

## Mech 3911

### Chapter 3911 Saint Mikel Spindar

Throughout the fight against the super whale, the mechers deployed a strong array of standard mechs.

While Ves admired their raw performance, their design traits, their degree of optimization as well as the abundant skill demonstrated by their mech pilots, he still felt the mech units were lacking a special addition.

"There aren't any expert mechs on the field."

Every mech force that was large and professional enough included at least one expert mech.

Ves did not believe that the MTA was so poor and shabby that it was unable to assign at least one expert mech to the mech roster of an important battlecarrier.

Why hadn't they shown up before? Ves couldn't answer this question.

What he did know was that the latest mech to enter the battlefield was an ace mech!

This was the second time in his life that he saw an ace mech live.

His first experience with an ace mech wasn't exactly pleasant, but it did allow him to 'appreciate' the power and majesty of ace mechs and ace pilots in an intimate fashion!

Although he was much further away from the battlefield this time, he was happier now that he could observe the performance of a powerful machine without getting into its crosshairs!

He took a closer look at the ace mech in the projected view.

Before he studied its appearance and construction, he first tried to get a sense of the domain of the ace pilot.

As soon as the powerful machine got up to speed, it had already expanded its Saint Kingdom. This made it a lot easier for Ves to analyze its properties even though he had to do so by remote!

"This pilot is a lot different from Saint Yila Mayorka."

The female ace pilot and the strongest guard at the side of the Iron Emperor possessed a unique and highly distinctive focus. As a formidable dwarven halfgod, she excelled in

mastering the use of mass, physical force and hammers to turn her ace mech into a physical powerhouse!

Compared to the heavy and unstoppable Olympus Mons, the MTA ace mech that emerged from the Paracelsus Optimus gave a slightly lighter and much more fluid impression!

One of the first words that came to mind when Ves examined this mech was water. The ace pilot evidently developed an extremely high affinity with water to the point where it became the core focus of its extraordinary power!

There were a few other elements in the pilot's domain that complimented this primary attribute, but they were secondary to the ace pilot's extreme embrace of water!

When Ves observed the actual ace mech, he understood a bit more why the pilot was so obsessed with the element of water.

It turned out that the ace mech was primarily designed as an aquatic mech!

Of course, an ace mech developed by the MTA would never be limited to a single environment.

It was too easy for the mechers to design an ace mech that fared best in aquatic environments but could also function well in space or in aerial environments.

The ace mech currently in view still exhibited the typical streamlined curves of an aquatic mech. It was partially shaped like a dolphin, but had transformed its frame so that it functioned better in space.

It made for a relatively strange sight, especially when the mech was surrounded by the strong ocean blue domain field produced by an advanced form of true resonance.

"It's like this aquatic mech is swimming through space by summoning its own water!"

The aquatic ace mech was too advanced for Ves to figure out any further details through sight alone. He finally gave in to his curiosity and quickly looked it up on the galactic net to learn more.

Every ace pilot was a prominent hero of human civilization. No matter who they belonged to or what they had done in the past, once they reached this level of strength, they had become noble figures that were comparable to Master Mech Designers in standing!

There was no way that such figures remained anonymous.

"Sure enough, there are records on the galactic net."

According to the MTA's external database, the aquatic ace mech was called the Margenna.

Just as Ves suspected, it was primarily designed to operate underwater and had already been deployed to fight against a diverse collection of aquatic opponents in the Red Ocean.

Whether it was sea beasts, sentient whales, submersible warships or other aquatic mechs, the Margenna had fought against them all with overwhelming power!

Of course, the Margenna also fought its fair share of alien threats on land and in space.

The ace mech was exclusively piloted by Saint Mikel Spindar, a talented junior ace pilot who was born in the MTA and served in its ranks for his entire life.

The public record didn't say much about Saint Mikel's special strengths and advantages, but it did state that he was avid about seeking out and defeating formidable beasts!

"This guy is a perfect match for the Paracelsus Optimus!"

