Ves gradually realized that Benny acted beyond those constraints.

In his role as Axelar's gatekeeper, Benny exercised a lot of power in seeing which decisions went through and which ones were conveniently thrown away and forgotten.

There wasn't anything malicious about Benny's conduct. To the old Axelar, a sane and sober gatekeeper who second-guessed anything his drug-addled charge came up with was a very necessary presence!

Who knew how much money Axelar would waste or how far he'd drag down the reputation of the Streon Clan without a human sanity check in place!

The big issue that Ves faced was that now that Axelar's body had been taken over by a saner person, Benny still decided whether Axelar's orders should be obeyed!

Ves could not get rid of this perpetually present attendant. The only times when Benny left Axelar alone was when his charge visited the bathroom or went to sleep!

Even then, Ves could forget about sneaking any commands past his bodyguard!

"Do you ever sleep, Benny?" Axelar's body idly asked.

"My gene treatments removed my dependence on sleep. Haven't I told you this before? You ordered me to undergo these procedures yourself so you would always have me on hand to inject more stimulants in your body!"

Ves mentally puked. What the hell?! Axelar turned his own gatekeeper into a perpetually active golem who stood ready to interpret every decision whether it was day or night!

Any hopes Ves held towards getting rid of Benny disappeared. After several attempts at giving Benny a day off or a vacation, it became clear that Axelar wasn't even in control of his own household.

Instead, it was Benny who held the final say!

Ves also realized that Benny didn't truly serve Axelar. Instead, he and the rest of Axelar's staff were loyal retainers of the Streon Clan. They acted on the interests of the ancient clan and had probably been sent to Axelar to keep a leash on the wastrel of the clan.

Now that Ves took over Axelar's body, he took over the Streon Clan's leash as well!

He developed a bunch of ideas on how he could take advantage of his control over the body of a Terran clansman. The sheer amount of wealth at Axelar's disposal tempted Ves enormously. If he set up some sort of development fund oriented towards the galactic rim and tweaked the conditions so that it fit the LMC, then Ves could become insanely rich after he got back from this abnormal Mastery experience.

Yet such an un-Axelar decision would never pass through Benny's inspection! For his entire life, Axelar had never been generous enough to set up a charity or an investment fund meant to benefit the galactic rim.

To Terrans like Axelar, the galactic rim was a complete backwater! They did not even waste a single second of thought in the vast but poor and sparsely-populated expanse.

If Ves set up anything that benefited a company or individual in the galactic rim, then alarms would immediately ring in Benny's head!

Even now, Ves already drew plenty of suspicion. His decision to sell the pharmaceutical company and get rid of all their existing formulas put Benny on high alert.

The jerky movements of Axelar's body didn't help either. Ves' consciousness simply hadn't been wired to puppet a vastly different body. All the sensations he received were distorted and his reaction speed was abysmally slow.

The lack of control was so bad in fact that Ves had to order Benny to seat himself on a souped-up hover chair!

To cover up for his invalid state, Ves offered the best excuse he came up with to his increasingly-concerned attendant.

"I've never spent this long without a fix." Axelar's body jerkily gritted its teeth. "I'm stronger than this! I won't give in! If I can't get past this hurdle, I can forget about experiencing the ultimate high!"

Fortunately, Benny seemed to buy the act. "Master Axelar, one does not simply quit taking stimulants. Your physiological parameters are highly unstable."

"Don't think about offering me another fix! It's not the same anymore! In fact, it should be your job to stop me from taking any drugs from now on! No matter how much I moan or cry, I will never go back to the same stale old highs!"

Everything the old Axelar did was to pursue extreme highs. Ves had no choice but to work around this obsession. It would be far too suspicious for Benny to hear that his charge quit taking stimulants entirely.

This was why Ves wanted Axelar to sign up for the Trail of Tears. The Terrans set up the elite training program for mech pilots who wanted to unearth all of their potential. Every mech pilot who participated in the Trail of Tears dreamed to advancing to expert pilot!

Yet out of the thousands that join each batch, only one lucky mech pilot came out as a winner at most!

Sometimes, the Trail of Tears failed to produce a single a single expert candidate. Instead, the majority of participants either died or became so broken by their hellish experiences that they stopped piloting mechs entirely!

It was very unlike Axelar to express a desire to take part in one of the harshest training programs for elites. However, only a radical decision like this paved the way for Ves to take further actions related to piloting mechs.

"Let's visit a mech arena." Axelar's body commanded. "I'm feeling rather itchy for some mech-on-mech action. What's the biggest event going on right now?"

"A grand group match between the Tyon Terminators and the Haspel Asps is about to take place at the Cube Arena."

"Great! Reserve a VIP seat for me! I want to have the best seat in the arena!"

Benny saw nothing wrong with this decision. Even if Axelar wasn't always enthusiastic about piloting mechs, he still liked to see other mechs in action.

Several hours later, Axelar, Benny and a host of other bodyguards arrived at the floating Cube Arena.

The Cube Arena was the biggest floating mech venue in the Tyon System. Situated in high orbit of Tyon IV, it was as large as a space fort as it hosted enough room for multiple three-dimensional arenas!

The Cube Arena's sophisticated internal structure could adjust its arena spaces if needed. During regular days, it partitioned its internal space into several smaller arenas that constantly hosted various mundane mech duels.

This time was different. The match between the Tyon Terminators and the Haspel Asps was a highly anticipated event! Both teams represented the best

professional mech athletes from their respective star systems, so the pride of hundreds of billions of people were at stake right now!

While the Cube Arena offered enough seats to host tens of millions of spectators, the sheer amount of fans that decided to attend stuffed the venue to capacity!

Naturally, a clansman like Axelar did not have to wait in line like a common Terran. As soon as his personal starship docked at the Cube Arena's exclusive hangar bay, the arena staff personally guided Axelar's hover chair and his bodyguards to an exclusive floating VIP booth that looked over the grand arena space.

The procession arrived just in time as the main match was about to commence. As the announcers fervently introduced each illustrious mech athlete, both teams sent out five mechs each.

The Cube Arena had been configured in a large, kilometers-long empty void this time. There were few obstacles to speak of besides the extremely powerful shields that protected the audience from all of the firepower about to be unleashed. Patches of rocks floated here and there, but the vacuum and the standard gravity being exerted over the entire dueling space resulted in a very confusing mix of environmental conditions.

This was a battle that would test a mech pilot's ability to operate both in a landbound, aerial and spaceborn environment at the same time!

The five-on-five match started. Since Ves wasn't really familiar with both teams, he didn't pay too much attention to the spectacle taking place below the floating VIP booth.

Certainly, the match was extremely exciting. Even if Ves' consciousness traveled ninety years into the past, the technology in use today was extremely impressive!

For example, one multipurpose mech from the Tyon Terminators possessed a fluid shape. It consisted entirely of smart metals and could endlessly transform its shape according to the mech pilot's will! This fluidly-shaped mech was a terror to fight in close combat for that very reason, but it could also unleash energy projectiles or even pieces of itself to fend off distant threats!

Ves figured that mech pilots wouldn't know what to do with the sheer amount of possibilities this feature offered, but the mech athlete who piloted made good use of its traits! The Terminator pilot only employed a modest number of predetermined shapes and varied their exact forms based on necessity.

"Who needs mech designers when you have a mech that can take on any shape you want?" Axelar's body idly commented.

Still, a mech like this came with a lot of downsides as well. The transforming smart metal couldn't match the offensive or defensive power of dedicated parts. It was the ultimate jack-of-all-trades that could perform every role, but only to a mediocre level at most.

The Haspel Asps obviously knew this since they sent a single teammate who excelled in close combat to sandbag the transforming mech.

After getting over the novelty of a mech that consisted entirely of smart metals, Ves turned his attention elsewhere.

Another mech that impressed him was the heavy mech fielded by the Haspel Asps. They employed a heavy multipurpose cannoner that was tough, fast and hard-hitting at the same time!

Not only did its designers pad the cannoner with a lot of armor, but they also paired it with a very powerful set of flight modules!

While the mech expended an extreme amount of energy while trying to propel its frame in different directions, it still posed a huge threat by using ammunition-based weaponry!

The mech's mounted cannons spat out various exotically-enriched rounds accelerated to fractions of the speed of light, causing them to slam against the various shields projected by the Terminator mechs!

Although Ves referred to it as a cannoner, in truth it possessed other capabilities as well. Any mech that got close enough to render its cannons ineffective would have to contend with its collapsible halberd and other nasty surprises!

The strategy of the Haspel Asps seemed clear to Ves. The heavy cannoner not only possessed enough firepower to wipe out the entire lineup of the Tyon Terminators, but it could also dodge and outrun most of its opposition!

The rest of the Haspel Asps tried to hinder as many Terminators as possible in order to let the heavy cannoner do its job. Even if one or two Terminators occasionally slipped the net, the heavy cannoner defied its weight class by flying just as fast as a first-class light mech!

"A mech like this is a massive cheat!"

#### **Chapter 1154 First-Class Comba**

The battle between first-class mechs was an amazing visual spectacle to Ves. He eagerly took control over the transparent VIP booth's flight system to adjust his view.

"If there's no surprise, the Haspel Asps will handily win this match." Benny commented besides Axelar's hover chair. "They completely surprised the Terminators, who expected the Asps to field a very different lineup of mechs."

One of the most exciting aspects about duels between first-class mechs was that it was always a question what configuration of multipurpose mechs a competing team might field next time. Every mech pilot in a first-rate superstate underwent intensive and arduous training in order to master multiple fighting styles at the same time.

