

Mech 3031

Chapter 3031: Exclusive Research

Ves was certain that Master Willix and the rest of her following weren't impressed by the welcoming ceremony organized by the Larkinsons.

The second-class mechs fielded by the Larkinsons and their allies probably looked like toys compared to the fancy first-class multipurpose mechs the mechers usually handled.

Indeed, when Ves carefully studied the expressions of the twenty mech pilots that he was supposed to kick into shape, the highly-trained men and women did not show any indication of awe.

They were professional though. Even if none of them thought much of the space peasants, the MTA mech pilots still acted in a manner befitting a member of one of the greatest authorities in the galaxy.

In fact, they didn't actually have to act in such a prim and proper manner anymore. The fact that they had exchanged their MTA uniforms for very ordinary civilian clothing meant that they were not here in an official capacity.

They were just a bunch of random civilian mech pilots looking to take part in Ves' special training program!

As long as this was the case, Ves didn't have to be afraid of the MTA mech pilots bossing everyone around.

Yet just because they were ordered not to kick up a fuss didn't mean they would cooperate with Ves and his fellow Larkinsons without question. These were true favored sons of the galaxy. Anyone who managed to rise up from the ranks of space peasants and managed to join the MTA were all remarkable in their own way. Their egos alone were probably the size of planets!

Making these people obey his instructions and respect the instructions of other Larkinsons would not be easy. Ves already thought about this problem beforehand but he still wasn't certain about his approach.

Well, he didn't have to make a decision right away. He still had an opportunity to pump Master Willix for information.

Once the initial ceremony had ended, many clansmen retreated from the hangar bay in an orderly manner. The Larkinsons still had jobs to do and it was impossible for them to drop everything and allow the Spirit of Bentheim to go out of control due to lack of supervision.

Ves and Gloriana led Master Willix and her entourage deeper into the factory ship. They all remained fairly silent and composed until they reached a formal reception compartment on the upper decks.

Nobody paid any mind to the various refreshments laid out on the table. The comfortable decor along with the quaint and harmonious decorations did not attract any interest either.

The MTA delegation did not come to the Larkinson Clan in order to have fun.

Everyone was all business.

With Lucky and Clixie scurrying off elsewhere and most of the guards left outside the compartments, the guests and their main hosts were finally able to talk without inhibition.

"Both of you have progressed substantially." Maser Willix spoke as her lab-coated form stepped closer and inspected Ves and Gloriana like a teacher. "I was afraid that I would be wasting my time by traveling to your fleet, but the documents you have sent me have intrigued me quite a bit. You, Ves, have especially given me a pleasant surprise. Your research on luminar crystals has progressed in a completely different direction from one of our own internal research teams!"

Ves felt uncomfortable by the praise. He wasn't as impressive as she made it sound. He didn't invent anything new or put too much effort into pioneering a new discovery. He merely took advantage of special circumstances to quickly master some of the nuances of luminar crystals.

He knew very well that his ability to perform true and independent research on luminar crystal technology was actually not that impressive!

In light of this circumstance, Ves made sure to understate and simplify his findings in his logs and reports. He didn't want to attract too much attention from the MTA, yet it appeared that Master Willix didn't easily let him off this time.

How much did she know? Ves quickly threw a glance at Gloriana, but she only looked incredibly enthused at meeting the female Master Mech Designer again.

"Ahem." Ves lightly coughed. "My discoveries aren't worth noting yet. Though I have found a new way to leverage luminar technology, the approach is rather unique to me. Someone without my design philosophy will have a very hard time replicating my methods. Only the luminar race can fully exploit their iconic crystal technology. This hasn't changed, and as long as this is the case, even I won't be able to

"Is this your opinion?" Master Willix slightly frowned. "You know, if you submit all of your research to our Association, you will be credited with a large amount of MTA merits. It is

not impossible for you to earn several million MTA merits if you have truly achieved a breakthrough in luminar crystal technology and found new ways to produce vastly more powerful crystals."

"Do you think I wouldn't be jumping at that opportunity? Alas, my method isn't replicable by others. Only those who share my design philosophy will be able to make the strengthened and more potent crystals that I have been able to create by chance."

"If you are able to pass on satisfactory findings to me, your innovations will be tied to me as well. As long as your research can contribute new understanding to the vast repository of knowledge of our Association, my standing will rise. This is an alternate way for you to assist me in fulfilling my objective."

The whole point of Ves taking on these twenty mech pilots was because Master Willix required more clout. Turning the subordinates of current and potential political allies into expert pilots was a considerable favor that could not be repaid so easily.

However, the practice of turning mech pilots into expert pilots was so difficult and fraught with uncertainty that Willix definitely wasn't betting on only this solution. She should be engaging in several different endeavors in order to maximize her chances and put herself ahead of the competition.

Now that she saw an opportunity to pick up an easy bargain, she didn't want to let this opportunity pass so easily!

It was a pity that Ves really couldn't afford to share all of his current findings to Master Willix. Since the mechers refused to pass on their own research on how to make second-class luminar crystals to him, then they shouldn't complain when Ves kept hold of the method he developed by himself!

"My research wouldn't be of use to you." Ves repeated. "Didn't you try and fail to replicate my design philosophy? If you can't get past this hurdle, then you don't have the qualifications to make use of my unique method."

Master Willix did not look pleased when she heard that. She scrutinized Ves quite carefully with her observant eyes, but she did not pick up anything suspicious.

Ves was actually telling the truth this time. He had nothing to hide and he wasn't trying to pull the wool over the Master Mech Designer's eyes.

After all, he was the only one who could channel a composite luminar spiritual entity. What he said earlier was all true. Only luminars were able to draw out the full potential of their tech, and Ves was the only person who was able to channel the Illustrious One!

Master Willix eventually dropped this inquiry. "Very well. I have taken a considerable time out of my busy schedule for several reasons. Before we discuss your expert mech

design projects, I'd like to introduce you to these fine ladies and gentlemen. I'm sure you can guess who they are, but their original identities are not important to you for the duration of your training task. Just know that all twenty of them must remain incognito. We have prepared suitable false identities for them, so it will not be easy to find out their true identities. Even their names and appearances are different, so don't expect to be able to track them down once they have returned to the Association."

"I see."

Master Willix made thorough preparations for this training task. The only reason for the mech pilots to spend time with the Larkinsons was to break through to expert pilot. Once they achieved this goal, they would leave and have no further entanglement with the clan.

It seemed that she had been quite wary of the possibility that the Larkinsons might subvert the mech pilots somehow. It would be very bad if they yearned to become a Larkinson after spending years fighting alongside their hosts!

"I understand your concerns." Ves said. "I will do my best to prevent them from becoming exposed, but the mech pilots themselves also have to do their part. Their current demeanor is quite obvious, you know. Only mechers and fleeters have this supremely confident air around them that make it seem that they can even fight against battleships and win!"

How could a Master as observant as Moira Willix not be blind to this? She just shook her head.

"They are mech pilots, not intelligence operatives. It shouldn't matter too much as long as your clansmen do not actively investigate."

"Our clan is quite adaptable and tolerant to outsiders. They won't be anything special anymore."

After exchanging a few more words, Master Willix gestured towards the twenty mech pilots she brought. "From now on, they are under your care. The MTA and I will not intervene in the slightest for the next five years. How do you intend to take care of them, Mr. Larkinson?"

Ves hadn't made a choice, but he couldn't delay any longer. Master Willix obviously wanted to see him take charge in an effective manner. He had to prove to her that he had a solid approach in mind.

He slowly stepped forward. His footsteps echoed against the deck. Though he felt a bit nervous to address the MTA mech pilots in Master Willix's presence, it was not a bad idea for her to be present this time.

As long as she didn't say anything, he would basically show these skeptical-looking mech pilots that Master Willix fully backed his decisions!

As long as he managed to rub some of Willix's authority on himself, it would be much easier for him to command these mechers in the future!

After getting a greater sense of the mech pilots he was dealing with, Ves decided on a more moderate approach.

He could not treat them too gently for fear of getting stepped upon by their feet. An absence of pressure would also prevent them from stimulating their potential, thereby allowing them to break through their previous shackles.

On the other hand, he couldn't treat them too harshly either. No matter what Master Willix promised to him, he was still dealing with elite MTA mech pilots who all possessed much higher standing than a native of the galactic rim like himself!

If he truly pissed them off, who knew what they might do if they returned to their old positions. Perhaps they might use their influence to mess with the Larkinsons or employ their relations to have their allies retaliate against the clan instead!

No matter what, Ves had to make sure that none of the surviving MTA mech pilots would have any reasons to blame him for all of their future suffering.

This was why he settled on a specific moderate approach that would hopefully shove away as much responsibility towards him as possible.

As he continued to gaze at these confident and unflinching MTA mech pilots, he felt this was the right way to go about this task.

In any case, he wouldn't be holding their hands all the time in the next months and years. He had a lot of elite mech forces under his command, so he intended to let his own men be in charge of their daily training.

This was not a mission that he would be able to complete quickly. Ves still had many priorities to deal with, and working on his expert mech design projects took precedence!

Chapter 3032: Three Training Packages

"Let me make this clear from the beginning." Ves spoke up, dispelling the cloud of silence that had descended over the reception room. "You are part of the best and strongest mech organization of humanity. You are not children, nor do you lack any guidance or training. I am sure that you can pilot far more advanced mechs that can demolish our entire expeditionary fleet. I respect your strength. I respect your qualifications. I respect your luck in being able to get accepted into the MTA."

The mech pilots all looked prouder, and for good reason. They were just like Charlotte Hoffmeister. They started off as average third or second-class mech pilots from very normal states, but managed to vault straight into heaven!

They enjoyed the most effective scientific training methods. They received extremely effective augmentations. Their salaries were paid with MTA credits which possessed a purchasing power that was so great that their parents probably had to work at least a billion years in order to earn a comparable amount of money!

All of these circumstances and more meant that these young but highly-trained MTA mech pilots were anything but inexperienced dummies who didn't know what to do. It would be a great mistake to underestimate their intelligence and wisdom.

Since these mechers were so full of themselves, why not play into their common personality trait?

At this moment, Ves knew exactly how he should treat these superior mech pilots!

A respectful expression appeared on his face. "You are all adults and I'm not your nanny. Only your choices and effort will determine whether you are able to transcend your mortality and step on the path to god pilot. The Larkinson Clan and I will merely act as your facilitators. While we will assist you in various ways, each of you must keep in mind that true strength can never be borrowed. You have to earn it yourself."

Though the MTA mech pilots may not have paid much mind to him before, the words he said just now caused all of them to look thoughtful.

Ves inwardly grinned. Even mechers weren't immune to his charm. As long as he was able to pull them into his narrative, he had already grasped the rhythm of controlling them! All he needed to do was to secure his current impression into their minds.

He waved his hand, causing projections of all five Larkinson expert pilots to appear in front of his audience.

"Don't look down on our ability to train expert pilots. Our clan is only a couple of years old, but we have already managed to raise five genuine expert pilots despite our relative lack of resources and amenities. We also managed to produce seventeen more expert candidates, but unfortunately only eleven of them remain alive."

He was sure the MTA mech pilots had already done their research, but the information carried more weight this time.

His smile turned grim. "You can never gain something without taking risks. The greater your ambitions, the greater the hardships that you have to overcome. This is the core principle of the Larkinson Clan and also the reason for our success. None of our expert pilots and expert candidates are flowers in a greenhouse. Each of them has thrown

themselves in battle against swarms of pirate mechs, actual warships and a hostile force that has brought a superior number of expert mechs. Each time, we were outnumbered and outgunned. Each time, we have lost thousands of good men and women. Yet the survivors among us managed to persevere. The best even managed to thrive! Each of our expert pilots are among these exemplary figures."

