

Mech 2621

Chapter 2621: Alternate Empowerment

Ves considered the Valkyrie Prime to be the Valkyrie variant with the highest potential.

In fact, if he had more confidence in his latest creation, he would have gone a step further and declared it to be his strongest Valkyrie mech straight away!

The reason why he withheld this judgement was because he couldn't definitively state that the Valkyrie Brunhild performed worse than the Valkyrie Prime.

At worst, the Valkyrie Prime sat between the Valkyrie Avenger and the Valkyrie Brunhild. The lack of certain key strategic materials prevented Ves from replicating all of the advantages of the latter.

Ves still felt sore about his inability to obtain Rorach's Bone. If he could add even a modest portion to the Valkyrie Prime, the mech would definitely be able to synergize well with Joshua's force of will!

As it was, Ves and Venerable Joshua had to make do with a mech without any inherent regenerating properties.

The Valkyrie Prime wasn't weak in other aspects. Aside from its excellent energy reserves, powerful flight system and upgraded sensor and communication systems, its defenses had reached an unprecedented level!

He couldn't have processed so much Unending alloy without his new personal workshop. Now that he finally obtained some proper production equipment, he could finally fabricate some proper armor plating for a mech.

Not just the Valkyrie Prime, but also its loadout was made out of Unending alloy! With a spear and shield made out of the same material, Ves believed that it could defeat nearly every standard second-class mech!

As for fending off expert mechs, Ves did not dare to state that the Valkyrie Prime could rely on its resilient structure and gear to get the better of them. Expert mechs possessed many comprehensive advantages that could completely trounce his custom mech.

What Ves strove for with the Valkyrie Prime was not to equal an expert mech, but to get as close to it as possible. That was what he aimed for with his upcoming experiment.

First, he explained his thoughts to Venerable Joshua.

"Do you know what resonance is?" He began.

As an expert pilot, how could he not know? "Resonance is what takes place when I synchronize with my mech. Or at least, that is what is supposed to happen. Outside of my breakthroughs, it's hard for me to accomplish resonance with the Quint. The mech just feels like a block to me. No matter how much I exert my mind, I simply can't get it to resonate."

Ves smiled in reassurance. "You don't have to feel disappointed by that. The Quint is ultimately just a standard mech. Without incorporating any compatible resonating materials in the mech, you can't arouse any resonance."

He wondered how the first expert pilots came into power. Did the first expert pilot coincidentally match up with a mech that just happened to have compatible resonating materials?

Perhaps the mech industry gradually built up an entire framework around expert pilots and expert mechs from this accident!

As Ves currently lacked the time, the knowledge and the resonating materials to develop a proper expert mech, he had to start from scratch.

He was not resigned to letting Joshua languish with the Quint, which he had completely outgrown as an expert pilot. Even if the Valkyrie Prime failed to catch up to an expert pilot, its superior performance should still allow Joshua to exert more strength on the battlefield.

"What does resonance have to do with this mech?" Joshua asked. He directed a suspicious gaze towards the tall and silent Hexer mech. "Are you saying..."

"That is what I am hoping to accomplish."

"How? Is it because of this strange material you are using?"

"Not completely." Ves shook his head. "Let me show you something."

He walked forward and placed his hand on the surface of the machine.

"MOTHER!" He called! "Please infuse this mech with your energy! Please lend your power to the Valkyrie Prime so that my friend here can leverage your strength in battle!"

Of course, he wasn't actually saying that to the Superior Mother. Ves was merely putting on a show to impress and allow Venerable Joshua to understand that the spiritual entity was responsive to those she favored.

While Ves behaved dramatically, he concentrated his mind and formed a connection to the Superior before he sent a more detailed request. He didn't want her to blindly dump her spiritual energy into the Valkyrie Prime.

Instead, he wanted her to channel her spiritual energy to two different destinations.

Much like his other spiritually-enhanced mechs, he wanted the Superior Mother to saturate the spiritual foundation of the Valkyrie Prime.

Since Ves had made this request numerous times, the Superior Mother knew what to do. She quickly began to channel a tiny portion of her abundant spiritual energy into the spiritual foundation of the newly-fabricated mech.

The change was obvious to Ves. His spiritual vision easily observed how the mech's spiritual foundation became thicker and more solid.

"Something is changing!" Joshua remarked. "It's becoming more and more like the Quint!"

The expert pilot might not be as perceptive as Ves, but he stood very close to the Valkyrie Prime. With the help of his life domain, he was able to tell that the custom mech rapidly bloomed to life.

The strengthening that the Valkyrie Prime went through was not comparable to the Valkyrie Redeemers that he had improved for the Wodin Dynasty. He had set a maximum enhancement level of just 25 Ves at the time.

As for the many Valkyrie mechs that the Hegemony produced and supplied to the Hex Army, even if they grew more powerful somehow, their enhancement was capped to the same degree.

Ever since Ves formulated his standard LMC mech template, all of his products aside from those used by his clan could go no higher than 25 Ves.

This did not mean his commercial and commissioned mechs could not grow further. Their spiritual foundation continually grew more unique when they were being used. The only shortcoming was that they wouldn't be able to help their mech pilots progress all that much.

It was different for his LMC mechs. Whenever possible, Ves wanted to saturate his mechs to at least 25 Ves when they were made. This already provided a substantial advantage to his mech pilots. An enhanced foundation developed a unique character faster and became more in tune with their mech pilots.

From the experiments he performed during the Nyxian Gap Campaign, Ves had also learned that higher levels of enhancement resulted in more dramatic effects. The only reason why he did not inflate every mech to at least 100 Ves was because it drained his design spirits and burdened his mech pilots.

In this case, these concerns didn't apply.

Due to the millions of Blessed Squire and Valkyrie mechs in use today, the Superior Mother was swimming in spiritual feedback. Not only that, but her nature as an ancestral spirit also allowed her to receive a tiny amount of spiritual feedback from every Hexer who 'worshipped' the Superior Mother.

Not even the Desolate Guardian was as rich as the Superior Mother!

Even though the overwhelming amount of spiritual feedback that she received was low in quality, the sheer quantity meant that the Superior Mother did not suffer any noticeable loss when she pumped the Valkyrie Prime all the way to 110 Ves!

Yes, 110 Ves!

Since Ves lavished quite a lot of care and attention to the Valkyrie Prime, it wasn't surprising that it started off with a stronger foundation.

Unfortunately, once the spiritual foundation became fully saturated at its current state, any additional spiritual energy that the Superior Mother donated simply spilled over. The Valkyrie Prime was like a bucket that had been filled with water. No matter how much additional water poured into it, the bucket simply couldn't accommodate more.

"Well... maybe that's not strictly true." He muttered.

He usually visualized spiritual energy as a cloud of energetic gas. What if he found a way to compress it into a liquid? What if he could compress it to the point where it turned solid?

Would he be able to strengthen his mech even further?

This was an interesting idea, but not one that Ves could explore at the moment. He shoved it to the back of his mind with the rest of his unexplored ideas. There were so much of them that they practically formed a mountain of neglected possibilities!

"Wow." Venerable Joshua said as he could sense the Valkyrie Prime approaching the strength of the Quint. "I'm not sure what has changed, but I can definitely feel it's more alive now. Is this what will help me perform better?"

"Not quite. If the Valkyrie Prime only approximated the Quint, it wouldn't be special enough for me to make it in person. Just wait for it. This mech is about to get a lot stronger!"

Once the Superior Mother noticed the spiritual foundation could not take any more strengthening, she directed her flow to another aspect of the mech.

This time, her spiritual energy poured into the Unending alloy that Ves had integrated into the Valkyrie Prime!

Ves watched with glee as the Unending alloy easily accepted the influx of spiritual energy. Just like P-stone, the mysterious material actively sucked in the energy as it came near.

The strength exuded by the Valkyrie Prime continued to increase. In fact, it quickly exceeded the strength of the Quint and kept growing further!

"Hahahaha! That's it! That's the spirit! Go on, mother!"

Venerable Joshua looked wide-eyed as he took a few steps back. While he didn't sense the mech becoming more 'alive', it somehow grew 'heavier' to his limited senses.

This was a related but different form of empowerment!

The Valkyrie Prime's capacity was huge. Ves incorporated many tons of Unending alloy into the mech. Not just its armor, but also its frame and much of its internal structure was made out of this extraordinary material.

If not for the fact that Ves had to add a lot of shock-absorbing material to the mech, he would have been able to stuff it with even more Unending alloy!

When the Superior Mother noticed that the Valkyrie Prime's physical frame wasn't even close to reaching saturation, she opened up her spiritual spigot even further. More and more of her spiritual energy gushed into the mech, which thickened its glow to such a degree that Ves and Joshua felt as if they were standing in front of several mech companies of Valkyrie mechs!

The spiritual energy capacity of Unending alloy was actually quite low. Ves had performed some tests beforehand and compared the capacity varying amounts of P-stone to identical amounts of Unending alloy.

After performing many tests, Ves concluded that P-stone was a true spiritual energy battery. In comparison, Unending alloy was mostly just a tough material that happened to store a bit of spiritual energy.

Unending alloy was only able to store around 4 percent of the spiritual energy of an equivalent amount of P-stone by mass.

Yet despite this astonishingly low efficiency, the Valkyrie Prime kept skyrocketing in strength without hitting its limit!

The Superior Mother was pumping so much spiritual energy into the mech that its presence was undergoing a metamorphosis!

Even Ves found himself taking a step back from the ludicrous intensity of the mech. A part of him was afraid of what he had initiated.

Had he gone overboard?

By the time the Valkyrie Prime's Unending alloy neared saturation, the mech was like a lighthouse in the dark! It stored so much spiritual energy that it was as if the mech's incredibly dense glow had materialized into a physical form!

Ves instinctively knew that there was no way for ordinary pilots to harness this monster. It was like a giant exobeast. If he had to express the empowerment of the Valkyrie Prime in numerical terms, then he estimated that the Unending alloy had absorbed spiritual energy equivalent to around 6300 Ves!

"This isn't even the true limit!"

Ves intuitively sensed that dumping spiritual energy in such a crude fashion might not be the best way to make use of Unending alloy. According to the information he gathered, the statues of the dark gods should have been able to store even more!

If he managed to figure out how to utilize Unending alloy properly, he might be able to store ten or even a hundred times more spiritual energy in this material!

He shuddered at the thought. 6300 Ves was already ridiculous compared to his other mechs. Though Ves was confident in Joshua's abilities as an expert pilot, he could not predict what might happen if the Valkyrie Prime became ten times more horrible!

Chapter 2622: Curious New Mech

Technically, the Valkyrie Prime had been enhanced to around 6400 Ves, give or take a few hundred Ves.

To be honest, the humongous strength exuded by the custom mech was so exaggerated that Ves couldn't even examine it properly. He could only make a vague estimate by observing the mech from a distance.

Precision didn't matter right now. What Ves truly cared about was that the Valkyrie Prime was a completely unprecedented mech. Not just its spiritual foundation, but also its physical form received the Superior Mother's bounty!

The two weren't equivalent, though. When the Superior Mother infused the Valkyrie Prime's spiritual foundation with energy, the intangible qualities of the mech directly grew stronger.

The same wasn't necessarily the case when the design spirit dumped the equivalent of 6300 Ves of spiritual energy into the Unending alloy that made up large parts of the physical frame.

All he could say was that the Valkyrie Prime turned into a huge battery of spiritual energy. The vast quantities stuffed inside all of the Unending alloy did not do anything except radiate an exaggaratingly thick glow derived from the Superior Mother's attributes.

Ves already expected an outcome like this. It didn't make sense for the mech to come alive if all he needed to do was to incorporate a lot of Unending alloy or P-stone in a mech before filling it up with spiritual energy.

The true purpose of doing so was not to empower the mech, but to provide the mech pilot with greater leverage. As long as Joshua was able to interact with all of that spiritual energy, then something dramatic might take place!

Once the Superior Mother completed his request and withdrew, Ves tentatively approached the mech again. Though the Valkyrie Prime's glow was still identical in character to a normal Valkyrie mech, its density and solidity was insane!

Ves winced as he tried to step closer. He felt as if he was digging through a huge amount of snow. While his physical body didn't encounter any hindrances, his sensitive spiritual perception experienced something very different.

Venerable Joshua seemed to be better off in this regard. His lower perception and strong will allowed him to bear the pressure a lot better. Once he shook off his astonishment at the Valkyrie Prime's insane empowerment, he became fascinated by the thought of piloting it. He had never experienced a mech with such a powerful glow!