Mech pilots with mediocre genetic aptitudes could forget about mastering the use of a multipurpose mech!

Axelar didn't resort to taking recreational stimulants for nothing during his own grueling years at the mech academies. At the elite institutions that the scion of the Streon Clan attended, the renowned mech instructors who presided over the mech cadets cared nothing about their illustrious backgrounds!

Right now, Ves witnessed the results of this highly selective training standards for mech pilots in action. The mech athletes of the Tyon Terminators and the Haspel Asps displayed an exceptionally broad proficiency in dozens of weapon and auxiliary systems!

Whereas the mech pilots of the Bright Republic already struggled with the meager amount of gimmicks that came with the Aurora Titans, the mech athletes competing in the Cube Arena multitasked many different functions without a single moment of hesitation!

The quality of mech pilots simply couldn't be compared.

If a mech pilot from the galactic rim suddenly entered the galactic center, then he would struggle to make use of more than ten percent of a first-class mech's full potential! Even the simpler Terran mechs were incomprehensible maze to the likes of Melkor, Raella and Melinda!

In contrast, if one of the mech athletes of the Terminators or the Asps visited the galactic rim, they could quickly dominate the dueling scene. Having mastered the use of all sorts of mech configurations and weapon systems, it was not very difficult for them to get used to the limitations of a specialized mech.

It was pretty much like piloting a crippled multipurpose mech that was stuck in a single narrow configuration.



A huge disparity existed between a Brighter mech pilot and a Terran mech pilot. The latter invested much more resources into the quality of their mechs and their training standards for mech pilots.

While Ves adjusted the position of his VIP booth, he recognized another crucial element.

Every Terran was genetically enhanced from the start! If their parents were already genetically superior from the start, then their offspring inherited those superior genes as well!

In addition, much like how the CFA offered gene optimization treatments to their own, each Terran enjoyed a lifelong regime of modest genetic updates.

Those with greater status and wealth like Axelar Streon enjoyed expertly tailored gene adjustments on par with CFA officers. Meanwhile the average citizen still made do with more modest treatments offered by the Terran government.

A vast gulf in parameters existed between a baseline human from the galactic rim and an average Terran citizen!

If the differences between the average people was already so pronounced, then the disparity grew even wider among mech pilots. All of the genetic and other types of enhancements available in the Greater Terran United Confederation meant that each mech pilot turned themselves into genetically-engineered super soldiers!

The result was that each mech athlete that competed in the Cube Arena today fought like quasi-expert candidates. All of them displayed an inhuman level of skill, reaction speed, multitasking that baseline humans simply couldn't match!

Not only that, but the well-trained mech athletes also displayed the instinctive cunning and sound judgement of an expert candidate while not actually being one themselves!

"None of the mech athletes are expert candidates, right, Benny?"

"Of course not Master Axelar." His attendant dutifully replied. "The instant an expert candidate emerges from the mech games, they are instantly taken to an elite mech corps. Expert candidates are simply too valuable to squander in an idle sport like the mech games."

Even in one of the most advanced superstates of human civilization, expert candidates and expert pilots were in short supply!

The restricted warfare the Terran clans engaged in meant that expert candidates and expert pilots didn't have to be afraid of being swamped by a gigantic horde of enemy mechs!

Both sides were only allowed to deploy an equal amount of mechs. Each expert pilot played an outsized role in an elite mech corps!

The match progressed as Ves predicted. Even though he didn't fully understand at least half of the high technology on display, it was easy to see that the fast, powerful and heavily-armored multipurpose cannoneer mopped the floor with the Tyon Terminators!

"The Terminators are faltering!"

Under the interference by the other mechs of the Haspel Asps, the Terminators could only sporadically pursue the heavy cannoneer. However, despite the range of functions at their disposal, the Terminator mechs failed to damage the heavy cannoneer!

The well-designed mech fielded by the Asp simply dodged or outran any Terminator mech with the offensive power to punch through its armor.

As for the lighter Terminator mechs that could match their opponent's speed, the heavy cannoneer simply decided to withstand the light attacks while saturating their foes with area bombardment!

"What a cheat mech!" Ves sighed. It was a nightmare to face this kind of mech in battle.

At some point, the Terminators adopted a defensive posture, indicating that they intended to wait until the highly-mobile heavy cannoner exhausted the ammunition reserves for its main cannons.

That was a big mistake!

While Ves recognized that the heavy cannoner only carried so much ammunition, it possessed more than enough rounds to beat at least half of the Terminator mechs to a pulp!

Now that it was no longer being pursued so intensively, the powerful Asp mech began to chip away at the Terminators, starting with its fancy but insufficiently tough smart metal mech!

Even a thousand different transformations didn't prevent this mech from falling in battle. As soon as the mech lost functionality due to all of the smart metal being blasted away from its core frame, the Cube Arena projected a strong spherical shield around the wreckage in order to preserve the life of the mech pilot.

With one mech down, the Terminators immediately fell into a disadvantage. Group matches like these often hinged on which side managed to take out a mech from their opposition!

Although some of the mechs of the Asps didn't appear to be in good condition anymore, they had a much easier time in hindering the remaining Terminator mechs!

By the time the heavy cannoner finally ran out of ammunition for its main cannons and resorted to taking potshots with its meager energy weapons, the Terminators only had two mechs left.

"The Haspel Asps has defeated the home team of the Tyon System! The Terminators have let down their fans!"

The majority of audience members were locals. Each of them booed the winners and expressed their dissatisfaction for the thorough trouncing of their home team!

The Haspel Asps paid little attention to the hostile masses. Every mech athlete got used to such reactions from the public. They were the away team, after all!

As the victory speech went underway, Ves figured it was time to enact his plan.

"The Terminators should have beaten the Haspel Asps!" Axelar's body angrily remarked.

"No team can guarantee victory, Master Axelar."

"The Asps are too devious! If not for making use of such a ridiculous mech configuration, they would have been trounced by our boys!"

Ves didn't really mean these words, but he made Axelar's body say them in order to prepare for his next action.

While Benny firmly limited Axelar's interactions, Ves intended to go around his gatekeeper by communicating in a very different fashion this time.

The key here was that Ves controlled the flight systems of the VIP booth!

During the match, Ves behaved like an honest enthusiast and used his control over the VIP booth's flight systems to get a better view of the action. He didn't employ too much speed and exerted a lot of care so that it did not approach any other VIP booths.

At this moment, Ves threw away all of his previous restraints. With a mighty jerk, Axelar's body violently pulled physically-projected elevation control!

The VIP booth that previously overlooked the arena area from above abruptly flew down! Automated safety controls quickly kicked into action and stalled its flight to prevent it from colliding against the protective shields.

Ves expected something like this to happen. He manipulated a different control that caused the booth to roll around its axis in a spinning fashion!

While Benny quickly moved to take Axelar's hands away from the projected flight controls, the antics of their VIP booth had not gone unnoticed!

One of the announcers reacted exactly as Ves expected!

"Look at the naked disrespect exhibited by this VIP booth!" The excited announcer said. "Ah, it's Master Axelar's personal booth! It seems that our local Streon clansman objects to the outcome of the match! Let us hear from the illustrious Axelar himself!"

The millions of disappointed fans of the Terminators immediately perked up upon hearing that. Was Axelar about to do something that could salvage their pride?

Benny looked aghast at his charge. If Axelar expressed a desire to contest the outcome of the match, then the bodyguard would have nodded in acknowledgement but quietly ignore the demand.

Yet now that Axelar attracted the attention of millions of local Tyons during an event that was broadcasted live throughout the galactic net, there was no possible way for Benny to force his charge to back down!

To back away after performing such a provocative action in public would shame the entire Streon Clan!

A huge set of projections appeared in the arena area, giving every member of the audience a good view of the interior of Axelar's VIP booth. Everyone

stared rapturously at Axelar's body lounging lazily on his hover chair, waiting for him to open his mouth!

Ves began his show.

"Thank you for your attention. As a proud member of the ruling clan in the Streon System, I cannot stand by as a foreign team tramples upon the dignity of our star system!"

Axelar's body grinned. "The Asps may have defeated the Terminators, but they haven't overcome the best of what the Tyon System has to offer!"

The team captain of the Haspel Asps stepped forward from down below. "The Asps have beaten the mech pilots of your star systems once. We are not afraid of thrashing you a second time!"

"Hahahaha!" Axelar's body arrogantly laughed. "If you're so confident, how about facing me in battle tomorrow in this very arena? Let's have a one-on-one mech duel to determine whether the Haspel System or the Tyon System are the best!"

The crowd went wild! While they didn't have a good idea of Axelar Streon's skill in piloting mechs, it should be quite considerable considering his high status.

The team leader of the Haspel Asps was not a timid person by any means. "Sure! I'll face you in battle myself! I hope the mech arena is ready to shield your cockpit from the destruction I'm about to unleash tomorrow!"

"Hahaha! I should be the one to caution you! I am the best mech pilot of the Tyon System! As a future graduate of the Trail of Tears, I'm afraid I won't be able to hold back when we face each other with our mechs! A quick victory tomorrow will be a nice appetizer for what's in store for me in the future. Perhaps one day you'll have the privilege of boasting that you faced someone as impressive as me in combat!"

Benny tried to maintain an impassive face, but it was getting harder and harder to maintain his composure!

All of the smack talk that Axelar engaged in with the away team's leader increased his internal distress!

The more Axelar boasted, the harder it was to walk back on the challenge! At this point, no force in the galaxy could prevent Axelar from stepping into the Cube Arena in a mech!