It was hard for them not to show their admiration towards other expert pilots. It didn't matter if there was a vast difference in identity between them and the Larkinson expert pilots. The latter had reached a height that the vast majority of mech pilots would never be able to reach!

To them, the status of becoming a strong and powerful expert pilot was much more desirable than becoming one of an endless amount of mech pilots in the service of a huge but impersonal organization!

If they didn't want to become expert pilots so badly, they wouldn't have shown up here today. Master Willix wouldn't be so bored to select mech pilots who lacked the motivation to work hard.

None of these mech pilots were anything comparable to the initial version of William Urbesh. They possessed both the skill, heart and courage of a true mech pilot.

Yet that was not enough for them to fulfill their dreams. Their weak and undeveloped spiritualities were hard limits that would forever block their attempts of separating themselves from the masses!

Only through outside help would they be able to break this limit, and Ves just happened to have some ideas on how to approach this problem.

The issue was that his methods might be a bit too extreme. He couldn't force these people to take part in his risky and potentially fatal experiments, but he just thought of a good way to persuade them to become his test subjects.

Ves clapped his hands, causing the projections to disappear.

"My clan and I have a proven track record of raising expert pilots and expert candidates. We are so good at it that Master Willix did not hesitate to arrange for you to serve with us for a number of years."

Ves boldly invoked Master Willix's name in her presence. The fact that she didn't say anything but merely stayed silent was a powerful message in itself. His credibility directly rose in the eyes of his current audience.

"That said, I will not presume to dictate your training without input. As I stated earlier, I am not your nanny. You are capable enough to make your own choices in life. It is for

this reason that I have prepared three different training packages for you. Each of them differ by intensity, expectations and rules."

He began to pace from side to side.

"The least restrictive option is the self-training package." He introduced. He just came up with it so he didn't have a fancy name to describe it yet. "Just as it says, this package will give you a great degree of autonomy while you remain a guest within our clan. If you think you know how to stimulate your potential the best, then you are free to compose your own schedule. We can offer you plenty of specific training activities that can help you improve. For example, you can choose to receive instruction from our expert pilots, or have us prepare one of our special living mechs to complement your training. While our trainers are willing to give you plenty of suggestions, the ultimate choice lies with you and no one else. Choose this package if you want to grasp your own fate."

Ves knew that there should be plenty of skeptical and strong-willed mech individuals among the MTA mech pilots. He didn't want to deal with their stubbornness, so he decided to give them a way out and let them sort their situation out by themselves!

Of course, the immediate implications of making your own choices and grasping your own fate was that they fully owned the outcome! If they failed to make any progress, then they had no one else to blame but themselves! They chose to go down their path, so there was no reason to put the blame on Ves!

The mech pilots all looked thoughtful at this option. Some became more interested than others. Ves carefully recorded their faces.

"The second option is our voluntary participation package. You won't be able to make a lot of choices as our trainers and I will expect you to follow the training schedule that we have prepared for you as well as take part in any battles our clan gets embroiled in. That said, we will not force you to accept all of our suggestions or abide by all of our requests. If you want to say no, then we won't push you, but remember that expert pilots are extraordinary for a reason. If you don't want to follow our arrangements, then that is your choice, but true expert pilots never make excuses for themselves."

This was a middle option that Ves probably would have settled upon if he intended to adopt only a single approach. It was a good enough compromise between cooperation and autonomy. His clan would genuinely put the mech pilots through activities that should be helpful, but some of them might not be very pleasant. If the mech pilots wished to skip out on those, then they had the right to do so, but it would be their fault if they happened to miss out on a great opportunity!

Ves set it up this way so that he and his clan would not bear much responsibility if their clients failed. They made their own choices, so they should own up to them. Hopefully, the mech pilots who chose this package wouldn't invoke this right too often.

"I'm sure you can already guess what the third option is all about. The complete dedication package is the most extreme one. Don't pick it unless you have a lot of confidence in our clan's ability to mold you into an incomparable expert pilot. You have to be on board with us 100 percent for the duration of our most hellish and high-intensity training package."

He adopted a bloodthirsty grin that seemed very out of place on someone who was supposed to be a mech designer!

"I'm sure you know about hell training programs that have high mortality rates but also happen to have the highest conversion ratios of expert pilots out of actual wars. The complete dedication package is similar, though the risks you face may not be as you think. We have our own unique methods to draw out the potential of our mech pilots, but some of them can be very extreme. If you commit to our decisions, then we will not allow you to refuse. You just have to trust us that we want the best for you as well, but I won't lie to you that death or disablement are very real possibilities. For example, one of my earlier successes managed to turn from a cowardly mech pilot into an unshakable expert pilot. All he paid in return was becoming mute."

This was a very worthwhile tradeoff to mech pilots. The allure of becoming an expert pilot was just that great!

In any case, the MTA had many ways to cure this affliction, and it wasn't as if life was unbearable if they lost their voice. As long as they became expert pilots, their voices gained weight no matter how silent they sounded!

However, few of the MTA mech pilots looked enthused at this option. Ves was asking a lot from them if they chose the complete dedication package. They had to put their unreserved trust in Ves and the Larkinsons because a lot of things could go very wrong if it turned out their trainers were doing an awful job!

Ves waved his hand and divided the area in front of him in three different zones. Each zone represented a different choice.

"It's time to make your choice, but before you do so, let me give you one more rule. Each training package will run for one year. No matter which one you choose, you have to stick to it for an entire year even if you regret it the next day. Expert pilots must be decisive, so I expect you to be nothing less. Even if you think you made a grave error, you can still make the best out of your situation as each option is meant to fulfill your dreams one way or another. Now, don't think too much and decide your training package."

Ves deliberately limited their thinking time because he wanted to maintain his current rhythm. The MTA mech pilots all had to know that no matter how they spent their next five years, the Larkinson Patriarch would always remain in charge!

In the end, nine mech pilots immediately entered the zone that stood for the self-training package.

This caused Ves to dismiss them in his mind. These mechers evidently had little faith in his ability to elevate them to the rank of expert pilot. If that was the case, Ves would just throw them to the trainers of his clan and stop paying any further attention to their progress.

Seven mech pilots moved over to the middle zone. Ves had a better impression of these mech pilots. Though they did not put all of their trust in the Larkinson Clan, they at least showed a willingness to cooperate and follow the schedules set up by the Larkinsons.

That left four MTA mech pilots who had yet to make a choice.

In fact, they were already staring at the last zone. The decision they were about to make wasn't light at all. They knew that once they stepped into this empty zone, they would be handing over their lives to strangers!

They never imagined that mechers such as themselves would be put into a position where they had to relinquish all of their power and decisions to an indigeneous organization.

Ves merely smiled in expectation at them. His twinkling eyes along with his prior words already conveyed what he thought.

Expert pilots never hesitated. If they ever wanted to become equals to demigods, could they afford to be any less?

In the end, the last four MTA mech pilots simultaneously stepped onto the most dangerous zone.

Ves openly grinned.

The four poor sods had consciously chosen to become his year-long test subjects!

With Master Willix as a witness, these unwitting fools would never be able to go back!

Chapter 3033: Fixer Iron

After the MTA mech pilots had made their choices, Ves recorded their decisions and sent them off. General Verle had already made adequate preparations to receive the new guests and put them through some introductory training sessions and familiarization activities.

Ves planned to discuss with Verle on how to flesh out and organize the three training packages later. He knew that he only had to give them his general ideas and let the rest of the military wing of the Larkinson Clan take care of the implementation.

He was a mech designer, not a mech instructor. Turning mech pilots into expert pilots was not his main job. He only planned to spend enough time on them to further his studies on spiritual engineering and to prevent the mechers from feeling neglected.

In any case, he had five years to produce solid results. This was plenty of time for Ves to find ways to solve their spiritual potential inadequacies and help them stimulate their potential.

If Ves failed to produce any positive results after a year of laid-back instruction, then he would consider upping the intensity and encouraging more MTA mech pilots to choose the more intensive packages.

A number of clansmen soon arrived and took the MTA mech pilots away. Meanwhile, Ves and Gloriana guided Master Willix over to the design lab.

Every assistant mech designer was present in the main lab. They all stood at attention even before Master Willix entered the compartment!

Ketis and Juliet stood in front. Both of them maintained their cool and did not lose control just because they were in the presence of a great mech designer.

Master Willix briefly swept her gaze over the assistants. "Your manpower here is insufficient."

"We didn't have any good opportunities to expand our design teams lately, ma'am." Ves excused.

"You should address this shortcoming soon. The Crown Uprising has already uprooted a decent number of mech companies. There are more mech designers on the job market than before, so it should not be a challenge for you to recruit an extra hundred Apprentices. The mech designers from most second-rate states in the Winged Serenade Star Sector are quite decent."

"I will consider stopping by to pick up a batch of recruits."

"Don't delay too long. The higher you set your goals, the greater the need for rigor. You cannot handle every little task yourself no matter how many augmentations you have."

Both Ves and Gloriana nodded in acceptance.

"Well, let us discuss the projects in more detail. I have brought some interesting resonating exotics that can drastically change the fighting approach of the upcoming expert mechs."

The Journeymen as well as Master Willix entered a secure meeting room. Once they took their seats, Gloriana began to present a quick summary and status update on the five expert mech design projects.

Master Willix was already familiar with most of the contents, but the presentation still set the stage for their upcoming discussion.

"Thank you, Miss Wodin. I am pleased to hear that you are not satisfied with the current state of the draft designs and are still working hard to improve them. If the new luminar crystals live up to their promises, then I agree that they can add a substantial degree of power and versatility to the expert mechs armed with ranged weapons. I do caution you not to put all of your stock in unproven and experimental technology, though. You must at least perform rigorous tests on the performance of different improved luminar crystals in order to verify whether they can endure the stresses of high-level combat."

"I will task a design team to perform this study." Gloriana quickly promised.

This was one of the many instances where assistants could take off a burden off the shoulders of the lead designers. Any recent science or engineering graduate could perform these basic tests as long as Ves prepared the test crystals!

After Master Willix pointed out a few other details about the expert mech designs, the discussion soon turned to the most important item on the agenda.

"As promised, I have brought a number of key resonating materials that will complement all five expert mechs under development. Not all of them are equal, and not all of them are my first choice, but they will all define your expert mechs for years to come once they are completed."

Master Willix brought two resonating materials per expert mech. Gloriana had been looking forward to receiving them for a long while. She had already discussed extensively with the great Master on what kind of resonating abilities their expert mechs should acquire.

While Gloriana and the others had plenty of ideas, it was useless to develop them any further when they weren't sure they would be able to get their hands on the right materials.

Though Gloriana and the Larkinson Clan did their best to procure the resonating exotics they needed, they only managed to satisfy their low-end needs. They weren't powerful enough to gain access to the more expensive and exclusive exotics. The quality of the

expert mechs they were designing would have ended up a lot lower if Master Willix didn't come to the rescue!

Ves sat up a bit straighter in his chair as the MTA Master started off with his favorite project.

"Let us begin with the Chimera Project. This is the most unfocused expert mech design of the five, so it is not clear which of its aspects should be strengthened. Whether it is defense, offense, mobility or utility, this hero mech will benefit regardless of how it is augmented with resonance abilities. An abundance of choice can often lead to no choices at all. This is why I am glad that you have still been able to choose your preferences for this project."

Both Ves and Gloriana held long discussions on what kind of resonance abilities they should aim to impart in the Chimera Project. They eventually managed to settle their differences, which gave Master Willix a solid direction on what to choose.

The MTA Mech Designer introduced the first key resonating exotic for the Chimera Project by projecting a mineral in front of the faces of the lead designers.

"Mr. Larkinson, you are familiar with Rorach's Bone, are you not?" She asked.

"Uhm, yes, ma'am. I have plenty of personal experiences with Rorach's Bone." He replied. "Is this resonating exotic related to it in any way?"