The battlecarrier was clearly on a mission to study and fight the formidable phase whale race. It made sense for the MTA to set up specialized ships and units for this purpose as the power and influence of this alien species was rather great in the Red Ocean.

At this time, the Margenna had approached the super whale.

Even as the massive creature constantly fought against all of the mechs while also trying to shake off the harpoons that pinned it in place, the super whale immediately noticed the arrival of the Margenna.

The ace mech was too ostentatious!

With its expanded domain field, the Margenna imposed its pilot's will to dominate the oceans and defeat all aquatic life!

"What did the fish ever do to this guy?"

Ves had the impression that Saint Mikel developed an enormous grudge against sea creatures!

A few moments passed as the Margenna silently hovered above and in front of the trapped super whale.

Perhaps the two were communicating or staring menacingly at each other. Whatever the case, the surrounding mechs had largely stopped their attacks on the titanic beast.

The only mechs that were still struggling were the Interstellar Harpooners and the auxiliary shielding mechs that protected them against damage.

The super whale did not launch any more attacks against the mechs either. It identified the Margenna as a formidable opponent!

"Is the ace mech truly up to the task, though?"

Ves believed that the Margenna may be strong enough to contend against an ordinary phase whale, but the monstrosity that had emerged from this star system was different!

Even ace mechs could break when they were hit by sufficiently powerful attacks! Their Saint Kingdoms could only withstand so much energy before they reached their limits!

The super whale seemed to think the tiny ace mech was not that big of a threat after all. Its gigantic eyes began to show disdain towards this new machine.

No matter what powerful or extraordinary attacks landed on its body, all of the layers of flesh and bone provided it with an enormous damage buffer!

Even if a powerful strike was able to cut through many layers of flesh, the whale could easily heal from its wounds due to its powerful regenerative capabilities!

Ves waited in order to see whether the Margenna had the power to defeat the super whale without going overboard and causing it to die.

He already figured that the MTA would never let such an interesting and valuable research specimen go. Only by capturing it alive would the mechers be able to gain the most out of studying the alien body!

The Margenna's domain field slowly became more active. More and more power radiated from the mech and the surrounding environment, making it seem as if Saint Mikel Spindar was just about to beat down the super whale!

The ace mech had yet to make a move, though.

The machine continued to hover before its target but did not launch any attack.

"What is it waiting for?" Ves wondered.

Suddenly, the Paracelsus Optimus shot out a large and powerful energy link beam!

The bright beam directly passed through the Margenna's domain field without hindrance and struck the ace mech on its back!

Now that the aquatic dolphin-like mech gained an infusion of energy from its mothership, the machine exploded with power!

The heat and energy radiating from the Margenna went up by an order of magnitude while its Saint Kingdom became a lot more active!

Ves looked in complete shock as the ace mech became a lot scarier now that it had gained access to a stupendous amount of energy!

Although this infusion of power was not able to amplify the ace mech's resonance strength or true resonance directly, the massive boost to the machine itself massively upgraded the foundation of its combat prowess!

An ace pilot's ability to project strength was largely constrained by his ace mech. If the latter suddenly became ten times stronger, the former would naturally benefit!

This was exactly what was happening with Saint Mikel Spindar and his Margenna!

In fact, the effective strength they displayed was no longer based on the combination of an ace pilot and an ace mech.

Properly speaking, the Margenna currently channeled the combined strengths of an ace pilot, an ace mech as well as a battle carrier!

"This is cheating! The mechers are cheating!" Ves couldn't help but shout!

Sadly, the MTA did not respond to his complaints at all. The boosted Margenna steadily accumulated power that was far beyond its previous limitations, causing it to radiate might that closer matched that of the super whale!

By this time, the powerful monstrosity finally recognized the formidable threat posed by the Margenna, but that didn't change anything since it was still trapped in place!

Once the ace mech was finally ready, it finally launched its attacks!

At first, the Margenna fired numerous thunderous projectiles that impacted the super whale's flesh and caved through a lot of layers of protection at once!

Not only did the rounds inflict a lot of damage, but also induced an effect on the surrounding flesh that prevented them from healing the damage!