Not only that, but Axelar publicly announced that he intended to participate in the Trail of Tears! Benny's attempt at stalling Axelar's application to the infamously grueling training program instantly became moot!

#### **Chapter 1155 Less is More**

As soon as Axelar stopped entertaining the audience with his smack talk, Benny firmly carted his hover chair out of the VIP booth and back to his personal starship.

They returned to Axelar's villa as fast as possible. Benny didn't want to take any risks. Trying to deal with Axelar when he was sober and free from the influence of recreational stimulants was a lot harder!

To his credit, Benny didn't make any attempts to abort the impending duel tomorrow. While Axelar may be a wastral of a mech pilot, he still represented the Streon Clan in public!

The surprise announcements that Axelar issued earlier could not be revoked! It was a given that he would enter into a mech duel with the team leader of the Haspel Asps and participate in the Trail of Tears soon afterwards.

All of this meant that Axelar could no longer spend his days as a drug-addled wastrel! Ves deliberately acted to cut off any means of returning for Axelar to return to his previous routine of spacing out on stimulants.

Ves did not forget about the point of this Mastery experience. He did not intend to live a day in the life of an elite Terran clansman.

He only cared about witnessing how a mech pilot handled a hero mech!

When Ves initially displaced Axelar's core consciousness and took over control, he quickly realized that it was impossible for him to pilot a mech in this condition.

Ves wasn't a mech pilot! His mentality wasn't geared towards piloting mechs. Even if he did somehow manage to form a stable man-machine connection with a mech, he lacked the training of how to operate a machine that required at least fifteen years of dedicated training to become proficient in its use!

All of these conditions basically meant that Ves needed to put Axelar's core consciousness back in control over his own body. Only when Axelar consciously committed to piloting a mech would Ves be able to glean valuable insights on the operation of a hero mech!

Still, getting Axelar to pilot a mech was harder than it sounded like. Ves knew what this wastrel was like.

The instant Axelar regained control over his own body, he'd probably do his best to weasel his way out of piloting a mech and instead order Benny to supply him with another batch of recreational stimulants!

"Hehe. Not this time." Ves mentally chuckled.

This was why Ves went through his extreme measures. He wanted to press Axelar in a corner. Only when this junkie had no way out would he finally do what Ves wanted to see!

All the while, Ves' control over Axelar's body slowly deteriorated. The weak but constant attacks from the core consciousness accelerated the drain in spiritual strength.



Soon enough, Ves needed to relinquish control of the body to its rightful owner. Until then, he still wanted to manipulate the circumstances to his favor.

Benny happened to speak up at this time once they returned to the villa.

"Master Axelar, considering the high import of tomorrow's duel, I can contact a Master Mech Designer from the clan to design your dueling mech."

"No!"

"Pardon?"

"I said no!" Axelar's body uttered. "I don't need a mech designer! I'm better than the Masters of the clan! The best mechs are the ones I designed myself! I refuse to bring a mech designed by a stranger into the duel tomorrow!"

"Master Axelar!" Benny looked shocked. "While your ability to design mechs is exemplary, you don't need to do all the hard work. Please allow a professional mech designer "

"Are you saying that professional mech designers are better than me, an eminent member of the the greatest clan in the Confederation?!" Axelar's body pressed.

"You are the greatest." Benny had no choice but to say.

"Then that's all the reason I need to design my own mech!" Axelar arrogantly declared. "If I don't pilot my own mech tomorrow, then I might as well park whatever garbage mech I'm piloting in the center of the arena and let the Haspel Asps run it through!"

His extreme statements finally managed to fend Benny off from obtaining a mech from the market or enlisting the aid of a mech designer.

Ves had a very good reason to make Axelar pilot a mech designed by 'himself'. If Benny shipped in a mech designed by someone else, it inevitably came in the form of a bloated, feature-rich multipurpose mech.

That was exactly what Ves was trying to prevent!

The Terran mech designers seemed to delight in cramming as many different systems as possible in their mechs. Not a single Terran mech did not come with at least five different weapon modules and more than a dozen additional modules!

Yet as the battle between the Terminators and the Asp demonstrated, versatility was not always the solution. The heavy cannoner-like mech fielded by the Haspel Asps employed fewer modules than normal, but nonetheless made an outsized contribution to the away team's eventual victory.

This was adding less redundant gimmicks onto a mech left more space to empower its core functions!

In contrast, the smart metal mech with its infinite amount of transformations never realized its full potential. While it was adaptable to many different situations, pure overwhelming force easily overwhelmed anything it could throw at its opposition!

With the resources and technology the Terrans had at their disposal, it was no surprise that they eschewed the rigidly-defined mech archetypes that was common in the galactic rim. A versatile and adaptable mech could be employed in many different situations and would never become irrelevant.

Yet witnessing multipurpose mechs in action made Ves realize that prioritizing versatility was not always the best idea. He had seen too many mechs that came with numerous possibilities, only to make use of half of them or less.

"More is not always better."

The capacity of a mech constantly divided up even further with the addition of each additional system. As the Asps had already shown, sometimes it was better to impose a bit more limits on the range of options in order to ensure that each system delivered better performance.

"Less is more."

That said, hero mechs fell into a strange category. It was an oddball of a mech archetype in that it was technically a hybrid mech. A Hero mech could be regarded as a simplified version of a real multipurpose mech.

In regions where multipurpose mechs hadn't taken off, the emergence of hero mechs led to a considerable amount of controversy. How could a mech be both good at fending off opponents up close and from afar?

Yet mech designers somehow made it work. While they were never cheap by any means, hero mechs eventually carved out a small niche in the market. To mech pilots who were skilled enough to wield both a rifle and sword with skill, piloting a hero mech allowed them to express their full capabilities in battle.

"Two weapon systems on a mech is already good enough. Adding more is just icing on the cake."

In the context of Terran-style mechs, hero mechs were awfully limited. In a place like the Bright Republic, a hero mech was extravagantly versatile. The exact same mech type solicited two very different reactions depending on the prevailing mech standards in the region.

Contrasting the responses to the two different settings made him realize that hero mechs didn't need to be versatile. They just needed to be good in two specific roles at once.

"Perhaps that is the true meaning of a hero mech. They are defined by their role and purpose rather than their design attributes."

The multipurpose mechs used by the Terrans were capable of fulfilling many roles, but only slightly excelled at some of them. More badly-designed mechs simply lacked a solid identity. Their designers didn't conceive of a solid vision before they designed the mechs.

Ves did not want Axelar to pilot such a muddily-designed mech in battle tomorrow.

"When it comes to designing mechs, If I want something done right, I have to do it myself."

To that end, Ves controlled Axelar's body to summon up the auto designer program.

While Ves would rather design a mech using his own methods, he would never be able to get away with it with Benny and the staff watching Axelar's every move!

Axelar Streon was very clearly a mech pilot. For this dummy to suddenly become a proficient mech designer at the level of a Journeyman overnight would ring all kinds of alarms! Benny would immediately realize that Axelar's body had been taken over by a mech designer!

In order to prevent Benny from acting out, Ves had no choice but to maintain Axelar's previous penchant for using the auto designer to develop a mech design on the fly.

Ves tried hard not to express his disgust at the auto designer system. Extremely powerful Terran processors provided the AIs with an incredible amount of thinking power. This enabled the auto designers to come up with mechs that were at least as good as anything a competent mech designer could produce after several years!

Auto designers like this had probably put many mech designers out of business!

For Ves to work with an auto designer was tantamount to heresy in the mech industry!

Still, despite the disconcerting implication of its existence, an auto designer offered one big advantage.

First, its raw processing power was so immense that it didn't take long for it to present the user with a technically-sound mech design.

Considering that Ves challenged the Haspel Asps to a duel tomorrow, he couldn't take his sweet time in designing a perfect mech!

As for the lack of control over the automated design process, Ves dug into the manual for the auto designer. He quickly found out that it enabled its users to configure the degree of automation and that it allowed for manual overrides over almost every aspect of the mech.

Ves started to get the feeling that the auto designer wasn't originally meant to be used by laymen. The deeper he delved into the various settings of the auto designer, the more he realized that perhaps it was actually invented as a complement to busy mech designers!

An auto designer was already capable in the hands of an idiot like Axelar Streon. Yet in the hands of a real mech designer like Ves, he could easily design mechs that were ten times as good while requiring only several days of work!

He didn't feel so limited now that he recognized the potential of the auto designer.

"It's actually a crutch."

Perhaps to Novices and Apprentices, the existence of an auto designer was like a cheat. Yet if they grew to be too dependent on its functions, they would never be able to express the full range of their design abilities.

How could they improve their skills and advance to Journeyman if they were too lazy to do all of the hard work by themselves?

The auto designer was not a panacea. They neither replaced mech designers entirely nor enabled them to advance with ease.

They were simply crutches that were suitable for use when a mech designer was awfully short on time.

Finding out about this made Ves feel a little better for himself. He only regretted that he had less than a single day to produce a hero mech design.

"It's unfortunate that the mech will be materialized into existence."

Ves already encountered materialized mechs before. They possessed no souls. Instead, they felt like a large collection of particles that just so happened to accurately resemble the shape of a mech.

He still wanted to try and see if he could impart some X-Factor to his materialized mech. Ever since he advanced to Journeyman, Ves began to think that his design seed increased his capabilities in some areas.

The opportunity to test whether his new capabilities extended to mechs that came into existence through materialization was a good opportunity to find out the truth!

"I hope it's not completely useless in this case!"

Axelar needed every advantage he could get in his upcoming mech duel!