"It's not how you think. Rorach's Bone is called this way because there are signs that it is derived from organic matter. Fixer Iron is an old and well-known metallic exotic that has definite inorganic origins."

Ves frowned a bit when he heard this. He always liked Rorach's Bone for its seemingly-magical regeneration properties. The fact that it had organic origins only increased his opinion about this material.

If possible, he wanted Master Willix to provide him with a resonating version of Rorach's Bone. Whether it was actually related to Rorach's Bone or not didn't matter. What Ves prized was the regeneration property and the organic connection.

"Fixer Iron doesn't sound very sophisticated, ma'am." He commented.

Willix lightly shrugged. "Most old exotics that humanity has discovered in the early days of our ascension into the stars bear simple names. The material scientists back then did not put much thought behind the implications of their individual naming preferences. That is why a lot of metallic exotics bear the word 'iron' in their name. It didn't help that Fixer Iron's effects weren't entirely clear before the advent of expert mechs."

"Does that mean that Fixer Iron will not perform as well as the alternatives?"

She shook her head. "Far from it. Fixer Iron is a staple solution for second-class expert mechs that require battlefield regeneration capabilities. It may not be the most optimal or efficient resonating exotic for the purpose, but it is one of the more widely available resonating exotics. We have substantial stockpiles of this resonating exotic in almost every sector headquarters of our Association."

Master Willix subsequently elaborated by mentioning some key properties while projecting a table that listed all of the relevant data that Ves needed.

He had to admit that Fixer Iron was quite a practical choice. While it was definitely a strategic material that couldn't easily be found on the market, it was still widespread enough for the MTA to not care if Master Willix took out enough material to satisfy the needs of a single expert mech.

"So what can Fixer Iron bring to the Chimera Project?" Ves pressed. "Also, what makes it different from Rorach's Bone?"

"Rorach's Bone is not a resonating exotic. It works passively by absorbing any heat and ambient energy around it before converting it into matter that conforms to the structure of the objects and components around the exotic. Fixer Iron can achieve the same effect, but will only perform it when influenced by a compatible resonance source. Venerable Joshua Larkinson happens to react well to Fixer Iron and vice versa."

"I see."

Essentially, Fixer Iron was an active and more potent version of Rorach's Bone. Whereas the latter only worked at a slow pace, the resonating exotic that Master Willix had brought could restore heavy damage within a dozen seconds!

Of course, the downside of this was that the expert pilot had to actively cooperate and expend his strength in order to sustain the energy-intensive regeneration process.

It couldn't regenerate a damaged mech 'for free', as it were. This meant that each time Venerable Joshua wanted to repair any battle damage, he would have to pause all other combat actions in order to fix his expert mech. This did not sound ideal!

"How long can a typical expert pilot regenerate his mech using this resonating exotic?"

"That depends. There are too many variables at play here. I don't need to remind you of that. In my estimation, the current direction of the Chimera Project should allow it to regenerate enough battle damage to shatter it entirely twice over."

"What?! That much?!" Ves reacted with surprise!

"This is why Fixer Iron is popular among many expert mechs, Mr. Larkinson. While it is theoretically possible for this material to restore so much damage, the expert pilot will

have to expend much if not all of his energy to do so. Don't put too much stock in this material until Venerable Joshua Larkinson has increased his resonance strength."

"We will pay attention to your advice, Master." Gloriana seriously said.

Willix briefly showed them a projection on where she could best integrate Fixer Iron in order to provide the most comprehensive active regeneration capabilities.

"Fixer Iron is an exotic that works best with components in close proximity." She explained. "Also it can only restore components that are within reach. If an enemy ever manages to sever a section which integrates a large amount of Fixer Iron, then the damaged mech in question will not be able to regenerate anything because the severed piece is no longer attached."

This was why it was best to integrate Fixer Iron within the torso of a mech. Nowhere was safer than there. By ensuring that the enemy wouldn't easily be able to pry away the Fixer Iron that kept the Chimera Project alive in battle, the latter would always be able to get back to optimal condition!

All in all, Ves was generally satisfied with the first resonating exotic that Willix introduced. Fixer Iron might not sound glamorous, but its effects were very solid!

Willix introduced the second exotic that she prepared.

"You have conceived the Chimera Project as a troubleshooter and a highly versatile combat problem. In this capacity, the expert mech has more than enough defenses to fulfill this role. You still need to increase its offensive power. Regular attacks will not allow it to defeat expert mechs fast enough."

This was true. Expert mechs were darn tough. It took powerful attacks to wear out their defenses over time.

Ves wondered what kind of solution that Willix was about to present. Would she whip up a resonating exotic that could augment the Chimera Project's melee or ranged capabilities?

Chapter 3034: Iridescent Mercury

The Chimera Project's main theme centered around adaptability and versatility. It did not explicitly aim to be the 'best' at anything.

However, it would be nice if it was able to excel at something. Increasing its damage-absorbing capabilities by pairing it up with Fixer Iron was a good choice. Though the resonating exotic did not excite Ves and Gloriana all that much, it paired well with Venerable Joshua's domain and was easy to integrate in his upcoming expert mech.

Increasing its defenses was not enough, though. An expert mech almost always needed offensive enhancements as well. It was a waste of an expert mech and expert pilot if their vast potential wasn't channeled into an offensive direction!

Master Willix did not immediately reveal her selection for offense-oriented resonating exotic. She merely smiled and asked a question.

"How do you envision the Chimera Project on the battlefield? What kind of role should Venerable Joshua adopt?"

Ves thought long and hard about these questions, and so did Gloriana... While their views diverged from each other, they still found a lot of common ground.

Since Ves was more passionate about Venerable Joshua's expert mech than his wife, he decided to answer this question.

"Venerable Joshua is a versatile mech pilot, ma'am. When paired with a versatile mech, he can function as a troubleshooter. In other words, he can shore up any weaknesses in our lineup, rescue any troubled units or add some extra strength to any important actions we might attempt on the battlefield."

"What should he and his expert mech excel at aside from the basics you have mentioned? Think beyond the technical and think strategically instead."

Master Willix was obviously hinting at something greater. When Ves did as he was told and pulled back his perspective, he envisioned a large battlefield in space where thousands if not tens of thousands of mechs grinded against each other.

The greater the amount of mechs, the greater the amount of confusion. The role of individual mechs and mech pilots became smaller and even expert mechs would find it hard to change the overall strategic outlook of a huge battle.

However... was this really the case?

A few thoughts flashed through his mind. He had become involved in many instances where a single individual managed to change the course of a major battle.

Outside of rare and unpredictable breakthroughs, the role of leaders gained more weight as battles grew larger. This was something that was becoming more and more relevant to the Larkinson Clan as its mech forces expanded into the thousands.

At this scale, the qualities of regular fighters became less impactful but the qualities of the senior officers became more pivotal!

A good commander was able to stabilize a battleline that was under heavy assault. A poor commander could easily cause it to collapse ahead of time.

The role of higher-ranking leaders such as Ves and General Verle became even more evident. Though most of their influence affected the military wing of the Larkinson Clan when it was out of combat, they still performed essential functions during a battle. Whether it was boosting morale, issuing broad commands, responding to enemy maneuvers and so on, the mech pilots of the Larkinson Clan all looked up to their leaders for hope, instruction and more!

It was as if a mech suddenly turned online in his mind. The hint provided by Master Willix allowed Ves to recognize the most suitable role for Venerable Joshua.

"Venerable Joshua has always been the most likeable expert pilot in our current roster." He noted. "He doesn't possess any significant leadership qualities, but he is able to befriend everyone regardless of their individual beliefs. From the Penitent Sisters to the Ylvainans, Joshua has earned great respect from all of them due to his amiability and ability to pilot their signature mechs. He is the standard bearer of the Larkinson Clan."

He could already picture how Venerable Joshua made his mark on the battlefield. His large, imposing mech would shine bright and deliberately attract attention. Whether it stayed in the rear and launched precision attacks on critical enemy machines or charged forward in order to lead an assault, all of his actions would be magnified to those who were able to view or track his actions.

While any other expert mech could fulfill this role as well, none of them were quite as suitable.

The Bulwark Project was too slow and would only be able to provide encouragement from the rear.

The Sentry Project was too passive and did not fight in an ostentatious manner.

The Disruptor Project was too fleeting and functioned best when operating far from other friendly units.

The Decapitator Project and Vanguard Project were too offense-oriented and lacked broad appeal.

Compared to all of these choices, only the Chimera Project possessed the balance and versatility to function well in any place on the battlefield!

"You understand now, do you?" Master Willix smiled.

Ves took a deep breath. "I do. We chose to design a hero mech for Venerable Joshua in order to make the best use out of his broad skill set. Yet we did not think sufficiently about what kind of role that he and his expert mech could really play. I get it now. Hero mechs might not be the most efficient or effective mech type we could choose from, but it is the iconic kind of mech to inspire other soldiers in battle!"

Hero mechs were called this way for a reason! Ves had explored this mech type extensively in the past. From the Ouroboros to the Transcendent Messenger, the few hero mechs that Ves designed had all become iconic standard bearers whose symbolic value surpassed their combat value!

Adding such an expert mech to the Larkinson Clan's lineup made a lot of sense as well. One of the core doctrines was psychological warfare. According to this school of thought, the Larkinsons should do their best to increase their own morale while damaging the morale of their opponents.

Venerable Joshua and his hero expert mech were very well suited to accomplish both objectives!

As Ves thought about orienting the Chimera Project in this direction, Gloriana began to frown.

"Master Willix, what does this have to do with the second resonating exotic that you have selected for the Chimera Project? Did you select something that isn't capable of enhancing the offensive power of this expert mech?"

"There are many solutions to increase the attack power of your expert pilot, Miss Wodin. The selection of enhancing options should fit the role and needs of the expert mech, not the other way around. I have vast experience in judging and determining the roles of expert mechs. In my judgement, the Decapitator Project, Vanguard Project and Sentry Project can already provide you with strong attacks. Instead of trying to force the Chimera Project to keep up in an area it doesn't excel at, it is much more fitting to enhance one of its strong points."

The Master Mech Designer no longer kept everyone in suspense. She switched the projection to display a light and delicate looking substance.

"This is Iridescent Mercury. It is a mercury-like exotic that is fairly rare but does not see much use as a resonating exotic."

Why is that, ma'am?"

"Its perceived combat value is too low in the eyes of most people." Willix simply responded. "This is because it doesn't directly enhance any solid combat parameters. When an expert pilot resonates with an expert mech that is laced with Iridescent Mercury, it becomes more noticeable and harder to ignore."

This sounded quite useful, but there had to be a downside to it, or else Master Willix wouldn't have mentioned that it was rarely used.

"What's the catch?"

"It's compatibility with other resonating exotics is not good." She said. "One of the reasons why Fixer Iron is stocked in every star sector is because it has low resonance interference. It either plays well or does not inhibit the performance of other resonating exotics. In comparison, Iridescent Mercury is a lot more difficult to pair with other materials. If you commit to using this resonating exotic, you will have to forgo many other powerful alternatives. You can only add weaker resonating exotics or none at all when you make use of this special material."

What Master Willix basically stated was that committing to the use of Iridescent Mercury came at a heavy price. Ves and Gloriana might have to settle with passing on the possibility of integrating a very powerful attack ability for the Chimera Project!

Suffice to say, Gloriana did not react well to this choice. Even though she respected Master Willix, that did not mean she blindly followed suit. As a classically educated mech designer who attended one of the best universities of the Hegemony, she was trained to form her own opinions even in the face of great authority figures!