Though Venerable Joshua wanted to hop into its cockpit right away, Ves pulled back the eager expert pilot.

"Wait! Not so fast. I need to make some readings and inspect the mech for any changes. I can't tell whether the Valkyrie Prime's components have changed or malfunctioned during its transformation. With a mech this powerful, we need to put safety first. Be patient while I examne this machine from top to bottom."

"Awww..."

Ves forcibly shoved the expert pilot back and activated a number of scanning and inspection equipment.

The top-of-the-line Hexer scanning machines worked quickly and efficiently. Even when they were faced with a material as hard as Unending alloy, they proved capable of peering through the material as long as they remained in place and boosted their power to their limits.

After a couple of hours of careful examination, Ves tentatively concluded that the physical state of the Valkyrie Prime remained unchanged.

No matter how much spiritual energy it carried, it didn't scramble any electronics nor misalign any delicate parts. Ves felt very relieved once he made this determination.

"Can I pilot this new mech now?" Joshua whined like an impatient little kid.

He spent over two hours doing nothing else but sitting close to the Valkyrie Prime. Though he was intimidated by the powerful at the beginning, he slowly acclimatized to the mech's extraordinarily dense aura.

The fact that Ves introduced Venerable Joshua to the Superior Mother undoubtedly helped. He seriously doubted whether other non-Hexer mech pilots were able to approach this extraordinary mech. Its deterrence factor was actually a lot higher than the Doom Guard and the Ferocious Piranha!

Still, Ves couldn't allow Venerable Joshua to take the mech out for a spin without taking extra precautions. During the scanning process, he had added some additional instructions to the mech's operating system.

He took a deep breath. "Venerable Joshua. Before we proceed any further, I would like to ask if you consent to taking part in a potentially dangerous experiment. I'm sure you can feel how drastically the Valkyrie Prime has changed. I cannot in good conscience guarantee your safety if you test pilot this mech. Are you willing to pioneer this mech by becoming its first mech pilot?"

The expert pilot bloomed a smile in response. "Did you need to ask? Of course I want to pilot this mech! I don't think this mech will treat me wrong. I've already spent a lot of time trying to befriend the mech while I was waiting for you to finish whatever you were doing. I think the Valkyrie Prime knows me well enough to accept me. I think."

"Well, in case you are wrong or are unable to withstand the pressure of piloting this mech, you should shut it down immediately. If you aren't capable of doing so, then the mech will shut down on its own. The extra programming I have added to the operating system will continuously monitor all of your life signs. If any of them turn erratic or enters into dangerous territory, the mech will automatically become unresponsive. Take that into account."

"That.." Venerable Joshua frowned. No mech pilot liked to lose control this way. "Can you give me a chance to—"

"Don't be reckless! There is danger in the unknown. For now, I just want you to pilot it briefly. Just fly out into space and perform some basic maneuvers before returning back to this ship. You can attempt to resonate with the mech if you can. That's the main reason why I came up with the Valkyrie Prime. However, don't exert yourself too much. I don't want you to get hurt or suffer permanent damage."

The heads of regular mech pilots exploded when they attempted to interface with mechs at strengths ranging from 50 Ves to 100 Ves.

Expert candidates possessed a much greater tolerance for spiritually-enhanced mechs. They could handle a mech with 150 Ves such as the Quint while enduring only a moderate amount of pressure.

Expert pilots were much stronger. Even a relatively new expert pilot such as Joshua was very impressive in this regard!

Yet when it came to the Valkyrie Prime, Ves was a lot less confident about the expert pilot's chances.

"Well, all of this speculation is useless. I need to gather hard data in order to prove my assumptions."

Ves proceeded to command his ship to move the newly-empowered mech to the upper hangar bay of his factory ship. His personal workshop was actually not that far away.

As the gravity subjected to the Valkyrie Prime disappeared, a couple of heavy-duty bots clamped the inert machine and slowly pushed it forward.

Ves and Joshua steadily followed the mech as it entered the cargo channels and navigated through it. Other mechs and containers passing through the network of large and cavernous hallways had to halt and wait for the remarkable new mech to pass.

This was one of the perks of being in charge.

"Is that the clan patriarch?"

"Wait, what is that mech?"

"By Ylvaine! How powerful is its glow?! I've never felt anything this strong anymore."

"I want to convert to hexism right now!"

The powerful mech unavoidably sparked a commotion. While the range of the Valkyrie Prime's glow hadn't increased, its intensity had definitely gone through the roof!

Ves didn't mean to hide the mech, though he didn't go out of his way to announce it. Once the mech was finally moved to the hangar bay, he commanded everyone stationed there to move away and keep their distance.

It took an instant for Venerable Joshua to suit up. Ves approached a nearby workstation and took it over as the expert pilot floated upwards until he slipped into the cockpit of the experimental Hexer mech.

Once Ves set up the workstation to monitor the Valkyrie Prime's telemetry, he gave a thumbs up to the mech.

"Alright, Joshua! You can boot up the mech whenever you are ready! Take it slow and don't be in a hurry to move!"

As Venerable Joshua settled into the brand-new piloting chair, he did as he was instructed.

The mech slowly began its initial startup. This was a slower process than normal because the mech meticulously checked each and every system as they came online.

No problems took place. Several minutes went by as the mech became more active. Ves studied Joshua's heartbeat, blood pressure, perspiration and other signs for any indications that he was under pressure, but aside from some elevated activity, he remained remarkably stable.

"Okay, Joshua. The mech should have come online without issue now. How do you feel right now?"

"I feel fine." The expert pilot responded. "This Valkyrie mech isn't as scary as I thought. I can feel its strength, but it isn't fighting against me. A part of it is actively helping me while the rest is just doing nothing but sitting around."

Ves smiled. That was largely within his expectations.

"Remain steady. If you are confident enough, you can sortie into space. Just go out and fly ten kilometers away. Make sure that no other mech or ship is within this distance from you. I will command any nearby patrols to stay away."

The Valkyrie Prime moved. It slowly approached the end of the hangar bay before engaging its flight system.

The mech soon emerged out of the upper hangar bay.

Somehow, word of the strange new mech made by the clan patriarch had spread throughout the fleet. A lot of sensors pointed straight at the Valkyrie Prime as it flew away from the Spirit of Bentheim!

Once it reached a fair distance, Ves demanded Joshua to perform a standard routine of test movements.

This was quite a boring chore. Ves and the onlookers quickly grew bored as the Valkyrie Prime methodically stretched its arms, adjusted its flight system, made some basic thrusts with its spear and waved around its round shield.

None of the readings from the mechs seemed abnormal, but that was because Joshua did not do anything special.

Since the basic performance of the mech was good, Ves felt a little bit adventurous. He didn't want to recall the Valkyrie Prime before satisfying his curiosity.

"Joshua?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Do it. Try to resonate with your mech. See if you can sync up with the dormant strength locked inside the machine. Don't do anything drastic, though. We just need to confirm if resonance can be achieved. We can explore the rest later."

"Alright. I will try. I think I have an idea on how to resonate with my mech."

Venerable Joshua had been waiting to do this for hours. He instinctively expanded his force of will and tried to run it through the entire mech. With him as the center, he tried to harmonize with the machine!

His force of will began to interact with the saturated Unending alloy.

Faster than Ves expected, a weak but increasing glow formed around the Valkyrie Prime!

The other observers became astonished as they spotted something remarkable from the strange Valkyrie mech!

"What is that?"

"Is that resonance? Since when did the clan patriarch design an expert mech?!"

"Wait! It's not quite right! The resonance meters aren't moving a lot. There's something wrong here.."

As Venerable Joshua managed to arouse the hidden potential locked within the Valkyrie Prime, Ves paid very close attention to the resonate meter and other signs.

The smile on his face drooped a bit. The result he was hoping for didn't materialize. While the data told him that Venerable Joshua was definitely resonating with the mech, the efficiency was dreadfully low.

"This isn't true resonance. It's much weaker. It's merely a stronger version of fake resonance. Whatever the case, it's not comparable to the real deal!" He disappointingly concluded.

The goal of his current experiment was to see if he could substitute resonating materials.

He hypothesized that infusing a spiritually-reactive material with spiritual energy could allow an expert pilot to resonate with it. The answer turned out to be yes, but barely!

Perhaps there was a way to achieve a greater degree of resonance, but for now, the Valkyrie Prime was not as strong as he hoped!

Chapter 2623: New Discoveries

What was resonance?

What made resonance between expert pilots and expert mechs special?

What allowed expert mechs to exert greater power when they resonated?

Ves couldn't answer these questions right now. As a Journeyman, he invested most of his energies into becoming better at designing standard mechs, particularly medium humanoid mechs. His expertise in other areas of mech design was sorely lacking.

It would have been great if someone actually explained the working principles of an expert mech. Sadly, neither the prim and proper Master Willix or the former desperado known as the Skull Architect was willing to share any details.

Only Senior Mech Designers and higher were qualified to learn the secrets behind expert mechs. There was no exception to this rule as far as the mech industry was concerned.

Perhaps a mech designer had to reach a minimum level of spiritual development in order to bear the burden of designing an expert mech. The higher the requirements, the more Ves hungered for the relevant knowledge. It had to be an amazing secret if every high-ranking mech designer treated it so seriously!

Yet the more he wanted it, the more the mech industry kept it out of his reach. Ves became more and more frustrated when he continually hit wall after wall. The only legitimate way for him to know the secret was to advance to Senior and pay a visit to the MTA.

That took way too long! While Ves had made brisk progress since he became a Journeyman, his design seed hardly became stronger than before. It was far from reaching any sort of fundamental transformation.

This meant it would take at least several decades for him to become a Senior.

He didn't believe that he needed to reach that point in order to design an expert mech. He possessed greater insights into willpower and spirituality than any other mech designer. As long as the secret encompassed these aspects, he was confident he could exploit his knowledge in a way to circumvent some of the requirements!

The Mech Designer System happened to offer him support. It charged 1 million Design Points to enable him to design expert mechs. This alone proved that Journeymen were capable of designing expert mechs somehow.

Why did it cost so much? One reason must certainly be supply and demand. Aside from the MTA, the System was the only other readily-available supplier. Since Ves wanted it badly, the System could easily jack up the price.

However, it would have been too ludicrous if profiteering was the sole reason. Ves also suspected that he might need some sort of rare resource or undergo some sort of profound transformation in order to design an expert mech. Providing him with the right qualifications must be a very costly procedure, so it should not be a surprise that both the MTA and the System charged onerous prices.

No matter whether Ves was willing to wait or not, the reality was that he wouldn't be able to gain the necessary knowledge and capabilities anytime soon. Since several Larkinson expert pilots were waiting to obtain their expert mechs, this was very bad, because it meant he would have to rely too much on a stronger mech designer's work in order to fulfill this need.

It was irresponsible to entrust the most crucial elements of an expert mech design to an external mech designer. Whether it was Master Moira Willix or Professor Benedict Cortez, they both pursued their own agendas. Who knew whether their goals conflicted with his own? What if they incorporated some hidden backdoor or vulnerability in a Larkinson expert mech design?

Ves had to take matters into his own hands!

While he did not believe he could single-handedly deduce all of the principles that made expert mechs work, knowing something was better than remaining completely ignorant. He wanted to perform some studies of his own in order to uncover at least a couple of insights.

The Valkyrie Prime was his first exploration in this direction. He combined his accumulation of expert pilots, spiritual foundation enhancement, spiritually-reactive materials and design spirits to come up with an experiment that hopefully produced a result related to resonance.

His main ambition was to develop a mech that was capable of generating true resonance.

As the Valkyrie Prime glowed in space, the readings that Ves observed from his workstation indicated that he had failed to reach this goal.

The state that Venerable Joshua and the Valkyrie Prime had managed to achieve was short of true resonance. It was actually similar to fake resonance in that there was hardly any substance behind the resonance.

The bright glow surrounding the Valkyrie Prime was incomparable to an actual resonance shield. While it offered extra protection like any barrier, it was not impressive enough to make it nigh-impervious against lots of regular attacks. Its ability to defend against attacks empowered by true resonance was also questionable.

According to theory, fake resonance was generated by the mech itself. Certain rare exotics possessed the capability to resonate with itself. Whether this was an accurate description or not, these peculiar materials basically provided regular mech pilots with a preview of what it was like to pilot an expert mech.

Fake was fake though. Because the self-resonating exotics lacked the support of a formidable demigod, their strength alone was not enough to elevate mechs with fake resonance to a different height.

At most, custom mechs such as Lord Javier Eneqqin's Loquacious Raphael gained an edge against standard mechs but did not come close to threatening actual expert mechs.