This opening move turned out to be a preparation for the next attack.

The Margenna fired a volley of energy beams that simultaneously struck the damaged areas on the super whale's body.

These beams were already incredibly powerful by themselves due to the boost the Margenna received from the Paracelsus Optimus.

When enhanced by the resonance of an ace pilot and an ace mech, the energy beams not only strengthened even further, but also gained extraordinary properties!

Ves and many observers became bedazzled as the true resonance affecting the energy beams actually morphed into the shape of water tentacles!

When the energy beams sank through the damaged portions of the super whale, they drilled through the flesh without much hindrance.

The trapped super whale thrashed its body in pain as the creature experienced an even greater suffering than before!

The Margenna was hardly finished. The energy beams turned water tentacles actually began to drill back out of the super whale's enormous body before turning around to wrap the gigantic body.

When the water tentacles began to squeeze the trapped beast, the super whale uttered another silent wail as its body and a part of its organs experienced great suffering!

After weakening the super wave, the Margenna dissipated its energy beams and launched its ultimate attack.

It began to move forward. Although it did not accelerate at its maximum possible rate, the closer it got to the super whale, the more the ace mech and its Saint Kingdom gained momentum.

The latter even began to churn before turning into an increasingly more vivid illusion of a tsunami.

The rolling water surrounding the Margenna began to exude more and more force and momentum.

At the last moment, the expanse of water expanded until it turned into a rolling wave that bludgeoned the head of the super whale along with much of its back!

Ves winced as the super whale endured so much damage that much of its upper bones broke!

When the Margenna eventually became visible just above the point where it physically collided against the head of the super whale, it became clear that the ace mech did not need to make any further moves.

The super whale had ceased all forms of resistance!

Ves almost couldn't believe what he had witnessed.

"This... this is the power that can contend against CFA battleships!"

### Chapter 3912 Demonstration of Power

Everyone in the expeditionary fleet became gobsmacked by the incredible show of force.

Although Ves was not able to estimate the differences in strength between Saint Mikel Spindar and Saint Yila Mayorka, but when it came to their impact on the battlefield, the latter was definitely inferior!

It didn't matter if the two ace pilots possessed similar skills and combat experiences. Their ace mechs were way too far apart in terms of effective performance.

Not only was the Margenna a peak first-class mech, it was also able to utilize energy link technology to borrow the formidable power output of the MTA's massive combat vessels!

"This is cheating!"

Ves felt that this combination was so profoundly strong and far beyond the strength of what ace mechs should be able to wield that it shouldn't even be allowed to exist!

What had just happened was probably one of the CFA's worst nightmares. Though Ves did not usually sympathize with the fleeters, he currently felt very sorry for them for having this massive threat hanging over their heads!

Ves knew way too little about the actual strength of god pilots and god mechs, so he wasn't able to judge whether the Margenna's previous display compared the pinnacle combat assets of humanity.

He vaguely judged that the Margenna's boosted attacks were not as unreasonable as the moves of a god mech.

In this regard, this ingenious method of amplifying the effective combat power of ace mechs might not be enough to fight against the strongest and most formidable CFA battleships.

The fleeters may be stubborn about their preferred methods and doctrines, but they were not stagnant. The warship fanatics constantly developed better vessels that could fight against more formidable threats.

Therefore, even if the MTA developed a means to amplify the unreasonable combat power of individual ace mechs even further, it did not necessarily mean that the dominance of warships had passed.

"Just the fact that ace mechs are required to deal so much damage to battleship-like threats is an enormously troublesome requirement!"

The population of humanity had ballooned ever since the Age of Stars truly commenced, but the proportion of ace pilots among them was miniscule!

Sure, the total number of ace pilots who were alive at this time was still a sizable number when put together, but the biggest problem with these rare assets was that they were renewed extremely slowly!

A purely material war asset such as a battleship could easily be rebuilt if lost. The CFA just had to invest a lot of money and resources to build a sufficiently large and strong war vessel as long as the infrastructure was in place.

Getting a new ace pilot was much more complicated!