"I do not doubt that Iridescent Mercury can add a useful function to the Chimera Project, Master Willix. However, it does not align with the expert mech's fundamental purpose. What we need the most are solutions against other expert mechs. The Komodo War as well as the Battle of Reckoning that we barely won has both showcased how disadvantageous it is to fight with less expert mechs than the enemy. We are confident that our regular forces can defeat the enemy's regular troops, so we do not particularly need to amplify the Chimera Project's ability to affect this lower-level struggle. What we truly need is to guarantee our chances against enemy expert mechs."

"Did I say that Iridescent Mercury is irrelevant in expert mech duels?"

"Huh?"

Both Gloriana and Ves looked nonplussed.

Master Willix let out a coy smile. "I may have been too busy to perform much research in your husband's design philosophy, but I did discover some notable interactions. Iridescent Mercury's main effect is rather limited under ordinary circumstances. However, according to my tests and calculations, it has a complimentary effect towards glows. If my theories are correct, it can drastically extend the effective range of the Chimera Project's glow to encompass several large formations."

"What kind of range are we talking about?" Ves cautiously asked.

"Kilometers. Maybe tens of kilometers."

"That much?!"

The effective range of an ordinary glow was much less! Unless Ves did something special like with the Valkyrie Redeemer, the glows of all of his mechs were only effective at melee range.

If Iridescent Mercury could truly extend the range of a glow, then the significance of the Chimera Project would drastically increase!

Ves was already starting to think if it was possible to debilitate thousands of mech pilots at once by integrating the glow of the Ferocious Piranha in this new superglow machine...

"Don't get too excited, Mr. Larkinson. My tests also show that the strength of the glow will substantially drop past its usual range."

"Damn." Ves cursed.

"While I admit that extending the range of glow to this extent can still be useful, at best it will free more of our regular mechs." Gloriana said.

"There is a second benefit to Iridescent Mercury that I have not mentioned yet. While it will weaken the strength of a glow past its normal range, it does the inverse at closer distances. At close distances, I predict that it can strengthen a glow beyond its usual level, even to the point of affecting an enemy expert pilot!"

"What?! Are you sure about that, ma'am!"

While Gloriana looked suitably astonished, only Ves knew full well what this possibility implied.

A glow that was strong enough to affect the rock-hard mental defenses of an expert pilot was absolutely remarkable! It could definitely swing the outcome of group battles between expert mechs as this advantage was not limited to affecting just a single individual.

Ves finally understood why Master Willix was willing to forgo other powerful enhancements in order to settle for Iridescent Mercury. This resonating exotic's effect was absolutely remarkable and one that synergized very well with both Venerable Joshua and the Chimera Project!

Chapter 3035 - Resonating Alloys

From an objective standpoint, the known effects of Iridescent Mercury were rather marginal and niche. It saw minor use in certain expert mechs piloted by notable leaders and commanders.

Yet the allure of using other resonating exotics that improved a concrete combat-related priority was too great. Few expert pilots and mech designers valued the effects of Iridescent Mercury over the alternatives.

The situation was different here. Iridescent Mercury happened to resonate quite well with Venerable Joshua. This allowed him to derive greater value from this material than many other mech pilots.

What actually stole the show was Master Willix's unexpected discovery that Iridescent Mercury possessed highly complementary effects towards glows. She even presented a bold theory that explained why this might be the case.

"If you think about it, Iridescent Mercury seems almost useless in any other circumstance. I suspect the overall function of this resonating exotic is centered around amplifying mental effects.. This is why this material can make expert mechs command more attention. However, when it is paired with a mech designed with a glow..."

Ves naturally understood the conclusion that Master Willix was hinting at. "Everyone else can't make the best use of Iridescent Mercury! Since they mainly amplify the expert pilot's inherent presence in those cases, much of the potential of this material is wasted. When paired with one of my own mechs, the resonating exotic can affect more factors. This results in a direct strengthening of one of the greatest advantages of my design philosophy!"

Iridescent Mercury had just entered into his crosshairs. Though Master Willix had cautioned Ves that her judgement was largely based on assumptions rather than solid proof, she was not the sort of mech designer who made spurious guesses. If she was willing to mention this material to Ves and Gloriana, then she must have great assurances that it lived up to its promises!

Though the Larkinsons still had to perform follow-up studies on Iridescent Mercury in order to know for certain that it could play a major role in enhancing the Chimera Project's importance, as long as it was viable, Ves was very willing to adopt it even to the exclusion of other powerful alternatives!

Master Willix spent the next five minutes explaining some of the specifics of using Iridescent Mercury.

The good news was that it did not interfere with the effects of Fixer Iron. A lot of other weaker resonating exotics would either not be impacted or be subjected to just a minor drop in effectiveness.

The bad news was that it truly left Ves and Gloriana with too few options to strengthen the Chimera Project in other ways.

"You are better off not integrating a third powerful resonance ability to this mech." Master Willix advised. "The materials that you can still squeeze in this expert mech are either unattainable or not suitable for this particular mech design."

Ves and Gloriana shared a heavy glance.

"We'll just settle on incorporating lesser amplifiers into the weapon systems of the Chimera Project." Ves spoke his thoughts.

His wife slowly nodded. Though this did not fall in line with her original ideas, the option presented by Master Willix made too much sense. As a mech designer who was sensitive towards fit and synergy, she could not deny the huge value of Iridescent Mercury to the Chimera Project!

The meeting soon moved on after determining the main resonating abilities of the Chimera Project. While this did not exclude the addition of other useful resonance functions, they would most definitely lack the impact of the Chimera Project's rapid self-repair and glow amplification capabilities!

"The Vanguard Project is much more straightforward." Master Willix addressed a different project. "Since it is based around a simple concept, there is no need for us to overcomplicate its resonance abilities. As an assault expert mech that is meant to resist tough opponents, it can better fulfill its role by amplifying both its defense and offense."

She quickly presented two decent but suitable resonating exotics that happened to be compatible with Venerable Rosa Orfan.

"Surprisingly, Venerable Orfan is actually compatible with a decent range of defense-oriented materials. That is quite uncommon to see in an expert pilot that excels in piloting offensive mechs."

This did not surprise Ves that much. Venerable Orfan possessed an undeniable connection to Qilanxo.

In fact, now that he thought about it, Qilanxo's method of bonding with chosen humans was actually a more primitive but also intimate version of his spiritual networks!

A projection of a rather dull and solid-looking metal appeared in front of the mech designers.

"BSN-17A is a different resonating material from the ones that I have introduced before." Willix spoke. "Fixer Iron and Iridescent Mercury are both naturally-occurring materials. Ores containing them only have to undergo light processing in order to obtain usable quantities. BSN-17A is different in that it is an alloy that blends several different weaker resonating exotics in order to achieve a stronger effect."

The Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan were no strangers to alloys, but it was rare to encounter one that was still able to interact with expert pilots.

"What does BSN-17A do, ma'am?" Ves asked.

"It enhances the defenses of a mech by forming a thin but highly-resilient energy barrier just above the surface of an expert mech."

"Isn't that a resonance shield?"

"This is different." Willix shook her head. "The coverage area and working principles are different. Ordinary resonance shields extend at least several meters from the upper surface of an expert mech. The barrier formed by BSN-17A only hovers a couple of centimeters above the contours of a frame. The efficiency and resistance of this active ability are quite good. Best of all, the BSN barrier can be stacked with an ordinary resonance shield. This allows the expert mech to brace itself against a very powerful strike such as the charge of a lancer mech."

While this was doubtlessly a useful effect, Ves felt it was a bit boring. There wasn't anything special to BSN-17A aside from passively increasing an expert mech's resistance against various interference effects. Unfortunately, that also caused the resonating alloy to interfere with plenty of other resonating materials.

Master Willix did manage to find another suitable resonating exotic that did not interfere with BSN-17A.

"Pierrotis is a rather common resonating exotic that matches well with the role of the Vanguard Project. It can amplify physical damage by amplifying the momentum driving a weapon forward. It is most often used in expert lancer mechs but it can also be useful for the Vanguard Project."

Ves adopted a strange expression. "Who the hell came up with this awful name?"

"Some boy named Pierrot most likely." Gloriana guessed.

The name was much less important than the effects. Passively, Pierrotis substantially increased the resilience of a weapon, allowing it to withstand much more punishment. When an expert pilot resonated with it, Pierrotis somehow increased the force behind the weapon in a way that allowed it to strike harder. No matter whether the expert mech was charging at high speeds or simply thrusting its weapon forward, Pierrotis directly amplified the attack.

The major downside of this resonating exotic was that it was very hard to show its full potential in static combat scenarios.

The less the Vanguard Project was able to move, the lower the amplification factor of Pierrotis.

Fortunately, this was not a big deal in spaceborn combat. The void of open space was so big and empty that it was virtually impossible to pin a mech to a single coordinate on the battlefield!

"It's not an ideal fit for a spearman mech, but Venerable Orfan resonates strongly with this material." Ves noted as he skimmed through the data.

There were few resonating exotics that could provide a stronger offensive enhancement to an expert mech while also remaining compatible with the expert pilot.

When Master Willix moved on to the Decapitator Project, she reused a material she mentioned before.

"Just like Venerable Orfan, Venerable Dise is also compatible with a range of defensive resonating materials. There should not be any problem with integrating BSN-17A to this expert swordsman mech as well."

"Are there any other good reasons to opt for BSN-17A again, Master Willix?" Gloriana asked.

"BSN-17A is a favored defensive material for offensive mechs because you do not need to integrate many tons of it into their frames. Just a moderate amount is enough for it to reach optimum performance."

"What about piling more BSN-17A onto an expert mech?" Ves curiously wondered. "I bet Venerable Jannzi is compatible with this resonating exotic as well. Is it possible for her expert mech to use three times as much BSN-17A than the other expert mechs?"

"It won't be as usable anymore, Mr. Larkinson. The defensive attributes of the thin BSN barrier will increase, but the strain on the expert pilot rises too quickly. An expert mech with such an excessively strengthened barrier will not be able to maintain its enhanced defenses for long."

"I see."

That made sense. BSN-17A may have been deliberately designed to complement offensive expert mechs.

Willix chose a different offensive material for the Decapitator Project. She sent a brief glance over to Ketis.

"I think you will be happy with the resonating exotic that I have found for our expert swordsman mech. "Bissonat is a rather scarce resonating exotic that can directly

amplify the cutting power of a sharp or bladed weapon. I imagine it will complement your design philosophy quite nicely, Miss Ketis."

The swordmaster's eyes shone when she heard that. Ketis was definitely interested in trying to superimpose the effects of Bissonat with her own specialty!

"What are the downsides of Bissonat?" Ves asked in a critical tone.

"It is rarer than Pierrotis and can cost you a hefty sum. It has a medium interference factor and there is not much room for other options when you use it in a bladed weapon. Its resonance effect is also more strenuous to maintain, so Venerable Dise must use it sparingly unless she must truly use its power to cut through a resilient opponent."

Though none of this sounded nice, the tradeoffs were worth it. Bissonat's cutting power amplification was substantial. It worked best against solid matter such as resilient armor plating but did not provide a lot of advantages against resonance shields and other energy barriers.

All in all, Bissonat was a good choice for the Decapitator Project. The whole point of the expert swordsman mech was to provide the Larkinson Clan with a solution against more powerful or heavily armored targets.

After a short discussion on how Bissonat should be integrated into the mech sword of a swordsman mech, Master Willix quickly moved on to her choices of the Disruptor Project.

"One of the greatest challenges to matching resonating materials with expert light mechs is that you cannot use those that are too heavy or take up too much space. This rules out many exotics that have to be used in greater quantities in order to justify their inclusion."

"So we can only use lighter resonating exotics?"

"Not quite. You can use dense and heavy ones as well as long as their potency is high enough that you can already obtain a usable result by using just a small amount of it. The problem is that this is a universally-desired quality, so lighter and more potent resonating exotics are difficult to procure."

Fortunately, the MTA was so wealthy and powerful that these material constraints did not hinder it from stockpiling such valuable materials.