As Ves continued to observe the Valkyrie Prime's telemetry, his experiment produced a similar result.

The only consolation was that the phenomenon he created appeared to be a little stronger than ordinary fake resonance.

"It has to be." He whispered to himself as he flicked through the charts. "I'm using an actual expert pilot, after all. Even without the use of self-resonating exotics, I still managed to invent a new and unknown form of resonance!"

At the very least, the characteristics of resonance his instruments were capturing did not conform to any known patterns. Perhaps some other mech designer managed to produce this result before but withheld it from the public, but Ves had a hunch that he was the first to perform this kind of experiment!

If that was true, the significance of this experiment was very great, especially if he was willing to submit it to the MTA in order to earn a lot of merits.

Of course, Ves did not intend to do something so stupid and short-sighted. His experiment involved too many trade secrets, some of which he hadn't even revealed to Master Willix!

He didn't care about the historical significance of his experiment. What Ves truly wanted to accomplish was to develop a quick and convenient method to strengthen his defenses.

He had five expert pilots, six if he included Venerable Davia Stark. All of them were lacking expert mechs right now, so each of them were being heavily under-utilized.

If he managed to develop some sort of quasi-expert mech that allowed his expert pilots to exert at least a portion of their capabilities, then his expeditionary fleet would be much better prepared to fight against powerful opponents!

"I'm not there yet, though."

The disappointing results gave Ves a bit of a headache. While failure was something that every researcher encountered, he still felt crushed. He was so hopeful about pumping 6300 in a mech that he couldn't conceive why the actual outcome was so weak.

Ves spoke into the communication channel. "Okay, this session is over now. Please halt your attempts to resonate with the Valkyrie Prime and bring it back to the hangar bay."

"What? Now?" Venerable Joshua replied. "It's too soon! I can do better! Let me try something different!"

"We can do something different next time. It's too dangerous to perform tests on the fly. You need to get back and give me time to study the Valkyrie Prime and the data I've gathered. Once I've made some conclusions and developed some new hypotheses, we can perform targeted experiments that are backed by existing data. Now get back to the Bentheim before you try something dangerous!"

"Awww.."

No matter how much Venerable Joshua wanted to continue the session, Ves had the power to pull the plug of his mech. The expert pilot had no choice but to do what he was told.

Ves smirked as he collected and archived all of the data. This was why he preferred to work with Venerable Joshua. Every other expert pilot was temperamental and demanding. They possessed strong egos and were very willful.

In fact, Venerable Joshua could be just as assertive as his peers. It was just that his obsession for LMC mechs made him unusually deferential to Ves. His domain also made him a bit more approachable.

"He's the perfect test subject for me." Ves concluded.

While his guinea pig brought back the Valkyrie Prime, Ves attempted to contextualize his results.

Though the session only lasted for a short amount of time, the new form of resonance showed some distinct properties.

As long as he replicated the phenomenon a few times, Ves was confident enough to claim he discovered a new form of resonance.

"What should I call it?" He idly wondered. "Since it sits between fake resonance and true resonance, should it be called half-true resonance?"

That was an awful name. Ves immediately threw it away.

He tried to come up with alternatives.

"Half resonance. Demi resonance. Partial resonance. Incomplete resonance."

None of those suggestions satisfied him. Each of them signalled that the new form of resonance was stunted or crippled. He needed to come up with a more positive descriptor.

"Larkinson resonance. Emotional resonance. P-resonance."

None of them sounded appropriate for this form of resonance. They didn't encapsulate what he had managed to achieve.

There were two conditions to forming this new form of resonance.

First, it needed a high-ranking mech pilot. Anyone below expert pilot was unlikely to achieve what Venerable Joshua had accomplished earlier.

Second, it required a new form of mech that Ves needed to classify. The mech in question was no different from a standard mech aside from incorporating spiritual storage materials that was filled with spiritual energy.

"What should I call this mech?"

He needed to come up with a name that he could use in public but did not reveal any secrets.

"P-mech?"

This was the clearest option to him considering that P-mechs could also function as P-stones. Both of them were capable of storing spiritual energy.

However, as Ves looked at the projection of the Valkyrie Prime, he came up with a better name.

"Prime mech."

The name sounded a lot more elegant. It was simple, clean and totally un-descriptive unless someone knew the truth. Ves had no qualms spreading this designation to the public considering that he intended to make prime mechs exclusive to the Larkinson Clan.

It was still too risky to allow others to get their hands on this new kind of mech!

"If prime mechs possessed a lot of untapped potential, which he suspected might be the case, then it was vital to explore its characteristic form of resonance further."

"Then the new form of resonance produced by this mech shall be called prime resonance!"

Whether prime resonance would live up to its name remained to be seen. All Ves knew right now was that he had opened up a brand new research direction that could yield several possible innovations!

As Ves fantasized about prime resonance, someone suddenly stormed in the hangar bay and flew straight towards his workstation!

"VES!" Gloriana angrily yelled. "What is the meaning of this?! Why did you keep me in the dark about this new Valkyrie variant?! And what have you done to create this odd version of fake resonance? TELL ME EVERYTHING!"

"Miaow!"

Her cat sprinted after her owner as well!

A sinking feeling overcame Ves. The reckoning had come. Hell hath no fury like a woman left out of an interesting experiment!

Chapter 2624: Hexer Mechs for Hexers

Before Ves could turn and fend off his wife, she reached him and grabbed both sides of his collar.

Her face pressed right into his own! "Why did you make Venerable Joshua pilot this new Valkyrie mech?! A HEXER MECH SHOULD BE PILOTED BY A HEXER!"

She attempted to jerk his body back and forth, but her weak arms failed to do more than cause his head to shake a bit. He innocently raised his palms.

"Calm down, Gloriana! You can argue with me, but please don't do so here. Our entire clan is watching!"

He waved his arm across the entire hangar bay.

There was no privacy to be found here. When Gloriana looked around, she spotted several mechs, mech pilots, mech technicians and other equipment.

That wasn't all. She knew that the monitoring system must be listening in as well.

She forcibly calmed herself down. "Fine. Let's bring your new Valkyrie mech back to my workshop and discuss what exactly you have done."

"Hey! This is my project! My mech should be brought back to MY workshop!"

The two argued for a bit until Gloriana reluctantly acknowledged his point.

She still glowered at him as a couple of cargo bots slowly dragged the Valkyrie Prime back to Ves' workshop.

"Miaow."

Even Clixie directed her ire at Ves!

"Good girl." Gloriana complimented as she picked Clixie up and held her pet against her chest. "Ves has been very naughty today. He went off to make a Hexer mech without involving a Hexer mech designer. What's even worse is that he asked a non-Hexer to pilot his homegrown creation. Don't you think that sounds ridiculous?"

"Miaow!"

"You hear that, Ves? She thinks you're wrong as well!"

"Uhm, Clixie is just copying you, you know." Ves pointed out.

"SHUT UP!"

When they eventually returned to the workshop, the bots placed the Valkyrie Prime back into the assembly system.

Ves activated a comprehensive diagnostic routine. Scanners and sensors quickly came to life and began to inspect the mech from top to bottom.

Venerable Joshua had emerged from the mech a while ago. He looked distracted as he kept thinking back on the unique sensation of resonating with the Valkyrie Prime.

While he had never piloted an actual expert mech before, Joshua guessed that there had to be some similarities.

At the same time, Gloriana dragged Ves to a private office space inside the workshop. She let Clixie go, allowing the cat to skulk around and stay on guard.

Gloriana placed her hands on her hips. "We're alone now. Can you tell me what you have been up to behind my back?"

"I was just conducting a small study."

"Liar! This is way more than a small experiment! Do you think I'm blind? You invested a lot of that 'Unending alloy' to make this mech. As far I know, you have been very stingy about using up this strange material you brought back from the Nyxian Gap. There is no way this Valkyrie variant is just an experimental platform!"

"Okay, I admit it." Ves sighed. "The Valkyrie Prime is supposed to be a replacement for Venerable Joshua's current mech. The Quint is a good machine for expert candidates, but it can't enable expert pilots to exert their full strength. Joshua needs a more powerful mech that possesses a higher skill ceiling and can tolerate more powerful maneuvers. While I can't develop a full expert mech, it is not that much of a problem to come up with a variant of the Valkyrie Brunhild. To be honest, I initially wanted to fabricate the Brunhild, but we don't have any Rorach's Bone."

"Hmmm..." His wife frowned. "From what it looks like, your Valkyrie Prime is more than that. Our strategic materials reserve doesn't contain any self-resonating exotics! How did you manage to accomplish resonance? Did you withhold crucial information?"

Ves vigorously shook his head!

"I didn't hide anything! It's just that I found a new way to empower Unending alloy. When I built my mech with this material, I filled it up with spiritual energy. That has caused the mech to become.. special. This is new to me as well, so don't ask me what it can do exactly. The test run you've witnessed earlier is the first time I put this idea into practice! I haven't even processed all of the data I've gathered!"

Gloriana placed her palm on her face.

"I can tolerate you performing an experiment by yourself. I don't have a problem with that. If you want to tinker around with a possible new application of your design philosophy, then you don't need to involve me. What I do have a problem with is your disrespect towards Hexers! I know you don't like them, but that doesn't give you the right to make your own Hexer mech and pass it on to someone who is completely unrelated to my home state!"

"This is not a mech that is meant to be utilized by the Hegemony!" Ves defended himself. "I've made it exclusively to increase the combat strength of our fleet. As I told you earlier, while our expert pilots are waiting to receive their expert mechs, I wanted to give them a second-class mech derived from our existing work that is adapted to some of their abilities. I don't have a lot of options at this time. Between the Blessed Squire, the Transcendent Punisher and the Valkyrie product line, and it's clear that the Valkyrie mech is the most suitable choice for our situation."

His wife pounded her fist against his chest.

"Don't you remember the fundamental rule of Hexer mechs?! Male mechs are meant to be piloted by boys and female mechs are meant to be piloted by females! Why didn't you choose Venerable Orfan or Venerable Dise? They might not be Hexers, but at least they're women!"

Ves held her wrist before she could pound him for the umpteenth time. "I did not choose to develop a mech for them. I chose to start with Venerable Joshua for some very good reasons. Not only is he eager to take part in my experiments, he is also our most adaptable expert pilot. He can pilot any LMC mech! As the initial test run has just proven, Joshua is fully capable of piloting a Valkyrie mech!"

"Just because he can doesn't mean he should! I won't dispute your claim that Venerable Joshua can pilot a Hexer mech, but it's not right! Back in the Hegemony, what you have just done is strictly prohibited. The authorities won't hesitate to confiscate your mech and put you and your friend into prison!"

Ves smirked. "It's a good thing we're not in the Hegemony, then. We are Larkinsons. Our clan is completely independent and not an extension of your home state. I don't have to abide by the Hegemony's arbitrary and discriminatory rules. In the rest of human space, it is not unusual to see women piloting masculine-looking mechs and men making use of feminine-shaped mechs."

"But—"

"—And don't attempt to bring up the issue of rights." Ves cut off his partner. "The Hegemony formally gave us permission to make use of the Hexer mech designs they've commissioned. Perhaps your home state assumed that we would follow all of its traditions and customs related to its mechs, but that isn't mentioned in any agreements!"

"You..."

"If you set aside the fact that the Valkyrie Prime is a Hexer mech, it is just a custom second-class mech. No one aside from Hexers cares about the gender of its mech pilot. This is why I felt free to make this mech for Venerable Joshua. This is also why I didn't want to involve you in this project either. I knew you would kick up a fuss and bring in

invalid arguments to stop me from designing a suitable mech for one of our expert pilots."

"You could have chosen to develop a variant of the Transcendent Punisher instead! It's just as powerful if not more than the Valkyrie Redeemer! Venerable Joshua has already proven that he can pilot Ylvainan mechs."

Ves crossed his arms. "Are you being serious? The Transcendent Punisher doesn't even have a flight system! Sure, it's a solid mech and possesses lots of firepower, but it is a one-dimensional machine that doesn't give full play to Venerable Joshua's varied skills. He's much more useful if he pilots a mobile mech. He excels at piloting assault-oriented mechs, and the Valkyrie product line completely fits this category!"

"It still looks wrong to me! If you needed a test pilot for your Hexer mech, then why didn't you turn to Venerable Brutus? He would love to help you in your experiments as long as I ask nicely."

