

Mech 3791

Chapter 3791 - Prime Development

Though Patriarch Reginald exhibited a lot of desire towards prime abilities and the prime materials that made them possible, Ves quickly had to shoot down his excitement.

There simply weren't any prime materials available.

He possessed a limited quantity of P-stones and did not expect to obtain any more of them. This was because he theorized that they originally came from the Nyxian Gap, which was an entire galaxy away from the expeditionary fleet at the moment!

The same went for Unending alloy. A long time ago, an ancient alien race must have originally developed this artificial metal substance with spiritual sorcery in mind, but the method of making it was probably lost.

It was not as if Ves tried to break down samples of Unending alloy into their base materials in order to decipher the formula and produce more alloy by himself.

Whenever he did so, the mysterious exotics that were responsible for making Unending alloy work quickly broke down and lost their special traits.

This was not an unknown phenomenon in materials science and was largely the reason why recycling salvaged goods rarely recovered every raw material put into their construction.

The final material that Ves found was the sample of Galenta Bone that he had once encountered in Rion's private stash.

The material might not be as hard as Unending alloy, but it was tough enough to be employed in mechs.

Aside from its decent ability to store spiritual energy, it also had the effect of nurturing it as far as he was aware.

The galenta whale was a species of astral beasts that had almost been hunted to extinction in the Milky Way.

They were apparently more ubiquitous in the Red Ocean, so Ves hoped he could get his hands on the strange bone growths that grew inside the brains of the largest galente whales.

Unfortunately, his clan never managed to get their hands on any of the samples.

Ves had put Galenta Bone on the list of must-buy materials, but the clansmen responsible for procurement never managed to find any samples on the open market.

He suspected that Galenta Bones were treated as rare and exclusive trophies. If that was the case, then they should only ever change hands in private auctions.

Only the upper echelon were invited to these events, and Ves was far from reaching that level.

This was bad news to Patriarch Reginald. The lack of resonating materials was the only barrier to turning the Mars into a prime mech.

While he could have requested the Larkinsons to repurpose the Unending alloy that adorned their existing expert mechs, he would never do so. This was a line too far and crossing it would seriously deteriorate the relationship between the two alliance partners.

As an expert pilot himself, he knew how much his Larkinson counterparts valued and cared for their expert mechs. He might be greedy for prime materials, but he would not ask his allies and fellow comrades in battle to mutilate their strongest assets.

That left the Cross Patriarch with no other option than hoping that he could get his hands on Galenta Bone.

"Give me a moment." He said with a frown. "Let me consult with Benedict."

He quietly called and exchanged words with Professor Benedict. Whatever the Senior Mech Designer said did not provide any relief to the powerful expert pilot.

The Cross Clan experienced just as much difficulties in obtaining Galenta Bone as the Larkinson Clan!

Eventually, Patriarch Reginald finished his call and looked back at Ves with a dour expression.

"Professor Benedict has promised to use his own channels to obtain Galenta Bone. If he is able to procure it, will you agree to add it to the Mars Project?"

Ves happily nodded. "Of course! It will be easy for me to do so as prime resonance works on different principles. If you Crossers actually succeed in getting your hands on this material, do tell me if you can obtain more of it. We have been looking for it ourselves. I can make the Minerva and the future version of the Blade Chaser considerably stronger."

"Only after you have made the Mars Project stronger first. My future fighting machine must possess the greatest possible combat power that we can put into a frame. We

cannot pass on this new and more versatile form of resonance that you have developed."

"I agree. Just don't complain if neither of us can obtain any Galenta Bone. We don't always get what we want."

Personally, he hoped that the Crossers managed to succeed somehow. Professor Benedict possessed different connections than himself and might be able to get his hands on this rare material in his own way.

Until this happened, Ves was not going to hold out any hope.

He turned his attention back to the rest of the gathered expert pilots. "While Patriarch Reginald's interruption was not on the agenda, his request directly relates to one of the topics I wished to discuss. A few of you have displayed abilities that you ordinarily shouldn't be able to employ if you were piloting a more conventional expert mech. These abilities have shown a lot of potential even if their implementations are not yet on par. Tusa, let's start with you first since you have the most time to develop your prime abilities. Tell me about the progress that you have made."

The light mech specialist stood up from his seat. "My expert mech has access to two design spirits, namely Arnold and Trixie. Building up relationships with them is extremely important as I need to resonate with one of them in order to pull off a prime ability. I am never performing this alone. The design spirit on the other side is doing the work as well, so I am not the only one who needs to make improvements."

"It's a team effort." Joshua commented.

"That's exactly right. Only together can we activate these prime abilities in battle. The design spirits are contributing their own strength when I call upon them. We are literally borrowing their strength in order to make it all possible."

Ves nodded in satisfaction. He was happy that the Larkinson expert pilots understood the key to developing prime abilities.

"Depending on design spirits to execute your prime abilities is both a strength and a weakness. If your relationship with entities such as Arnold deteriorates, then you will be left without their assistance in a crucial battle. On the other hand, if you have developed an extremely strong bond with them, they will be willing to leverage as much strength as they can in order to help you succeed."

All of the Larkinson expert pilots nodded in understanding.

"One of the reasons why I have gotten better at pulling off my prime abilities is because Arnold and Trixie have both grown a lot stronger than at the start." Tusa said. "They not

only have a lot more reserves, but they have also grown smarter and more familiar with our resonance abilities."

That made a lot of sense. Ves briefly reached out to the two design spirits in order to gauge their strengths.

Arnold had clearly grown a lot stronger due to his involvement in multiple mech designs.

While Trixie fell behind because only Tusa provided her with spiritual feedback, the singular source also caused her to take after the expert pilot a lot.

The design spirit that Ves had derived from the remnant of the Inexorable One not only reinforced her free and elusive traits, but also developed a considerably stronger bond with Venerable Tusa!

Although the connection between the two hadn't reached the intimacy between an individual and a companion spirit, the two had clearly become partners in crime!

Ves suddenly gained a new idea. What if he attempted to augment this bond and tie them together on a permanent basis?

What if turning Trisk into Venerable Tusa's permanent companion was an alternate way of bestowing him with a 'companion spirit'?

This was an interesting idea but not one that compelled him to perform this experiment on the spot.

He did not want to waste Trisk's potential. The constantly changing avian design spirit was the only 'heir' to the Inexorable One. He believed the bird still possessed a lot of untapped power.

"Tell me more about the abilities that you have employed. How have you improved them, exactly?" Ves asked Tusa.

"Arnold and I worked hard to improve my control over the Endless Paths ability." The expert pilot answered. "We managed to make it so that we can not only choose the amount of decoys of the Dark Zephyr that appear, but also gain more precise control over their movements. That is how I was able to make one of them take the place of my actual expert mech."

The mechanics of Arnold's ability was far from simple as far as Ves knew. Rather than creating illusionary clones, he creates alternate selves that seemed to exist in multiple possible realities.

While the 'copies' were ultimately fake, they seemed to possess enough substance to fool most sensors and interact with reality. They only truly revealed their falsehoods when sustaining them became too costly.

Only a single outcome among many must be valid. The actions of the Dark Zephyr in the other realities ultimately never happened, at least if everything proceeded normally.

"Have you made any other improvements?"

"Yes. The decoys of my expert mech used to last 1.86 seconds at most, but we have been able to push it up to 2.06 seconds after Arnold grew stronger. We can also produce up to 14 copies now, but it is really difficult to summon so many in a busy battlefield."

A couple of expert pilots looked horrified at Venerable Tusa. Even though his Endless Paths resonance ability was not permanent, the ability to fool enemies by producing 14 realistic decoys at the same time could be a gamechanger in the right circumstances!

This was especially when Venerable Tusa managed to combine it with his second resonance ability!

"I see that you have successfully employed both your Endless Paths and Untouchable abilities at the same time." Ves remarked with interest. "Can you tell us how you have managed to accomplish this? How can you resonate with two separate design spirits?"

"It's not that difficult once Trisk and Arnold got along with each other. When I originally came up with the idea of using a decoy to hide the disappearance of my real expert mech, I had to bring them together and encourage them to coordinate their efforts with me. It wasn't easy, but we eventually made it work!" Tusa grinned.

The actual reason why he worked so hard to develop this combo was because he felt pressured to improve his combat effectiveness. Many of his fellow expert pilots were improving at a faster rate because they had the fortune of obtaining masterwork expert mechs!

Since Tusa didn't enjoy this benefit, his resonance strength ultimately wouldn't be able to grow as quickly. He had to find other ways to improve his strength, and the solution he decided upon was to put in a lot of effort into making the most out of the power that was already at his disposal!

In other words, he focused on improving his efficiency!

All of this effort paid off as Venerable Tusa probably developed the most refined prime abilities out of anyone in the Larkinson Clan!

Tusa continued to explain his efforts to improve his combat solutions.

"I spent most of my time improving my control over our Endless Paths ability. My usage of the Untouchable ability is still rough in comparison. My Dark Zephyr can only 'phase' forward for a short distance as it doesn't last long enough for my liking. I also lose awareness while I am in this mode, so I can't react to any changes that have taken place. It is already exhausting and costly for Trisk and I to pull it off. We can't do it a second time in a single battle."

There was clearly a lot more room for improvement here, but that did not change the fact that Venerable Tusa's combo had already become formidable!

Chapter 3792 - Prime Directions

Everyone in the meeting room grew impressed at Venerable Tusa's accomplishments in strengthening his prime abilities.

Patriarch Reginald Cross held the most appreciation. Although the Larkinsons had shown off prime resonance and specific applications of it before, they had never reached this degree of strength and utility before!

To Reginald, the addition of prime resonance to expert mech was akin to increasing the fighting machine's trump cards!

"It is similar to putting more resonating materials in an expert mech!" He realized.

The problem with resonating materials was that many of them weren't compatible with each other. There were only so many different types of resonating materials that mech designers could add to a mech frame.

This was one of the reasons why Patriarch Reginald wanted to add prime resonance to his upcoming Mars Project so badly. While it appeared that prime materials were extremely hard to come by, they apparently did not impact the performance of resonating materials!

If his Mars Project was built the right way, then he would be able to develop abilities like the ones that Tusa had developed with his 'partners' one day!

"Alright, Tusa. Thank you for your clarification." Ves said with a smile. "I hope that each of you have drawn lessons from his approach. He has worked hard to realize the potential of the prime mech aspect of his Dark Zephyr. He is significantly further ahead than all of you, as befitting our fastest expert pilot."

Ves had become so impressed by Venerable Tusa's latest advancements that he became tempted to upgrade the Dark Zephyr right away.

Of course, now was not the time. The Dark Zephyr's performance hadn't fallen behind yet and Ves wanted to wait until he had access to much better tech and materials before designing a refit of his first true expert mech.

"Venerable Stark." Ves turned to the guest pilot of the Larkinson Clan. "You have made a lot less progress than Venerable Tusa. The new special attack that you have developed has a lot of potential, but it has not yielded any notable results in your earlier bout."

"The Bolvos Rage's resonance shield was unusually strong and thick. We will do better against a more ordinary expert mech." Davia Stark replied as she crossed her arms.

She had not spent as much time as Tusa in refining her application of prime resonance. She had focused more on the fundamentals and her usage of the Amaranto's regular resonance abilities.

To her, the best way to increase her combat effectiveness was to make her routine actions as impactful as possible!

This entailed specific improvements such as increasing her accuracy at extreme ranges or being able to plan out and predict the trajectory of her arcing beam attacks in a split second!

Ves already understood that Venerable Stark was still motivated enough to keep up her training, so he did not ask any further.

"Venerable Orfan." He turned to the next expert pilot on the list. "Your resonance ability has come as a pleasant surprise to all of us. Can you tell me more about this new trick that you have developed?"