"The Disruptor Project's greatest strength is its evasion capabilities. Since this trait plays such a key role in its performance, I have carefully sought a resonating exotic that can strengthen it while at the same time meet all of the other requirements."

The projection changed to show off a bar of metal alloy with a blue sheen.

"This is Perfidious Steel. As its name suggests, it is another resonating alloy."

"What is its effect?"

"It makes an expert mech more perfidious." Master Willix straightforwardly answered.

???

Chapter 3036 - Perfidious Steel

When Ves implanted the Archimedes Rubal in his mind, it didn't take long for him to load it up with a large database of information that might become relevant at some point in the future.

This was one of those days. Ves quickly accessed the latest edition of the standard language dictionary and looked up the definition of a word that he had almost never encountered in his life.

[perfidious: deceitful and untrustworthy.]

While this dictionary definition clarified the meaning of the word, it did not dispel his confusion. What did deceit have to do with expert mechs? What the hell did Perfidious Steel have to do with expert light mechs?!

Master Willix looked amused at the confusion she managed to generate among the Journeymen. She did not leave them guessing for long, though.

"Perfidious Steel is the product of an accident. It is an unintentional invention of a company that is dedicated to developing new resonating alloys. While the material does not meet the original goals of the company, its effects are still useful enough to be put on the market.."

"What does Perfidious Steel do, ma'am?" Ves practically begged.

"This is not easy to explain. The physics and theory is beyond your level, but to put it simply, it can cause a mismatch between the perceived and actual coordinates of an expert mech."

That barely offered any clarification to Ves and his fellow Journeyman.

Master Willix shook her head in disappointment.

"As mech designers and engineers, you should be familiar with the phenomenon known as refraction."

She raised her hand, causing the active projection to switch from showing off a material to a very simple example of refraction.

The projection showed off a very simple pool of water with a wooden rod sticking out of the surface.

The most notable part about this image was that the angle of the stick above the water did not match the angle of the stick below the surface. Even though the rod was clearly a single, straight piece, the presence of water caused the observer to have the illusion that they were laying eyes on a crooked stick!

"The concept of refraction is simple to understand in this example." Master Willix adopted the guise of a high school physics teacher. "The refractive index of air and water do not match. This means that any light that travels through these mediums actually differs. It also causes the light to bend at an angle when it passes through another material."

This was all basic knowledge that any mech designer should have mastered long ago. It was also highly relevant to Ves and anyone who worked on laser weapons.

Master Willix waved her hand, causing the simple example to make way for an actual clip of an expert light skirmisher that incorporated Perfidious Steel!

"Watch carefully."

The expert light mech appeared to be charging towards a distant enemy fleet. Doing so by itself was quite perilous as it was difficult for it to dodge every attack.

In order to evade incoming attacks, the expert mech had to dodge in a limited amount of directions, namely up, down, left or right.

This was a problem because the light mech had to invest a lot of effort into traveling straight ahead in order to reach its target and fulfill its primary goal!

These two priorities conflicted with each other.

If the light mech wanted to maximize its dodging chances, then it should direct all of its efforts into dodging side to side or up and down.

If the light mech wanted to get anywhere fast enough, then it had to travel forward.

Focusing on one directly detracted from the other. A light mech could not simultaneously do well in both without paying an unacceptable price!

Though the Disruptor Project was a bit better off in this regard due to its plethora of boosters, it did not carry enough booster fuel to keep this pattern up for long.

The light expert mech therefore needed another solution in order to ensure that it would be able to reach its targets quickly while still retaining enough combat effectiveness to complete its mission!

This was why the archival footage presented Ves with a remarkable sight.

Numerous laser beams attempted to strike the approaching expert light mech. Though the mech attempted to perform some lateral movements in order to prevent the enemy from piling up a lot of precise attacks onto its frame, there were just too many attacks.

Yet.. when the laser beams struck the shape of the expert mech, they went right through as if it was just a projection!

"Is the real mech under stealth?!"

"No. There are no stealth systems on this expert mech. That would compromise its defensive capabilities too much."

When the footage continued to roll, Ves eventually noticed that some beams hit the mech.

The strange part was that the beam that hit the mark had actually missed the illusion by tens of meters!

Yet when the laser beam hit the 'real' expert mech, the damage was reflected on the illusion. It was as if there was some kind of strange dislocation of space that caused the actual coordinates and perceived coordinates of the light mech to diverge!

"I get it now." Ves spoke. "Perfidious Steel acts on the observers, is that correct? Is it effective against just humans or can it also fool artificial systems?"

"Both. It distorts perspective. The best part about this material is that it works on more than just visible light. No matter whether you are scanning for heat, mass, air displacement and so on, they will all point to a different coordinate than where the mech is actually positioned."

"That... that's incredibly useful!" Gloriana gasped.

Ves shared her shock. How come he never heard of this material? Perfidious Steel should be integrated in every expert light mech if it possesses such an incredibly useful effect!

However, there were always downsides.

"I wouldn't get excited too soon." Master Willix spoke in a calm tone. "There are several major downsides to Perfidious Steel. First, it is an obscure product with low availability.

Second, its resonance interference is high, which means that you must forgo many other resonating exotics. Third, it is highly effective at longer ranges but is of limited use at shorter ranges. In melee combat, the degree of distortion can only amount to a few meters or less."

The last point was especially painful. While it was just enough to allow the expert mech to slip attacks through an enemy's guard, it would not play a significant role in preventing attacks from landing on the machine.

Still, Ves was quite satisfied with what Perfidious Steel had to offer. He did not forget about the superb armor system of the Disruptor Project. With a frame clad with Unending alloy, Venerable Tusa didn't have to worry about his expert mech falling apart anytime soon!

Gloriana made the same realization. "With Perfidious Steel, the Disruptor Project will effectively be able to function as a defensive mech!"

Evasion was another form of defense. Though it was not as simple and direct as resisting attacks with armor, if the Disruptor Project could attract a lot of firepower for a long period of time, then it could directly alleviate a lot of pressure elsewhere!

Although it sounded stupid for enemies to focus a lot of firepower on a highly-evasive machine, sometimes they had no choice! If the Disruptor Project unflinchingly penetrated enemy lines and surged towards the more vulnerable portions of an enemy fleet, then the expert mech had to be stopped!

Ves looked at Master Willix with a lot of appreciation. Even with all of its downsides, Perfidious Steel fit perfectly with the Disruptor Project! In fact, using this material would definitely turn Venerable Tusa's expert mech into a nemesis against hostile ranged expert mechs!

The second key resonating exotic for the Disruptor Project was much less exciting in comparison. Due to the fickle nature of Perfidious Steel, there were few options left.

"Since Perfidious Steel must be integrated into the frame of the expert mech, it is best to push the other key resonating material onto an external component. The Disruptor Project's daggers will suffice. We can apply Bissonat to its blades as well in order to ensure that the light mech can pierce through better-protected parts."

Ves frowned a bit. "Why Bissonat? Shouldn't Pierrotis be a better choice? Light mechs move around a lot. Their high acceleration makes it easy for them to build up momentum. If they can initiate a charge, they can inflict heavy damage on an enemy mechs' resonance shield."

"You make a valid argument, but in most cases resonance shields are not that difficult to break with regular resonance-empowered attacks. It is breaking past solid high-

quality armor systems that is more challenging. The Disruptor Project doesn't have the staying power to get entangled in longer duels. It must assassinate its target quickly."

"I see."

He still felt that Pierrotis was a better choice, but Bissonat was not a bad choice. Combining its properties with Ketis' design philosophy would produce remarkable results!

The discussion soon moved on to the resonating exotics chosen for the fifth expert mech design.

"The Sentry Project is different from the other expert mechs." Master Willix stated. "It is an expert mech that is dedicated to long-ranged precision marksmanship. The design choices that you have made so far have all been geared towards maximizing its long-ranged lethality at the cost of diminishing its close-ranged combat capabilities. I must say that you are very brave for doing so. Venerable Davia Stark must trust you to a great degree to design such a one-dimensional rifleman mech."

Ves merely shrugged. "She can count on other Larkinsons to shield her against incoming attackers."

"I respect your design choices. Whether I agree with them is not in consideration." The MTA Master affirmed. "In any case, I have chosen to bring two resonating exotics that can complement its strengths rather than shore up its weaknesses."

The projection showed a ranged expert mech that fired repeated energy beams. The most notable part about this display was that as some of the beams propagated further, they began to bend at angles up to thirty or even forty degrees!

This allowed the ranged expert mech to deal damage to targets that didn't expect to get hit at angles that didn't completely block the incoming energy attack!

"This is an effect that your strange luminar crystals haven't displayed yet." Master Willix smiled. "Opticonium is a rarely seen resonating alloy that can bend the trajectory of energy attacks. The theoretical maximum is 45 degrees, but the strain on the expert pilot is too great. This resonating alloy is much more efficient when it is used to bend trajectories to a smaller degree. You can still hit targets without warning at very long ranges."

Ves didn't see how that could be useful. He was much more interested in the possibilities enabled by bending attacks around solid obstacles such as shields or ship hulls.

"Bypassing enemy defenses should be the greatest use of this resonating alloy, correct?"

Master Willix nodded. "That is indeed the original purpose for this product. Though the degree of bending is not too extreme, angles of thirty and forty percent is already enough to slip attacks around a corner, as it were. It is especially effective if the Sentry Project has already positioned itself at an angle from an enemy force to begin with. It will allow the expert rifleman mech to be able to deal effective damage against an enemy force without needing to fly too far away from the main body of friendly mechs."

Ves deeply appreciated the tactical possibilities opened up by Opticonium. Though he wanted to strangle whoever invented such a stupid name for such a fantastic resonating alloy, that did not stop him from wondering how Venerable Stark could frustrate a lot of enemies!

Opticonium was apparently a rarer and less accessible product than the other resonating materials that Master Willix had mentioned. However, a rifle only needed to integrate tens of kilograms of this alloy in order to produce an effective result.

The Sentry Project would definitely turn into a confounding sniper when paired with this resonating alloy!

Chapter 3037: GT-535

This was the first time that Ves truly felt that the expert mech design projects deserved to be treated differently than ordinary mechs.

Up until this point, much of his current work did not differ that much from his regular mech design projects. He just felt like designing some really fancy custom mechs.

The best way to describe his lack of awe towards his current projects was that it was just one step higher from designing his prime mechs. Though Ves appreciated the current mechs of his expert pilots a lot, he couldn't deny that they fell far short of what expert pilots deserved to depend upon in battle.

Ves realized that a void had quietly grown in his heart ever since he embarked on the current round of projects. This empty feeling may have caused him to act less steady than usual.

Perhaps this explained why he pushed so much against Gloriana's strict planning. His desire to match or exceed the grandeur of all of the other expert mechs he had witnessed in battle prompted him to explore radical options.

This was his usual solution whenever he felt his mech designs were lacking!

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He put a lot of effort into coming up with unconventional but powerful upgrades such as mounted wargear and enhanced luminar crystals. These were the solutions that helped

him fill up the void in his heart and make the Chimera Project and Sentry Project more palatable in his eyes.

At this moment, Ves began to doubt whether he should have worked so hard in the first place.

When Master Willix presented one dazzling resonating exotic after another, he felt that the usage of all of these amazing materials overshadowed all of his efforts.

He inwardly shook his head. That wasn't completely true. While he had to admit that resonating exotics did indeed possess the spark that transform expert mechs into brilliant combat assets, they were not all-powerful.

For one, they only worked when the expert pilot in question actively resonated with the new materials. This was a strenuous task and one that only became harder when the resonating material became more potent and powerful.

There was always a price. No resonating exotic could deliver great power without input to power its effects.

That power mainly came from the extraordinary qualities of an expert pilot. Yet no matter how powerful a demigod had become, the power they could exert had limits. They were not perpetual motion machines nor unable to violate the law of conservation of energy.