"Have you been listening to me, Gloriana?! The Valkyrie Prime is not a disposable experiment! It's a stopgap mech for Venerable Joshua! I'm killing two birds with one stone by developing this mech. That's efficiency for you. Besides, Venerable Brutus is primarily a ranged specialist, while the Valkyrie Prime possesses powerful melee capabilities. Not only is there a mismatch between mech and mech pilot, but your brother is already piloting the Star Dancer! It doesn't make sense to tailor the Valkyrie Prime to an expert pilot that already has a fine expert mech."

It took several more minutes to rebut and deconstruct Gloriana's objections. Even though her Hexer sensibilities still objected to his project, logic was on his side.

She didn't have a leg to stand on and she knew it. Once she realized that her husband wasn't going to appease her, she finally got off her high horse.

"Okay, I get it. You want to perform some experiments while developing a new mech for Venerable Joshua. While I don't agree with your decisions, I won't stop you from proceeding with your project."

Finally. Ves was about to head back to the main hall of his personal workshop, but Gloriana quickly stood in his way.

"You're not leaving me out of this! You should have brought me in the moment you chose to work on a Hexer mech. Juliet can keep watch over the design lab."

She pressed her body up against his own. Her scent wafted in his nose. She smelled like honey and flowers today.

He didn't have any energy left to fend her off. He slumped his shoulders in resignation. "Okay. However, I'm in charge of this project. While you can help me with analyzing the

data that I've gathered and providing me with a second opinion, I will decide how to proceed."

"I'll do my best to help you succeed. I'm not your enemy, Ves."

Now that they have made up, they emerged out of the private office while discussing the details of what Ves had done.

He quickly summarized his goal, his theories, his decisions and the outcome of the initial test.

When he introduced the concepts of prime resonance and prime mechs, she finally looked impressed.

"That's quite a good naming scheme? I'm not sure if anyone has already used the term 'prime mechs', but I think it is quite appropriate in this case. You can even extend it further to the key materials that makes this possible. Unending alloy and any other exotic with similar properties should be classified as prime materials."

That was actually quite a good suggestion! Ves immediately embraced her idea.

"I actually have two different prime materials in stock. The P-stone that I have shown you before is another one. It's too bad that I only have a modest collection of lumps. While the storage capacity of P-stone is much higher, it is a soft and fragile exotic that is not available in larger quantities. Sourcing more P-stone has actually troubled me for several years. As for Unending alloy, you already know where I got it from. I don't think we'll be able to find it anywhere else!"

The limited supply of prime materials severely limited how many prime mechs they could make.

Chapter 2625: Do You Even Lift, Joshua?

Once Gloriana clung to Ves like an adoring wife, Clixie no longer hissed at him. Instead, the furry cat cutely crawled on his lap while he checked the data.

"Miaow~"

"According to these readings, the physical performance of the Valkyrie Prime did not receive any noticeable boosts." Gloriana pointed at her terminal. "Fake resonance has a much more limited scope of improvement. It's usually just the components that incorporate self-resonating materials that are boosted. True resonance is broader and can affect the entire frame of a mech."

There was no way to arouse true resonance without pairing an expert pilot with an expert mech.

The only other method that could produce a comparable result was forced resonance, which only happened when mech pilots broke through. This was no different from winning the lottery, so no one ever pinned their hopes on banking on forced resonance despite not needing any expert mechs.

Ves had actually hoped his experiment produced either true resonance or forced resonance. The former was like winning the jackpot while the latter was like getting the second prize.

Reality on the other hand saw fit to hand him a consolation prize. While prime resonance appeared to be stronger than fake resonance, it wasn't very useful in this context.

Ves pointed his finger at the projected schematics of his mech. "The problem with what you've just described is that my mech's armor system and internal frame is almost entirely made out of Unending alloy. The prime material I've used is also top notch in terms of defense. Strengthening the defenses of this material even further is completely redundant."

He would have wanted the prime resonance to enhance other aspects of the Valkyrie Prime. Increasing the mobility and offensive power of his mech would have a measurable impact on its battle performance!

Gloriana hummed as she thought about this issue. "From what I can see, I don't think you can utilize Unending alloy in many other ways. Even though you have clad the flight system of this mech with this prime material, it didn't gain any additional thrust. We need to learn how to apply Unending alloy in other ways. Utilizing it as armor and internal support is only the most shallow application. One way I can think of to leverage Unending alloy further is to fire it as a projectile."

"Absolutely not!" Ves instantly replied. "Don't even think about that! Unending alloy is incredibly rare, strong and precious. Even if it's available on the market, I doubt we can afford any with our current means. Unless proven otherwise, I'll assume that this alloy is only available in the Nyxian Gap. While I am willing to keep an open mind, I highly doubt that Unending alloy or its component exotics can be found in the Red Ocean. That means we can't waste a single gram of Unending alloy."

"It's just a possibility, Ves. I didn't mean you should go through with it. My point is that you need to be more clever with how you utilize Unending alloy. If I was in your place, I would have started with just a fraction of Unending alloy. I wouldn't have used it all on armor plating, structural parts and armaments."

"This isn't just an experimental mech. It's also a mech that is meant to be deployed in battle. If you set aside prime resonance, the Valkyrie Prime is by far our toughest and most damage-resistant mechs. That alone is worth using up so much Unending alloy. It's not doing anything useful while it's collecting dust in our vault."

Gloriana still had a point, though. As both of them studied the effects of prime resonance, they concluded that it was effectively useless in its demonstrated form. Even if the Valkyrie Prime exhibited ten times stronger resonance, it only offered an extra layer of protection to a mech that already possessed excellent defenses!

Due to the many limitations they faced, Ves saw no way to improve his mech by focusing on this aspect.

He would rather focus on another, more mysterious angle.

"My goal is to achieve true resonance." He stated. "That hasn't changed. Even if it isn't possible to accomplish it with our current resources, I want to come as close to it as possible. I managed to create prime resonance by putting something together that is completely different from existing methods. My current idea is to expand upon the incorporeal and human side of my project. My specialty is man-machine symbiosis, so I must continue to explore the Valkyrie Prime concept from this angle."

His wife tentatively nodded. "I can't help you much on that aspect, but what I can do is optimize your mech. Even if you swapped out one material for another material doesn't mean the mech performs as optimally as before. The altered mass and density of the Valkyrie Prime has unbalanced the frame. I'll go ahead and correct that while I perform some other optimizations."

"Don't spend too much time on that. There are several other expert pilots who urgently need improved mechs as well. Our overall priority lies in boosting the strength of our expert pilots as quickly as possible rather than perfecting the mech of a lone individual."

Gloriana frowned. That did not sit well with her. "Why are you in such a hurry, Ves?"

He hesitated for a couple of seconds.

"It sounds silly, but... the Living Prophet made a prediction that we might be confronted with some enemies on our way out of the star sector."

"That's impossible. Our fleet is incredibly powerful and we are still inside Hegemony-aligned space. If the Fridaymen are targeting us, then they need to muster up thousands of mechs and lots of carriers. It's impossible to hide the movements of a massive fleet."

"I know. I agree with you. We're detouring through Vicious Mountain just to stay as far away from Coalition-aligned space as possible. We might encounter other enemies along the way, though. What if some Garlaners attempt to waylay us? What if we'll encounter trouble at the Life Research Association? We need to increase our strength as quickly as possible. Don't forget that it's not a secret that our expert pilots don't have access to any expert mechs. They are paper tigers who won't deter a formidable enemy."

"Hmmm. Maybe you're right." She agreed with his logic. "I don't like rush jobs, but I know this is important to you. We better do a proper job when we design our expert mechs. I don't want to rush any aspect of our best works."

"I get it, I get it. Let's get to work."

Ves finally managed to get away from his wife. While she proceeded to examine the armor layout of the Valkyrie Prime, Ves rose from his seat and approached Venerable Joshua.

"Hello again."

"Oh, hey." Venerable Joshua snapped out of his daze. "What do you want to know?"

"First, let me begin by telling you that we have not detected anything concerning the initial test run. Neither you nor your mech sustained any damage. We've also discovered a new form of resonance. Let me tell you what we know."

He briefly filled Joshua in about prime resonance. The problem was that the expert pilot never experienced fake or true resonance. He only ever experienced forced resonance twice.

"So in conclusion, it appears the Valkyrie Prime is not capable of imitating a genuine expert mech." Ves said at the end of his explanation. "What we currently have is prime resonance, which has potential but isn't a game changer."

"Sir.. I don't think prime resonance is as weak as you think." Venerable Joshua replied. "Back when I tried to resonate with the Valkyrie Prime, it felt as if I was trying to lift something heavy. A couch or something. I only managed to lift one side of the couch, and that was with the mech and.. the Superior Mother helping me out. I could have achieved more if I was able to lift the entire couch."

That was a rather poor analogy, but Joshua managed to convey his point.

"Does this mean that resonating with your mech is strenuous to you?" Ves asked.

He nodded. "It's a workout, for sure. I can't do that with other mechs because there is nothing for my mind to grapple on. The Valkyrie Prime is the first mech I've piloted that I feel useful as an expert pilot."

"Interesting. Tell me more about how you feel about the mech itself."

"The mech is quite friendly to me. I can actively feel the Superior Mother's influence now that I know what to look out for. I actively tried to get in touch with her and tell her what I want. I can feel she is helping in some way, but don't ask me for any details. The mech

is very powerful to me, but it's frustrating that I can't fully channel it. There has to be a way!"

Ves nodded and smiled in encouragement. "I think so as well. We'll have to perform some subsequent test runs in order to gather more data and try out some different methods."

They began right away.

While Gloriana worked to optimize the armor layout of the Valkyrie Prime, Ves frequently commanded Venerable Joshua to pilot the Valkyrie Prime.

Since his expeditionary fleet was engaged in FTL travel most of the time, it wasn't possible to deploy the Valkyrie Prime in space.

Fortunately, it wasn't necessary to do so. After a few cautious attempts, Ves decided to keep the test runs in his personal workshop. It featured enough space for a mech to move around in a very tight circle and rise a bit in the air, but not much more.

In fact, Ves didn't even need the Valkyrie Prime to move. It was already sufficient to station the mech in the most open space in his workshop before ordering Joshua to keep the mech still.

It was already enough to gather data on the mech while Joshua was actively inducing prime resonance. The machine glowed brightly in the mech workshop, but none of the nearby production equipment suffered any damage.

The repeated tests fatigued Venerable Joshua. While he didn't feel much strain if he induced prime resonance for a couple of minutes, it quickly added up when a session stretched on for twenty minutes or longer.

To be fair, other forms of resonance aside from fake resonance were also strenuous to mech pilots. The power granted by resonance always came at a price. The greater the resonance, the greater the burden on the mech pilot.

Still, no matter how much Ves was asking from Venerable Joshua, the expert pilot diligently did what he was told. He did not ask for any reprieve.

"I can still go on, sir! I am nowhere near my limit!"

While Ves worried about overworking the expert pilot, he wanted to stress test the Valkyrie Prime and its mech pilot. He needed to know if some kind of limit existed if the combination continually engaged in prime resonance.

The frequent, lengthy test runs were very useful in other ways. Sustained use of the Valkyrie Prime soon exposed some details that took Ves by surprise!

"This..."

"What's the matter?"

Gloriana walked over as Ves looked shocked at the pattern he read from the data!

"Look at this graph."

"I see it. The squiggly line is slightly rising upwards. It's quite flat, though, so the change isn't drastic. What am I looking at, Ves?"

"Resonance strength. According to this chart, in a span of four days, Joshua's resonance strength rose from 2.51 laverses to 2.55 laverses."

"What? That's impossible! Expert pilots are only capable of growing stronger when they are piloting actual expert mechs! Everyone knows that!"

"Well, apparently I came up with a new method. Prime resonance isn't the same as fake resonance. The latter is entirely produced by the mech, while the former is something that an expert pilot actively needs to induce. I think that our prime mech is somehow capable of allowing an expert pilot to 'exercise' the aspect that is responsible for resonating with a mech!"

This was a considerable discovery! If this was true, then the expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan didn't have to wait to receive their expert mechs in order to develop their new powers!

A few days later, Ves made another discovery.

The Valkyrie Prime had slightly grown weaker. As Ves carefully examined the mech, he discovered that it had lost at least 100 Ves!

"Where did it go?"

In the process of investigating whether prime resonance slowly consumed the spiritual energy stored inside the Unending alloy, he came up with another experiment.

Everytime spiritual energy was being consumed, something happened. What if Ves attempted something that consumed even more spiritual energy?

As soon as the fleet transitioned out of FTL, Ves immediately commenced his next test!

Chapter 2626: Realization of Energy

Energy by itself was powerful, but only if it was being used.