"I call it the Disharmony Barrier. It's exactly what it says."

The woman proudly explained the basics of how her ability worked. The theory behind it was surprisingly simple relative to the impact it had achieved.

"Qilanxo deserves most of the credit." She graciously said. "She is the one that figured out the finer details. I am the one that is responsible for sustaining the Disharmony Barrier and directing it to the right opponent."

"It is a truly effective means of attack." Patriarch Reginald voiced his appreciation. "My resonance shield lost cohesion far too quickly as your ability attacked its foundation. I hope to see you disrupt our actual enemies with it. A lot of enemy expert pilots will become unpleasantly surprised when they see their first line of defense crumbling because of your disruption."

Both Venerable Jannzi and Venerable Joshua looked intrigued when their colleague explained her new ability.

In theory, any expert mech with Qilanxo as its design spirit should be able to employ a similar ability!

"Rosa, are you willing to share your insights and teach this ability to me as well?" Jannzi asked.

"Sure." Orfan straightforwardly answered. "I'm actually curious to see whether you and your Shield of Samar can pull off the same move. I get the feeling that it's not so simple even if our mechs share the same design spirit."

That was a good response from the former Flagrant Vandal officer. She could have gotten possessive about her own ability and tried to keep it to herself in order to increase her value.

"Can you add me as well?" Venerable Joshua asked. "My expert mech can't channel Qilanxo as well as your own machines, but I still want to try and see whether I can gain an extra weapon against my future opponents."

"You're welcome to join the party, Josh."

Personally, Ves had little confidence that Venerable Orfan was able to propagate her Disharmony Barrier. He had rerun the footage of her struggle against the Bolvos Rage and figured out that the Riot itself provided one of the key ingredients to make the remarkable ability work.

Neither the Shield of Samar nor the Everchanger incorporated any chaos gems!

Perhaps the two expert pilots would develop a different kind of barrier with Venerable Orfan's instruction.

Ves turned to Venerable Dise.

Though he had praised Tusa's efforts, the truth was that her application of prime resonance was by far the most refined! Her excellent swordsmanship combined with inheriting the Heaven Association's traditional swordsmanship resulted in the development of unsurpassed new sword techniques, none of which she showed today.

Now that Ves thought about it, swordmasters did not actually resonate with their weapons in the same way that expert pilots did with their expert mechs.

The swords did not incorporate any specific resonating materials as far as he knew. Instead, the swordmasters developed deep and emotional relationships with their own

swords, causing them to become alive in a sense and turn into a more suitable channel of their wielder's strength!

In other words, Venerable Dise and First Sword were the standard bearers of prime resonance!

No other combination of expert pilot and expert mech could replicate the remarkably high combat power that this specific combination displayed in battle because it was too difficult for others to meet all of the requirements!

"I don't consider my techniques to be prime abilities." Dise explained to the rest. "The design spirit of my mech is also Qilanxo, but I don't make a habit of borrowing her strength to execute my techniques. I only need myself and a good weapon in order to perform my special moves. Outside of the cockpit, that weapon is my trusty greatsword. Inside the cockpit, that weapon is both the First Sword and the Decapitator in its hands."

In other words, Venerable Dise was less reliant on external sources than the rest!

Though she possessed a lot more control over her techniques, she passed over the benefit of borrowing the strength and special qualities of powerful design spirits to her special techniques.

Everything had a price, but it was good that at least one expert pilot in the Larkinson Clan followed a different path.

"Jannzi." Ves turned to his least-favorite expert pilot in the Larkinson Clan. "You have harnessed several new gravity-related tricks in your spar against Venerable Linda Cross, but these are not based on prime resonance, correct?"

The younger female expert pilot nodded. "I have been spending most of my time learning how to take advantage of GT-535. Whenever I resonate with it, I can choose to apply the gravity my mech and I are generating in different ways. I had a lot of difficulty in harnessing it at first, but after several months of focused practice, I have managed to gain enough control that I can harness gravity in battle. The problem in my last practice fight was that my gravity manipulation was a bad match against another expert space knight."

Ves nodded. "Your example illustrates that not all resonance and prime abilities are effective in every situation. Each of you needs to think carefully on what you do. If possible, try your best to develop different abilities that can cope against different threats. For example, have you ever tried to use your own gravity manipulation power to speed up the movements of your own mech, Jannzi?"

She looked annoyed. "Don't underestimate my intelligence, Ves. I tried that out pretty soon after you upgraded my machine. I tried creating a gravity well in front of the Shield

of Samar, thinking it would drag my mech forward, but somehow my heavy mech isn't budging."

"A shame." Ves genuinely said. "It would have been great if your huge and sluggish mech was able to accelerate as fast as a medium mech at the very least, but I think I understand why you aren't able to exploit this interaction."

Conceptually, it was like trying to lift up his own body by using one of his arms. His arm and the rest of his body was part of a closed system, so displacing himself in this manner was impossible without the use of an outside factor.

"Have you been able to develop any new prime abilities with the help of Qilanxo?" Ves asked.

"My prime abilities augment my resonance abilities. I perform both of them at the same time if I want to project the strongest energy barrier. I think the combination of both will yield the greatest possible defense that I can muster."

"That is a good approach. Your Shield of Samar's primary mission is to protect others from getting damaged, so the better this barrier, the more people you are able to save!"

Developing more abilities was not necessarily useful if none of them were particularly strong. Venerable Jannzi's approach was highly suited for her own situation.

It was interesting that Venerable Joshua took a completely different approach.

"Joshua. You've resonated with several different design spirits and used completely different resonating abilities in your practice fight against the Bolvos Rage. How many resonance abilities have you developed up to this point?"

"Nine so far. I am still trying to make something happen with Kalo and the Titania since they recently became available."

"What?!"

The other Larkinsons were astounded by Joshua's efforts!

"I try to develop at least one form of cooperation with every design spirit that I can work with." Venerable Joshua clarified. "It helps with improving my relationship with each of them. I haven't been able to spend much time refining all of the new abilities that I have developed like Tusa. They're all very basic and weak to be honest. I spent most of my time improving my cooperation with the Illustrious One because our fleet is lacking in ranged firepower."

"I see."

The Everchanger was a complicated mech as far as prime resonance was concerned. Ves had to put a lot of thought behind this aspect of its design in order to make it truly compatible with every design spirit.

The consequence was that the Everchanger was never able to match the other expert mechs when it came to forming deep connections with any single design spirit.

Since Venerable Joshua was disadvantaged when it came to developing strong prime abilities, he opted to go for quantity instead!

This was a good choice for an expert pilot that liked to remain versatile. The entire mech concept of the Everchanger was about using the right means to target an opponent's weaknesses.

Ves grew curious at what Venerable Joshua was capable of after working with so many different design spirits.

"Can you briefly explain all nine abilities?"

"Sure." Joshua shrugged. "They are all rather basic, so don't get too excited. Let me begin with Ylvaine. I can borrow his help to guide my attacks just as if I am piloting an Ylvainan mech. If I work together with Lufa, I can forcefully calm down nearby mech pilots. If I combo this with my Hero's Glow resonance ability, I can potentially pause an entire battle..."

Chapter 3793 Joshua The Prime Master

Everyone looked at Venerable Joshua as if he was a freak.

Unknowingly, he developed a variety of different resonance abilities!

While their complexity and methodology were rather simple, that did not change the fact that each of them produced real effects!

"With the Illustrious One, I can activate a new form of attack that I like to call 'Sticky Energy Mode'." The expert pilot explained. "It's the one form of attack that I spent most of my efforts in strengthening. Don't ask me how it works. All I know is that as long as I blend in as much of my will into my energy beam attacks as possible, I can make it so that they behave like a jet of acid that sticks to my targets for a few seconds. I can't make it last any longer since the energy attack really doesn't like it when I change it like this. I know it isn't supposed to behave like that but I can temporarily make it obey."

This was one of the most nonsensical prime abilities that Ves had ever heard. It rivaled Venerable Orfan's success in creating a method to sabotage enemy resonance shields.

The combat applications of Joshua's so-called Sticky Energy Mode were myriad, but this new attack mode was especially useful against huge vessels and insanely durable opponents!

"Can you use it for every luminar crystal attack phase?" Ves asked with an intrigued expression.

"Yes, sir, though not all forms of energy are as easy to manipulate like this. It works best with positron beams since I feel like they are already the most solid attack type available."

That made sense as positron beams were basically tiny charged particles accelerated at extreme speeds. They actually dealt hybrid damage as they inflicted both energy and physical damage.

Still, the fact that Venerable Joshua could accomplish this physics-defying feat at all was incredibly ludicrous!

Ves felt that the role of the Illustrious One was indispensable. After all, the luminar race which the design spirit was based upon used to play with energy as if it was their pet!

Venerable Stark exhibited an obvious interest in what Joshua had accomplished.

"Can you teach me this method?"

"I can, but... I think it only works with someone who loves and values life."

"I understand that, Joshua. I am not trying to copy your method. I want to learn a new approach so I can expand my own repertoire."

"I have no problem with that as long as you show me how you formed that attack that is able to penetrate through resonance shields."

"Deal."

Ves smiled as he witnessed this exchange. This was far from the first time that the expert pilots wanted to compare their notes with each other. He hoped that each of them would be able to broaden their horizons and come up with even greater applications of their strength.

"Compared to my Sticky Energy Mode, the ability I formed with the help of Qilanzo is not that exciting." Joshua continued. "I think that Jannzi can teach you a lot more about how to cooperate with the design spirit than myself. My Solid Reinforcement ability only makes my resonance shield a bit stronger."

"My Prophet's Guidance ability is exactly what it says. I open myself up to Ylvaine so that I can obtain his guidance on where I should launch my attacks."

"With Lufa, I can project a Peace Field that can take most of the aggression out of enemies that I target. It's more than just activating Lufa's glow. What I do is infuse my own power into it so that Lufa's influence can actively force my targets to calm down. It's harder to resist for that reason."

"With Bravo, I can project a Courage Field which can make friendly mech pilots a lot more daring, eager and courageous. I think it can work pretty well in supporting charges. It works better on men than on women."

"With the Solemn Guardian, I tried to go in a different direction. With his extensive experience in nudging mech pilots to do the right thing, we managed to come up with Call of Duty. Simply put, we stare really hard at a target and make him feel extremely obligated to do his duty even if it costs him his life. I wanted to make this effect as strong as possible so we tried our best to put all of our effort into influencing a single mech pilot no matter if he is friendly or hostile. It doesn't work on expert pilots but it should work on everyone else. The range is also long since it is so hyper focused."

Ves shook his body. Call of Duty sounded like a benign technique at first, but he could think of plenty of ways that the Larkinsons could abuse this to their advantage!

They could force a cowardly enemy commander who was on the verge of cutting his losses to change his mind and fight to the end!

They could force the leader of a retreating allied force to turn around and stall a superior enemy while the Larkinsons took advantage of the situation to run away without any interference!

Not just humans, but also aliens could be manipulated in this fashion! The non-human targets just had to be able to feel the right emotions and possess compatible cognitions in order for the Call of Duty ability to take effect.

The other expert pilots looked wary at Venerable Joshua until he clarified its effectiveness.

"It doesn't work on expert pilots." He said in an exasperated tone. "You guys are too strong-willed for the Solemn Guardian and I to influence you in this way. If you can stand your ground against an ace pilot, you should easily be able to brush aside this ability."

? ?? ??-??? ??, ?,?,? This caused everyone to relax again. None of them looked forward to the prospect of getting mind-controlled one day!? ??? a ???e?

However, Ves was keen enough to sense that Joshua's answer wasn't as innocent as it sounded.

There was a hint of ambition and desire in the expert pilot's mind that only briefly became apparent.