As long as these conditions were in place, resonance abilities would always be costly to employ!

In most cases, expert pilots were better off reserving the power granted by resonating exotics against other expert mechs and powerful opponents.

Against a large number of regular enemies, it was better to rely on the more ordinary properties of their expert mechs. This was where powerful systems and components could make a substantial difference.

Besides, the base performance of the expert mech also affected the power of resonance abilities. A cheap and badly-designed machine would not be able to produce a lot of output. This was why the mech community obsessed a lot about the mech designers in charge of designing expert mechs.

It was always best to have a Master or a team of Masters in charge of these crucial projects!

"...In short, opticonium is a resonating alloy that suits an immobile rifleman mech better. If the Sentry Project is designed as a more traditional mobile mid-ranged combatant, then it wouldn't need to bend its attacks, as it always enjoys the option to relocate so

that it can attack the enemy at a more favorable angle. Since this is not the case, the opticonium will provide greater value than a more basic amplification in attack power."

Master Willix had just given the four Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan a crash course on the bizarre but incredibly useful effects of opticonium.

Though Ves felt a bit uncomfortable that choosing this key resonating material over others would forgo the opportunity to increase the impact of Venerable Stark's expert mech, he understood the underlying logic.

Mechs and other hardy targets were far harder to take down when attacked from the front. Every mech designer designed their machines in a way that allowed them to fight with great effectiveness when facing a single and ideal direction.

In order to strengthen their frontal performance, some sacrifices had to be made when it came to fending off attacks from the flanks and especially the rear.

If the Sentry Project could curve its beam attacks so that it could attack the sides of any mech, even an expert mech, then the effective damage it could deal would be significantly greater than just firing off an attack that was twice as strong to the front of a target!

"What is the second key exotic that you have selected for the Sentry Project?" Gloriana attentively asked.

Ves could already make some guesses. From what he saw before, powerful resonating materials generally didn't go along too well with each other. The best way to minimize any potential interference or unstable interactions was to place them as far away as possible.

This was why a typical offensive and defensive arrangement worked so well. By putting one key resonating material in the torso of a mech and the other one in the external weapon would put them far away enough to minimize some of the negative consequences.

Master Willix didn't disappoint this time. She lifted her finger, causing the projection to switch to a display of the preliminary version of the internal architecture of the Sentry Project.

"Since the Sentry Project forgoes defense solutions in favor of strengthening its offensive capabilities, it makes sense to find another solution to increase its damage output. Upgrading the power reactor and the power management system is a popular choice because increasing the absolute power of any mech is a solution that always works. Electricium Secundus is a suitable choice to amplify the performance of the power reactor."

Electricium Secundus was another artificial resonating alloy. It actually belonged to a series of similar materials as Electricium Tertius was cheap enough to be used in third-class expert mechs while Electricium Primus was powerful enough to be used in first-class expert mechs.

The effects of Electricium Secundus were rather simple. It directly increased the energy output of a power reactor without significantly increasing the amount of input. It was actually quite remarkable how this resonating alloy was able to convert resonance strength into a more usable form of energy for mechs.

An expert mech that made use of Electricium Secundus also didn't have to worry about frying the mech from the inside due to vastly exceeding the amount of energy it could channel. Integrating just a bit of Electricium Secundus into the energy transmissions systems vastly increased their tolerance.

Ves was happy that the Sentry Project would be able to pour greater power into a shot after all. Combining Electricium Secundus with Opticonium would result in an expert mech that could function as a supreme sniping machine!

However, the use of Electricium Secundus also came with a major downside. Since this resonating alloy not only had to be integrated in the power reactor, but also laced in the energy transmission systems that was supposed to direct all of the amplified energy to the rifle of the expert mech, there wasn't much room for any other resonating exotic!

At the very least, committing to Electricium Secundus meant ruling out the use of defensive resonating materials that would also have to be integrated in the frame of the expert mech.

Neither Ves nor Gloriana spoke a word of complaint about this, though. They had already set a distinct design direction for the Sentry Project. Master Willix merely presented resonating materials that matched their goals.

Once she finished explaining her choices for the Sentry Project, Master Willix moved on to the final expert mech design project.

"I saved the Bulwark Project for last because I intend to do something different for this special expert mech." She spoke as she commanded the projection to display the planned expert mech revision of the Shield of Samar. "Expert space knights are not unheard of, but it is rare to see one of this size and stature."

That was because it was a stupid concept in space, at least according to Ves. They were too immobile and their defensive capabilities covered a tiny area. The mismatch in scale was simply too big for heavy space knights to make any sense!

Master Willix observed the expressions of the Journeymen carefully. Not even Gloriana was able to exude much confidence even if she chose to fulfill Venerable Jannzi's vision.

"I know what you are thinking. Under ordinary circumstances, your doubts may have merit, but have you forgotten what kind of project you are working on? Expert mechs are different from standard mechs. It seems that you have not yet adjusted your mentality sufficiently enough."

"What do you have in mind for the Bulwark Project, ma'am?" Ves tentatively asked.

He sensed that the Master Mech Designer had subtly changed her demeanor. This meant that there had to be something special with the expert mech that she was currently addressing.

Master Willix smiled. "Do you recall my specialization?"

"It has something to do with gravity systems." He answered.

He would never forget something as crucial as this! It was just that Ves didn't really notice anything related to gravity systems whenever he interacted with the MTA Master. As a rational mech designer, Master Willix dabbled in many other design philosophies, so she tended to be neutral whenever there wasn't any need to do anything special.

This time was different, though. A hint of enthusiasm appeared on her face as she pointed at the frame of the future version of the Shield of Samar.

"The Bulwark Project's main shortcomings are painfully obvious. Any melee mech can bypass it and attack more vulnerable targets instead. This is not a unique problem for defensive mechs. Many people have developed different solutions that can address this problem. From arming them with chains to imparting them with powerful mobility, expert mechs do not have to abide by the traditional rules that limit the practicality of standard mechs."

"We know that, ma'am."

"What if I tell you that I have developed a solution to this sort of problem as well?"

"Huh?!"

Master Willix smiled wider. "In the past, I developed a resonating alloy in cooperation with others. When this material is integrated in the frame of an expert mech, it can allow an expert mech to bend spacetime around it as if it is a singularity. All space in its vicinity will be curved so that it becomes much more difficult to bypass it. Not just mechs, but also projectiles will bend when subjected to the artificial gravity well generated by an expert mech integrated with GT-535."

In order to illustrate her point, she played a brief animation of the Bulwark Project if it was laced with GT-535. The expert mech glowed as violent but barely visible fluctuations appeared around it. Mechs that sought to fly past the relatively immobile defensive mech suddenly found that their straight path no longer brought them away.

Insead, they curved right towards the Shield of Samar!

Due to the strength of the gravity well generated by the indomitable expert mech, the trapped enemies didn't possess the power to pull themselves away from the attraction force.

In the end, they collided head-on against the tower shield of Jannzi's mech. The collision alone was enough to shatter these unfortunate mechs to pieces!

"This... this is amazing." Gloriana's eyes shone like stars. "This is everything I wanted for the Bulwark Project. This is a much better option than the alternatives I had in mind!"

Ves was still in shock at the display. The range of the resonance ability along with the strength of its attraction force was too exaggerated. The value of GT-535 should not be comparable to the other resonating materials that Master Willix had brought.

Perhaps she was not as impartial as he previously thought. Contrary to his impression of a rational mech designer, Master Willix was openly biased towards the Bulkwork Project!

Chapter 3038: Super Bulwark

The names of resonating materials were all over the place. Different companies and individuals adopted very different naming schemes for the powerful materials they discovered or made.

Compared to the more ridiculous-sounding materials like Pierrotis and Opticonium, GT-535 sounded incredibly boring. It wasn't even a real name. It was a code name, a model number or a registration label.

Yet the potency and efficacy of GT-535 absolutely trounced all of the other resonating exotics by a considerable margin!

Why did she choose to favor the Bulwark Project over the other ones? Did she have a soft spot for large and heavy mechs? Did her main specialization cause her to develop a greater affinity towards heavy knights or something?

There had to be a reason why she intended to lavish the Bulwark Project with a bigger gift than the other expert mech design projects!

Master Willix could guess what Ves was thinking. "Are you wondering why I chose to grant a more precious resonating material to the Bulwark Project in particular?"

Ves nodded.

"The rationale is not that deep..." The older woman answered. "Unlike other resonating materials, GT-535 is a product that I have personally developed. You can say that it is my property. I have vastly greater rights regarding its use and propagation than with other materials. You do not know this, but it is quite difficult to bring out materials such as Bissonat and Perfidious Steel from the Association's reserves and transfer them to private individuals and organizations. This is also one of the reasons why I have not given you anything more powerful and potent. GT-535 is not subject to the same restrictions, which is why I can dispose of it with much less scrutiny."

"I see." Ves softly answered.

He wasn't fully aware of all of the rules that Master Mech Designers had to abide by in the MTA. It didn't make much sense for him that Master Willix had greater latitude when it came to using products such as GT-535. Even if she developed it on her own, she was still a part of the MTA, which meant that all of her work should have belonged to it as well.

Maybe Masters enjoyed special treatment. Maybe the Association thought that it could encourage its members to innovate more by promising that they could do what they wanted with their own inventions.

If this was the case, then the ambitions of high-ranking mech designers within the MTA were not small!

"GT-535 potency is high as it was not originally developed for mechs such as the Shield of Samar. It is more suitable to be integrated in a high-tier expert mech that is piloted by an expert pilot of notable strength." Master Willix cautioned.

"Does that mean the Shield of Samar will become too difficult for Venerable Jannzi to control?" Ves asked while frowning.

"Not as such. As long as Venerable Jannzi Larkinson does not activate this resonance ability, her expert mech will not put her under great burden. In its passive state, GT-535 already provides value in the form of increasing the physical resistance of the expert mech. It has to be able to do this in order to ensure that it can withstand the center of its gravity well. It is only when Venerable Jannzi attempts to activate the resonance ability that she will be under strain, but she can scale her own effort to a manageable range."

A mech didn't have to fly forward at maximum acceleration. The stress put on a mech and its various systems was substantial if it did everything it could to move forward as

fast as possible. In order to preserve the integrity of the mech and prevent it from malfunctioning, it was customary to hold some power back unless it was truly needed.

In the same way, Venerable Jannzi would be able to activate just a small proportion of the potential of GT-535. While this was not an efficient process, it was a decent solution to the problem of lacking the strength of activating the resonance ability associated with such a potent material.

Ves wasn't sure how large the gravity well would be and how strong its attraction force would turn out. Perhaps Venerable Jannzi would have to wait for years until she gained the strength to make good use of this promising but incredibly arduous resonance ability.

While Ves tried to estimate how much time it took for the upcoming version of the Shield of Samar to show off its full might, Gloriana studied the spec sheet provided by the principal developer of GT-535.

"According to this data, GT-535 is not an easy material to work with." She noted. "An expert mech will have to integrate multiple tons of this resonating alloy. Concentrating so much GT-535 in a single mech frame will result in a high degree of resonance interference."

That was a huge downside, especially for an expert heavy space knight that possessed lots of capacity!

It meant that they would have to forgo many lesser resonating exotics because of interference issues.

Master Willix didn't look surprised. "GT-535 is a hardy and resilient material in itself. It was partially meant to replace the structural materials of a mech in the first place."

All of that sounded well and good, but that also made it insanely expensive to repair the Shield of Samar if it ever suffered substantial internal damage!

Though Master Willix hadn't mentioned the cost of this material, the fact that it was so high-specced implied that the cost of making it was not low! For someone in the MTA, the cost might not be a problem, but it was different for the Larkinson Clan!