### **Chapter 1156 A Protagonists Mech**

What was a hero mech?

From a technical perspective, a hero mech was simply a mech that occupied the role of both a rifleman and a swordsman.

Sounded simple, right?

Yet when Ves tried to come up with a vision for a great hero mech, he felt that this answer didn't encompass the full range of meaning behind a hero mech.

First, the name. Why not call it a musketeer mech or a dragoon mech or something?

"Because those names don't describe the usage of the mech." Ves' consciousness mentally mused inside Axelar's mind.

He tried his best to ignore the hammering of Axelar's weak core consciousness.

The name of the mech type conjured up a specific image. Anyone who heard the phrase would think of the many action dramas broadcasted throughout the galaxy of adventurous young mech pilots who performed many heroics with their versatile mechs.

Whether it was to save a galactic princess from the clutches of nefarious pirates, or buy time for a beleaguered colony fleet to flee from a horde of astral beasts, a hero mech always managed to save the day!

The hero mech archetype couldn't be separated from its public image as the iconic mech of a protagonist!

Even in a first-rate superstate like the Terran Confederation, before the advent and popularization of multipurpose mechs, hero mechs already gained a reputation for achieving the impossible and fighting in a flamboyant manner.

From the perspective of a show maker, Ves knew that pairing up the main character with a hero mech was initially out of convenience.

If the protagonist piloted a knight mech, then they'd be toast if they encountered an aerial ranged mech.

This was why the early action dramas that incorporated mechs predominantly paired their main leads with ranged mech. A rifle-bearing mech looked much cooler.

Yet that was not enough!

What about facing threats up close? What if a light skirmisher stabbed a dagger into the back of the main character's mech?

There was nothing cooler than to see the main character's mech whip out a sword and fend off the fatal blow and turn the tides on its attacker!

Initially, the portrayal of a mech that excelled at both melee and ranged combat excited the audience!

At the same time, the mech designers in the early days of the Age of Mechs experimented with pairing mechs with both close-ranged and long-ranged solutions.

The results were rather mixed. The technology wasn't quite there yet to make both of them effective at the same time in a single mech.

Yet the popular emergence of hero mechs in fictional dramas led to a spike in demand for such a mech!

Business-savvy mech designers smelled an opportunity. If they succeeded in developing a viable mech that matched the unrealistic capabilities depicted in the action dramas, then they stood to make a lot of money!

A lot of mech designers poured a lot of time and effort into making hero mechs practical, and eventually they succeeded!

The early hero mechs did come with a lot of caveats. The tech to make hero mechs possible was a lot more advanced and expensive than normal, as long as customers could bear the price, they got themselves a mech that was much more versatile than anything else on the market!

Eventually, the hype died down when the new mech pilots learned that it was really hard to be skilled in both modes of combat at the same time. Most baseline mech pilots could forget about mastering both marksmanship and swordsmanship in their lifetimes!



"A hero mech is only suited to be piloted by a hero!"

Only the hero of the story who possessed a high genetic aptitude or possessed some other advantage could make full use of such a complicated mech!

Soon enough, many mech pilots learned this lesson the hard way! Stuck with expensive mechs that only exhibited half of their potential in most cases, these fancy investments led many mech pilots and outfits to ruin!

Aside from some exceptions, hero mechs were thoroughly derided as an impractical mech type only fit for entertainment!

"Yet that's a rather outdated perspective now, especially in the more developed regions of human space."

Four-hundred years after the start of the Age of Mechs, both humanity and technology advanced by leaps.

The Terran Confederation already surpassed hero mechs and moved on to true multipurpose mechs for some time! Why settle for two weapon systems when a mech designer could stuff ten weapon systems in a single mech frame?

The more weapons, the more versatility a mech possessed! Not only that, but destroying or depleting the ammunition of one weapon system would not instantly cripple the mech's offensive capabilities.

Mech pilots in advanced states also kept up with progress. Through the help of genetic and other biological enhancements, mech pilots became more skilled in the operation of multiple weapon systems.

"All of this is very expensive, but as long as a state can afford it, it's definitely worth it! Who doesn't love a mech that's useful in every situation?"

Right now, the galactic rim fell behind on this trend due to limited resources. Without a sufficient amount of wealth, the conditions to make hero mechs and multipurpose mechs practical simply weren't there yet. Ves estimated it would take at least a couple more centuries to make them affordable and usable in his home state.

The current landscape of mechs never stood still. While some mech designers saw it as a detriment, true mech enthusiasts always looked forward to innovation.

"Let's get back to my mech design."

Recalling the history behind the hero mech type provided him with much-needed context. No matter if it was the galactic rim or the galactic center, hero mechs always played a controversial role.

If Ves paired Axelar with a hero mech instead of a standard multipurpose mech, then he would definitely be raising a lot of eyebrows!

A very scary realization suddenly emerged.

"The challenge I issued on behalf of Axelar is going to be watched by billions or trillions of people!"

A huge proportion of the population of the Tyon System and the Haspel System would be watching the live broadcasts of the upcoming duel. Plenty more fans from other star systems would tune in as well to witness whether a scion of the Streon Clan could back up all of his boasts.

Along with the tens of millions of people who would be viewing the upcoming duel in person at the Cube Arena, Axelar practically became the star of an action drama!

"What better way to compliment his expectations by foisting a hero mech onto him? This situation is practically begging for it! I'm sure he'll love the attention!"

That last one may be a stretch, but pairing Axelar with a hero mech would make a very strong statement!

The thought of influencing the perception of trillions of Terran citizens with a hero mech designed by himself pumped him up! How could he not be excited to exhibit his creations in front of such a huge audience?

Even if he was designing a mech to display in front of stuck up Terrans, the thought of influencing the lives of so many people, even if it was just for a single time, appealed to his sensibilities as an artist!

Perhaps Ves could even shift the course of history in the Terran Confederation with his stunt!

"This is the perfect stage for a hero mech!"

That brought Ves back to his immediate problem of coming up with a vision and concept of his hero mech.

The main goal of this Mastery experience was for him to observe how a mech pilot operated a hero mech. The insights he gleaned from his observations served to sharpen his approach to designing this special mech type.

Yet what about now?

Even with the use of an auto designer, Ves struggled to come up with a direction for a hero mech.

"This is like putting the cart before the horse!"

In his previous Mastery experiences, Ves always got to ride in the minds of mech pilots who fought with existing mechs.

He essentially studied how mech pilots interacted with the products of other mech designers!

This time was different. Ves was in a rare position where he could design the mech and observe its usage up close!

This was a unique if daunting opportunity!

As soon as Ves wrapped his metaphorical head around this realization, he became excited.

Rather than work around the paradigms of other mech designers, Ves could start off with a clean slate and develop his own statement of a hero mech!

Due to the circumstances of his Mastery experience, Ves did not intend to hold back too much. As long as the mech put up a decent fight tomorrow, he'd be able to learn from this experiment and do better next time.

As for the other consequences? Ves didn't care! Let Axelar deal with the aftermath! The clansman deserved all of the trouble for being such an unproductive wastrel!

Since Ves intended to design a mech that deviated from the norm in this setting, he might as well run with it and shock the audience tomorrow.

"Two. My mech only needs two weapon systems."

The team leader of the Haspel Asps piloted the heavy cannoner-like mech in their match against the Terminators.

That did not mean the same mech would appear again. Terran mech athletes could easily afford to change the configuration of their mechs before every match. It was always a completely surprise what mech configuration they fielded next.

Yet no matter what kind of multipurpose mech the Haspel Asps fielded tomorrow, a well-designed hero mech would be able to handle any variation in mech configurations!

"Two weapon systems are enough to deal with the vast majority of multipurpose mechs in existence!"

In the past, hero mechs used to mean that the mech pilot was exceptionally skilled in multiple competences at the same time.

In this current time and space, a hero mech took on a different meaning. It sent an undeniable statement of confidence! A mech pilot who brought a hero mech into a battle against a multipurpose mech basically stated that they only needed two weapon systems to win!

A vision for his mech emerged. It would be a mech that revolved around the concept of two. Two weapon systems. Two heads. Two wings. Two arms. Two legs.

Ves even thought of splitting up the torso into two discrete portions. Even if the left half of the mech got destroyed, Axelar would still be able to put up a fight with the other half!

"A mech like that sounds very interesting, but it's not something I want to design with an auto designer."

He pulled back his imagination a bit and settled for a single unified torso to keep all of the pairs together. Ves did not wish to deviate too much from the hero mech he was commissioned to design for Madame Cecily Curin.

To that end, Ves decided to pair his hero mech with weapons that resembled a laser rifle and a sword, but not exactly.

It would be too gauche for Axelar to pilot a mech that incorporated outdated and underpowered technology.

"Each weapon has to be enough to handle most possible threats."

Something overly complex and specialized may be exceptionally suited in some circumstances, but left glaring holes for the enemy to exploit if they brought the right mech.

Considering that he intended to incorporate only two weapon systems in his mech, Ves could opt for something simple but scaled very well if they didn't have to share any space for other weapon systems.

"If I don't have to insert a ton of gimmicks into the frame of my mech, I have more space on hand to improve its core capabilities. That will do my hero mech design a lot of good!"

Still, Ves hesitated a bit as he faced a seemingly endless amount of choices. The auto designer offered access to all but the most advanced, expensive and most exotic weapon systems!

#### **Chapter 1157 Twin Imprints**

After he browsed the extensive parts catalog of the auto designer, he settled for something the Terrans considered to be standard. In fact, Axelar already made use of them in his previous auto-designed mech, so the selection did not arouse too much suspicion from Benny.