This led Ves to believe that Venerable Joshua might be working to make his Call of Duty ability effective against stronger targets. He would have to raise his resonance strength in order to make this viable though.

Joshua continued to elaborate on his numerous prime abilities.

"With the Golden Cat, I can activate my Larkinson Monitor ability. It's nothing flashy. It just gives me a lot of awareness of the health and mood of every Larkinson. The best part about this ability is that I don't seem to have any range limit. I can even check up on how the Larkinsons stationed in Davute are doing!"

Although a lot of Larkinsons were surprised at the latter, Ves did not exhibit the same reaction. He could already do the same whenever he held the Larkinson Mandate. The only noteworthy aspect about Joshua's trick was that he could accomplish this effect with the Everchanger as his medium.

Perhaps there was a way for Joshua to accomplish more than gain a mental radar that was attuned to his fellow clansmen. He would have to invest a lot of time and effort into expanding his options, though.

"I haven't spent much time cooperating with Arnold, so the ability that we've developed is still a work-in-progress." Joshua explained. "I can't make decoys as good as Tusa, but I think I can make a small illusion of my expert mech appear for just an instant. It doesn't last too long so I still need to put in a lot more work before my False Mech ability is usable in battle."

That was already a respectable accomplishment! Venerable Tusa looked highly impressed as he knew that Joshua's conditions were much worse than his own. The Dark Zephyr was made for cooperating with Arnold while the Everchanger was much less specialized.

So far, Venerable Joshua outlined 8 different prime abilities. Only one was left, and Ves had a good idea of the identity of the last design spirit that Joshua had partnered up with. The expert pilot had intimately channeled her power in battle several different times already.

He directed a more careful look towards Ves. "The Superior Mother is not like the other design spirits that I have worked with. She has a lot of power and is able to make use of it in many ways. The only aspect of her that I am familiar with is that of death. To that

end... I have been trying to form a method that can augment my resonance attacks with her death power."

Another gasp rang throughout the meeting room.

So far, the only instances where the Larkinsons were able to wield this power was when the Penitent Sisters performed their battle formation.

While the death phase battle formation was insanely effective against the right opponents, it was an incredibly costly attack method that drained the mech pilots involved with it. The attack was also huge and indiscriminate, making it difficult to determine when and where to direct its power.

If Venerable Joshua was able to harness the Superior Mother's death power in a more controlled fashion, then he could neutralize opponents in a much more effective fashion!

"Can your death-empowered attacks bypass energy shields and physical obstructions?" Ves immediately asked.

Joshua shook his head. "That's the problem. I haven't spent much time on it yet, so my Death Infusion ability is only half-done. I can augment my melee or ranged attacks as long as I have already empowered them with true resonance, but the death energy only lasts long enough until my attacks hit a surface. I am still figuring out how to make the death energy pass through obstacles. Even if I managed to do this, I am still doubting whether the power is strong enough to actually kill people inside mechs."

"Take all of the time you need." Ves reassured the expert pilot. "You have already succeeded in broadening your capabilities. I suggest you focus on improving your Death Infusion ability next. Its potential against biological opponents and starships is great once you learn how to propel the death energy forward. We don't have to rely so much on the Penitent Sisters to kill our enemies by a different means!"

The expert pilots soon began to ask questions of their own to Venerable Joshua. They had become thoroughly impressed by how well Venerable Joshua had befriended all of the design spirits and managed to develop so many different prime abilities.

Even Ves looked at Joshua in a different light. When he initially came up with the idea of the Everchanger, he never imagined that its expert pilot would leverage the living mech's advantage to this extent.

Venerable Joshua was a veritable prime master in the Larkinson Clan!

Although there were expert pilots such as Venerable Tusa and Venerable Orfan who had excelled in developing strong and unique prime abilities, the only one who could come up with a thousand different abilities was the pilot of the Everchanger!

If Joshua continued to specialize in this aspect, then Ves could scarcely anticipate how much of a terror the Everchanger would become on the battlefield.

What Ves was especially impressed with was how extensively the Everchanger could alter entire battlefields with its powerful glows which could be amplified with the expert mech's signature Hero's Glow resonance ability.

When enhanced with Joshua's new prime abilities, it was not impossible for the Everchanger to turn thousands of friendly mech pilots into fearless warriors and hordes of enemy mech pilots into frightened cowards!

"This is what a true hero mech should be." Ves affirmed to himself.

It had been the right choice to pair Venerable Joshua up with a hero mech. The symbolism and perceived leading role of such a mech suited him the best!

He just hoped that the future enemies that the Larkinson Clan were susceptible to emotional manipulation. As long as their future foes weren't as dull as the sandmen, the Everchanger would always be able to sway the battlefield!

Chapter 3794 The Golgotha Foundation

After a productive exchange session that was mostly dominated by talking about prime abilities, the expert pilots finally returned to their own haunts.

Only Patriarch Reginald Cross remained behind with Ves and Gloriana. The Cross Patriarch briefly spent a bit of time conveying his wishes to the two Larkinson mech designers.

"Professor Benedict is a good friend and a good mech designer, but as good as he is in designing high-performing mechs, he is not as good in adding that special spark that you Larkinsons are used to putting in all of your mech designs."

The gruff man's voice clearly betrayed his envy and admiration towards the myriad of special features that defined the Larkinson expert mechs.

Although Ves was proud that his expert pilots managed to develop new tricks with their expert mechs that he had never envisioned, he did not let this success get over his head.

Other mech designers were no slouches. Those that designed expert mechs themselves were all capable of adding their own special touches to their works.

The main reason why the Larkinson expert mechs stood out so much was because he and his clan were willing to invest large amounts of money and resources into their design and fabrication.

Many other mech designers who were tasked with doing the same often had to abide by strict budget, time and manpower constraints. It was rare for them to gain all of the conditions necessary to turn an expert mech design project into their passion projects.

The only instances where mech designers could go loose was when they designed machines for more distinguished pilots.

High-tier expert mechs such as the Gatecrasher showed that Masters were capable of designing far more powerful expert mechs if they were working under the right circumstances!

Of course, Patriarch Reginald wasn't content with obtaining a machine of that caliber anymore. He wanted an expert mech that was stronger than any of the high-tier expert mechs that he had the pleasure of coming into contact with. The possibilities demonstrated by the Larkinsons only fueled his desire even more.

His future and the future of the Cross Clan was on the line!

"As we have promised, we shall put our best effort into designing our strongest expert mech to date." Gloriana eagerly responded to Patriarch Reginald's renewed urgency. "That said, our work is limited by the materials that we have access to. The quality and properties of the materials determine the upper limit of a mech. We cannot build a machine that is strong enough to challenge alien warships by itself if it is made out of sticks and stone."

Ves wasn't so sure about that claim. There were all kinds of wondrous materials available in the cosmos. He could think of several ways to design a mech that was primarily made out of exotic woods and stone, though admittedly they wouldn't be as good due to his lack of mastery in these materials.

Patriarch Reginald unexpectedly smirked. "About that, I may be able to present you with hopeful news. Ever since I passed on the word to Professor Benedict, he has been using his own network to find any opportunity for us to acquire Galenta Bone."

"What?!"

Ves was shocked at this news!

He and his Larkinson Clan had been trying to acquire a Galenta Bone for ages without any result.

In contrast, Professor Benedict only spent an hour or so before he was able to get a lead on Galenta Bone. The disparity was enormous!

Though a part of Ves was jealous that a Senior like Professor Benedict was able to open up a lot more doors than him, he was largely happy with this development.

Galenta Bone was the only prime material that he knew for certain was available in the Red Ocean!

"Please tell us more." Ves quickly said as he tried to suppress his eagerness as much as possible. "Who is selling it and what is the price?"

There was no way that Galenta Bone could be obtained so easily. It was a precious trophy and possessed several desirable properties that turned it into a real treasure. Ves expected to hear a difficult answer and he was not disappointed in this regard.

"The party that is willing to offer a whole Galenta Bone to our alliance is a charitable organization called the Golgotha Foundation." The Cross Patriarch revealed.

"The... Golgotha Foundation...?"

Both Ves and Gloriana looked at each other. Neither of them had ever heard of this strangely-named foundation.

This shouldn't be a surprise, actually. Human civilization was enormous and the amount of groups that had entered the Red Ocean in the past few years was immense!

"What is the Golgotha Foundation?" Ves asked. "Is it based in Davute? Who are its backers?"

Reginald raised his hands. "Calm down, boy. I will answer your questions one by one. From what I've learned, the Golgotha Foundation has set up a branch in Davute, but its headquarters is located in a different region. The truth is that the foundation and its owners are first-raters."

"..."

Both Ves and Gloriana fell silent as they took in this news.

It was to be expected. Galenta Bone was classified as a first-class material due to its excellent properties. Alpha galenta whales were also highly formidable astral beasts that could not be felled by ordinary pioneering fleets.

Only first-raters had the means and the motivation to hunt these creatures down for sport. The prestige in completing such a hunt would definitely enhance anyone's reputation.

Ves slowly frowned.

The trouble with first-raters was that they were much more powerful and wealthy than anyone else. They looked down on second-raters as they treated anyone below their level as subhuman space peasants.

It was incredibly difficult to get along with these snobby types!

"From what I know about these charitable foundations, they all function as vehicles that allow their owners to spread their influence." Ves stated. "They are never purely about doing good. There are always greater motives behind them, whether they are political, economical or cultural."

"You are right to be vigilant about these foundations, but that does not change the fact that the Golgotha Foundation is the only organization that has shown a willingness to trade their Galenta Bone to us." Reginald replied.

That made Ves feel even less comfortable about this situation.

"Who... owns the Golgotha Foundation?"

The Cross Patriarch let out a deep breath. "Professor Benedict has told me that the Golgotha Foundation is an arm of the Impresario Principality."

"Impresario... Principality?"

Gloriana's eyes instantly widened. Ves followed suit a few seconds later.

The only organizations that had a habit of putting the word 'principality' in their names were the umbrella groups of Rubarthan princes!

"Which prince?!" Gloriana almost shrieked.

"Prince Casevir, otherwise known as the Impresario Prince." Reginald answered. "He is the 5733rd Prince of the Rubarthan Imperial Household."

"Oh."

Ves grew a bit more relaxed after figuring out how many older brothers and sisters possessed.

The reason for that was simple. The thousands of direct offspring of the man who reigned over the New Rubarth Empire all set up their own fiefs after they had reached maturity.

The earliest sons and daughters of the Star Emperor received the privilege of ruling over actual territories or arms of the immense Rubarthan states.

However, these cushy dominions soon ran out as the highly virile emperor kept making one heir after another.

The fiefs turned virtual as the later princes were left to start from scratch. The further down the line of succession, the more the princes had to scramble to build up their own private networks and organizations!

It was for this reason that most humans learned how highly they should treat a Rubarthan prince.

The first hundred or so princes and princesses were widely regarded as the contenders to the throne. Their high ranks, their powerful fiefs and the many years they spent in building up their support networks granted them real power

The next thousand imperial offspring were seen as dark horses more or less. Their fiefs were less wealthy and powerful so they could not attract the same amount of support as their oldest imperial siblings.

Still, the throne contenders still competed for the support for the dark horses because the latter could still offer a lot of help in case the succession battle of the millennium finally broke out in the old galaxy!

The offspring younger than these groups were much less influential in comparison. They only received nominal fiefs when they grew up and did not have any way to compete against their older and more entrenched siblings.

They were pretty much free to do what they wanted as they possessed no particular obligations.

Many became business tycoons.

Others dedicated their lives to research.

Plenty of princes became mech pilots.

Others turned into good-for-nothings that spent most of their time on parties and social events.

Nonetheless, even if these younger imperial descendants were trivial existences in the New Rubarth Empire, their identities could still crush any second-class organization!