Ves directed a deep glance towards Master Willix. As far as he knew, she was the only source for GT-535. If this resonating material was about to become an essential source of strength to the Shield of Samar in the decades to come, then Ves would have to go back to the MTA Master every once in a while in order to replenish the Larkinson Clan's stockpile.

The ability to generate a strong localized gravity well and bend the spacetime around an expert mech as sluggish as the Shield of Samar was too valuable to give up! This was

especially the case when GT-535 would only begin to show its true value when Venerable Jannzi developed her strength further and approached the level of Patriarch Reginald Cross.

Ves keenly recognized the difference between low-tier expert mechs and high-tier expert mechs. He always envied the Cross Clan to possess expert mechs that were more powerful than the ones he had seen before. There was a very definite division between strong and weak among expert pilots and expert mechs.

The resonating exotics that Master Willix provided granted the Larkinson Clan a chance to skip over low-tier expert mechs and directly obtain higher quality expert mechs.

Even if he had to jump into Master Willix's little scheme and become more dependent on her generosity, the implicit deal she offered was worth the price!

In any case, Ves already depended on her for cover from the rest of the MTA and more besides. He did not have a good relationship with any other high official within the Association.

Under these circumstances, Ves didn't need to obtain the advice of a diplomat to know that becoming estranged to Master Willix was a really bad idea!

"Don't worry about the cost and supply. I will provide you with sufficient GT-535 to realize the Bulwark Project and ensure a comfortable reserve." The Master promised. "I will have to intervene more extensively in the design process of the Bulwark Project, however. This material has to be integrated across the entire frame of the mech."

"Ah, you are welcome to do so!" Gloriana quickly said.

No one would say no to extra help from a Master Mech Designer!

Once Master Willix explained some additional quirks about GT-535 that the Larkinsons should take note of, she moved on to the second resonating material that she intended to integrate in the Bulwark Project.

"Since the future Shield of Samar will carry large quantities of GT-535, there isn't much room left in the mech frame for other notable choices. The shield carried by this mech does not fall within this scope, fortunately. The so-called Unending alloy you use to form the main layer of this shield is quite interesting. Its resilience falls beyond the scope of second-class expert mechs. This makes it rather difficult for me as strengthening its defense even further is not that useful. There are more ways to improve the shield than that, though."

She switched the projection so that it centered around the massive tower shield of the expert mech. When Venerable Jannzi resonated with it, a large barrier formed that looked very familiar to Ves!

"Isn't that a space barrier?"

A large circular space barrier that was at least several hundred meters across formed just in front of the tower shield!

Ves was not that unfamiliar with the sight. He had witnessed Venerable Jannzi conjuring such a space barrier during her breakthroughs and when Qilanxo was able to assist.

Since Jannzi and Qilanxo were connected by a bond, it was no surprise that the Shield of Samar would be able to form such a huge defensive barrier.

"Venerable Jannzi has a high affinity towards resonating exotics that manipulate space." Master Willix noted. "In fact, Venerable Dise and Venerable Orfan also share this affinity. This is rather curious."

Ves didn't say anything. This related to a secret that he did not want to share too easily. He at least had to obtain a high price if Master Willix expected him to spill the beans!

Fortunately, she didn't pursue the matter any further. She slightly shook her head and focused on the topic at hand.

"BSN-11F is the big brother of BSN-17A, in a way. As their naming convention suggests, BSN-17A is a newer product that has been developed to address a different requirement. BSN-11F is more in line with the original intention of this product. It is a defense and utility-oriented resonating alloy developed specifically for knight mechs. It aims to substantially increase their applicability by extending the range of their defensive coverage."

BSN-11F certainly accomplished this considering how big of an area the space barrier actually covered. At its best, the Shield of Samar with this resonating exotic could even cover an entire starship!

Yet Ves immediately recognized the possible problems.

"Forming a space barrier this large should put Venerable Jannzi under a lot of strain, right?"

"Correct." Master Willix nodded. "I will not lie. While BSN-11F is a good fit for the Shield of Samar, it is not a cheap material, nor will it be easy for Venerable Jannzi to use it to this extent. She will have to grow stronger in order to defend a large area of space."

This sounded quite bad. Sometimes, piling too much good stuff on an expert mech was not a good decision. No matter which resonance ability Venerable Jannzi chose to activate, she would not have it easy!

If the Shield of Samar integrated both GT-535 and BSN-11F, then it was practically a given that Venerable Jannzi would never be able to activate both of the resonance abilities associated with these materials at the same time.

She would probably suck herself dry if she tried out such a foolish act!

Ves understood why Master Willix still chose to go with BSN-11F despite the huge burden it brought. The resonance ability it imparted to an expert mech worked great against ranged attacks.

If the Shield of Samar ever needed to block a lot of incoming firepower onto a vulnerable asset, then it could rely on this massive space barrier to hold the line!

All in all, the Bulwark Project would gain so much from Master Willix that its actual potential actually caught up to a high-tier expert mech. The disparity between this expert mech and the rest was too great!

If Master Willix chose to lavish so many goodies on the Chimera Project, Ves would have celebrated this outcome.

Why did it have to be Jannzi's mech, though?! Was there any fairness in this cosmos?!

Chapter 3039: New Food

It took some time for the extensive discussion to end. Master Willix had to hold a lengthy lecture in order to make sure that Ves and the others knew how to handle resonating exotics.

In most cases, resonating exotics directly replaced some of standard materials in certain systems and components. This allowed the Journeyman to design the expert mechs in the same manner as standard mechs. The only difference was that Master Willix would swoop in and substitute some materials for resonating ones.

"This is not the most ideal approach to designing expert mechs, but the barrier is low enough to allow Journeymen like you to design the mechs you envisioned without too many issues." Master Willix stated. "The burden of trying to integrate the resonating exotics into the expert mech designs while ensuring that their performance does not grow worse falls squarely on my shoulders. You can trust me to give you as much space to display your design skills. I will not interfere unless your design choices result in excessive drawbacks or interference."

In other words, Master Willix affirmed that she was not going to hold their hands too much. This was supposed to be their work, not hers. The performance of the expert mechs would definitely be worse off, but Ves didn't mind this at all. As long as he was able to retain sufficient ownership of their designs, then he would still feel satisfaction when they succeeded in battle.

After asking a bunch of questions, Ves and the others needed no more clarification for the moment. They were all looking forward to Master Willix to add the resonating materials to the draft designs and move onto the more important phases of the design projects.

Only by knowing what they were working towards would they be able to put their full skills into play!

Ves eagerly sought to impart the expert mech designs with life.

Gloriana wanted to perfect every single element of the designs.

Juliet wanted to optimize the mobility of the designs as much as possible.

Ketis wanted to arm each expert mech with sharp and unfailing blades.

In short, each of them couldn't wait to express their unique strengths in the strongest mechs that they would ever have the privilege of designing in the current period of time.

Who knew when they would be able to design something better. Unless Ves was able to find a replacement for Master Willix and get his hands on high-quality resonating materials, it might take decades before he could top these works!

The Master keenly felt their eagerness and enthusiasm. To her, the young Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan all resembled little chicks. They were overflowing with so much youth that they didn't realize how difficult it was to design a successful expert mech.

Just because she was willing to solve the most difficult aspects of an expert mech didn't mean the rest was easy to cope with. Mechs that performed as extreme as this were never simple! The forces they had to withstand and the stresses they had to cope with all meant that there was much less tolerance for error and weakness!

A major, uncorrected flaw could easily doom an expert mech along with its accompanying expert pilot during a crucial battle. While Journeymen were quite competent in designing mechs, the ones under the employ of the Larkinson Clan were still too young and inexperienced.

Her eyes finally fell upon the ambitious face of Gloriana. The main reason why Master Willix was willing to take part in these unorthodox projects was because of the young lady who insisted on perfection.

With Gloriana, the Larkinsons actually stood a decent chance of succeeding without requiring Willix to bail them all out. While the MTA Master would not allow everyone to waste their time and fail the projects, it would be a pity if she had to override the design choices of these young and naive mech designers.

"Seeing that you understand all you need to know at this point, I will take my leave now." Master Willix declared.

Everyone stood up in respect.

"Ah, would you like us to show you around before you go?" Gloriana spontaneously offered. "We have quite a lot of curiosities for you to see. Ves has stashed a bunch of interesting organic statues in his personal workshop for example."

What?! Ves tried his best to refrain himself from storming over to his wife and press his palm against her mouth.

Though he didn't hide the existence of the Aspects of Lufa, two of them were more controversial than others.

Ves didn't know how Master Willix would react to the Aspect of Rationality, but he could definitely not afford to let her know about the Aspect of Transcendence!

Fortunately, Master Willix didn't look interested.

"I have already spent more than enough hours on this ship." She spoke without too much interest. "My path to promotion leaves me with little time for leisure or distractions. Do not be surprised if I am not able to contribute to your projects for several weeks at a time. You will have to rely on your own to solve most of the problems regarding your design projects. I have already commanded my crew to transfer the resonating exotics that I have brought to the cargo hold of this ship. Make sure to secure them all. Do not underestimate their difficulty and do not get complacent. Also, do not forget to increase your manpower."

When everyone nodded, Master Willix returned to the Ubiquitous Force in the most efficient manner possible. Her form grew fuzzy before fading away as she teleported straight back to her personal ship!

Everyone paused for a moment.

"I will head down to the hangar bay in order to sort out the new resonating materials." Juliet said and left the room.

"I'll go with her. I'd like to take a look at Bissonat and see what is so special about this resonating material." Ketis quickly followed suit.

That left Ves and Gloriana. Both of them remained in deep thought as the lessons they learned today deeply affected their views towards the design projects.

Gloriana eventually turned around and left as well. "I will start on adjusting our drafts and wait for Master Willix to show me how she plans to integrate the resonating exotics in the designs."

"Okay, have fun, I guess."

Once she left, Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin for a moment.

He had to adjust his perspective on each expert mech design project to a substantial degree. After all, the addition of so many resonating materials profoundly altered their performance profile and substantially increased their impact on the battlefield!

Though Ves had to take a lot more troublesome variables into account, he embraced the challenges. As long as he gained more power at the end, he was not afraid of dealing with a couple of complications!

Hours passed as Ves and the Larkinsons dealt with the aftermath of the brief visit of Master Willix. The Ubiquitous Force had already portal-jumped out of the star system shortly after her owner returned.

As the clan returned to normal business, Ves met with Calabast yet again.

"Meow." Lucky floated alongside Ves and looked up at the mech designer with cute, glowing green eyes.

"I said no! Your memory isn't that bad, so don't pretend you forgot. I will not allow you to take a single bite out of all of those resonating exotics. You're not an expert pilot, Lucky! You don't possess any extraordinary will like Ketis either. What do you think you'll be able to accomplish if you snack on a material like GT-535? It takes entire tons to form a decent gravity well, and that is only when you have enough resonance strength, which you do not have at all. Quit dreaming!"

The greedy gem cat wasn't satisfied with that answer. Lucky flew closer and pressed his front paws against Ves' chest.

"Meow meow meow!"

"Just because I have a surplus of resonating materials doesn't mean that the excess is for you to snack upon! We need to keep them in reserve for years if not decades in order to ensure we have enough to draw upon if we need to perform repairs."

Lucky angrily hissed and distanced himself from Ves.

"Meeeeeoow!"

Ves sneered. "Master Willix has given me a manifest that states exactly how much of each substance she transferred to us. Don't think you can sneak in and take a bite out of my resonating materials. I will prepare a special sensor that will detect whether you have been near the place where they are stored. I'll also make sure that my stash is measured on a daily basis. If even a single gram is missing from the stockpile, I know who to look for in order to cough up the missing material."

"Meow!"

Seeing that Lucky still wasn't satisfied, Ves knew that he had to offer a compromise. If not, who knew if Lucky would disregard the warnings and eat some of the resonating materials anyway!