For the melee option, Ves chose the Destroyer Sword. Through the use of extremely advanced tech and materials, the Terran Destroyer Weapons led to an instant shift where mechs needed to be plated with Destroyer-resistant armor plating in order to stand a chance against these powered weapons!

Ves always carried a very strong impression of Destroyer Weapons. Back when he foolishly participated in the Groening Mission to earn some merits from the Clifford Society, he witnessed Captain Felicia Kaine's Cathrec penetrating formidable defenses with ease with her Destroyer Spear!

Ever since the Terrans surprised the mech industry by unveiling the Destroyer Weapons, their rivals struggled to mitigate their destructive capabilities. The Big Two and the New Rubarth Empire all shifted from normal armor formulas to more expensive ones that resisted the unnatural penetration power of a Destroyer Weapon.

Lesser states did not have the money to fund such an expensive shift. Second and third-rate states could forget about fielding mechs that could resist a Destroyer Weapon upfront! The exotics and materials that made up the armor system were simply too unaffordable!

Therefore, even if Ves knew of their existence, he never maintained any hope he would be able to incorporate them into his mech designs anytime soon.

"I guess I'm wrong in that prediction."

Working with a Destroyer Weapon was very novel to Ves. He understood practically nothing about the underlying principles that made them work, but he didn't need to know all of that to incorporate them into his hero mech design.

"They're not so different from a conventional melee weapon. The only major difference is that they have to be supplied with power in order to achieve the most effect."

The power source of a Destroyer Weapon was usually integrated in their hilts. Some mech designers opted to add some redundancy by incorporating a power receiver or something similar that drew out energy from the mech that wielded the weapon.

For the ranged option, Ves opted for the positron rifle. A positron beam was a hybrid damage type that possessed both energy and physical properties.

A positron rifle was fairly trouble to use in atmospheric conditions. They operated most ideally in vacuum because the positrons accelerated out of the muzzle of the rifle annihilated the very air in their path out of existence!

"Still, it shouldn't be a major problem in the Cube Arena. Even if air is pumped into the arena space, the range is far too short to impact the performance of the positron rifle."

Positron beams may not travel at the speed of light like a conventional laser beam, but the rifles accelerated the particles so fast that mech pilots didn't notice the difference in actual use!

The only downside to using positron rifles that they were fairly vulnerable to damage. They were also voraciously hungry for energy and generated heat like a star!

Fortunately, the Terrans developed solutions that mitigated those problems. The power source and heat management systems offered by the auto designer were almost as amazing as the tech employed in the copy of the Amastendira!

"I might not have access to something as ridiculous as a dimensional heatsink, but the high-capacity heatsinks the auto designer already offers are more than sufficient for my purpose!"

Since his hero mech wouldn't be filled with bloat, Ves had plenty of space to stuff an abundant amount of high-tech heatsinks into the design. It should be more than sufficient for Axelar to fire his positron rifle nonstop for the entire match!

Once he decided on the weapon loadout of his hero mech, Ves had a solid idea of the mech he intended to design.

"It's time to take the next step."



How could he not make use of his specialty? Even though the auto designer and materialization systems were very detrimental to the X-Factor, Ves still wanted to see whether he possessed the strength to overcome these barriers.

He still had to deal with the short time limit and the other restrictions in play. Ves did not intend to invest too much into forming the images that underpinned his vision for his hero mech design.

"I can't afford to weaken my Spirituality, or else I'll lose control over Axelar's body! The System might pull me out of this Mastery experience prematurely if I exhaust myself!"

Ves therefore decided that he wouldn't make his hero mech too fancy, at least when it came to its X-Factor.

However, that did not mean he would let any opportunity to empower the images that made up the Triple Division technique.

"I'll leave the totem animal aside. It takes too much effort and time to find a suitable exobeast that can empower the totem animal. In any case, for a hero mech that revolves around the concept of two, it doesn't really seem fitting to make use of three images."

Two images would be enough.

For the base model of his hero mech, Ves intended to enrich it with a small amount of his own spiritual energy. Although he hated to spend his own energy, it ensured that the hero mech he intended to design would firmly embody his own understanding of hero mechs!

"Even if my perspective on hero mechs is flawed and incomplete, it nonetheless belongs to me! Making use of another mech designer's understanding of of this mech type doesn't fit in this instance."

Aside from the action dramas he watched in his youth, his personal experiences with hero mechs also played a major role in shaping his ideas on hero mechs.

The first real instance where Ves witnessed a hero mech in action was during the Detemen Operation. The Flagrant Vandals invaded Detemen IV in order to capture Lord Javier of House Eneqqin!

"Lord Javier didn't make it easy for us to capture him. His hero mech gave us a lot of trouble!"

The noble was one of the few talented mech pilots in the Vesia Kingdom who was skilled enough to make full use of a hero mech! His custom Loquacious Raphael defeated numerous Vandal mechs in battle in the same ease that an action drama got rid of cannon fodder!

The memory of that battle still drew a lot of admiration from Ves. While Lord Javier was still very much a bastard, Ves had to admit that he was probably one of the best non-expert mech pilots in his state!

As for the second hero mech Ves had witnessed, it was very far beyond the norm.

"The Belisarius piloted by Venerable Foster practically won the Vesians the battle on Aeon Corona VII."

How could he not forget about the ridiculously expensive expert mech that the Hafner Duchy provided to one of the most promising young expert pilots to emerge from their ranks? All the Rorach's Bone put into the mech made it into an unstoppable, self-repairing engine of destruction! Not even the pervasive breakdown effect was enough to hinder this wildly expensive mech!

"I'm glad Venerable Foster no longer has access to such a deadly machine."

As far as he was aware of, the sudden flight from Aeon Corona VII caused by Sigrund's awakening forced the Vesians to leave the mech behind. Whether this piece of intel was accurate or not was still in question, though.

In any case, the Loquacious Raphael and the Belisarius both affected his view on hero mechs. Their exceptional performance reinforced the notion that they could play an exceptional role in battle if paired with excellent mech pilots!

"The essence of a hero mech is that they reach their full potential when piloted by heroes!"

While Axelar did not fit the standard of a protagonist as well as Lord Javier or Venerable Foster, he was nonetheless a talented and well-trained mech pilot. The elite Terran mech academies he attended in the past practically forced him to become extremely good in piloting complex multipurpose mechs.

When Ves began to form the image of the base model of a hero mech from his own understanding, he found the process to be easier than before. The design seed he formed empowered his mental abilities in many different ways.

Even so, the image was still mostly pretty on the outside but empty on the inside. Ves merely drew a sketch of the image. In order to make it come to life, he needed to fill it with color.

Right now, Ves tentatively donated the color from his own reserves. He partitioned a modest amount of spiritual energy and injected it into the image.

The base model came to life. While it wasn't a very detailed image, Ves didn't quibble too much over the technical details.

Due to how little spiritual energy he donated, the empowered image of the base model only mildly impressed him. Aside from representing an aspirational view on hero mechs, the empowered image also carried his own imprint!

This was important, because a strong connection formed between him and his image!

"I've never directly employed by Spirituality in this fashion before!"

Ves was fascinated by the implications of this action. He felt as if he possessed a stronger connection to the image than before. Subsequently, any mech design that incorporated the image in its X-Factor extended his connection to them as well!

He could hardly fathom the consequences of this action.

"I don't know what will result from this, but I'm kind of excited to see what happens!"

After forming the image of his base model, he moved on to form the image of the human myth.

Rather than exercising his imagination to form a mythical figure from nothing, Ves decided to borrow from the closest source material at hand.

"Why invent a fictional hero when I'm already in the mind of a real one?"

Although Axelar was anything but a traditional hero, he at least possessed all the right ingredients to be one. It was not impossible for him to step up in his life and live up to his potential!

"You should rejoice, Axelar!" Ves mentally grinned. "I'm going to make a real man out of you, starting with pairing you with the perfect mech for the job!"

The System already inserted Ves' consciousness in the sanctum of Axelar's mind. This meant that Ves didn't have to go through the trouble of penetrating Axelar's spiritual defenses because he was already inside!

Perhaps due to his high genetic aptitude and all the biological enhancements, a small amount of faint spiritual energy floated in Axelar's mental space.

This meant that Axelar possessed the most essential requirement of becoming an expert pilot!

"Now that I recall, most of the mech pilots from my Mastery experiences are exceptional in this regard!"

The first mech pilot that Ves came in touch with in this manner even advanced to ace pilot!

Still, just having the right ingredients on hand didn't mean that Axelar would be able to cook a delicious meal. The wastrel possessed so much potential, but never came close to forming a coherent force of will due to all the recreational stimulants that clouded his mind!

For his purposes, Ves did not need something so extravagant as the force of will of an expert candidate or an expert pilot. As long as the weak spiritual energy carried Axelar's attribute and imprint, it served as sufficient fuel to empower the human myth.

Ves took some time to form the image of the human myth. He used his access to Axelar's mind to draw upon his memories. While it was quite hard for Ves to draw the memories he wanted, he still formed a good impression of Axelar's life.

He even learned a couple of secrets known only to Terrans and to the members of the Streon Clan!

Still, they weren't anything to be excited about. Axelar Streon may hold a high position among average Terran citizens, but he was still a nobody in his ancient clan! No one would ever entrust him with galaxy-shaking secrets!

Ves set aside everything irrelevant and formulated a human myth of Axelar.

Of course, forming the image of an addict was not his intention.

"A human myth is supposed to be larger than life. How can a drug addict be worthy of myth?"