Reality consisted of energy and matter interchanging with each other. Order arose when lots of processes took place that converted one form of energy into another form of energy, allowing someone or something to take advantage of the process to accomplish something useful.

An ordinary human converted the energy absorbed by the food he absorbed to perform his job and go about his day.

A simple mech consumed the energy supplied by its energy cells and power reactor in order to move around or attack its opponents.

A star released energy at a massive scale due to the immense gravity pressing a huge amount of atoms together, fusing them into bigger atoms that also happened to release a lot of energy in the form of electromagnetic radiation.

The entire cosmos, from tiny specks of space dust to astronomically huge galaxies, operated along these lines. The conversion of matter to matter, matter to energy, energy to matter and energy to energy basically explained every single process that took place from the beginning of time.

As a mech designer, Ves possessed a deep appreciation of energy. It was the most essential pillar upon which human civilization rested. Without harnessing a sufficient amount of energy, how could humanity possibly fuel the enormous industries that produced the huge amount of weapons and war machines that kept humanity dominant?

Without developing and sustaining enormous power reactors, how could humanity's awesome battleships defeat the previously-dominant alien empires during the Age of Conquest?

Without powerful weapons of mass destruction, how could the human race almost make itself extinct in the span of less than a century despite spreading widely across the galaxy?

Energy could be used to create and destroy. No matter what form it took, energy was neither inherently good or evil. It was neither aggressive nor peaceful.

It just existed.

It was up to someone or something else to make use of energy.

After performing an extensive series of repetitive tests on the Valkyrie Prime, Ves had gained a slightly deeper understanding of all of the spiritual energy dumped into the mech.

First, the spiritual energy used to enhance the spiritual foundation of the mech did not vanish. The 'soul' of the mech appeared to be a self-sustaining entity that did not exhibit any changes in the short term. It did not need to be fed, though piloting the mech slowly caused it to grow and develop further.

While this largely ruled out many means of accelerating its growth, at the very least Ves didn't have to worry about its upkeep, unlike his expensive factory ship.

"This also explains why the triggered abilities of my recent mech designs aren't that powerful." He suddenly realized.

The Marked For Death ability of the Valkyrie Redeemer.

The Disorientation Pulse of the Doom Guard and the Ferocious Piranha

The Guided Aim ability of the Deliverer.

All of these triggered abilities were impactful in their own way, but that was mainly because they affected the human mind. In truth, none of the triggered abilities that Ves developed over the course of his career was ever able to affect reality itself.

It was only now that Ves explored other applications of spiritual energy that he understood the fundamental reason behind the limitations of glows and triggered abilities.

There wasn't enough energy!

Every LMC mech that was alive possessed spiritual energy in the form of spiritual foundation. Yet without any active enhancement, these freshly-made mechs measured at almost 0 Ves.

How could a mech with only a tiny amount of energy possibly be capable of affecting reality? It was already a miracle that it was able to influence people's minds!

Even if a mech's spiritual foundation absorbed a lot of spiritual energy, either through spiritual foundation enhancement or by collecting the spillover of the breakthrough of its expert pilot, it still did not change anything.

This was because a mech's spiritual foundation was not set up to consume its own energy to power energy-intensive processes!

It was like any normal living entity. When a normal human like Gavin Neumann ran laps throughout the Spirit of Bentheim, he would probably collapse in less than an hour.

Even if the personal assistant felt as if his entire body was sucked dry of energy, in fact his body still possessed more than enough energy to sustain its normal physiological

activities. Otherwise, his muscles would no longer be able to move, his brain would no longer be capable of producing thoughts and his digestion system wouldn't be able to replenish the body's energy levels!

"The spirit of a mech is akin to a normal human." Ves concluded. "It's not a power reactor that rapidly consumes fuel in order to release a huge amount of energy."

The spiritual energy required to affect reality was massive. Ves couldn't help but recall the instances where Ketis demonstrated her 'superpower'.

That was actually a very good example of how spiritual energy could be used to achieve something energy-intensive but meaningful.

It also illustrated how the price was very onerous. Ketis could only empower the edge of a blade for a single attack before she was done for the day!

This single case proved that spiritual energy could accomplish more if it was being expended in some fashion.

Ves himself also expended spiritual energy when he performed his more demanding techniques. Creating design spirits, channeling the strength of design spirits, donning a spiritual mask and performing remote domain sharing with Gloriana all drained a lot of his energy, but the results were always drastic!

"In order to get something, you have to pay something. The more you pay, the more you get."

Of course, it wasn't that simple. Every process and transformation generated waste. Not even spiritual energy was immune to the concept of efficiency.

In any case, the realization that consuming spiritual energy produced a lot of remarkable outcomes was a very important insight.

It explained many powerful phenomena that previously seemed like mysteries to Ves.

Even the power displayed by high-ranking mech pilots and supermechs was no longer inexplicable as far as he was concerned!

The successively greater power exhibited by expert mechs, ace mechs and god mechs in combination with their pilots also resulted from a combination of expending spiritual energy and willpower!

Ves looked intrigued. "Is this also a part of the secret that mech designers need to understand in order to design an expert mech?"

Regardless, the realization he made was such an important acknowledgement of how reality worked that Ves was actually experiencing another round of sublimation in his mind.

His design seed evolved!

Even though the shift wasn't very drastic, Ves could definitely feel his design seed had reached another stage of growth.

This was because this fundamental realization had the potential to unlock many powerful ways of applying his design philosophy. Enabling prime resonance was only a preview of what he could accomplish now that he understood a new truth about spiritual energy!

"I have taken one step closer to becoming a Senior!" Ves joyfully guessed.

It sounded so incredibly simple and obvious in hindsight, yet he was still limited by his imagination.

Now that he knew more than before, Ves became a lot more eager to explore the new methods he came up with to employ spiritual energy in a greater fashion.

Still, as exciting as these new possibilities sounding, his enthusiasm dampened when he recalled the price he had to pay.

"Everything has a price."

The greater the value, the greater the price.

Ves winced as he recalled he lost his Grand Dynamo. While this sacrifice produced an incredibly powerful result, the fact of the matter was that he had lost a very powerful source of renewable spiritual energy!

In the case of prime mechs, they continually needed to be supplemented with additional spiritual energy when put into use. While Ves welcomed the discovery that piloting the Valkyrie Prime exercised Venerable Joshua's force of will, it was by no means a cheap process!

As Ves thought about developing more prime mechs in order to give his other Larkinson expert mech pilots their own workout tools, he inevitably faced the problem of sustaining their energy consumption.

According to Venerable Joshua, he was only capable of arousing prime resonance with the assistance of his mech and its design spirit.

That essentially meant the expert pilot had to develop a good relationship with the source of the spiritual energy infused in a mech.

Venerable Jannzi, Venerable Orfan and Venerable Dise should be alright as long as they piloted a mech that was compatible with Qilanxo.

The problem was that aside from Jannzi, he didn't have a readily available mech to accommodate the latter two. They were offensive mech pilots who fit poorly with the Aurora Titan and were much less flexible than Venerable Joshua when it came to befriending an entity like the Superior Mother.

Venerable Tusa and Venerable Stark were even worse off. Ves lacked the second-class mech models to adapt suitable prime mechs for them. He needed to wait until his Design Department completed the Ferocious Piranha IB and the Bright Warrior IB Projects to even consider developing their prime mechs.

There were many other problems and complications surrounding this issue. All of these headaches caused him to appreciate a flexible and adaptable expert pilot like Venerable Joshua even more.

Whereas other expert pilots became more narrow and specific with regards to their demands, Venerable Joshua was just as tolerant to different mechs and circumstances than before. He didn't present much resistance when being asked to pilot an Ylvainan or Hexer mech.

With Venerable Joshua, Ves did not need to adapt a mech for his specific demands and inclination.

Instead, he could rely on the eager expert pilot to adapt himself to a mech instead!

Joshua was a real treasure to Ves for this reason!

After making all of these profound realizations, Ves tried to figure out how he could put it all into practice.

Much like energy, theory was only powerful if he put it to use.

After considering a number of options, he quickly set his sights on one of his most powerful innovations. He had used his invention to very good effect during the Battle against the Abyss.

It was a pity that it was very hard to replicate the effects at the magnitude shown during the fight. Ves essentially relied on the one-time outburst of forced resonance to achieve an outcome that ordinarily required true resonance to produce.

"Forced resonance is like winning the lottery. True resonance is like earning a regular paycheck. Fake resonance is like begging on the street. Prime resonance is like... working part-time because you can't get a real job."

This statement illustrated his views on the different forms of resonance. Forced resonance was more powerful than true resonance, but the latter was actually more desirable and sustainable.

However, as his expert pilots didn't have any means of generating true resonance, Ves had to settle for the discount version, which was prime resonance.

Still, discount or not, it was better than nothing!

It was because of this that Ves issued a special mission to a large number of Penitent Sister mechs and mech pilots.

When they realized what Ves wanted to do, the Penitent Sisters felt very mixed!

This was why they made a move when the fleet emerged out of FTL and the mechs were being prepared to sortie into space.

An angry group of Penitent Sisters led by their mech captain stormed up to Ves as he was setting up his workstation in the hangar bay!

"Patriarch Larkinson! What is the meaning of this?!" Captain Chelsea Vidovic indignantly demanded.

"What is the matter?" Ves frowned as he calmly turned to face the female mech pilots.

"While we Penitent Sisters are at your disposal, we cannot understand why you would put a male in charge of us!" She stated while waving her hand in the direction of Venerable Joshua and the Valkyrie Prime. "Why don't you give your new Valkyrie mech to us? It will be in much better hands when piloted by someone who is truly devoted to the Superior Mother!"

Chapter 2627: Boy In Charge

Captain Chelsea Vidovic and the Penitent Sisters temporarily transferred to the Spirit of Bentheim were not pleased.

They didn't have a problem with taking part in an experiment. No matter how dangerous it might be, they had pledged their allegiance to Ves and the Larkinson Clan. As damned and outcast Hexers, they were very grateful to their new benefactor for offering a path towards redemption.

Their loyalty to Ves was very high, especially since they were under the delusion that he was the son of the Superior Mother!

The Penitent Sisters also didn't have a problem with joining the Larkinson Clan. They knew they had lost the right to determine how they lived and choose which values and traditions they were allowed to keep.

It was rather fortunate for the former Hexers that the Larkinson Clan offered plenty of room for diversity. The Penitent Sisters, but also other groups such as the Ylvainans and the Swordmaidens were allowed to keep many aspects of their unique identity.

For this reason, the Penitent Sisters still identified themselves as Hexers, if a bit softer than before due to the necessity to play nice with the Larkinsons and the altered values espoused by the Superior Mother.

Slowly but surely, the Penitent Sisters became more and more tolerable to Ves and other people who believed that gender didn't determine an individual's worth.

Unfortunately, Ves overlooked the fact that their transformation was still an ongoing process. The Penitent Sisters still retained many of their biases against 'boys'. Even if Venerable Joshua was an expert pilot, the former Hexers still couldn't look past his gender!

Ves really didn't want to deal with this, but if he wanted the Penitent Sisters to cooperate with his experiment, he had little choice but to play nanny again.

He peered impatiently at Captain Vidovic, who appeared to be their spokesperson today.

"You are Larkinsons, are you not?"

The mech captain nodded. "We are both Larkinsons and Penitent Sisters. There is no contradiction between our two identities."

"I beg to differ. When I took you into my clan, I clearly told you all that you need to abide by our rules. One of the rules we hold very dear is that every clansmen deserves to be treated as equally as possible. One Larkinson is not inherently superior to another Larkinson. I am not exempted from this rule either. Strictly speaking, I am just the first among equals."

This was a very important principle to the original Larkinsons. The original Larkinson family was not authoritarian by nature. While the Larkinsons respected expert pilots, they generally ruled by consensus.

It was unrealistic to make everyone truly equal in an organization, especially a larger one like the Larkinson Clan of today. Yet no matter how much power and influence the

higher ups accrued, they were still required to abide by the same rules as the lower ranks.

Ves continued to stare in the eyes of the Penitent Sisters. Most Larkinsons gave way to him, but the Penitent Sisters were different. Their strong heritage as Hexers and radical cultists caused them to be a lot stiffer than other Larkinsons.

The Penitent Sisters were always decisive! They never waffled around.

It seemed that Ves would not be able to persuade them with his words alone. He needed to employ a more direct method to set them straight.

He sighed. "So you think that the Valkyrie Prime should be piloted by a woman?"