Getting involved with any Rubarthan prince was dangerous business. If not for the promise of obtaining Galenta Bone, Ves wouldn't even want to get close to this highborn orbit!

"What kind of person is Prince Casevir?" Ves cautiously asked.

"We are still figuring that out, Ves. On the surface, His Highness is an imperial who has strongly distanced himself from the power games in Rubarth. He has dedicated much of

his life to enjoying, mastering and promoting the arts. This is why he became known as the Impresario Prince. He has a habit of splurging a lot of money on millions of artists, craftsmen, artisans, storytellers, media producers, musicians and so on. He even makes a lot of different artworks himself."

Ves looked up the Impresario Prince on the galactic net through his implant while Patriarch Reginald explained.

The 5733rd was indeed an artist and an entertainment aficionado. He had sponsored and supported so many different artistic and media initiatives that his influence in the galactic art sector and entertainment industry were not negligible!

"One of the more notable details about Prince Casevir is that his current preoccupation is producing and directing different drama shows." Reginald continued. "He and his media companies have already released a bunch of successful drama shows, some of which have achieved popularity in many parts of human space. Their genres range from comedy, action, tragedy and mystery. His Highness personally took charge of each of these high-budget productions."

Ves didn't know what to think about this artistic prince.

On one hand, the Impresario Prince had managed to achieve a lot of success in his chosen fields.

On the other hand, spending all of his time and effort on furthering his standing in the art and entertainment sectors meant he amounted to nothing in the Rubarth Empire's power center!

Patriarch Reginald finally turned his explanation back to the organization at hand.

"The Golgotha Foundation is one of Prince Casevir's many channels to support the arts. When Professor Benedict inadvertently got in touch with the charitable organization, the spokesperson showed interest in our alliance and more specifically you." He pointed at Ves.

"Me?" Ves looked puzzled.

"Golgotha has refrained from telling us the price we need to pay in order to obtain the Galenta Bone that we need. The only way we can learn the details is if we return to Davute and visit the foundation's in person."

"Figures. Well, that will probably take a month, maybe two. I do not plan to leave the Garimel System until we have filled our cargo holds with valuable ore."

The expeditionary fleet had yet to complete its exploration of the Garimel System. Ves strongly suspected that it had more to offer than what was apparent on the surface!

He and Patriarch Reginald continued to discuss this strange offer. They agreed to gather more intelligence about the Golgotha Foundation and the prince it was acting under before they made any moves.

In the meantime, they would continue their search for other ways to obtain Galenta Bone. As far as Ves was concerned, just a single bone wasn't enough for his ambitions!

Chapter 3795 Violet Ridge

Ves had a lot on his mind as of late.

He and his fellow Journeymen were contemplating a lot of possible commercial mech design projects.

Dr. Perris had made a lot of progress in her biotech projects and would soon begin cultivating the promised living coin trees and the so-called meat suit.

The Flagrant Vandal combat carrier sent to explore Auralis, otherwise known as Garimel I, had almost reached the orbit of the heavy gravity planet.

The mechs and shuttles sent to survey the various moons of Lemigo Distat, otherwise known as Garimel II, had begun to discover considerably more lucrative mineral deposits.

Gloriana and Ketis were finally undergoing the implantation procedure that would make them pregnant.

Of course, nothing concerned him more than the prospect of getting his hands on actual prime material which he could use to augment the Mars Project and possibly other high-value mechs!

He had occupied himself with all of these matters and more in the following days. He had become so stressed and concerned about these preoccupations that he decided that he needed a break.

Hence, he decided to board a shuttle to go on an improvised field trip to Iron Crusher, the largest moon orbiting Lemigo Distat.

Unlike the wilder and more active Gatecrasher, Iron Crusher was a fairly tranquil moon. While it was subject to a few tidal forces and the like, the moon remained stable and quiet for much of its lifetime due to several factors.

The Larkinsons didn't have to worry about volcanoes bursting out of the ground or the entire moonscape cracking into pieces because of frequent tectonic activity.

Even though Gatecrasher exposed a lot more valuable mineral deposits on the surface, the environmental hazards made it difficult to take advantage of them. Numerous mining mechs incurred major damage after they became affected by the violent terrain.

The Larkinsons eventually learned the hard way that mining deposits on Iron Crusher was a lot less difficult.

Sure, the work required a lot of digging and prospecting, but at least the tunnels weren't about to collapse anytime soon.

Ves had decided to visit the largest concentration of valuable exotics that the survey parties had found so far. When his shuttle and its escort of mechs arrived at a place that his fellow Larkinsons had named the Violet Ridge Mountain Range.

"Welcome to Violet Ridge, patriarch." A mining director assigned to the Andrenidae transmitted to Ves. "Please follow me to the main camp. We are eager to show you a glimpse of our mining operations."

The mining director, Ves and his honor guard all opted to float above the surface and fly towards the mining camp settled at the foot of the notable mountain range.

He could already observe a large amount of vehicles and mining mechs moving in and out of the camp.

Large amounts of raw ore poured in from the various mines that the Larkinsons had opened up after discovering the abundance of this mountain range.

A lot of this ore consisted of silicates and regular materials that were basically worthless on the market. Taking them in only wasted a lot of cargo space so the mining camp had to process them first in order to cut them down to size.

While the processing machines set up by the Larkinsons were not capable of refining the ores completely, the Larkinsons were already happy with doing a quick pass.

They could complete the final refining stages at the Graveyard or ship them back to Davute and dump this problem on another company's lap.

No sound propagated throughout the airless moon. If it did, then Ves would probably hear the sounds of industry as a lot of vehicles and machines were being put to use.

He paid special attention to the special mining mechs assigned to the Andrenidae.

Each of them looked distinctly different from the combat mechs of the Larkinson Clan. They were essentially bestial mechs as they were designed in the shape of bees.

The Andrenidae used to be a Hexer mining ship that the Larkinsons had managed to acquire on the second-hand ship market.

While the Hexers had done a good job in designing and constructing this capital ship, the downside to buying their former products was that Ves got stuck with their idiosyncrasies!

Her origin meant that she was shaped-like a hexagonal hive and featured a distinctive honeycomb internal structure.

In order to complement the 'beehive' theme that the Hexers had applied to the Andrenidae, they designed and equipped their mining ship with the 5R Worker Bee Mech Model.

"How has this mining mech model worked out for you guys?" Ves curiously asked.

"Our crew were initially skeptical about the Worker Bees, but we learned to appreciate them once we used them in various situations. They are more than just mining mechs. Their six limbs, each of which can be used to perform different types of precision actions, makes them useful in tasks outside of digging ore. We have used them to assist with harvesting salvage, performing repairs on starships and transporting materials from one location to another. The only limit to their versatility is the training of the mech pilot. The Worker Bees are a bit more challenging to learn than other mining mechs and the pilots require specialized knowledge in order to become qualified to perform repairs and other tasks."

In other words, the Worker Bees could also function as general purpose worker mechs. They were useful in any fleet and could easily provide a lot of help in completing different tasks as long as the pilots possessed the right work training.

This made the Worker Bee model useful in situations where there were no mining operations taking at all. Whenever the expeditionary fleet was traveling around or parked in a restrictive star system such as Davute, the Andrenidae and her many Worker Bees would not have to sit around and do nothing all the time.

"What about their mining performance?" Ves asked the key question. "While it is nice that the Worker Bees are flexible worker machines, their main purpose is to mine stuff. How well do they do their jobs?"

The hazard suited mining director looked at all of the Worker Bees in sight.

"The model is... decent, I would say. When utilized for mining purposes, we have found that they excel in calmer conditions. They the Worker Bees are fairly flexible, move fast when unloaded, can take in a moderate volume of ore and can mine delicate or volatile minerals with care."

"What are the downsides?"

"We have found that the Worker Bees are not that durable. They get damaged fairly easily and they do not have a high fault tolerance. They require regular maintenance and they cannot handle hazardous environments well. They also move a lot slower when they are filled with ore. Overall, we have found that the mining mech model is efficient when used in calmer sites like Violet Ridge and not that ideal when used in more active environments such as Gatecrasher."

That was what Ves figured as well. A moon where volcanoes and earthquakes ravaged the crust on a regular basis was not a nice place for a mining mech model that could easily get crushed if rocks fell onto its bee-shaped body!

Ves approached one of the Worker Bees that was being serviced. He paid close attention to the wear-and-tear of the mech frame.

"These mining mechs are too light and hollow to work under difficult conditions." Ves concluded with a skeptical eye. "While the Worker Bee model has its advantages, I don't think they will remain a good fit in our fleet going forward. We need to replace them with a more heavy duty mining mech model that can perform its primary mission in many more environments."

The mining director turned to Ves. "We would love it if you could design a living mining mech for us! The Andrenidae would truly come alive if our crew can work with the same sort of machines that grace the Larkinson Army."

"I will consider it at a later date." Ves stated after he thought about it. "The Worker Bee's performance is not up to par, but it is hardly an incompetent mining mech model. From what I can see, it is doing the job it is supposed to do. I'm not in a hurry to replace them if that is the case. I will get around to starting a new design project because I think we can do much better than these fragile bee mechs, but for now try your best to make the most of your existing machines."

The mining director was not enthused about the answer, but it was the best that he could get. Ves could clearly see that the workers assigned to the Andrenidae would become a lot more motivated if they received his personal attention, but he had so many priorities on his list that he didn't really find it important to cater to these people's desires.

Perhaps he could treat this job as a minor design project and leave most of the development work to a design team.

That was a course of action that he would consider in the future. For now, he wanted to know more about the valuable exotics found in this mountain range.

"I've seen enough here. Take me to where Lucky is stationed. I want to see what my cat is doing these days."

"Certainly, sir. Let me call a vehicle that can take you to the mine."

They boarded another shuttle that slowly brought them to the largest and most active mining site. It was basically a giant hole in a mountainside that branched out as they followed different veins.

A lot of work was needed to dig out and stabilize the tunnels, but fortunately the relatively low gravity of the moon made it easy to handle all of the heavy matter.

As the shuttle slowly flew deeper into one of the tunnels, Ves and the rest eventually flew out into a dark tunnel where a couple of mining mechs were carefully inspecting the surrounding walls.

Lucky happened to be located close to the bottom. A handler was keeping in touch with the gem cat.

"What's going on here?" Ves asked.

"We have found small quantities of a high-quality resonating exotic called Hulivaster. It is a metallic substance that can be used to increase the effectiveness of certain forms of active stealth measures."

Ves became a lot more interested in that. If the Venerable Tusa happened to be compatible with Hulivaster, there might be a way to integrate it into the Dark Zephyr.

However, this was only a faint hope. The Dark Zephyr was already stuffed with enough resonating exotics and it also wasn't a true stealth mech.

If nothing else, the Larkinsons would probably bring back any Hulivaster retrieved from this site and dispose of it in Davute where they could be put to use in other expert mechs.

"Meow!?"

When Lucky phased through the tunnel wall, the cat was surprised that Ves had decided to show up in this dark and unpleasant mining tunnel.

A piece of raw Hulivaster ore rested between the cat's teeth. Lucky's apparent surprise did not stop him from chewing his prize and swallowing it in his belly!

Ves directed a critical look at his cat. "Will you be able to turn invisible now that you've eaten a batch of Hulivaster?"

"Meow meow."

"What?! Then why the hell are you eating this valuable resonating exotic in the first place? Leave it all to us so that we can sell them for lots of MTA credits!"

"Meow meow meow!"

His cat adamantly refused to stop. This was his reward for sniffing out all of these yummy exotics! He didn't want to go back to munching on the same exotics as before!

Ves sighed in exasperation before he turned back to the mining director.