In order to spice up the image of the human myth, Ves decided to embellish it by extending it to the future. He formed a grand, heroic image of an older Axelar!

### **Chapter 1158 Simple but Strong**

Although it took some valuable time, Ves succeeded in forming two empowered images for his upcoming hero mech design.

He had never performed this combination of actions before. Leaving out the totem animal portion of his mental superimposition technique seemed like he was only creating a half-finished image, but he didn't feel that way.

"The meaning I instilled in the image of the base model and Axelar's excellent piloting skill should be enough to fill in the gaps. A hero mech is a very simple machine to pilot for someone like him. His instincts don't require any reinforcement."

A mech pilot as talented as Relia Foster also possessed a highly intuitive approach to piloting mechs.

Once Ves finalized the shape of his two images, he mashed them together.

As expected, they didn't come into conflict. The base model of the hero mech and the human myth of a future Axelar didn't possess any inherent conflicts with each other. In fact, it was quite the opposite. They complimented each other very well!

Without a hostile factor like the image of an aggressive and primal totem animal in the mix, the base model and the human myth didn't put up a hostile front.

As Ves witnessed the two images blending into each other to form a single amalgamation that combined both of their traits, a strange feeling crept up his consciousness.

The base model carried his imprint while the human myth carried Axelar's imprint. Both of them danced in each other's presence before they started merging.

For some reason, Ves had the impression that he was making love with Axelar by proxy!

"Blegh! What a disgusting idea!"

The repulsion that radiated from his thoughts almost derailed the merging process. Ves hastily concentrated his mind again to avoid disturbing the process any further.

Fortunately, it seemed that one of the benefits of his design seed was that he could extend less than his total concentration to perform his design-related techniques.

"That's convenient."

While he still preferred to dedicate his total concentration to his design work, Ves couldn't exactly do that while maintaining control over Axelar's body. Ves constantly had to split off his attention to allow his consciousness to remain in control.

The process didn't take too much time. If Ves was honest, he predisposed the images to merge with each other from the moment he made them. After all, one image consisted of a mech, while the other image consisted of a mech pilot. How could they not get along with each other?

The merged image that resulted from the fusion process was a lively hero mech that possessed real presence!

Ves was very satisfied with the result. While it wasn't the strongest amalgamated image he conceived of, it was one he felt very strong ownership towards!

It was as if it was his child with Axelar!

"Urgh!"

Ves quickly erased that thought from existence.

"Ahem, in any case, I've finished all of my preparations to design Axelar's hero mech."

Now that Ves formed a complete vision and spiritual image for his mech, he was ready to start putting the hero mech together.

From an outside perspective, Axelar's body spent more than an entire hour doing nothing but spacing out. Benny had been growing rather concerned, but not too much since he witnessed his charge spacing out all the time.

The only difference was that Axelar hadn't taken any stimulants this time.

As Benny was wondering if Axelar enjoyed so many stimulants that he developed the ability to get himself high from memory alone, the body finally came back to life.

"Aha! I've come up with the perfect mech!" Axelar's body gloated as his fingers slowly danced across the projected interface of the auto designer.

"Just watch me design the perfect mech to beat the arrogant Haspel Asps!"

Although Ves quickly became frustrated at his lack of fine control of Axelar's limbs, the auto designer wasn't so finicky about precision. Even a six-year old child could design a completely functional mech with the sheer amount of assistance and automation the auto designer provided!

What a cheat! Ves had the illusion that he could perform months of work in a matter of minutes!



It was easy to come up with a functional mech, but it took a lot more effort to make it good enough for sale. Ves did not trust the auto designer AIs to come up with the most optimal solution to every problem. Instead, the AIs tended to skew towards safe and widely-applicable solutions instead.

Ves first started with selecting the components of his mech. He didn't spend too much time differentiating between the countless possible selections. Instead, he used the search and filtering functions to select parts that met his criteria.

"Positron rifle, Destroyer Sword, armor system, power reactor, energy cells, heat sinks..."

As part of his deliberate strategy to design a hero mech that only depended on two weapon system, Ves didn't want to overcomplicate his mech design in other areas.

The Terrans developed countless gimmicks to spice up a mech, from adding the capability to phase them out of existence for a brief time to disturbing the gravity all around them. A lot of these gimmicks resembled the manifestations of resonance from expert mechs.

"Looks like the Terrans have taken inspiration from resonance in their research." Ves mentally noted.

In any case, aside from adding a powerful shield generator to his list of parts, Ves deliberately rejected the use of any other auxiliary modules!

Oh, he felt tempted to add some extra features to his mech. The trend towards multipurpose mechs led to an incredible drive towards miniaturization among Terran component designers.

Every part came in a small and compact package by default. Any Terran mech designer could easily licence these compact modules and slot them into their mech designs no matter how little space they had left!

Yet overburdening his hero mech design with technological gizmos only detracted from the purity of its vision.

His goal was to design a hero mech that mainly depended on two weapon systems to fight!

To that end, rather than enhancing the design of his hero mech with numerous gizmos that possessed a small footprint, Ves would rather use up the internal volume of his mech to shore up its fundamental attributes.

All of this meant that all of the internal components he selected were larger and more powerful than the ones normally utilized in multipurpose mechs!

Having a flight system that took up twice as much space didn't necessarily mean the mech's mobility had doubled!

A mech engine that was twice as big as normal did not mean that the mech was able to exert twice as much force from its limbs!

The truth was that the increase in performance depended on many factors.

In some cases, the law of diminishing returns applied. A part that was twice as big only resulted in a modest thirty percent boost in performance.

The opposite also happened sometimes. A part that was twice as big performed three times better than a standard-sized equivalent!

However, no matter to what degree the larger parts improved upon their smaller versions, they all elevated the fundamental attributes of his hero mech to a very significant degree!

His mech would be tougher, faster, more flexible and more enduring than a multipurpose mech of the same size!

Still, whether a hero mech with strong fundamentals but few options available would be able to beat a multipurpose mech in battle was still in question.

It depended heavily on chance whether the two weapon systems that Ves had selected for Axelar would be effective against the mech that the team leader of the Haspel Asps intended to bring to the arena tomorrow.

"There are ways to mitigate positron rifles and Destroyer Weapons to a point where they are rendered ineffective."

Axelar would be in big trouble if his opponent tomorrow happened to include such solutions!

"Well, I can only accept that this possibility exists." Ves mentally shrugged.

It wasn't his life or reputation he was gambling with anyway. All of the consequences of winning or losing the duel would be borne by Axelar instead of him.

Ves only needed to make sure that Axelar possessed the tools he needed to put up a lengthy fight. He wouldn't be able to glean much insights if Axelar was defeated in a single minute!

With the help of the automation functionality of the auto designer, Ves rapidly put the parts together and integrated them into a coherent and synergistic hole.

Due to the pressing time concerns, Ves did not bother to make too many fine adjustments. Instead, he decided to manually override wherever he could make the most major gains in as little time as possible.

Some of the design choices the AIs came up with really made Ves want to scratch his head. The lack of human logic led to many solutions that technically made sense, but was completely wrong from the perspective of a human mech designer.

"It seems these AIs still have a long way to go before they become indistinguishable from their human counterparts."

Part of the problem was that the mech he was trying to design was a hero mech, which was a very rare mech type. The auto designer was optimized to design multipurpose mechs that were standard in the Terran Confederation.

This resulted in many instances where the auto designer unnecessarily squeezed the amount of space taken up by the components or internal architecture! The auto designer presumed that Ves intended to fill up the mech with additional modules!

It took a lot of digging through the settings and many manual overrides in order to rid the auto designer of this annoying tendency.

Still, Ves wanted to make so many adjustments to the mech generated by the auto designer that he kept Axelar's body up all night and throughout the next morning.

Fortunately, Axelar's augmented body barely became affected by the all-nighter. While his biological enhancements hadn't removed his need for sleep entirely, it was no problem for him to go without rest for a few days.

A procedure as extreme as removing the need for sleep entirely as Benny had undergone was a step too far for most Terrans!

There was something undeniably human about requiring sleep. Even if their bodies didn't require it, their minds still yearned for some downtime in order to rest and recuperate. Only those with strong and disciplined minds could endure the side effects of never letting their minds go to rest!

Even so, Benny never witnessed his charge staying up all night.

One of the most pleasurable moments for Axelar was when he slept under the influence of mellow recreational stimulants! The wild dreams and visions he experienced during his sleep never ceased to excite him! It was as if he traveled to a different alternate universe each night!

Another issue that Benny began to grow worried about was the very abnormal mech that Axelar designed.

It wasn't so obvious at the start, but after an entire night of design work, the mech that Axelar came up with started to look less and less like a normal multipurpose mech!

"Pardon me, Master Axelar." Benny interrupted Ves from his latest adjustment work. "While I don't wish to question your august design abilities, is it wise to add so few weapons and other systems to your dueling mech?"

Axelar's body grinned at his bodyguard. "I don't think so! Two weapons are enough! I don't need anything more than that to trounce the Haspel Asps! How better to show that the mech pilots of the Tyon System are superior than fighting with one of my arms tied behind my back!"

This logic made Benny speechless. "Master Axelar, You don't need to resort to handicaps to prove your superiority to the Haspel Asps. It is more than sufficient for you to duel against the Asps under fair circumstances. Might I remind you that the clan won't be happy if you lose!"

"Hah! The clan should prepare their congratulations for my impending victory! There's no way I'll lose the duel while piloting such a fantastic mech! Trust my design skills, Benny. I'm the best mech designer in the galaxy!"