Blindly pouring in money and resources into pilots didn't work. The chances that any of them could advance multiple times and reach the rank of ace pilot was still small.

Not only did they need to test and polish their skills in actual combat where they could lose their lives at any time, they also needed to shape and refine their willpower which served as the core of their extraordinary strength!

Trying to improve the former was still manageable, but trying to progress the latter was extremely difficult since it was so mysterious and intangible.

Therefore, even if ace pilots were able to fight against the CFA's battleships with the help of energy link technology, their horrendous replacement rate made it certain that the MTA would never be able to rely on them to win the war in the long term!

Ves briefly froze.

"Wait a second... if the replacement rate for ace pilots somehow increased..."

He briefly recalled the previous battle where he directed Venerable Joshua to expose a lot of mech pilots to the light of the Aspect of Transcendence.

A lot of mech pilots had broken through at the time, although the Everchanger's momentary glow did not seem to affect Patriarch Reginald Cross in any significant fashion.

Even so, if the total amount of active expert pilots multiplied by ten, then the amount of ace pilots emerging from this expanded base would also increase by the same proportion!

"It's like buying a thousand lottery tickets instead of a hundred of them. There is always variability in the amount of times I can win a prize, but in general the odds of winning at least something are considerably greater!"

His eyes glinted. Was this one of the reasons why the MTA prized high-ranking mech pilots so much?

If the MTA needed more ace pilots because of this, then he may be able to provide them with a way to get more!

He possessed even more leverage than he thought!

"What a wonderful demonstration." He sighed.

As someone who became increasingly more familiar with schemes and plans, he clearly recognized that the MTA did not go out of its way to demonstrate so many methods and means because it wanted to test the super whale.

If the MTA wanted to capture the super whale in the most efficient manner possible, then it would have made more use of the Paracelsus Optimus aside from her linking capabilities.

A few missiles and a few shots from her main cannons would have sped up the capturing process!

Instead, the mechers relied mostly on their mechs not just because of their confidence in them, but also gave Ves a clearer idea of what the MTA was capable of these days!

"The crisis appears to be over."

The Larkinsons and the others slowly relaxed as they no longer believed they were under acute threat anymore.

If the Paracelsus Optimus and her mech contingent did not make a move, then the chances were great that the super whale would have been able to catch up to the expeditionary fleet!

Ves would have been in true danger if that happened!

Yet now that the MTA no longer sat on the sidelines, Ves did not have anything to worry about anymore. Even if a second super whale or other biological monstrosity appeared, the MTA battlecarrier was more than capable enough to neutralize such threats.

"It looks like the mechers are also standing down."

The Margenna had already retreated from the battlefield after subduing the super whale.

Now that the massive beast had lost consciousness, the surrounding MTA mechs were free to deploy additional restraints as well as dig in further inhibition methods that steadily blocked or neutralized more and more of the massive monster's capabilities!

Although it took a lot of effort and planning to dig into its body and perform crippling operations, the MTA made steady progress in inhibiting the super whale's ability to move forward and utilize its rich set of organs.

Additional mechs and vehicles emerged from the Paracelsus Optimus after the super whale's threat level had dropped to the extreme.

They quickly surrounded the prone monster and began to construct a gigantic containment structure around the motionless body.

Clearly, dragging this monstrosity back to a secure MTA research facility was a difficult task. The mechers probably planned to secure the body on the spot and stay in the Garimel System for a while in order to study Purgatory and the Royal Tomb further.

While the MTA did its business in the inner system, the expeditionary fleet slowed down and no longer fled the star system as fast as possible.

The Golden Skull Alliance already received a formal request for its fleet to stay a while and wait for further inquiry.

Ves did not have to think too long to understand that this was the most difficult battle of all. If he did not handle his next meetings with the MTA well enough, he would definitely get into deep trouble!

While he waited for the mechers to arrive and hold a discussion with him, he decided to spend his remaining time by checking up on other people.

He hadn't really paid attention to his fellow Larkinsons as they weren't directly involved in the last battle.