"How many valuable types of exotics have you found so far in Violet Ridge?"

"We have come across 49 different types of exotics, of which half of them are resonating exotics." The man replied. "We found many of the resonating exotics inside this exact mountain!"

Chapter 3796 Master Barnard Solas Voiken

The end of the last design round introduced a lull in the Design Department that its mech designers eagerly took advantage of. With no major projects hanging over their heads, they could take stock of their current situation and reflect on what they had accomplished.

In the last few months, Sara and Dulo Voiken fully integrated into the Larkinson Clan. Though they still possessed a lot of affection for the Voiken Family, in their hearts they had put a definite stripe between their old lives and their new ones.

The design of the Rigid Wall, the Rigid Spine and the Transcendent Charger brought the Voiken duo into prominence. They were no longer faceless names in the Larkinson Clan. They were Journeymen who almost stood on an equal level to that of their revered patriarch.

Sara Voiken never had any doubts about her value to the Larkinson Clan.

Mech designers who specialized in defensive systems were actually quite common in the mech industry, but it was odd that the Larkinsons never employed one at the Journeyman-level until she had accepted their offer.

In any case, she was grateful that she had decided to plunge into the eccentric clan. There weren't any Masters or Seniors who she could look up to for guidance, but she had discovered that she didn't really need their handholding anyway.

Becoming a part of the Larkinson Clan provided her the liberation that she needed. Now that she was practicing her craft away from her rulebound family and her stuffy elders,

she could finally design the mechs she envisioned with a relatively free reign and a considerable degree of trust.

She was still surprised at how much latitude she received from the patriarch and head designer. In a more formal and established design organization, a relatively young Journeyman like herself would never receive so much autonomy and decision-making power a short time after joining its ranks.

"Then again, the Larkinson Clan is anything but normal."

The highest leader in the clan and in the design labs was not a Senior or Master who was solely intent on pressing his own vision of mechs.

The existence of a certain... loyalty-reinforcing mechanism meant that the clan did not need to rely on more overt forms of controls over its people.

Though Sara should have felt horrified at the thought that a creature called the 'Golden Cat' monitored every clansmen day and night, she had assimilated into the Larkinson Clan so well that she no longer regarded this dubious cat with fear.

Instead, just like any other Larkinson, she held nothing but love, respect, admiration and even faith towards the Golden Cat!

"It also helps that she is just so cute. How can I possibly accuse a cat of any misdeed?"

The Larkinson Clan's embrace and adoration of cats had infected her as well. She just wanted to hold one, squish one and snuggle up with one when she slept in her bed.

Anyway, aside from the Larkinson Clan's strange insistence on bringing the entire fleet on dangerous expeditions and excursions, Sara Voiken had little to complain about as she settled into her new home.

She gazed at her grand stateroom and took pride that she and her brother stayed in one of the most luxurious living compartments on the flagship of the Larkinson fleet. It was one of the more obvious signs of her high status in a clan where mech designers like herself wielded a lot of influence due to the machinations of its founder.

"Sister. It's almost time."

"I am aware. Stop fidgeting. We are only about to hold a conversation with the former founder of our family."

Dulo Voiken's eyes shook for a moment. "Why did you accept his request to talk over the galactic net? We ran away from the Voiken Family, remember? Our ancestor must be pissed!"

Both of them had grown up under the tall shadow of the Master Mech Designer who headed the Voiken Family since the beginning. The founder's prestige was enormous. As someone who lived over 300 years and spent much of that time as an accomplished Master, it was hard for the brother and sister to lift their heads up when they realized that Journeymen were still located on the bottom half of the totem pole.

"I don't think it will be that bad." Sara soothed her brother. "No matter what, we no longer take orders from our ancestor. His blood might flow through our veins, but we answer to a different master nowadays."

The pair waited for a few minutes until their comms finally received the notification that the other side was ready to hold a cross-galaxy conversation.

Separated by hundreds of thousands of light-years, the usage of quantum communication nodes managed by the Comm Consortium never failed to open channels with virtually zero delay in transmissions.

The only reason why the connection took longer to establish this time was because the caller on the other side requested additional encryption and security measures.

Certain people possessed more privileges than others. A Master whose age surpassed three centuries could definitely request special treatment from the Comm Consortium!

Finally, the connection came into being. A physical projection of an old but strong-backed man appeared in front of the Voiken siblings.

Sara and Dulo instinctively bowed despite no longer being obliged to do so. The instinct had been carved into their very bones since they were young.

Without the great Master putting in so much effort into raising a family organization, the pair of Voiken descendants would have never turned into a pair of young and successful Journeymen!

"Master."

"Master."

The projected figure standing before the pair possessed a dignified appearance. Though he wore a white lab coat that was typical to mech designers, his own was embellished and decorated with red and brown depictions of mythological beasts.

This was the honored Master Barnard Solas Voiken, one of the rare breed of mech designers who had managed to rise up from the early years of the Age of Mechs.

The mech industry was still rising up at the time. Master Barnard Voiken did not enjoy the abundance of institutional guidance and well-established technological conventions that the younger generation such as Sara and Dulo took for granted.

As a result, the amount of mech designers that emerged in those days eventually fell off as their lifespans expired.

While there were means to prolong people's lives, the best and most effective methods were tightly held by the MTA and CFA.

The price to prolong a person's life as they got older became prohibitively more expensive.

Age therefore became an effective way to judge a high-ranking mech designer's worth.

The more centuries they lived, the more they contributed to the MTA. Those who still remained alive after living for over four or five centuries were legends in the mech industry!

Though Master Barnard Voiken was not among the earliest generations of mech designers, he was not that far off. He enjoyed an enormous status in his home state in the Uplifting Note Star Sector in the galactic heartland.

This was not just because he was old, but because he was an excellent mech designer. The bestial mechs that he was known for designing always stood out for the firepower of their integrated weapons.

When a client wanted to obtain a bestial mech with excellent attack power, he could do no wrong by buying a product designed by Master Barnard Voiken!

Now, this renowned and prestigious figure had taken time away from his ambitious research and design projects to talk to two former members of his family.

There was no way that Sara and Dulo could maintain their composure in front of such a figure. Just the suppression of facing a highly-successful Master was enough to put the Journeymen into place!

Master Barnard stared deep at his two descendants. Though his bloodline had flourished over the centuries, it was still difficult for the subsequent generations to advance to Journeymen.

The loss of two young and talented Journeymen was not a trivial event.

In addition to that, there was also his pride and the pride of his family to consider. The fact that Sara and Dulo would rather defect to a no-name clan that was barely a few years old served as an obvious indictment to the Voiken Family!

His personal reaction to this whole affair was therefore crucial to the Voiken siblings.

Fortunately, their ancestor did not withhold his reaction for long.

"Sara Voiken. Dulo Voiken. The two of you... appear content." The old man began. "Answer this plainly. Do you regret your decisions?"

Though both of the younger Voikens felt tempted to massage their answers, they knew that it was best to tell the truth.

"We don't." Sara softly answered. "We still stand by the statements we made back then. We... felt constricted by all of the rules and customs that we needed to abide by. We weren't happy back in the Uplifting Note Star Sector. I don't think I could have furthered my design philosophy at a pace I was satisfied with if I stayed."

"Could you not have founded your own company or joined another influence closer to home?" Master Barnard questioned. "I can understand if you feel the need to leave our star sector. Leaving your home galaxy is an extreme decision."

"As my sister said, we do not regret our decision, sir." Dulo softly replied. "We chose not to stay in the same star sector or star cluster for several reasons. We knew that if we did not move far enough, our many relatives who have spread throughout the different star clusters would find a way to impose their norms and rules on us again. We left the family exactly because we couldn't stand the cage that you have built around us all. We knew that with your... views on society, we could only ever free ourselves if we traveled to the new frontier."

Sara nodded in support of her brother's words. "We largely found what we have been looking for in the Red Ocean. Mind you, we never imagined we would join an organization as new and special as the Larkinson Clan, but we have come to appreciate the many upsides to becoming near-founder figures in a group that is still in the process of rising up. Here in the Larkinson Clan, we have everything we truly need to execute our vision."

The Voiken Ancestor studied his two bloodline descendants carefully. He maintained an impassive expression, making it difficult for Sara and Dulo to discern his true thoughts.

Fortunately for the pair, Master Barnard did not react as badly as they feared.

The old man did not raise his tone. He did not issue any recriminations towards the siblings. He merely... voiced his regret.

"While I do not agree with your decisions, I can accept them." He slowly spoke in a measured cadence. "The rules and customs that you complain about are there for a reason. The family that I have created with my own efforts was never meant to diminish youngsters as yourselves. Human society is far more dangerous than you can imagine."

Our family is organized in a manner that provides the greatest amount of protection to my children and grandchildren. Your parents and direct supervisors must have been negligent for the two of you to find too much fault in our ways."

Both Sara and Dulo Voiken had a lot of words to say about that. The Voiken Family was a prison to them! The more their former superiors wanted the pair to conform to the family, the more they felt they did not belong among the Voikens anymore!

Though the two young Journeymen did not speak out their current thoughts, Master Barnard was sharp enough to pick up the notable degree of resentment from his two descendants.

He lowered his eyes. "What is done is done. Whether you have erred in your actions, both of you are adults in the standards of our society. I will respect your choice to leave our Voiken Family as long as you take responsibility over your decisions. I can promise to you that our Voiken Family and I will not pursue your untimely departures nor demand you repay your debts. You wished for a clean break. You will have it. Consider this to be a parting gift from your family."

A weight was lifted off the shoulders of the Voiken siblings. They had been afraid that their ancestor might persist in tying them to the family, but the Master Mech Designer treated them with grace.

Chapter 3797 Integrating into the Red Ocean

The mood in the grand stateroom lifted quite a bit after Master Barnard Solas Voiken essentially forgave the two defectors of the family.

The Voiken Ancestor would have been in the right if he chose to pursue the matter further.

It was undeniable that the Voiken Family invested a lot in their upbringing. From expensive gene treatments to rare and desirable cranial implants, the family did not skimp in its attempt to turn Sara and Dulo Voiken into its future mainstays.

There were many descendants among the Voikens that had subsequently achieved success after enjoying so many benefits.

While there were plenty of mech designers who had stalled or failed to reach their potential, there were enough success stories to earn back all of the investments.

Although the continued absence of a second Master Mech Designer was a blemish to the Voiken Family, everyone believed it was only a matter of time before one of the many Seniors made the critical jump.

Sara and Dulo could have followed the stable and comfortable trajectories of the older Voikens. They had no doubt that they would have been assigned to helpful mentors in the family that could guide their subsequent development.

It was too bad that overt meddling in their careers was exactly what the two younger mech designers did not want!

Master Barnard may regret the departure of the two kids, but he did not believe his family was in the wrong. It had long provided a lot of welfare and guidance to his offspring and their offspring. Many other people in his star sector envied the lives of his Voikens!

"How... are our relatives taking our departure?" Dulo Voiken finally mustered up the courage to break the silence. "Are they... angry?"

"I cannot say." The projected figure shook his head. "You should explore that on your own. They should not fault you once I pass on my opinion to them. We should move on rather than get stuck on an event that has already passed."

The old Master had lived through many ups and downs. If he was the sort of person who could not forgive and forget, he would have never been able to make it to this stage.

Besides, the 'loss' suffered by the Voiken Family was not concerning enough. There were more kids that could fill in the small hole created by Sara and Dulo.

Sara Voiken decided to bring up another topic.

"We have heard that you have... changed your stance on the Red Ocean, sir. A group of Voikens have already arrived in the Red Ocean. Did our departure change the family?"

Back when they were in the family, the thought of expanding their presence in the Red Ocean was unthinkable!

Barnard was a long-standing associate of the Preserving Order Faction. He supported the cause of peace and stability for his entire life.