#### **Chapter 1159 Black and White**

The mech that took shape at the end of the design session set a new standard for Ves. The assistance provided by his design seed guided his thoughts and accelerated his mental calculations by a considerable margin!

A different way to describe the difference was that his intuition with regards to mechs experienced a qualitative leap. Whereas before he needed to perform meticulous calculations or simulations in order to know whether he made a

good design choice, now he could just take one deep look and make a very accurate judgement.

This kind of help was very valuable when Ves was short on time and needed to design a mech on the fly!

Exercising his design seed and his accelerated design abilities gave him a greater understanding of the power of Journeymen.

"No Journeyman is a bad mech designer. Their mastery of the basics is so good that they can work faster and still stay on the right track."

For normal mech designs, it meant they could shave months off the design process. For competition mechs, it meant that they could maintain a decent quality level despite the rush!

Novices and Apprentices shouldn't lose hope, however. As long as they spent enough time on refining and optimizing their mech designs, their works could approach or even surpass the quality of a mech designed by a Journeyman.

"It's just that the time investment is disproportionately in favor of the higher-ranking mech designer." Ves muttered.

He estimated that a Journeyman could casually output three or four quality mech designs per year. It would take an Apprentice at least an entire year just to develop a mech of comparable quality!

"If the time savings for Journeymen is already so significant, what about Seniors and Masters?"

Even if a Senior was capable of pumping out ten mech designs a year, Ves doubted that they would actually rush to design so many mechs.

Rather than mass-produce a large number of decent mech designs, Ves would rather take advantage of his increased productivity by elevating the quality of his designs even further!

In the same amount of time, the quality of a mech designed by an Apprentice simply couldn't compare against the quality of a mech designed by a Journeyman!

One was like a child and the other was an adult! Of course the latter was far more capable of completing the same task!

Amazingly, Ves believed that his design seed could do more than this! Throughout the entire design process, he never felt as if he truly exerted it to its full potential.

It made him question what a design seed truly represented. The name he bestowed it suggested that it was a seed waiting to sprout, but was that really the right description?

"Perhaps instead of a seed, it is more akin to a furnace. It's constantly outputting spiritual waves for some reason."

Ves never understood the purpose and reason behind this strange effect. The only reason why he left it be was that it at least used up spiritual energy drawn from the imaginary realm instead of his own reserves.

He stopped wondering about the properties of his design seed and instead turned his attention to his finished mech design.

Despite the lack of time, Ves still managed to design a very respectable mech.

While the high technology employed by the Terrans something dazzled and confounded him, a mech designer did not need to understand how the parts of a mech actually worked.

A power reactor was a power reactor. Whether it worked by fusion or some insanely advanced multi-dimensional voodoo, the only properties that Ves cared about was how susceptible it was to damage, how much heat it

outputted, how efficient it was in its operation and how much power it could supply to the rest of the mech.

Naturally, Ves took a lot of smaller details into account as well, but it was best not to overthink the matter, especially when he needed to finish a design in a single day!

Ves took the same approach with all the other parts. He had no clue how the Destroyer Sword worked at all, but from the perspective of a mech designer, he could just treat it like a normal mech-sized sword.

He only needed to take a couple of additional complications in mind, such as that the Sword required a power source to function at its best.

Through this process of simplification, Ves avoided getting enthralled with all of the fancy high technology offered by the auto designer. It would do more bad than good if Ves became overly obsessed with stuffing his mech with the most advanced gimmicks available.

The mech that resulted therefore closely matched his vision.

It exemplified simplicity in its capabilities. While it did not incorporate a whole toolbox of solutions, it outperformed most multipurpose mech in every fundamental specification!

The design stood in stark contrast to the feature-rich multipurpose mechs that seemed to offer a solution to every problem!

The concept of two was not only apparent in its mech concept, but also its visual design. While it took up valuable design time, Ves couldn't help but add some artistic touches to its design.

"A hero mech should always stand out! A remarkable appearance is a necessity!"



He decided to coat the mech in a simple black and white division. Its left side was dedicated to the sword. The structure of the arm, shoulder torso and artificial musculature had all been optimized to enhance the power, speed and flexibility of one-handed sword moves.

With all the internal volume that Ves had at his disposal, the hero mech could output very strong or very tricky techniques as long as the mech pilot could keep up with the higher parameters!

"This level of power is not something that Axelar is used to in his previous mechs."

The left side of the mech was dedicated to wielding the Destroyer Sword, so Ves painted it black to symbolize the death and destruction that this weapon implied. When used against any alloy not specifically rated to withstand Destroyer Weapons, the powered sword could cut through anything like a hot knife through butter!

Even the hugely expensive Belisarius with its abundant use of Rorach's Bone would instantly be cut in half in front of this Destroyer Sword! The regenerative properties of Venerable Foster's old expert mech would not even have the time to come into play as it was being chopped up in a matter of seconds!

"Destroyer Weapons are genuine examples of Terran technological might!"

Ves carved and sculpted some generic scenes of destruction and ruination on the left side of the mech.

In order to make a stronger statement, he explicitly browsed the galactic net for footage captured during the latter days of the Age of Conquests.

The horrible archival recordings of planets housing billions of people got blown up just because an insane admiral woke up with the wrong foot off the bed put Ves in the right mood to express the feelings he wanted into his artwork.

The result was that the black-coated side of his hero mech iconified destruction incarnate! The scenes that Ves sculpted throughout the entire surface of the mech all showed various instances of death and ruin!

Although he described the process as sculpting, he did not have the time to manually carve out all of the detailed contours and reliefs. He decided to take the expedient option instead and imported various scenes into the auto designer so that he could apply them onto the exterior of his mech design.

The result was something that already looked like a piece of art.

Ves feared he might have gone a bit overboard on the left side. Anyone looking at the dark, left side of the mech would think that its designer and mech pilot wanted to wipe out the entire galaxy!

He therefore tried his best to balance out the negativity by injecting a lot of positivity on the right side.

The right side was dedicated to wielding the one-handed positron rifle model that Ves selected for his hero mech. While the rifle was both compact and rich with various features, Ves designed the right side of the mech in a way to increase its grip, accuracy, precision and power supply to the maximum!

Those parameters were so high in fact that the ranged effectiveness of the hero mech predominantly depended on Axelar's marksmanship rather than hardware constraints!

"This is a mech that can keep up with Axelar's growth if he ever throws off his addiction and works on his piloting ability!"

A positron rifle outputted a lot of energy. Especially in an atmospheric environment, all the air particles getting annihilated resulted in a very impressive and dangerous light show!

When impacting a solid object like a shield or the exterior of a mech, a fantastic burst of light spread out. Positron weapons were therefore just as flashy as laser weapons if not more!

Therefore, Ves applied a shiny, white coating to the right side of his hero mech design. While a positron rifle was just as destructive as a Destroyer Sword if not more, the difference was that energy also alluded to creation.

Ves controlled Axelar's body to browse the galactic net yet again. This time, instead of viewing macabre scenes of genocide and planetary destruction, he instead browsed footage and articles on the rebuilding and recovery process. What happened to terrestrial planets burned from horizon to horizon? What happened to star systems poisoned by perpetual toxic storms?

As long as planets or star systems wracked by destruction still held any value, humanity always came back and cleaned up the mess. As long as the states or other organizations invested enough resources in the rebuilding process, what was lost could always be recovered!

"Humans are inherently destructive, but that is only one side of the coin. We are capable of amazing feats of creation as well!"

By taking inspiration from the footage of the rebuilding process, Ves sculpted various scenes that alluded to creation on the right side of the mech. Anyone looking at the right side of his hero mech would never think that it was a machine capable of outputting a lot of firepower!

Even though the depictions on the right side of the mech did not entirely fit with the actual purpose of the mech, it nonetheless provided a lot of balance to the conceptual identity of the mech.

Life and death. Creation and destruction. Positive and negative. Day and night. Attraction and repulsion. Ves amplified the duality inherent in every hero mech and themed his entire mech design around polar opposites!

This duality also played out on a spiritual level. Ves possessed a strong affinity for the creation side of his hero mech. He created a lot of mech designs in his career, and some of them went on to sell thousands of copies.

Yet the act of creating mechs only proliferated destruction, as mechs were always used as war machines.

This was why Axelar possessed a stronger affinity for the darker side of the mech. Mech pilots mainly engaged in their destroying his opponents. Mechs also had a penchant for causing a lot of collateral damage in populated areas.

"Also, from a personal standpoint, Axelar has been destroying his life ever since he graduated from the mech academies."

While Ves constantly tried to be as productive as possible in order to advance his career, Axelar neglected his skills entirely, destroying everything his upbringing prepared him for! The two couldn't be more different in this aspect!

To combine black and white in a single mech design was a very difficult concept to realize. From a technical, conceptual and spiritual level, the conflicting sides constantly tried to fight each other!

It took a lot of thought and effort for Ves to harmonize them into a single, stabilized existence.

As Ves regarded his finished mech design again and again, he mentally nodded in satisfaction.

"This is a mech that unifies two weapon systems, two opposite concepts and two opposite spiritual influences."

The spiritually-augmented image he formed to guide his design process continually fawned over the design as it took shape.

Whether Ves worked on the black side or the white side of the hero mech, at least one aspect of the image resonated with the design in some fashion!

Although Ves hated the analogy, to describe the hero mech design as his spiritual child with Axelar was not inaccurate!

"If Axelar and I had a child, how should we name the baby?"