He first contacted Director Ranya in order to verify whether all of the harvested fish-whale organs were still in good condition.

"None of them have deteriorated so far, sir." Her projection answered his question. "The Phase King's brain is doing well enough after our exobiologists and other specialists have come together and devised a few more stabilizing measures. Our work in the past

hours has taught us that the vitality and self-healing capabilities of the fish-whales are much more impressive than we thought."

"Oh?" Ves looked intrigued.

He recalled how quickly the super whale was able to heal from injuries inflicted by a lot of MTA mechs and believed that the enormous whale might have inherited this trait from the fish-whale race.

"The Phase King's brain is slowly healing itself after we have fed it with nutrients made from recycled fish-whale tissue samples. While that doesn't bring back any memories or other bioinformation stored in the original neurons, it does help with preventing the brain from deteriorating any further in a short amount of time."

"That sounds impressive!" Ves smiled. "I'm not sure how I want to handle this brain, but it would be best for all if you can keep it alive and active enough. Please keep an eye on it and make sure to inform me right away if you think it is dying."

"Will do, sir."

Although the most valuable spoils from the Phase King's body was its design spirit, Ves did not want to let go of its brain too easily. There were many differences between design spirits that were still anchored to their corporeal forms and ones that were no longer directly attached to the material realm.

Although the latter appeared to be stronger and less affected by the limitations of physical reality, Ves always thought that they were still lacking in different ways.

Ves would rather deal with living design spirits such as Arnold and the Quint because he could exert more control over them. It was a lot easier to keep them by his side and check up on their activities if they did not exist in some kind of unfathomable realm that was difficult to access for more normal life forms such as himself!

He checked up with General Verle, Venerable Joshua, Commander Casella Ingvar and a few other important figures.

None of them reported anything of grave concern. The expeditionary fleet was in decent condition and more than capable enough to defend itself against a phase whale that appeared out of the blue for whatever reason.

As Ves attempted to inquire on the state of the unconscious or comatose mech pilots that had recently broken through, the hatch to the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim slid open.

"Oh Ves, what is this I heard about you gallivanting off into a battle against phasewater-wielding fish-whales?" Gloriana asked as her suited form approached with Aurelia and

Clixie floating behind her wake. "A battle where hundreds of mech pilots have died, I might add. Oh, I also heard that 27 mech pilots broke through over a span of just a couple of minutes. Do you have anything to say about this exceptional stroke of luck?"

The irritated smile on her face made it clear that she was not entirely content with what Ves had done in Purgatory!

"Oh, hello, honey. Isn't it great to hear that our clan have obtained a bunch of expert candidates and expert pilots? Oh by the way, I haven't seen our daughter in a while. Aurelia! Come over here and give daddy a hug"

"Papa!" his daughter happily cried as she stretched out her arms!

Ves instantly felt most of his worries fade away as her daughter hugged the breastplate of his Unending Regalia.

All of the layers of protective material could not stop their love from flowing between them. Ves felt incredibly warm now that he had reunited with his little family!

"Ahem." Gloriana impatiently tapped her boot against her deck. "You can play with our daughter later. First, I need answers."

"You'll get them." Ves sighed. "Let's get somewhere more private first. I need your advice as well."

He was about to hold an important discussion with the MTA soon. He desperately needed more advice!

Chapter 3913 Appealing to an Audience

"Miss you, papa!" Aurelia cried as she continued to hug her father's neck as soon as the little family returned to their grand stateroom.

"There there, I'm back now. I won't be leaving your side anytime soon."

Ves did not regret going on an excursion in Purgatory, but he knew it came at a price.

Looking at his first-born daughter and knowing that there were more children on the way made his heart increasingly heavier.

Someone with his personality would never be satisfied with staying in a single place all of the time.

As uncomfortable it was for him to admit it, he did yearn to go on subsequent adventures like the one he just concluded in Purgatory.

Riding the Everchanger into combat and observing his proud work in action made him feel more alive than ever. The high stakes along with encountering completely new enemies had excited him and given him a much more rounded perspective on his work.