The expansionist goals behind the invasion of the Red Ocean directly clashed against his beliefs!

Their ancestor shook his head. "No, my dear. The family does not revolve around your actions. From the moment the Big Two went ahead with opening the Red Ocean to human pioneers, our civilization has already charted an irreversible course. As the benefits of conquering and colonizing have quickly fed back to our society, the pattern has already set. We Preservers cannot reverse the wheel of history once it has turned.

The most we can do is to accept our current circumstances and do our best to compensate for the excesses of other people. We already have more than enough practice in doing so after we have rebuilt our collapsed order in the aftermath of the Age of Conquest."

This was certainly a clever way to spin a complete reversal from a previous decision. Sara and Dulo weren't sure whether their ancestor was enthused about extending his family into the Red Ocean, but it appeared that he could not resist going with the tide any longer.

"Our humanity has taken a new step after it has stepped up its takeover of the Red Ocean." The Master continued. "For the first time in our history, our race is no longer confined to a single galaxy. While you can argue that expanding to a small dwarf galaxy as opposed to entering a larger starfield such as the Andromeda Galaxy does not qualify as stepping out, it is a harbinger of what is to come. If our family continued to dig its head in the sand of the Milky Way, our cause will fade into irrelevance. That is a worse outcome than playing along with the current consensus of our society."

The Master essentially confirmed their own theory on the matter. The Preserving Order Faction was so afraid of getting ignored that it no longer held on to their outdated insistence that humanity should stick to their previous borders.

Regardless of the reason, neither of the siblings thought this was a bad development.

"I wish the family good luck in this expansion." Sara sincerely said. "The Red Ocean is a rough and difficult place. The conditions to do business are much harsher here. There are so many interests trying to secure a first-mover advantage here that competition can be cutthroat."

"I am aware." Master Barnard said. "Speaking of our family's expansion in the Red Ocean, are you willing to entertain a proposition of ours?"

Both Sara and Dulo quickly exchanged glances with each other. They recognized that their ancestor was about to broach a serious topic that went beyond their actions.

"Please continue, sir."

The projected figure smiled and held his arms behind his back. "Your description of the Red Ocean's mech industry is correct. Compared to the state of the mech community back when I initially rose to success, the conditions in the dwarf galaxy are considerably more difficult. The main reason for that is that a large number of highly capable and well-prepared competitors are compressed into a limited number of territories. Even I cannot guarantee that the Voikens that we have sent to the new frontier will find their footing without relying on subsidies."

"It shouldn't be too difficult for them to make it, right?" Sara asked. "From what I heard, our grand-uncle Taigen is leading the Voikens in the Red Ocean."

Sara and Dulo still remembered receiving guidance and lessons from Professor Taigen Herman Voiken. The older man had been a little more generous towards the two because of their more direct family relations.

"That is correct. Taigen may not be the most accomplished Senior in our family, but he is young enough to know how to be flexible. He and the Voikens in his charge are currently settling down in the Pellysa System in the Magair Middle Zone at the moment, but soon they will begin to conduct business."

"Are they having any problems in gaining access to the necessary resources and infrastructure?"

"You do not need to be concerned about that, young lady. My reputation and my contacts are still useful in the Red Ocean. We did not enter the new frontier without a strategy. As we speak, Taigen should already be in the process of making contact and establishing business deals with my old friends and business partners."

This was the power of the network of a Master Mech Designer, especially one as old and established as Barnard!

The Larkinson Clan was much worse off in comparison! The only 'old friends' that could offer real benefits to the Larkinsons were the Hexers, but this was clearly not an acceptable option to the clansmen!

"Working together and pursuing mutual profit is the correct way to build a sustainable foundation in a new community. To that end, my proposition relates to a potentially lucrative opportunity for my Voiken Family and your Larkinson Clan to accelerate both our integration into the Red Ocean."

His words surprised both of the siblings!

They never imagined that their ancestor would propose a collaboration with the organization that essentially poached his descendants!

Sara quickly straightened herself up. "I cannot speak for the Larkinson Patriarch, but I can say that he is always open to collaboration with other mech designers as long as the benefits are concrete enough. He has even extended us permission to look for opportunities ourselves, though he holds the final say in any cooperative ventures."

"Did he, now? Your new leader must already hold you in high regard if he is willing to extend you this trust shortly after you have joined his organization."

"The Larkinson Clan... does things differently, sir."

Master Barnard couldn't possibly understand how the Larkinsons organized themselves. It was too far out of his accumulated experiences that Ves might seem naive in his eyes.

Still, a good mech designer was primarily judged by his work.

"Your grand-uncle Taigen is planning to embark on a design project that we hope can expand our Voiken brand in the Red Ocean's mech market. However, it is far from certain whether he can achieve the goals that we have to meet in order to achieve critical success."

Dulo looked skeptical. "How so, sir? Taigen has always been a good mech designer when it comes to designing law enforcement mechs. His mech design will surely be able to capture enough market share with your support."

Master Barnard scoffed. "You are overestimating our capabilities, young man. Being 'good' is insufficient in a marketplace as competitive as the Red Ocean. Taigen is only a Senior for now. He is unable to compete against real Masters. It is true that I can provide design and financial support from the Milky Way, my means are ultimately limited. Even if I have entered the new frontier in person, our difficulties will still remain. Do you think the other Masters that have settled over there are complacent? I will most certainly find my match if I compete against them directly."

The two siblings became confused.

"Then... how does this proposal of yours make sense, sir? Our clan's best mech designer is only a Journeyman."

"Too many people look at rank and assume that this is all they need to know to judge the ability of a mech designer." Master Barnard dismissively snorted. "I have studied your Larkinson Clan, its founder and his eclectic body of work. He reminds me of many mech designers who have gone on to open up entire new fields. Aside from that, I have made inquiries in the MTA. My contacts tell me that the Association holds special interest in his work and design philosophy. That alone makes it worthwhile for our family to work together with him and his clan."

He was right. Ves was an amazing mech designer who could not be measured according to the ordinary standards of a Journeyman. Sara and Dulo just didn't expect that their ancestor was open-minded enough to acknowledge this truth.

"What form of cooperation do you have in mind then, sir? Are you proposing that our patriarch lends his glow to grand-uncle Taigen's upcoming law enforcement mech design?"

"That is exactly what I am proposing." Barnard replied and projected two different mech models besides his form. "Mr. Larkinson's Peaceful Soldier and Tranquility models both

possess glows that are of great interest to peacekeeping units. In fact, I am told that the Peaceful Soldier variant is widely used by the Planetary Guard units of many third-rate states. The continued popularity and enduring reputation of this mech model numerous years after its initial release is a testament to its value. No matter how it works or what kind of concerns that people may have over this model, the approach is worth duplicating as long as it can continue to assist law enforcement officers subdue violent actors."

"Frontier life is a lot rougher than back at home." Dulo thoughtfully said. "I would imagine that effective law enforcement mechs are even more important in this market. The big port systems are mostly okay because their owners are powerful enough to protect their investments, but the smaller and more rural colonies should have a lot more difficulties in keeping order. If we can introduce a law enforcement mech that brings the best of both of our worlds, we might be able to capture a lot of market share!"

This was definitely a venture worth pursuing!

Chapter 3798 Why Voiken?

A combat mech was designed according to vastly different criteria from a true law enforcement mech.

The former was designed to end a fight in the most overwhelming means possible.

The latter was designed to end a fight in the least violent way possible.

The difference in goals already produced a divergence in the requirements, development and outcome of a law enforcement mech.

A machine that possessed no subtlety at all and could only solve problems in the most blunt and destructive means possible would fit right at home in most battlefields!

Collateral damage was a secondary concern to beating the snot out of the enemy!

Naturally, such combat engines were completely unsuited to be employed in peacekeeping jobs. The governments and organizations hired and funded the Planetary Guard organizations in order to preserve the order and safety of their planets.

It would be a cruel irony if the Planetary Guard mechs were so incapable of showing restraint that they wrecked the cities that they patrolled!

This was why this sector demanded a substantially different approach towards mechs!

More specifically, law enforcement mechs were primarily designed to subdue out-of-control combat mechs in the fastest way possible without causing mass damage themselves.

This was quite difficult to accomplish to be honest. The most effective and widespread method to disable mechs without blowing them up was to encase them in hardening substances.

However, if it was so easy to disable hostile mechs by bathing them in slimes and slurries, such a means should have been ubiquitous on the battlefield!

The actual reality of trying to subdue mechs was that it was always challenging to suppress a violent incident with equal numbers.

The Planetary Guard organizations needed to deploy twice, quadruple or even more law enforcement mechs in order to stop a single criminal mech under ideal conditions!

This was also why many planets that allowed for the entry of foreign machines insisted on limitations in the amount of mechs that organizations could parade on the surface.

Although the ideal solution was to prohibit anyone from bringing in mechs, this was not always a realistic solution.

Many traders, visitors, businessmen and so on only trusted their own guard mechs. While they might not be as extreme as Ves when it came to demanding that mechs should follow them on each foreign visit, many people tended to show their preferences through their actions.

Planets with more permissible rules tended to attract more visitors who subsequently engaged in trade and commerce activities.

Planets that restricted the entry of mechs actually invited less visitors in many cases. The main exception were highly developed population centers that had reached such a scale that they naturally invited a lot of traffic.

Even then, these places were so large and bustling that it was hard to prevent mechs from emerging!

Both Sara and Dulo Voiken had never participated in the design of a mech that could effectively handle these difficult situations. They roughly knew the theory behind them and also understood a thing or two about law enforcement mechs.

When they thought about the cooperative venture that their ancestor had proposed, they hardly came up with reasons to reject it. Both sides stood to gain a lot of profit if they worked together on a law enforcement mech.

The only serious question was why the Larkinson Clan should cooperate with the Voiken Family in particular.

If Sara was still a member of the family, she would not have considered this matter.

However, she was a Larkinson now. The interests of the clan trumped over the interests of her former relatives.

As a professional, she was expected to stand up for her current comrades. She believed that the Voiken Ancestor would not begrudge her skepticism.

"Master, our clan will surely appreciate your offer to cooperate, but... as far we are concerned, we hold the key to designing a transformative law enforcement mech. You already stated that the competition is fierce. We could approach many other mech companies and mech designers that are involved or have ambitions in the law enforcement sector. You will need to provide us with a good reason to convince us to cooperate with Professor Taigen Herman Voiken rather than one of his many rivals."

"That is a valid argument." Master Barnard nodded respectively towards the two kids. "Let me explain a rationale that should be sufficient to catch your patriarch's interests. First, he and his clan are so new and poorly-established that the Larkinsons should not have many dependable friends in the Red Ocean mech industry. There are bound to be trust and commitment concerns if you Larkinsons rashly decide to cooperate with an unfamiliar third party."

"The Voiken Family claims to be a superior alternative?"

"Yes, young lady. The presence of you and your brother in the Larkinson Clan is enough to form a bridge between our organizations. You may have shifted your allegiances, but there is no denying that you are still family to our fellow Voikens. The blood that flows through your veins and the many uncles and aunts that have guided you into the mech industry means that we can still trust you in matters like these. In turn, your background also allows you to understand and trust us in turn. It is not without reason that an arranged marriage is the most solid method of solidifying alliances. The only difference here is that the two of you have joined the Larkinson Clan without marrying into its families."

This was indeed a compelling reason and one that someone such as the Larkinson Patriarch should care about.

"One reason is not enough, sir."

"As long as our initial collaborating project is successful, your clan will receive our friendship and appreciation. Don't underestimate the value of forging a bond of familiarity and mutual respect. As long as we become friends, it will take less effort for you Larkinsons to approach us for future collaboration projects. As long as they are mutually beneficial, we will not say no. Prospering together is always better than trying to prosper alone. The premise is that we both have our own strengths."