Ves knew his first cat quite well. Lucky was an intractable bastard who continually failed to keep his urges in check. The gluttonous metallic beast possessed a bottomless stomach for new and shiny objects and would not feel sorry if he broke the rules!

"I'll order Benny to procure a batch of cheaper and more abundant resonating materials." Ves said in a softer tone. "I hope you can get it out of your system after you have tasted these odd exotics. They're nothing different from normal exotics if you take their resonating properties out of the equation."

"Meow meow!"

Lucky finally cheered up a bit after hearing that. At the very least, Ves was a bit more confident that his cat wouldn't sneak off and eat any forbidden food.

After settling his cat, Ves reached Calabast's familiar workspace and entered it. He sat down on the chair across the spymaster's desk without a word and only cast a brief glance towards Arnold.

The dimwitted exobeast wasn't hugging or licking Calabast's boots for once. Instead, he was lying comfortably on a pillow while dozing off. The woman working quietly behind her desk terminal occasionally reached out and brushed the plump animal's head.

Ves went straight to business. "Did you check out the details of the 20 MTA mech pilots that Master Willix has dumped into our lap?"

She chuckled. "That's an odd way to describe an opportunity to earn MTA merits. This should be an easy task for you. You managed to foster five expert pilots in just a brief moment of time."

"You know as well as I do that there were special circumstances behind that. It won't be as easy as this time. If I truly want to succeed, I might have to push our guests harder than I did my own clansmen. What I want to know is if there is anything I should watch

out for. From my brief impression of the twenty men and women, none of them are average."

"That's a given. General Verle has already put them through some simple tests. Their skills are extremely good. So good in fact that they can even approximate the performance of expert candidates and expert pilots in some areas."

"That good?!"

"From what I've been told, there is still a gap, but it is a lot smaller than with others." Calabast stated in a serious tone. "These mech pilots have already gone through excellent training. Our clan simply can't match that, and that will become a major problem over time. The disparity is so big that the mechers will quickly become dissatisfied with our primitive methods. You need to take that into account and find ways to retain their confidence in their new training programs."

She made a very good point, as always. Ves hadn't put sufficient thought on this angle. He simply assumed that the MTA mech pilots would be disciplined enough to endure the relatively low standards of the Larkinson Clan. Evidently, he was wrong.

"Maybe this was why so many of them chose to design their own training programs." Ves whispered.

Chapter 3040: Divided Guests

Though the new MTA mech pilots did not really expose any notable information about themselves, the Black Cats keenly observed them as they went through introductions.

Not enough time had passed for the Larkinsons to get a good sense of the traits of every mech pilot that aimed to become more. However, through scans and observation by behavioral experts, the agents answering to Calabast gleaned a lot of clues from the twenty individuals.

"My first impressions of our guests are that they are quite unprepared for this assignment."

"Unprepared?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"Yes, unprepared." Calabast smirked as she scratched Arnold's funny ears.

"Squeak! Squeak!" Arnold enthusiastically responded.

When Master Willix initially introduced this mission to Ves, he gained the impression that she had only recently begun to build relationships and increase her qualifications... Before the Crown Uprising broke out, she didn't really seem to be in a hurry to gain the appreciation of her superiors.

A sinking feeling overtook Ves. "So these guys are actually a lot less willing to go along with us than we initially expected."

"I wouldn't say that. I am merely stating that they look unprepared or bamboozled. They have been thrust into a very dubious training program that they never asked for. They look as if they are here only because their patrons or commanders told them to and not because they have undying confidence in our ability to transform them into expert pilots. This has resulted in a noticeable enthusiasm gap."

That sounded very troublesome to Ves because turning any of them into expert pilots was not a simple task. They all looked to be around thirty to forty years old. While this was the prime period for mech pilots, it was extremely late for them to develop spiritual potential by themselves.

From what Ves had observed from other people, teenagers and humans in their 20's had the best chance of developing spiritual potential. After that, those who never accomplished this would have to climb uphill.

While Ves did not completely rule out the possibility of success, he felt the chance was too small for any of the twenty mech pilots to overcome this impossible hurdle.

That meant that they needed help. Ves happened to have a way to place some stairs in front of this hurdle that would make jumping over it a lot easier.

The problem was that the 'stairs' in question were covered in sharp and lethal spikes! If anyone stepped on it without care, they would just impale their own feet and fall down to the ground!

What Ves needed to do was to refine the design of these 'stairs' and reduce the danger to such a degree that a trained athlete could at least place his toes in the areas where there were no lethal spikes.

This metaphor generally described his current challenge. Unless he was able to reduce the lethality of the Aspect of Transcendence, he would probably be unable to make any progress in the mission that Master Willix dumped onto his lap.

"I must say your strategy to divide them into different training groups is an apt way to handle these privileged mech pilots."

"Hmm?"

Calabast leaned forward a bit. "The MTA's reputation is unassailable in human space. Its members derive a lot of confidence and conceit from that. Even if they have been told to hide their identities, they are not professional spies and thus cannot shake their original mentalities. Arrogance and superiority towards space peasants is rooted in their

bones. If they form a united front, it will be extremely hard for you and the rest of the Larkinsons to control them while they remain our guests."

"I see." Ves frowned. "Even I would feel hesitant to push them too far if all twenty of them take issue with my approach."

"This is why dividing them into different groups is such a genius idea!" Calabast grinned. "You not only separated them by their degree of willingness to play along with us, but also set the stage for further division between the groups."

"Explain."

"It's quite simple. From the moment they split up into three groups, a competition has essentially formed between them. You forced each of the mechers to make a difficult choice that has a great impact on their lives. Now, they are motivated to do their best and make as much progress as possible to vindicate their choice. Don't you see? These highly-trained individuals who have always been told that they are the best can't bear the thought of losing!"

This was human psychology. No one was immune to envy, jealousy, regret and other selfish emotions. In this new situation, the MTA mech pilots divided into three new groups would naturally work hard in order to prove that their judgement was right and that the others were wrong!

If Ves had deliberately set out to divide and set the MTA mech pilots against each other, he would have patted himself on the back.

As it was, he completely overlooked this dynamic. If Calabast hadn't pointed out this situation, he would have remained ignorant!

Fortunately, now that he knew about it, he could tailor his future plans with these underlying tensions in mind. Competition was a powerful driver, and the developing rivalry between the three groups would ensure that the guests wouldn't expend all of their energy making trouble for the Larkinsons.

In fact, their eagerness to one-up their rivals might drive them to cooperate even better with the clan!

Ves smiled. "You just made my day a little better. Do you have any advice on how to manage the groups better?"

"Well, out of the three groups, which one do you wish to succeed the most?"

"Do you have to ask? I don't want those nine dummies who chose to form their own training schedules to get ahead of the rest. It is somewhat more acceptable for the seven mechers who chose to keep an open mind and listen to the advice of our people

to succeed. What I really want is for the four fellows who put all of their trust in us to make the most progress. If all four of them advance to the rank of expert pilot within five years, then that would ensure the rest would become convinced of our methods!"

Calabast hummed and nodded. "That is the most ideal scenario. If you can succeed in transforming the group of four into expert candidates, then that will already prove your ability. What you need to do now is to make sure that you can actually get them that far. Tell me honestly. Do you think you can succeed?"

He refrained from giving her a spurious answer in order to reassure her. She knew him well enough to know when he was lying. As one of his confidantes, she deserved to know the truth.

"I'm... not that confident at all at the moment." He sighed. It was difficult for him to admit his doubts and fears, but he had to do it in order to give her an accurate picture of the future. "I have to perform some very dangerous experiments in order to refine my method. The problem is that I am currently lacking in test subjects. If I stayed on Prosperous Hill VI a little longer, I might have been able to refine my method."

The woman sitting opposite to him looked sharper at him. She even stopped petting Arnold, much to the exobeast's chagrin.

"Squeak! Squeak!"

"You need to make progress sooner or later. MTA merits are vital to our development. You can never have too many of them. Do I need to... procure more test subjects on your behalf?"

A shudder ran through his spine. Ves had the feeling that Calabast would start something very dangerous if he said yes!

He quickly shook his head. "Let's not head in this direction. I don't want to be caught messing around with this stuff. Besides, the study I have in mind doesn't necessarily require... humans. I think I can obtain accurate and representative results if I perform them on exobeasts instead. They just have to be smart and sentient enough. I've already tasked Dr. Ranya Wodin to procure suitable batches of exobeasts. The Dragon's Den has a lot of impressive biomes but few creatures to populate them. This ship has to show her value."

In fact, the Dragon's Den was already paying for herself. All of the former citizens of the Life Research Association absolutely adored the partial biovessel. The highly-skilled doctors and other biotech professionals who had settled on this grand research vessel were already providing invaluable services to the rest of the Larkinson Clan.

That said, the Larkinsons had yet to maximize the value of the Dragon's Den. As long as he could fill her biomes with lots of beasts, Ves would be able to advance his spiritual engineering a lot further!

Ves and Calabast spoke a bit more about what he needed to accomplish in order to pave the way for the MTA mech pilots to transcend their mortality.

"I have several different ideas in mind, but I'm not in a hurry now." He spoke. "Right now, I think it is fine to rely on conventional methods to stimulate the mechers. I need to devote most of my time on developing our first batch of expert mechs. They're all incredibly promising and I can already feel my passion firing up. I don't want to get too entangled by other issues while I am devoting my entire time towards my main pursuit."

Calabast frowned a bit. "Five years is a long time, but if you squander a year or two, you will have a lot less time left to make significant progress."

"I know that, but I can only handle so many priorities at once." Ves helplessly shrugged. "I will have plenty of time to try out serious solutions on the lucky four mechers who have volunteered to become my test subject in a couple of months maybe. I won't waste the year-long period that they have given me. In the meantime, I'll just hand them over to our instructors and our expert pilots and see if they can do something to whip these mechers into shape."

To be honest, he didn't expect much out of this. The MTA mech pilots already enjoyed some of the best training that mech pilots could ever enjoy. Their skills were already top-notch among regular mech pilots so not even expert pilots would be able to help them in this aspect.

The only area these mechers truly needed to develop was their mind and will towards their vocation. This was a more individual and esoteric field. No successful systematic training existed in human space that impart any regular mech pilot with the qualifications to become an expert pilot!

"Enough about this topic." Ves tiredly waved his hand. "General Verle has already made the necessary arrangements. He will be the one who will determine our treatment of these powerful mech pilots. Tell me something good this time."

"I may have found a lead on a suitable diplomat to take charge of our new Foreign Relations Department."

Ves immediately sat up straighter when he heard that. He had long wanted to find a diplomat that could forge deals with difficult trading partners, establish new friendships with powerful organizations and prevent the clan from provoking new enemies during its travels.

The problem was that he had set his standards too high. He wanted to obtain a diplomat who was both incredibly competent but also fully committed to the Larkinson Clan.

Apparently, finding someone that could satisfy both these requirements was rare!

This was why Ves became very intrigued by Calabast's claim. If she was confident enough to reveal this news to him, then she was definitely confident about her lead!

She tapped her terminal and activated a projection. Ves instantly recognized the Winged Serenade Star Sector. She tapped once again to show a single second-rate state.

"Have you ever heard of the Grand Loxic Republic?"

"I have." Ves nodded. "That is where the parent organization of the Infinity Guards are headquartered. The Star Strider Security Group is a big force over there."

"Well, the Star Striders aren't doing so well lately, and so is the rest of the Grand Loxic Republic. The Crown Uprising has caused a lot of cracks to form in this second-rate state."

Ves looked skeptical. "The crown terrorists are very difficult to stop, but they can never deal enough damage to shake the foundations of a state."

"Are you sure about that? What if the crown terrorists managed to assassinate the leader of the state?"

"...That would do it, I guess."