Captain Vidovic nodded again. "Yes, sir. The mech is clearly a Hexer mech. Why you would put an unrelated male mech pilot inside its cockpit is beyond me. We do not understand why you have passed us over."

"You're not the only ones." Ves chuckled. "Gloriana asked the same question as well. Let me show you why I have assigned the Valkyrie Prime to Venerable Joshua."

He moved forward and gestured for the Penitent Sister mech pilots to follow suit. The group approached the corner of the hangar bay where the Valkyrie Prime and Venerable Joshua stood by themselves.

"Do you know why the Valkyrie Prime isn't being serviced by mech technicians?" He suddenly asked.

"Um, no, sir."

"Look around you. Your mechs are being serviced and readied by the hangar bay crew. As for the Valkyrie Prime, it's only being tended to by a couple of bots."

"What are you trying to convey?"

"If you think you are strong enough to pilot my Valkyrie Prime, then you must first pass its test. Start by moving closer."

They had already moved close enough to get within the range of its glow. The Superior Mother's presence was already strong, but there was still a lot of distance left until they came close enough to touch the machine!

Ves proceeded forward as if he was taking a walk in the park.

The Penitent Sister mech pilots fearlessly followed suit.

As they came closer, they gradually slowed down. The Superior Mother's glow continued to grow thicker and thicker. It was as if they encountered more and more resistance.

This was not because the air became thicker. The actual reason why the female mech pilots struggled to advance further was because the Valkyrie Prime increasingly burdened their mind.

A mech that concentrated over 6000 Ves was not a machine that mortals could endure!

The faces of the Penitent Sisters increasingly reflected their inability to endure the growing mental strain. Each step forward took a greater amount of effort than the last one. Sweat began to drip from their heads!

"We.. can't.. go.. further." Captain Vidovic spoke with difficulty. "Back.. away... sisters..."

The Penitent Sisters soon stepped backwards. This was much easier than walking forward. The greater the distance from the Valkyrie Prime, the more and more relief they gained. At a certain distance, the glow had weakened to the point where the Penitent Sisters could tolerate the strain.

All of them felt ashamed. A pair of boys managed to succeed where a group of devoted female worshippers of the Superior Mother had failed! The Valkyrie Prime was obviously a Hexer mech. Why did the mech reject their approach? Were they.. not worthy enough?

In contrast to the downcast women, Ves casually strode forward until he reached Venerable Joshua's side. He patted the expert pilot's shoulder.

"Are you ready to work together with the Penitent Sisters?" He asked.

"I'm not sure about this, sir." He frowned. "I don't think they like me very much. I've tried to approach them multiple times, but they always huff and sneer at me. Is it fine for us to proceed?"

"There won't be any problem. I'll make sure the Penitent Sisters fall in line." Ves promised to Joshua. "You just focus on your own task. In order to make this experiment succeed, it's crucial for you to bond with the Superior Mother. It's not enough to rely on her to carry every burden. You need to meet her halfway, and to do that, you need to become more immersed in her interpretation of Hexer values. Have you read through the notes I've prepared?"

"Yes, sir. I can't say I am comfortable with embracing these ideas, but I will do my best to synchronize with the Superior Mother."

"That's good enough. We'll see what happens."

Once Ves made sure that his test subject knew what to do, he turned around and returned to the group of Hexer mech pilots.

Their confidence had been completely sapped by the demonstration. Their failure was so clear and evident that no amount of rationalization could excuse their failure.

"I hope you don't have any objections about assigning the Valkyrie Prime to Venerable Joshua."

"We don't understand." Captain Vidovic spoke in a hollowed voice. "Why him? Why not us? Is he the Superior Mother's son as well?"

Ves shook his head. "He may not be a Hexer, but he is still a friend. Not only that, he's an expert pilot, which is the most essential requirement to pilot my new line of prime mechs. As far as I recall, your Penitent Sisters have yet to produce an expert candidate, let alone an expert pilot."

"We are trying our best!" The female mech captain defended her fellow sisters. "We only had a chance to pilot one of your famed mech models after we have returned from the Nyxian Gap. With our new Valkyrie Redeemers, we will definitely catch up to the rest!"

The Larkinson Clan still revered expert pilots. The Penitent Sisters weren't blind to this reality. While they managed to gain some representation at the upper levels through Juliet Stamos, they recognized that this was not enough.

Ves did not discourage them in their current pursuit. Every Valkyrie Redeemer the Penitent Sisters received was enhanced. Most of them started off with 25 Ves while a couple of mechs were boosted to 50 Ves.

Once he made sure that the Penitent Sisters had no further issue Venerable Joshua, he commanded everyone to get into place.

A large number of Valkyrie mechs deployed into space.

Ves just wanted to prove something today. He didn't need to produce the strongest possible result.

Two mech companies of Valkyrie Redeemers formed up with the Valkyrie Prime.

Due to the latter's extremely dense glow, not a single Valkyrie Redeemer dared to move too close to the prime mech.

This was actually quite an interesting interaction to Ves. While the Valkyrie Prime was not meant to debilitate nearby enemies like the Doom Guard and the Ferocious Piranha, its glow effectively produced the same result.

This meant that the Valkyrie Prime enjoyed an overwhelming advantage against any enemies that attempted to fight the prime mech up close!

That was not the advantage that Ves was interested in right now, however.

Gloriana arrived as well and began to operate the workstation as well.

"Do you really think this will work?"

"Believe in me, Gloriana."

He commenced the experiment. He passed on some instructions to the 81 Valkyrie mechs that had flown out into a pocket of empty space.

At the same time, hundreds of Larkinson mechs approached the test site and formed a huge cage around the Valkyrie mechs. Each of them activated a special module held in their hands.

A large cube-shaped energy screen formed around the site. Static and interfering energies scrambled everyone's view of what was taking place inside.

Only Ves and a handful of other authorized Larkinsons had access to the observation data supplied by the mechs and sensor platforms placed inside the test site.

Since the experiment was related to one of the Larkinson Clan's trump cards, Ves did not want others to know what was going on. Not even the nearby Cross Clan was clued in to the test.

A familiar presence took shape among the Valkyrie Redeemers. As their mech pilots prayed to the Penitent Sisters, their battle network became active.

The mechs slowly adjusted their positions until they adopted a specific formation.

Yet even as the Penitent Sister mech pilots synced up to the Superior Mother, Venerable Joshua was still struggling to do the same.

"I can do this!" He gritted his teeth. "The clan patriarch expects me to succeed. I cannot let him down!"

Through sheer willpower, Joshua managed to overcome the resistance that formed as a result of his lack of alignment to the Superior Mother.

A brand new bond between Joshua and the Superior Mother became active as well! Ves had especially forged this bond with great difficulty in order for the expert pilot to lead the Penitent Sisters in this experiment!

The Valkyrie Prime finally joined the battle formation. While Venerable Joshua still retained awareness due to his powerful will, he felt a different influence affecting his judgement and decisions!

The 81 mechs adopted a V-shaped formation. This was the characteristic battle formation that embodied the death phase of existence!

The mechs slowly flew forward. A giant silhouette formed over the formation! The Valkyrie Prime glowed as Venerable Joshua induced as much prime resonance as possible.

What was remarkable was that the silhouette of the Superior Mother actively absorbed the prime resonance generated by the Valkyrie Prime!

The projectors embedded into each and every Valkyrie mechs automatically filled up the glowing silhouette with the lifelike appearance of the Superior Mother!

She appeared greater than how Captain Vidovic and her fellow Penitent Sisters remembered. The glow surrounding the silhouette caused her to appear more powerful and sacred than before! Even the nearby mechs that maintained the scrambling screen felt as if they were facing a true deity!

"Attack!" Venerable Joshua shouted! "Unleash death!"

Seconds later, an enormous V-shaped energy wave passed through the energy screen and launched away into deep space!

The mechs that were closed to this outburst of energy momentarily lost their minds!

The strange wave energy was so powerful that they instinctively felt their minds would collapse if they were hit directly by that broad wave!

Chapter 2628: Prime Power

The experiment succeeded!

Previously, the Penitent Sisters relied entirely on the Superior Mother to supply the energy needed to power their battle formations.

There were many limitations to this process. Normal mech pilots weren't able to endure the strain of channeling the Superior Mother's power for an extended amount of time. The conversion of energy was also very inefficient due to several other factors.

Now, Ves managed to slip in a prime mech that was piloted by an expert pilot. The extra addition added a second source of power. Even though this source mostly consisted of spiritual energy that originated from the Superior Mother to begin with, Venerable Joshua was able to convert it into prime resonance, which directly empowered the battle formation!

All of this sounded fairly complicated, but the result was very clear!

Even Ves felt his hair raising as he observed the projection of the V-shaped wave of death passing through in space!

It was fortunate that Ves had specifically instructed the battle formation to unleash its manifested power away from the combined fleet!

Ves tried his best to ignore the incoming calls and messages that expressed alarm at the wave of death that had gradually dissipated in the distance.

Instead, he and Gloriana eagerly analyzed the data. While they did not capture the full majesty of the resonance-empowered battle formation, they still noted several remarkable clues!

During the time that Task Force Predator roamed the Nyxian Gap, Ves had ordered his mech pilots to engage their battle formations many times. He collected a sufficient amount of data relating to the Penitent Sister battle formations.

He roughly knew how much power a battle formation formed by 80 Penitent Sister mechs was supposed to exert.

The addition of the Valkyrie Prime to the battle network instantly increased the output of the battle formation by several times!

And this was Venerable Joshua's first attempt!

At this time, Joshua was barely trying to get accustomed to the Superior Mother. If he continued to develop his relationship with the Superior Mother, empathize with the Penitent Sisters and become more accustomed to piloting the Valkyrie Prime, it was very much possible for the battle formation to unleash even more power!

"And that is just with 81 mechs! What if there is double the amount of mechs?"

The power unleashed by the battle formation today was not indicative of the power it could unleash tomorrow. Ves was very confident that his mech pilots could achieve better results with practice!

Of course, there was definitely a price for this. As Ves rewatched the footage of the Valkyrie mechs surging forward while generating a powerful energy silhouette, he could easily imagine the abundance of power generated by the battle formation!

Soon enough, the mechs flew back to their motherships. The Valkyrie Prime along with a dozen Valkyrie Redeemers flew back to the Spirit of Bentheim and entered the hangar bay.

Once the mechs shut down, the mech pilots emerged out of the cockpits with dazed and wondrous looks.

Captain Vidovic and her fellow Penitent Sisters no longer looked skeptical or indignant at Venerable Joshua. Their eyes only conveyed their respect and astonishment towards the Larkinson expert pilot!

As Ves observed this unspoken interaction, he recalled that battle networks worked by tying the minds of every mech pilot together.

Just like the neural networks of Master Huron, the mech pilots that took part in them did not necessarily share all of their thoughts. However, they were not completely independent either.

Instead, the network caused them to form some kind of mental collective that allowed them to coordinate their actions and move in unison. At least that was what Ves surmised from Master Huron's work.

Battle networks were different from the original source. To be honest, Ves still did not understand the intricacies of this recent invention.

He was glad that one of his hopes came true. Though he needed to perform some follow-up tests to confirm today's result, he was already sure of the truth. Prime mechs were capable of supercharging battle formations.

By feeding prime resonance to the battle formation, the combination supercharged the manifestation! More energy produced more power, it was that simple!

Of course, Ves still needed to investigate how much energy the Valkyrie Prime expended to unleash its ominous attack. He was under no illusion that the earlier attack came for free.

Only fools believed in free energy.

So far, every phenomena related to spirituality and his design philosophy abided by the law of conservation of energy. It didn't matter how wondrous or magical the transformations appeared.

Unless proven otherwise, even gods had to abide by the fundamental laws of reality!

As Ves approached the Valkyrie Prime, he immediately noted that it was a lot easier for him to get close.

While his mental strength was more than capable of withstanding the pressure of the Valkyrie Prime at its height, its sudden weakening was very noticeable.

The decrease in glow intensity was too big. This means that a single outburst from the battle formation consumed a lot of prime resonance!

How much of the energy supplied by the Valkyrie Prime empowered the attack and how much of it went to waste?

While Ves couldn't judge the efficiency of the process due to lack of data and understanding, he guessed that the efficiency must be pretty low. Despite the impressive power of the battle formation, he did not forget that he had basically cobbled it together with poorly-understood means.

His battle networks were too rudimentary. Though he was determined to refine them over time, at this stage it was too difficult to pioneer this new invention.

He idly wished he could steal Master Huron's research. Though the Fridayman Master's specialty wasn't directly related to his own, Ves was sure he could steal more good ideas if he had access to the core trade secrets!