#### Chapter 1160 Out Of His Mind

Ves wanted his hero mech to make a bold statement, so he wanted to pair it with an attention-grabbing name.

"It should be a name that encapsulates its duality as well as its ownership to both me and Axelar."

This was the first custom mech that he designed that was truly spiritually connected to both himself and its intended mech pilot. Ves broke new ground with this mech design, and would model his subsequent custom design approach from the lessons he learned from this brief but insightful experience.

"It's only right commemorate my first real custom mech with a memorable name."

Playing on both the symbolism behind its conceptual and visual design, Ves came up with a fitting moniker for his remarkable hero mech design.

"Let's call it the Ouroboros!"

Ves said those words aloud through Axelar's body, which instantly alarmed Benny!

"Master Axelar, I would highly caution you to avoid adopting such a name for your mech! A name like the Ouroboros might offend the sensibilities of a number of religious factions!"

"I don't care! This is a mech that encompasses both creation and destruction! Like a serpent eating its own tail, it is a mech that personifies duality!"

The excuses that Ves made Axelar say sounded a bit too high-minded for him to come up with on his own. Fortunately Benny merely mistook it as the usual nonsense that Axelar expressed when his mood swung in an extreme direction.

In fact, the style of the mech that 'Axelar' just designed should have been beyond him! The technical and artistic aspects of the Ouroboros far surpassed the previous mechs that Axelar designed with the help of the auto designer!

If Benny possessed at least half of the training of a mech designer, he would immediately notice the abnormal discrepancy in design style. Not only that, but the bodyguard would be able to recognize that the Ouroboros was a product from a genuine mech designer instead of a layman!

It was a good thing that even in the Terran Confederation, no human was omnipotent. Benny might be a great bodyguard, personal attendant, minder, gatekeeper and household manager, but that left very little time for him to study the inner workings of mechs. His knowledge towards mech only extended up to learning how to cope with them in a combat situation!

As long as Ves was able to fool Benny and the rest of his staff, it didn't matter whether other people recognized that the Ouroboros hadn't actually been designed by the real Axelar. By the time people started asking questions, Ves would hopefully be long gone from this time and place.

He was starting to miss his old life. Even if the Komodo Star Sector was a backwater village compared to the fantastic splendor of the Radiant Pulsar Star Sector, there was no place like home.

"The Terran Confederation is a fantastic place to live, but I don't belong here." Ves mentally sighed.

He appreciated the System for letting him experience what life was like in the Terran Confederation. Even though Axelar was anything but a common

Terran, what he observed so far revealed a society that was obsessed with abundance, decadence and technological supremacy.

The nature of conflict was very different in the galactic center. With the absence of external enemies, the powers of the Radiant Pulsar Star Sector instead played a delicate game against themselves. The restricted wars between the ancient clans resembled elaborate, large-scale mech games rather than a total war where states unleashed the full might of their war potential.

"Everything is so fake and artificial here."

The Terrans were some of the most materialistic humans Ves had ever seen! With the wealth and power at their disposal, they could indulge in their fancies to a much greater extreme.

All of the easy living did not do people like Axelar any good. If this exceptional mech pilot genuinely applied himself, he stood a decent chance at advancing to expert pilot just like Venerable Foster! Yet his overly-indulgent clan never pushed this wastrel to make something out of his life!

Did that mean that the New Rubarth Empire was better than the Greater Terran United Confederation?

"I shouldn't come to a hasty conclusion. I've only witnessed what life is like from only one part of the Terran Confederation. A first-rate superstate is much bigger than what I've glimpsed up until now!"

In any case, Ves was ready to wrap up his preparations for the upcoming duel. After he bestowed his two-headed mech design with a name, he prepared to infuse his spiritually-charged image into the Ouroboros.

"It's time to take up your new home."

He always looked forward to this moment. Each design he infused with life was like giving birth to another child.

"I'm no different from a mother!"

This time, the spiritual imprints embedded into the fused image of the base model and the human myth made him the mother and Axelar the father.

The child that resulted from their spiritual union possessed an active connection to them both. This mattered a lot because when the image finally took its place as the design spirit of the Ouroboros, Ves still felt an active connection to it whenever he looked at its depiction!

"Axelar must be feeling the same."

The junkie's weak consciousness paused in its attempt to dislodge Ves' consciousness from maintain control over Axelar's body. Even this dummy had noticed something.

Now that he finally completed the design, he sent out a command to materialize it into existence. While Ves would rather prefer to fabricate it through a more manual process, he could hardly do so without arousing a lot of suspicion from Benny.

Practically every mech in the Terran Confederation was made with materialization technology. Only eccentrics and vintage lovers went back to working with 3D printers and other outdated production equipment.

Axelar may be a conceited individual, but even he wouldn't dare to mess around with error-prone equipment when materialization technology was both faster and more convenient.

It didn't take a long time for the Ouroboros to be materialized into existence. When Ves viewed the mech as it was being loaded into the cargo bay of



Axelar's personal starship, he experienced a deep sense of belonging to the mech!

He donated a part of his Spirituality into its design! This was a very significant action. Ves realized that it somewhat resembled the process of forming his design seed!

There was something very remarkable about a mech that carried his own imprint!

If Ves already perceived this much about his own creation, then what about Axelar, who was its spiritual father?

"Hopefully he'll be able to roll with it and use it to its advantage." Ves mentally muttered.

Axelar's body, Benny and a considerable amount of staff all boarded the starship which lifted off into space. An entire space lane had been cleared for Axelar's passage to the Cube Arena.

The Tyon System became incredibly active right now. News of the unexpected challenge issued by Axelar Streon towards the Haspel Asps spread like wildfire in the Radiant Pulsar Star Sector!

Many enthusiasts who could travel to the Cube Arena fast enough to witness the duel all hopped into a starship and arrived at the Tyon System in droves!

The arena operators took full advantage of the situation and jacked up their prices! Even then, they still sold out all of their seats within minutes!

The participants of the upcoming duel were all entitled to a share of the proceeds, with the winner taking the lion's share. When Ves thought of how much T-dollars Axelar stood to gain if he won, he regretted that he couldn't take any of it back.

Axelar was nothing without Ves and would have continued to waste his life away!

As the private starship arrived in one of the Cuba Arena's private hangar bays, the staff moved the Ouroboros deeper into the arena. Benny made sure to assign a crack team of reliable guards to keep an eye on the Ouroboros and prevent anyone from tampering with the mech.

The upcoming duel affected the reputation of the Streon Clan. Many enemies and rivals would love to tarnish their name by sabotaging Axelar's dueling mech!

"Master Axelar? This way, if you'll please. The mech duel will start in an hour."

Before the duel commenced, the Cuba Arena needed to perform an extensive examination of Axelar's physical condition. Even if it meant disappointing the entire star sector, they couldn't allow Axelar to step into the arena space if he wasn't sound in mind and body!

Ves knew that it was time for his consciousness to step back from Axelar's body and allow its rightful owner to return to his own body.

With a mental heave, Ves moved his consciousness out of the spot it previously occupied in Axelar's mental space.

The original core consciousness immediately moved in to resume its natural space. It formed a seamless connection with the rest of Axelar's mind and body, showing that the reintegration process was a success!

Axelar's consciousness was back in control!

He woke up confused and disoriented. What had happened to him? Where was this place? Why was his mind unusually clear? Where were his stimulants?

Benny spoke up from the side. "Master Axelar, the first physical examination will begin in a few minutes. Please move out of your hover chair and enter the pod the next room."

"Wueh?"

"Please, this isn't the time to doze off. Your impending mech duel against the team leader of the Haspel Asps will start in less than an hour! More than ten million citizens from the Tyon System and the neighboring systems are waiting to see whether you can preserve the honor of our star system."

"Huh?"

"I know that you are in a lethargic condition ever since you swore off from using recreational stimulants for the rest of your life, but you need to push through the psychological withdrawal symptoms you must be going through."

"What?! You got rid of my entire stash of stimulants?! That was at least twenty years worth of doses! And you sold my supplier as well?!"

Benny frowned with worry. "I did so on your orders. Don't you remember?"

"How the hell would I ever remember issuing such insane orders?! I would never forswear my drugs even in my most psychedelic highs! Tell me that this isn't true! If this is a nasty prank of your Benny, then it isn't funny!"

"This is no joke, Master Axelar." Benny said with a firm and serious voice.

"Regardless of the irregularities in your conduct ever since you decided to stop taking stimulants, you've already made a couple of public commitments. To uphold the dignity of your clan, you have no choice but to fulfill your promises."

Axelar threw a stumped and unknowing look towards his bodyguard. "Please refresh my memory, Benny. What did my insane, sober self commit to in public? Nothing too bad, I hope?"

"You made two very bold promises. First, you challenged the the team leader Haspel Asps in a mech duel that is about to start soon. Second, you announced that you will be participating in the next run of the Trail of Tears elite training program!"

"WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?! The Trail of Tears!? Me?! That isn't me?! I would never put myself through that hell!"

"It's too late, Axelar. You can't pull back after announcing your intention to enter the Trail of Tears in front of a live broadcast!"

Axelar was devastated. He held his head and started to moan like a child. How could he possibly volunteer for the Trail of Tears? He was out of his mind to jump into that infamous training program! One in four mech pilots died in every batch! Many of the rest either broke or became mentally disabled!

At this time, a doctor entered the room. "Master Axelar? The first examination will begin soon. Please follow me to the first inspection machine. We'll be running a very fine check of your body to make sure you are in the most optimal state to perform for the masses!"

Axelar was already eyeing the exits. He wanted nothing to do with this insane challenge!