Neither Sara nor Dulo knew how to take this promise seriously. They had learned about friendship when they joined the Larkinson Clan.

The clansmen were always close to each other and did not mind helping each other out without expecting any overt form of remuneration.

On the other hand, the clan was less enthusiastic about befriending outsiders. The Larkinsons had been burned by betrayals way too many times over its short existence.

The siblings had therefore received a lot of warnings about rashly accepting promises and assuming that other people were acting in good faith.

"We cannot make any specific statements with regards to these promises, sir." Dulo gave the safest answer that he could give. "We have diplomats in the clan who can negotiate with your family in detail."

"Negotiations can proceed after we have established our intent to cooperate." Master Barnard Solas Voiken dismissively replied. "For now, I only wish to hear whether your patriarch is amenable to this proposal. The sooner we can agree on our intentions, the sooner we can begin our cooperative design project. Our family has already fallen behind when it comes to conducting business in the Red Ocean. Our competitors have already taken a step ahead and have begun to dominate the mech market with their own offerings. The only realistic way for your grand-uncle Taigen to break open the law enforcement mech market is to publish a work that is so disruptive that it breaks any current model for sale."

A law enforcement mech designed in collaboration between their two organizations definitely had the potential to turn every other comparable product obsolete!

"Not enough. It's still not enough, sir." Dulo Voiken shook his head as he tried to play the tough game. "A law enforcement mech designed with a Senior Mech Designer at the lead is inferior to an equivalent mech designed with a Master Mech Designer at the helm!"

"Ah, but how many Masters will choose to lower themselves and treat your patriarch as an equal partner in a collaborative project?" Master Barnard grinned as he recognized an opening. "Mech designers at my level are strong and prideful. We only consider our fellow Masters to be our equals in mech design. It comes with all of the struggles we have overcome in order to realize our design philosophies. Mr. Ves Larkinson is far short of that and is little more than an unproven brat in the eyes of my peers. In fact, even if I propose to collaborate with him on a project as an equal, the disparity in strength and development between our design philosophies are so great that his contributions will not reach the level of his own work. It is more advantageous for a Journeyman to collaborate with a Senior because the latter will not easily engulf the former."

This was a dynamic that was somewhat familiar in the Voiken Family. Collaboration between Voiken mech designers happened all the time since everyone was so tight and

close towards each other. This was why Sara and Dulo knew that their ancestor was right in this regard.

"So you are positing that Professor Taigen Herman Voiken is the ideal collaboration partner for this mech design project?" Sara asked.

"Correct. You should know your grand-uncle well enough how good he is at designing law enforcement mechs. They are his passion and his life. While he is not a Master, in his 140 years of life, he has accrued a large amount of experience and know-how related to non-lethal mechs. He is not that far away from advancing to Master in my judgment. An alternative and transformative work like this collaboration project may be exactly what he needs to find a lead on how to push past his bottleneck."

The siblings gasped when they heard that last part. Both of them began to suspect that this might be the driving motivator why their high-and-mighty ancestor wasted so much time in this conversation!

The benefit of having Professor Taigen Voiken advance to the rank of Master was huge to the Voiken Family!

No longer would Master Barnard be the sole pillar of support that allowed the family to enjoy its current level of power, prosperity and influence.

Although he was definitely one of the best mech designers in his field, he was certainly getting on in his years.

If he perished in the near future, the Voiken Family would undergo a lot of turmoil!

Even though Barnard had made enough arrangements to ensure that the Voiken Family would remain protected, the simple reality was that without another Master, it was impossible to fund all of its expensive amenities.

These concerns should largely go away once the Voiken Family welcomed another Master among its members!

"This..." Dulo trailed off for a few seconds. "Are you that hopeful about Taigen, sir? He is not the oldest nor the most knowledgeable Senior in the family..."

Master Barnard scoffed. "My good-for-nothing sons and daughters have long exhausted their potential. The fact that they have opted to stay in the galactic heartland says enough about work ethic. Taigen is the first Senior that has volunteered to lead our mission into the Red Ocean. He is both proactive and open-minded enough to collaborate with a Journeyman mech Designer. I may not have appreciated him this much in the past, but his performance since he has been appointed to lead our branch in the Red Ocean shows that he is ready to take up greater responsibilities, both in our family and in the mech industry. He only needs a turning point."

"I... see."

The two siblings certainly wanted to see their grand-uncle succeed, but what did that have to do with the Larkinson Clan?

Seeing that Sara and Dulo weren't entirely moved, Master Barnard decided to throw in another piece of bait.

"Tell your patriarch that we are willing to gift him a starship as gesture of good faith."

"Why didn't you say so from the start, sir?!"

Chapter 3799 A Clear Pattern

"What are resonating exotics?"

Many people had asked this question, mech designers most of all. They all relied on these materials to transform ordinary mechs into unique war machines that achieved their greatest strength in the hands of the expert pilots they were designed for. The mech piloting profession would have never become as glorious as today if not for the expert mechs, ace mechs and god mechs inspiring entire generations of humans to become involved with mechs!

Although most ordinary people never got in touch with expert mechs and expert pilots in their lives, the significance of their existence could not be understated. The way they worked and fought was completely different from any other combat approach that humanity had traditionally employed in the past.

The CFA was the most straightforward evolution of how humanity fought. Just like the many alien races that populated the Milky Way Galaxy and beyond, immense starfaring vessels armed with the biggest guns and missiles that could be fitted onto them was a tried and true formula for galactic domination!

The rise of mechs and more specifically high-ranking mechs had yet to topple warships as humanity's most powerful weapon platform, but that was because they were too new and underdeveloped.

While warship technology never ceased to advance, the rise of mechs in the span of almost half a millennium was stupendous!

The earliest generations of mechs were all rough and ungainly machines that moved and fought like giant metal bricks.

The current generation of mechs has far surpassed this primitive level. They were faster, more powerful, more efficient and immensely versatile.

Yet no matter how fast mech technology advanced, scale remained a persistent problem. Mechs were many times smaller than typical warships. They simply couldn't fit any weapon systems that were powerful enough to threaten the biggest warships.

With such a heavy handicap, mechs didn't deserve to be the protagonists of this age if not for the existence of a phenomenon as weird and unfathomable as high-ranking mechs.

They were practically a completely different species. These reality-bending mechs were capable of amplifying the extraordinary characteristics of exceptional pilots to a degree where they could alter the entire battlefield!

A lot of people questioned how these powerful mechs could accomplish feats that could not completely be explained by contemporary science, and now Ves was asking the same question.

His flew over a bucket where the mining teams had filled up a crate with resonating exotics that Lucky had sniffed.

His cat happened to play a key role in this mining operation.

, c.o.m In order to prevent the Worker Bee mechs from unnecessarily crushing and destroying the potency of all of the high-value exotics found in this mining tunnel, the Larkinsons had no choice but to adopt a more delicate approach.

Many Worker Bee mechs had left this tunnel in order to control the situation better. The ones that remained were largely occupied with taking samples and performing close-ranged scans.

The presence of scores of different types of exotics that each produced their own form of interference completely mucked up any attempt to map out the placement and identification of all of the exotics buried underneath the Violet Ridge Mountain Range!

Lucky became a useful asset in this situation as he was able to phase through solid rockets and investigate what lay beyond without producing any disturbances.

What was even better was that his innate smell for valuable minerals always led him in the right direction!

This was how he managed to discover 49 different types of exotics in this mining site, each of which were distributed in their own little pockets.

The Worker Bees had carefully extracted a lot of the identified minerals. They had deposited all of their harvests in reinforced containers that were placed apart from each other in order to minimize any unstable or dangerous interactions.

Fortunately for Ves, the miners had also left out a few samples which they placed in a series of floating crates.

Different rocks glinted in the light as his Unending Regalia's suit light shone over their surfaces. Some were black. Others were gray. A few even reflected rainbow colors.

The variety of exotic types dazzled Ves. Although it was not unusual for a well-endowed planet or moon to offer over a hundred different valuable exotics, he did not think it was normal to find 49 separate varieties of them, each of which possessed vastly different properties!

None of them were related to each other as far as he knew!

As Ves inspected the other crates filled with various different ores, he noted from the labels that his men had already discerned that half of them contained resonating exotics!

He turned to the mining director accompanying him on this visit. "How do you know that they are resonating exotics? Do you have a way of determining whether these minerals possess this rare quality?"

The figure garbed in a hazard suit shook his head. "No, sir. We merely put our scanning data into our internal network and wait until the processors have found a match. Half of these resonating exotics you see before you are not unique. Other humans have already encountered them elsewhere in the Red Ocean or even the Milky Way, so their details have long been added to the MTA's database."

Ves began to think through the implications of what he heard.

"Wait a minute..." He turned towards the boxes that held the unidentified exotics. None of them were labeled. "Are you implying that these unknown minerals might be resonating exotics as well?"

The mining director swept his arm towards all of the containers filled with known and unknown materials.

"We do not dare to make any premature conclusions, but the evidence that we have gathered so far paints an unusual pattern. Of the 49 resonating exotics that we have uncovered in this mining site, we have managed to identify 26 of them. Each of them all have entries in the MTA database that positively identifies them as resonating exotics. That leaves us with 23 unidentified mineral types. We know that they are exotics because your cat and our scanners have detected the typical signs of exotic activity. We cannot determine whether they are resonating exotics because the MTA database doesn't contain any entry on materials with these specific properties, but..."

"This can't be a coincidence." Ves furrowed his brows.

He began to suspect that there was a lot more to this dig site than was apparent on the surface!

All of the exotics that happened to be known to the MTA were all capable of producing resonance.

Not a single one of the exotics found in and around this tunnel were ordinary. [PAG 24 - N 24 - OL](#)

How could this be? Weren't resonating exotics supposed to be rare?

The rest of the Violet Ridge Mountain Range was rife with more conventional exotic minerals. Each of them possessed numerous different uses, but according to the MTA database, none of the metallic minerals found in those places were known to possess true resonance qualities.

The only exception was the collection of remarkable resources found in this specific place. The known materials were all proving resonating exotics.

As for the unknown ones? Ves became increasingly more certain that they were also part of the same club! Humanity simply hadn't encountered yet and the Larkinson Clan did not possess the necessary hardware and know-how to confirm that these mystery minerals were resonating exotics.

All he could rely upon was circumstantial clues and simple logic. Even though there was no guarantee that the 23 unknown types of exotics also possessed resonating properties, he felt so sure about this theory that he was willing to assume it was the truth unless he had evidence that suggested otherwise.

He turned back to the mining director. "If all 49 exotics possess resonating properties... what does that say about this site? Has there ever been a case like this in humanity's history?"

"There are cases in the past where humanity has found concentrations of many different exotics in a single site." The man answered. "The vast majority of them are related to anomalous or powerful cosmic events. There are no hard rules concerning the generation of exotic materials, but they are more likely to appear in high-energy environments. If I have to make a guess, I would say that an event must have occurred in the distant past that contaminated the surrounding environment and eventually produced the results that we are profiting from today."

All of this sounded too vague for Ves' liking. This was because humanity possessed an incomplete understanding of what exotics actually were and why they were so remarkable.

"I would like to examine these exotics in person."

"Be my guest."

Ves picks up a piece of rock that was similar to the chunk that Lucky had chewed on earlier.

The MTA database stated that it was a resonating exotic called Hulivaster, which were apparently useful in improving the functionality of extremely rare expert stealth mechs.

"I've never seen an expert stealth mech before."

Stealth mechs in general weren't common to begin with. They excelled at sneaking around but performed abysmally when exposed. In order to minimize their emissions and camouflage their surfaces, the stealth machines were much more fragile than standard combat mechs.