"How are you feeling, Joshua?" Ves asked as he reached the expert pilot's side.

"I'm tired." Venerable Joshua replied. "I'm excited as well. I can't explain what I just experienced. It was magical. For a couple of minutes, I felt as if I was at the center of a group of soldiers. Those Penitent Sisters.. they don't think like normal people. It was a bit difficult for me to get accustomed to their personalities. Still, once we managed to get along with each other, we succeeded in our mission! We all exerted our utmost to unleash that strange attack!"

Ves smiled and patted the younger man's back. "That's great to hear. Before you take a shower and freshen up, I'd like you to write down your feelings and personal experiences. I need to know everything that went through our mind while your memories of the moment are still fresh."

The expert pilot did not look forward to this chore. While he wasn't exhausted to the point of collapsing on the deck, his earlier exertion was not light!

"Very well..."

As Joshua moved to a nearby terminal, Ves stayed in place and took a deep look at the Valkyrie Prime.

Physically, the mech was fine. The short deployment into space hardly affected the integrity of the machine.

Spiritually, it was a different matter. When Ves concentrated his mind, he perceived more clearly that the Valkyrie Prime's Unending alloy had lost a significant chunk of spiritual energy.

Ves found it difficult to judge exactly how much strength it consumed. Making this observation by feel was as primitive as judging the length of a building by eye. Properly speaking, he needed to develop a spiritual measuring instrument.

"That's not something that I can make at this time." Ves shook his head.

He had no choice but to go by feel. Right now, he tentatively judged that the Valkyrie Prime had weakened to around 4000 Ves.

"That's a steep price!" Ves winced.

That was worse than he expected. It basically meant that the Valkyrie Prime was burning an immense amount of spiritual energy every time it amplified a battle formation!

Was it worth it? Ves wasn't sure.

In pitched battles where a loss threatened the existence of the Larkinson Clan, then it was definitely useful.

In practice sessions or skirmishes against riffraff? Expending so much energy was incredibly wasteful.

"In the end, it's still a trump card." He concluded with a sigh. "The strongest means should be reserved for the most desperate situations."

That was a lesson that Ves had learned in the Nyxian Gap Campaign. The pirates his task force confronted in the region all pulled out one card after another. His forces suffered far more losses than he anticipated at the start due to the inability to account for the hidden options the pirates had at their disposal.

After Ves stepped close and placed his palm on the foot of the Valkyrie Prime, he confirmed his earlier judgement. The Unending alloy had emptied considerably.

Unless the mech pilot was able to control the amount of energy being expended, Ves would have to get used to paying a significant price to achieve a strong effect on the battlefield.

Ves silently contacted the Superior Mother. He briefly felt her presence drawing close.

The Valkyrie Prime soon regained its strength. The Superior Mother effortlessly filled up its tank until it returned to the maximum level of more than 6000 Ves.

He wasn't too worried about the energy expenditure of the Superior Mother. With the entire Hexadric Hegemony backing her up, she was not going to run out of spiritual feedback anytime soon!

"Of course, it's only the lowest quality of energy." He muttered.

His concern lied instead to other prime mechs. Not every design spirit was as flush with spiritual energy as the Superior Mother.

Certain design spirits such as Lufa and the Golden Cat were still paupers in comparison. Telling them to fill up a prime mech comparable to the Valkyrie Prime would likely weaken them to a noticeable degree!

"There's another concern." He muttered.

The Superior Mother owed her luxurious position to the existence of the Hexadric Hegemony.

If the Hexers ever lost the Komodo War, then it was a given that the Superior Mother would lose a lot of spiritual feedback!

"That will be a disaster!"

Limited energy was one of the greatest limitations that held humanity and every other race from overpowering their rivals.

Ves once heard that the Big Two managed to steal the Fire Scroll from the Five Scrolls Compact.

If that was true, he had to admit that the CFA and MTA chose the most suitable Sacred Scroll!

As long as they unlocked the secrets to generating more energy, they could directly increase the strength of their warships, weapons and other means!

In fact, Ves was certain that this had happened at the end of the Age of Conquest. Otherwise, how could the Big Two possibly rise in power to the point where they were able to suppress the Terrans and Rubarthans?

As Ves finished inspecting the Valkyrie Prime, he turned around and left the range of its glow. He returned to Gloriana as she finished packaging the data.

"I think we're ready to develop some other prime mechs." Ves stated.

"Hm?" His wife turned around. "Isn't that premature? We still need to perform more tests on the Valkyrie Prime."

"Unless we do something drastically different, I don't expect the tests to produce different results. I've confirmed enough theories and know all I need to know to develop our other prime mechs."

"I do have to admit that the Valkyrie Prime is very powerful when used to this effect."

Ves suddenly had a new thought!

It was so astonishing that he froze for a few seconds!

"Gloriana?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Do you know whether different forms of resonance can stack?"

"Huh?"

"Think about it." He became more excited. "What if it is possible to make a prime version of an expert mech?! According to my theoretical framework, prime resonance does not necessarily conflict with other forms of resonance. Do you know what this means? It might be possible to design a prime expert mech that is capable of combining the strengths of two forms of resonance at the same time!"

This was a radical idea! Gloriana looked stunned as she tried to imagine what Ves had described. Was it possible for prime resonance to overlap with true resonance in the same mech?

She had no idea!

Chapter 2629: Developing Prime Mechs

Prime mechs had become the new obsession of the Miracle Couple.

This newly-invented category of mechs exhibited properties that no one in the fleet had ever heard of. In order to make sure that someone hadn't stolen his thunder, Ves even spent a few hours searching across the entire galactic net.

He even visited the MTA and Rim Guardian's virtual portals to look up whether other mech designers discovered different forms of resonance besides the ones that everyone knew about.

It turned out that Ves was not unique in this case. He looked fascinated as he read up on inventions that enabled resonance between two expert pilots in a single expert mech, resonance between two expert mechs with two expert mechs and more creative arrangements.

In fact, a more immediate example was the infamous Unit L of the Coalition Reserve Corps! Venerable Ghanso Larkinson's Charlemagne exhibited the capability of extending its resonance to the Scarra, a group of accompanying quasi-expert mechs!

Therefore, inventing a new and unusual method to generate resonance was not unheard of in human space. The reason why they weren't popularized like other forms of resonance was because the conditions were too harsh.

Unless a skilled mech designer specifically invested in a specific solution, it was too difficult to meet all of the conditions. It simply wasn't worth it to popularize a different method because the market and the mech industry simply had better options at their disposal.

Better did not necessarily mean stronger. After all, Unit L had already paid off in spades by defeating more than a dozen expert mechs and killing off almost just as many expert pilots.

Better in this case meant that it was more economical, practical and cost-efficient to just rely on fielding expert pilots with traditional expert mechs. If a better and more affordable method of utilizing resonance became known, then it would have displaced the current paradigm!

In the context of the prevailing industry standard, prime mechs were not that impressive. They were merely souped-up standard mechs that failed to match the standard of genuine expert mechs.

The main reason why Ves bothered them at all was because he currently lacked the ability to field expert mechs. This was just a temporary problem, though. Once he completed the current round of mech design projects and tackled the next round, his clan would likely welcome its first batch of expert mechs in about a year.

Ves was looking forward to that time.

He just had to be patient. For now, Ves was attracted by the convenience and the various applications of his new invention. He had just confirmed that just like forced resonance, prime resonance could be used to supercharge battle formations, thereby allowing them to unleash much more powerful attacks than usual.

Now that he confirmed the utility of the Valkyrie Prime, it was no longer a priority to investigate it further. If he wanted to increase the comprehensive strength of his forces, it was much more efficient to develop additional prime mechs.

When Ves and Gloriana entered the former's personal workshop the next day, they planned out their next assignments.

"We have multiple expert pilots who are currently being underutilized due to the limitations of their mechs." Ves began as he projected a list of the Larkinson Clan's expert pilot roster. "Now, we have given Venerable Joshua something to sink his teeth into. While he still cannot express his full might with the Valkyrie Prime, he can at least begin to exercise his resonance strength. This alone is enough of a reason to continue building prime mechs. While they demand a very specific resource, they aren't as troublesome to design as expert mechs."

"How much Unending alloy do you have, still?"

"I just took stock of that earlier." Ves spoke. "To be honest, we don't have as much as I would like. We have enough Unending alloy to comprehensively armor three to four mechs depending on how frugal we are. The Valkyrie Prime admittedly uses more Unending alloy than is strictly needed. If we skip reinforcing the internal frame and reduce the thickness of the armor plating by at least 25 percent, we can probably make four additional prime mechs that will perform nearly as well."

Of course, both of them knew that this wasn't actually true. While the performance of the subsequent prime mechs was indistinguishable from the Valkyrie Prime against normal opponents, in tougher battles that extra armor and reinforced structure could make a substantial difference!

Though Gloriana frowned a bit, she was helpless to do anything about it. The only way to remedy this shortcoming was to supply more Unending alloy, but how could she possibly do that? She didn't even know how Ves got his hands on this extraordinary material!

"It's so fascinating to know that materials like Unending alloy exist." She sighed as she leaned against her husband's shoulder. "The Milky Way is home to a large variety of exotics. The Red Ocean will introduce even more materials with unusual effects. I wonder if we can find a substitute for Unending alloy?"

Ves shrugged. "I'm not so sure about that. Unending alloy itself is a manufactured product. I salvaged it out of some really old and creepy statues that must have been

built by extinct alien civilizations. I've tried to analyze the alloy in order to figure out its composition, but it's too damn hard and incredible in other ways for me to do that. Not even the lab equipment on this ship is up to par. I think we need to get our hands on actual first-class scanning machines to identify the exotics and the proportion that make up this remarkable alloy."

That wasn't going to happen anytime soon. While Ves was tempted to ask Master Willix a favor, he didn't want her to look too closely at what he was doing with Unending alloy.

As Ves and Gloriana made some quick calculations on how far they could stretch their current reserves of Unending alloy, they ended up with an unsatisfactory conclusion.

"We can either build 4 good prime mechs or 5 barely passable prime mechs with the supply we have." Gloriana stated. "Barely passable in this case means very vulnerable when their weak points are targeted."

"The biggest issue by far is the Shield of Samar." Ves noted. "The mech is too damn big. It uses up more Unending alloy than a more normal medium mech. While Venerable Tusa's light mech is not as demanding, we can't be too stingy with his machine."

The two puzzled over their options and eventually decided to make some compromises.

Ves tapped the projected names of Venerable Dise, Venerable Orfan and Venerable Tusa. "We need to prioritize our resource allocation towards our offensive melee mechs. They are the ones who need the premium protection the most. Venerable Dise just happens to be the nexus of the Swordmaiden battle network, so her mech has the highest priority."

There was a good reason to focus on meeting the needs of their offensive melee specialists. Just like Venerable Joshua, the three aforementioned expert pilots were powerful duelists and possessed a lot of agency on the battlefield. They could single-handedly turn a battle around by taking advantage of their high threat and fantastic freedom of movement.

However, when it came to choosing which base model to develop the three prime mechs from, Gloriana developed some very serious misgivings.

"What?! You want to develop our prime mechs based on our unfinished designs? Are you crazy? They're not complete!"

"Calm down, Gloriana!" Ves quickly raised his palms. "It's not as absurd as it sounds! First, look at the current state of our projects. They are all in their early prototype testing phase. We have already performed extensive simulation testing to optimize our designs to an extent. Compared to the past, we have been able to accomplish much greater improvements at this stage due to the vastly-increased processing power at our

disposal. So even if we are merely in the stage of testing the first iterations of our mech designs, they are already functionally sound!"

Naturally, the designs still had much to go before they reached a satisfactory standard of quality, but the difference it could make was only 5 to 10 percent at most.

This meant that if Ves really wanted to, he could immediately command the Spirit of Bentheim to churn out second-class Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas that already performed nearly as well as the finished versions that would come out in a couple of months!

Of course, he wouldn't do so. His factory ship's production lines were still in the process of producing enough Transcendent Punishers to occupy all of the bunkers of his fleet.

In addition, Gloriana would get even more upset about using products before they were finished. Ves was already pushing her patience to the limit by suggestion they do so for their prime mechs!

"Look, it's not as bad as it sounds, honey. We might be moving quickly, but we can always correct the prime mechs afterwards once we complete the designs they were derived from. We're only talking about a handful of mechs, so the amount of work we need to do is not that onerous."

While Gloriana still didn't look pleased with his idea, she couldn't think up a better solution.

She sighed. "Fine. Have it your way then."