It also didn't help that good stealth systems were expensive to build!

When combined with the fact that stealth mech pilots usually weren't upright warriors who fought a lot of pitched battles, the amount of them that advanced to expert pilot was low.

For this reason, the market price of Hulivaster was quite low. Demand was almost non-existent in the new frontier.

"It makes sense. States haven't come into existence yet, so there is no support for a large and organized intelligence agency."

While Ves was certain that many different powers in the Red Ocean had brought over their shady action groups, their numbers shouldn't be too great.

All of that would change in a couple of decades as the first states built up all of their civilian and military institutions. The demand for Hulivaster would probably rise by then, allowing the Larkinsons to earn a handsome profit by selling this substance to different clients.

Ves shook his head. "I'm not going to wait that long to earn a modest amount of MTA credits."

It was not worth it to keep a rare and niche material like Hulivaster in his strategic materials reserve for decades in the hopes of earning a profit through speculation.

He didn't want to sell it either. The market price was just too low. Should he store it all? He was reluctant to do so because he did not wish to take up valuable cargo space on his fleet.

An idea came into mind.

"Maybe... I should build a vault on a planet and store all of my unwanted but potentially useful loot over there."

That would require his clan to select a location and build a stronghold.

Although Ves disliked the thought of stationing more Larkinsons away from his main fleet, he became increasingly cognizant that he couldn't rely on his fleet for everything. The lack of space aboard his ships had become an increasingly more significant constraint to his ambitions!

Therefore, building a large and fortified base on Davute or another planet became an increasingly more compelling option to him. On land, space limitations no longer existed as his clan could build new structures and dig new caverns whenever it wanted!

He could dump a million times more exotic materials than what his clan were excavating from this moon!

While protecting it all from raiders would be a grave concern, the advantages outweighed the costs.

"Maybe I should order the construction of a base when we get back to Davute..."

This was a major endeavor that had massive implications for his clan if he proceeded with this idea.

A part of Ves felt reluctant to increase his dependence on Davute and its power structure.

Perhaps he should build his stronghold on another planet...

Chapter 3800 Celestan Cobalt

Ves held the piece of Hulivaster ore that his clan had harvested towards his cat. He had called Lucky over because he wanted to investigate the abundant variety of resonating exotics that had been excavated from this remarkable mining site.

"Come on, Lucky. Can you figure out what this material does?"

"Meow?"

Lucky looked confused as he floated besides Ves' armored body. Seeing that this was not a joke, he took a bite out of the chunk of Hulivaster ore.

"..Meow... meoww... meow..."

"So you are able to ascertain at least this much? That's great!"

Ves grinned. His guess was true!

Lucky was a gluttonous gem cat who ate valuable exotics like no tomorrow. He hungered for the most special and remarkable metallic exotics and wasn't above sneaking around on the Spirit of Bentheim in order to take a secret bite every once in a while.

How did Lucky find these valuable exotics?

How was he able to discern the properties and the overall value of different exotics?

Though Ves did not understand how Lucky worked at all, that didn't stop him from taking advantage of his cat's unique abilities!

According to Lucky himself, he was able to discern different exotics by 'taste' and 'smell', though the ways the cat experienced these senses were vastly different from that of normal cats.

Lucky was even able to sniff out nearby exotics in a vacuum environment or through many meters of solid rock!

All of this signified that Lucky's senses were remarkably effective even if they were beyond understanding.

Ves had no hopes of deciphering Lucky's various functions and mechanisms. He might look like a mechanical cat but his systems were far too sophisticated for him to understand and replicate!

He might have a chance of deciphering how Lucky was built if he became a Master Mech Designer or Star Designer, but that was too far away from him. For now, he should be happy with the utility that Lucky was able to provide.

Ves floated over to a second box and picked up another mineral. "Take a bite and tell me what you've figured out about this rock."

"Meow!"

Even though Lucky had filled up his stomach with a lot of minerals today, he could never say no to an additional snack. He happily darted forward and took a big bite out of the second exotic.

"Meow meow meow..."

"It's hot and spicy, you say?"

Ves nodded in affirmation as Lucky's descriptions largely matched the properties that the MTA database described.

Usher-B was a resonating exotic that was capable of amplifying the temperature or heat energy of a component. This allowed it to have multiple uses, most of which were offensive in nature.

The only unfortunate aspect about Usher-B was that it was classified as a third-class exotic by the MTA. The reason for that was because Usher-B was too fragile and prone to breaking when subjected to the rigors of second-class combat.

"Too bad." He said as he tossed the remaining rock back into the crate.

Not even Lucky was eager to finish off this little snack!

Time went by as Ves fed sample after sample to Lucky. He did not skip any of the 26 identified exotics because he wanted to know exactly what his cat discovered when taking a bite out of the different rocks.

Although Lucky's way of perceiving the properties of different exotics was anything but precise and objective, the fact that he was able to provide descriptions that matched the findings of the MTA confirmed that the gem cat was truly able to figure out every metallic exotic in his own way!

They soon arrived at the last identified exotic which also happened to be the most valuable one they discovered so far. It stood out from the rest due to one reason.

"This is a first-class low-grade resonating exotic!"

It was by far the most valuable find from this mining site. Even if he did not intend to use this material for his own purposes, he could easily earn a small fortune if he sold it in Davute!

Lucky was a lot eager when he took a bite out of the tiny sample Ves presented. The cat speedily muched it down as if he was afraid that Ves would take back the remainder!

"Well? What can you tell me about the treasure that you have just eaten?"

"Meow meow meow! Meow meow meow meow meow!"

Apparently, Lucky was a lot more eager to express his feelings about the first-class resonating exotic that he had just eaten. Even though it pained Ves that he had obtained this answer by bribing his cat with another sample, at least he picked the smallest chunk in the box this time.

Ves parsed what Lucky had conveyed to him and matched the information with the description in the MTA database.

Celestan Cobalt was a special material. It was a material that was exclusive to the Red Ocean. The material was not energetic in its raw form and was difficult to detect with ordinary mineral scanners.

If Lucky didn't possess such an accurate sense for powerful exotics, the Larkinsons would have missed out on this treasure!

Celestan Cobalt didn't do anything special under ordinary circumstances aside from being denser and harder than normal materials.

The indiginous aliens races apparently treated it as a low-value exotic. If Celestan Cobalt could be found in large quantities, then the weaker alien races probably would have used it to build their starships and structures.

However, the material was so rare that the aliens didn't even bother using it for this purpose. It was better to employ a proper bulk material that could be used to build lots of starships in a uniform fashion.

"All the better for us then." Ves grinned.

Humanity was one of the few races if not the only one that could make proper use of resonating exotics. The deposits of Celestan Cobalt found in other star systems that remained untouched due to alien indifference easily enriched the pockets of the humans that came later!

"Even though the supply of Celestan Cobalt is not low due to this turn of events, that doesn't mean its market price is low."

The reason why Celestan Cobalt deserved greater attention was because of its discovered effects.

When paired with the right expert pilot, an expert mech that integrated this resonating exotic was able to accelerate at least 20 times faster!

20 times faster!

This was the power of a first-class resonating exotic, and it happened to be classified as a more inferior material by the mech industry!

"I really can't imagine what a comparable first-class medium-grade or high-grade exotic can do. Are they able to speed them up by fifty times? What about a hundred times?"

These were ludicrously high numbers!

Increasing the acceleration of an expert mech by two or three times was already fast enough to the current Larkinson Clan!

The reason why Celestan Cobalt was able to do this was not quite clear. The MTA's entry on this material was quite brief and showed many signs of obfuscation. It only stated that Celestan Cobalt was able to produce a resonating effect that caused mechs to accelerate faster by 'warping their passage through realspace', whatever that meant.

What was remarkable was that the expert mech in question did not endure greater g-forces or expend extra energy in order to achieve this boost. The only real cost was tiring out the expert pilot.

"Even if it can only be reserved as a trump card, this is still a powerful resonating ability!"

Ves had to search for rumors and unverified reports on the galactic net in order to understand the significance of this resonating exotic.

"Celestan Cobalt and phasewater may be related to each other!"

If that was the case, then the heightened interest as well as the reticence in providing more information could be explained.

A lot of powers that managed to get their hands on Celestan Cobalt probably wanted to keep all of the details to themselves.

The MTA was probably conducting a lot of research in the material as well.

"If Celestan Cobalt can really interact with phasewater, then its applications may be greater than everyone knows." He guessed.

The value of Celestan Cobalt was evident. It was a boon to many speed-oriented expert mechs.

He briefly sighed. "It would be great if I can integrate Celestan Cobalt into the Dark Zephyr, but Tusa's mech is already stuffed with remarkable materials."

Every expert mech only possessed a limited capacity for resonating exotics. Each additional material introduced more incompatibilities and undesirable interactions.

This was especially a problem for a smaller machine like the Dark Zephyr! Its frame offered less room than the other Larkinson expert mechs so all of its active components were squeezed together.

The only way for Ves to fit Celestan Cobalt into the Dark Zephyr was if he replaced another key exotic to make room for the new material.

"This is too great of a price."

The Dark Zephyr possessed a strong identity and its resonating exotics matched it extremely well. The Perfidious Steel that enabled it to distort its coordinates in space was one of its signature abilities due to how well it increased the expert mech's evasion capabilities.

"If I pull out all of the Perfidious Steel from Tusa's mech, it wouldn't be the Dark Zephyr anymore."

Ves could not bring himself to do that. Although any light mech could benefit from having more speed, evasion was more important to Venerable Tusa.

The best course of action that he could take was to put it in his strategic materials reserve and reserve it for an upcoming expert mech design project.

"Hm. Maybe I should prioritize the breakthroughs of light mech specialists in the future."

The Larkinson Clan needed ranged specialists more, though. He had high hopes for Isobel Larkinson who was making constant progress while piloting the Quint.

The only immediate pilot that might be able to make use of Celestan Cobalt was Imon Ingvar, but Ves did not have any expectations regarding their compatibility.

Imon Ingvar was an eager fighter and duelist. He did not prioritize mobility.

It would soon become clear if the harvests from this planet were of any use to his expert pilots. Ves planned to expose every resonating exotics to his expert pilots to see whether they were compatible with each other.

Even if he couldn't use them in any of the existing Larkinson expert mechs, he could still hold the matching resonating exotics in reserve in case he needed to design another expert mech one day.

Ves turned away from the box of Celestan Cobalt and floated over to a container that held the first unidentified exotic dug out from this pit.

He picked up a grayish rock and presented it to his cat.

"You know the drill. Tell me what you can uncover."

Lucky bit the gray rock without any hesitation. The cat crunched and chewed it for a bit before gulping down his latest snack.

"Meow meow meow..."

"It is cold, you say? That sounds like it might be useful for heat management."

If what Lucky was saying was correct, then this unidentified exotic might be capable of producing a powerful cooling effect!

This effect could be employed as a useful secondary resonance ability for mechs that were prone to producing a lot of heat.

His thoughts instantly drifted to the Mars Project. The expert hybrid mech was stuffed with energy weapons and each of them produced massive amounts of heat when used at maximum power.

Though Professor Benedict had many plans in mind to minimize the heat problem, there was no denying that hybrid mechs were always prone to overheating!

If this new exotic could be used to cool the Mars Project, then it could massively extend its damage output!

"Do the Crossers even need this feature, though?"

Professor Benedict should have made his own selection of resonating materials already. This was a step that he could prepare well in advance. There shouldn't be any space for additional resonating exotics anymore.

Besides, Ves wasn't sure whether this unknown exotic was up to par with first or second-class materials. He would have to perform additional lab tests to make a reasonable estimate.

"Well, let's see whether there are better treasures in this pile of unidentified materials!"