With her consent, she cooperated with Ves to determine the individual configurations of every prime mech.

Venerable Dise was paired up with the Bright Sword Prime, a prime version of the swordsman mech configuration of the Bright Warrior IB.

Venerable Rosa Orfan was paired up with the Bright Spear Prime, a prime version of the Bright Warrior IB that was hastily customized to wield spears.

Venerable Davia Stark was paired up with the Bright Beam Prime, a prime version of the rifleman mech configuration Bright Warrior IB.

"These names aren't very creative." Gloriana grimaced.

"They're descriptive enough, and that's enough."

Venerable Jannzi still retained the Shield of Samar. Instead of developing a new prime mech, Ves and his wife would instead convert the defensive expert pilot's beloved machine into a prime mech.

As for Venerable Tusa, he was slated to receive the Piranha Prime, a prime version of the Ferocious Piranha IB.

With this setup, Ves predicted that they could probably finish the development of all of the prime mechs.

As the couple determined what kind of mechs they needed to design and build over the span of a couple of weeks, they began to decide how much Unending alloy they should allocate to each mech. In order to gather even more Unending alloy, Ves even decided to take away the Unending mech weapons he previously built for his expert pilots during the Nyxian Gap Campaign!

Despite this extra addition, they still came up short, just as they expected.

"We have no choice but to skimp on the prime mechs assigned to Venerable Jannzi and Venerable Stark." He continued. "Stuffing their prime mechs with as much Unending alloy as we can cram into their frames will definitely strengthen their capabilities, but the value we gain out of it is marginal. After all, it's fine to keep them in the backline during a battle."

In order to make the best use out of the dwindling amount of Unending alloy they had left, Ves developed a fairly novel suggestion.

He did not allocate any Unending alloy to the Bright Beam Prime.

He instead diverted all of that extra material to the Shield of Samar, thereby supplying it with enough Unending alloy to armor up its entire forward exterior! If that wasn't enough, Ves also wanted to gift it with a thick tower shield that consisted of multiple layers of Unending alloy and Breyer alloy!

As long as the Shield of Samar wasn't attacked from the rear, it should be more than capable of withstanding a huge amount of damage!

"What about the Bright Beam Prime?" Gloriana asked. "You used up all of the Unending alloy we have left. I won't have any extra defenses, let alone the ability to induce prime resonance."

Ves smirked. "The mech doesn't need any defenses. The Bright Beam Prime can just huddle behind the prime version of the Shield of Samar. As for the other issue, we actually have another prime material on our hands. I have 51 P-stones in my collection, most of which are collecting dust. I'm willing to invest 40 of them to empower the Bright Beam Prime's laser rifle!"

Since Unending alloy could be used as a prime material, why not P-stone? Even though the latter did not possess any defensive properties, it could still be used to augment other components and systems!

Chapter 2630: Priming Mechs

The new prime mech projects brought a lot of excitement to Ves and Gloriana. While their current mech design projects were already interesting enough, much of their work blended into a routine at this point.

They already settled most of the surprises and interesting design choices of the current round of mech designs. Aside from some design spirit issues, Ves did not expect to make any drastic changes or revisions to the current iterations of mech designs. All of the prototype testing and number crunching that would take place in the remaining couple of months were solely devoted to refining and polishing their current work.

Therefore, the novelty of designing and fabricating five new prime mechs cast away a lot of boredom.

In order to deliver all of the prime mechs as soon as possible, Ves and Gloriana already decided to split up some of their responsibilities. One of the problems they faced was that the production equipment in their personal workshops needed a lot of time to process Unending alloy. They had to put both workshops into use in order to make the best use of their time.

Unfortunately, diverting so much time on developing their prime mechs would definitely affect the progress of their main design projects.

"It's okay." Ves spoke. "Even though I said that we should meet our deadlines, I don't want to wait a couple of months until we are finally capable of supplying our remaining expert pilots with prime mechs. Every day of practice counts."

Fortunately, they had Juliet. While it wasn't fair to burden her with supervising all six mech design projects, it wasn't as if Ves and Gloriana decided to isolate themselves.

The married couple could still drop by the Design Department every day and perform some essential guidance. Due to the nature of the current phase of the projects, they didn't need to perform all of the calculation and modelling work by hand.

Of course, it was still better if they were present all of the time, but it wasn't strictly necessary. Juliet was always at hand if a project ever hit a wall.

Once they agreed on a plan, the pair immediately went to work.

Gloriana happily stroked Clixie's back as she sat down behind a terminal. Her cat comfortably stretched across her lap and settled for a long petting session.

"Miaow~"

Since Lucky was working together with Calabast every day, Ves was starting to miss his gem cat.

Fortunately, he gained a new pet.

"Bygul, come out here!"

[Mew!]

The physical projectors in his workshop came to life. They projected a distinct electronic cat. Once Bygul appeared into view, the cat floated over to Ves and hung on his shoulder like a needy feline.

Ves scratched Bygul's chin.

"Hehehe. You're a good boy, aren't you? You're not as naughty as Lucky, that's for sure."

[Mew mew mew!]

Once Ves satisfied his cat addiction, he began to tackle his first prime mech.

Due to the need to apply considerable changes or modifications to the Shield of Samar and the Bright Spear Prime, Gloriana took it upon herself to figure out how to apply Unending alloy to their designs.

That left Ves with the relatively easier and more straightforward task of preparing the Bright Sword Prime, the Bright Beam Prime and the Piranha Prime.

The Bright Beam Prime was the most interesting and uncertain of the three of the three prime mechs. Whereas the Bright Sword Prime and the Piranha Prime were merely straightforward adaptations of their current mech design projects, the rifleman mech demanded greater attention.

How would Ves be able to integrate P-stone into Venerable Davia Stark's machine?

"Technically speaking, P-stone is also a prime material. It's actually much better at storing energy than Unending alloy."

The issue was that 40 P-stone didn't amount to a lot of material. It sounded impressive when Ves gathered them all together in front of his body, but compared to the scale of a mech, they were miniscule!

Therefore, any enhancement derived from adding P-stone to a mech needed to be implemented in a targeted manner.

When Ves pulled up the design of the rifleman mech configuration of the Bright Warrior IB, he directed his sights towards the rifle.

"Hmm. Since I'm already at it, I can upgrade the entire weapon while I'm at it. There's no need to make the prime mech as economic as possible."

While it took a lot of time to upgrade the Bright Warrior in a comprehensive fashion, it was not that difficult to perform some quick and easy upgrades to the weapon.

Ves replaced cheaper subcomponents with their more expensive counterparts. He reinforced and expanded the rifle in order to enhance its heat capacity, raise its energy throughput and strengthen its damage resistance.

Even though the rifle became twice as heavy, it became a lot more potent!

Since making the rifle larger meant it gained a lot of extra capacity, Ves filled up the extra spaces with P-stones and luminar crystals.

Ves wasn't sure about how the former would interact with the rifle when Venerable Stark attempted to resonate with the prime material. There was a significant chance that nothing would happen at all because he completely misused the P-stone.

He shrugged. "Oh well. I'll just get back to the drawing board and try again if that's the case."

His lack of understanding on how prime materials and prime resonance interacted with the systems of a mech limited his options. He had no choice but to resort to trial and error to figure out the correct use of P-stone.

Aside from the weapon, Ves also integrated a couple of P-stones to the frame of the mech. He wanted to see if these additions could enhance other aspects of the Bright Beam Prime when it was under the influence of prime resonance.

Once Ves applied some other quick upgrades to increase the performance of the Bright Beam Prime, he implemented a final change.

"Although I don't have any Unending alloy left to offer the best possible protection to this mech, I still have plenty of Breyer alloy to go around!"

Ves basically went old school with the Bright Beam Prime's design. The original Bright Warrior Version C used to be a bridge mech that relied on its Breyer alloy armor system to withstand powerful attacks.

While he had decided against implementing Breyer alloy in the Bright Warrior Mark I Version B due to his inability and the scarcity of the material, it was no problem to lavish as much of it as he could on a single mech!

He quickly revised the entire structure and armor system. With lots of Breyer alloy applied to the exterior and interior of the mech, the Bright Beam Prime became deceptively resilient!

Although it was not capable of confronting expert mechs and first-class mechs, the prime rifleman mech was more than capable of coming on top in a duel against any other second-class mech!

That was the extent of the changes made to the unfinished Bright Warrior IB design. He transferred his work to Gloriana so that she could work out some of the kinks before he turned to the other two prime mechs.

The Bright Sword Prime was supposed to be a straightforward prime conversion. However, Ves wanted to make sure that Venerable Dise adapted well to the mech.

In order to make sure she was happy with her prime mech, Ves decided to invite Ketis to his personal workshop.

"What do you need me to do, Ves?" She asked.

"Come over here. You've already worked on the swordsman mech variant of the Bright Warrior Version B design. I'd like you to help me customize this variant for Venerable Dise."

"I see. You're right to call on me." She replied as she sat next to Ves. Since she worked on the Bright Warrior IB Project, she was already familiar with its nuances. She immediately outlined some quick adjustments. "The Bright Warrior is designed to accommodate a general fighting style. Most of our Larkinson mech pilots haven't trained in any distinct swordsmanship styles. They're just utilizing a mix of standard techniques and some individual moves that are specific to a state, mech academy or mech instructor. As a result, the swordsman mech configuration is too rounded. It doesn't excel at anything aside from reliability."

This was typical to mass-produced mechs. With thousands of Larkinson mech pilots, it was too difficult to please everyone. The Design Department had no choice but to find the most optimal middle ground as possible in order to ensure that every mech pilot was at least somewhat compatible with the Bright Warrior.

Ketis crossed her arms. "To be honest, our Swordmaiden mech pilots won't like the Bright Warrior. It's too... average. I'm not talking about its quality or its glow or something like that. The Bright Warrior is actually a good design for what it is meant to do. It's just that our Swordmaidens excel in an offensive, momentum-based fighting

style. We are used to swinging heavy greatswords, which the Bright Warrior doesn't exactly accommodate."

"Then let's change that." He said. "While we don't have the time to turn the Bright Sword Prime into the perfect Swordmaiden mech, it shouldn't be a problem to improve some of its parameters. We can even reuse the Unending greatsword assigned to her Sword Hunter."

The Sword Hunter was the custom mech that Venerable Dise piloted during the Nyxian Gap campaign. While the older mech was too weak to be of use in second-class battles, its greatsword was too good to pass up! Besides, Venerable Dise was already accustomed to wielding this specific weapon.

The two collaborated well on this project. Ves was pleasantly surprised at his first student's performance. Compared to half a year ago, Ketis demonstrated noticeably better judgement and applied her knowledge in a much more thoughtful fashion!

"You've improved." He complimented.

"Thanks." Ketis smiled back at him. "I worked hard to catch up to you. I've already completed a bunch of swordsman mech designs. Although I'm not proud of them, I've learned plenty of lessons along the way. I'm not as ignorant as before. I think I am getting closer and closer to advancing to Journeyman!"

Ves looked closely at her. Her spiritual potential had indeed grown stronger the last time he inspected her mind. Whether she was one step away from becoming a Journeyman was still in question, though. The gap between Apprentice and Journeyman could not be bridged through steady accumulation. An Apprentice needed to accomplish something significant and impactful in order to break past the final bottleneck.

At least that was what Ves concluded from his own breakthrough experience.

"When are you ready to design your much-anticipated Monster Slayer mech?"

"Not until I reach Journeyman." She raised her fist. Her eyes burned with determination. "My first real mech for the Swordmaidens should not be a graduation project. I want to make sure my Monster Slayer is a full Journeyman-level mech design. Anything weaker is not acceptable."

Ves looked worried at her. "Don't you think that your reluctance to begin a major design project might be holding you back from breaking through? If you keep assisting in other projects while designing some unimportant and inconsequential swordsman mechs in your free time, I'm afraid your breakthrough might be delayed for years."

He had a very strong interest in seeing her advance as soon as possible. The more Journeymen in the Design Department, the more time he could spend on other projects such as working on his prime mechs!

"I get what you're saying, Ves. I've been thinking about this problem as well. I think I might propose a commercial mech design to you. I want to take advantage of the LMC's sales and distribution network to propagate one of my personal works. Is that okay?"

Ves smiled and nodded. "You're welcome to do so, Ketis. As I have stated earlier, any mech designer working for the LMC can apply to let us sell their own products. The only caveat is that it won't be sold under the LMC brand."

"That won't be a problem. While I don't think my work will sell for millions, it's enough to satisfy a couple of thousands of customers!"