The insights he gained from the Purgatory Campaign was one of his most valuable prizes. Sure, harvesting over 2 metric tons of phasewater may sound fantastic, but material gains could easily be spent, destroyed, taken away or used up over time.

Information and knowledge were different. Any additions to his mind became permanent that could not easily be taken away by anyone, even the Big Two.

As a mech designer, his greatest weapon and reliance was his design ability, and this was largely a function of his accumulated professional knowledge as well as his unique experiences.

Two mech designers who took the exact same classes, studied the exact same textbooks and achieved nearly identical grades could nevertheless build two completely different careers.

This was because their experiences became different after they split paths.

Someone who spent much of their time in a design lab would develop mechs that were generally more refined, technologically advanced, optimized and free of major flaws.

Although Ves looked down on these boring lab nerds for lacking the guts to take major risks, he did not deny that they had their place in the mech industry.

The mech market was highly competitive and highly developed, so the customer base demanded mechs that met a high standard of performance and quality. These were exactly the points that nitpickers and perfectionists excelled in delivering!

His wife was the quintessential example of a lab-oriented mech designer.

Then there were the mech designers who embodied the innovative and exploratory side of mech design.

These people weren't content with treading the beaten path and sought to venture away from it. Most of them just got lost, but those who succeeded often became so inspired that they became capable of coming up with design solutions that might lead to major technological leaps!

A lot of innovations in the mech industry such as true resonance, juggernauts and Destroyer Weapons only came about when their original inventors took great risks and fought against the prevailing consensus.

Of course, the amount of innovations that crashed and burned far exceeded the ones that eventually gained acceptance. Biomechs never caught on to the wider market, for example.

The low success rate did not stop the truly daring and confident from making their own attempts to revolutionize the mech market in their own way.

Ves proudly counted himself among these daring inventors and innovators.

What was even better was that he was not just a brat that talked big games but had yet to win any of them. His career may be short, but he already created several successful design solutions that were bound to interest the MTA.

While it was true that the troubles he sparked due to his habit of taking risks were not light, he believed the mechers would be willing to overlook a lot of annoyances as long as Ves was willing to share enough benefits!

Thinking about how many problems he created this time made him feel ill at ease. He knew he was in the hot seat this time because his decisions directly compelled the MTA to intervene in a strong fashion.

If the Paracelsus Optimus hadn't arrived in time, what Ves thought of as the strongest phase whale to ever exist would have succeeded in escaping into the depths of the Red Ocean!

Ves was well aware that if any normal person performed this deed, the MTA would likely execute them for 'colluding with hostile alien entities', 'endangering human lives' and most importantly 'damaging the interests of the Mech Trade Association'!

With such a heavy cloud hovering over his head, Ves was no longer in the mood to play with cute little daughter.

"Aurelia, daddy needs to talk to mommy. Will you be a good girl and keep our cats company?"

His precious baby cutely nodded her head and ran off to poke and hug the gem cat who she hadn't seen in a while!

"Lucky!"

"Meow!"

Ves and Gloriana sat down at a nearby couch. The latter looked expectantly while the former briefly narrated the Purgatory Campaign from his perspective.

The most difficult part was explaining his own side with the full knowledge that the MTA was likely eavesdropping on the conversation in real-time.

He had no expectation of privacy whenever the MTA was too close. Though Lucky was a highly competent bug catcher, the tech he was based upon was not omnipotent. The Association developed secret spying tech that exceeded their standard spying solutions!

This was why Ves refrained from going into too much detail. The more he spoke, the more he risked saying anything that might paint him in a worse light to his invisible listeners.

Fortunately, Gloriana was smart enough that he did not have to convey these considerations out loud. She knew that Ves was speaking to a greater audience than just herself.

His wife even played along by asking more restrained questions that were bound to divert the MTA's attention.

"I don't know if we will be able to do anything productive with those disgusting fish-whale organs you've brought back from Purgatory, but they're not important. What matters is that in the backdrop of getting played by an ancient alien king fish, you managed to produce a working implementation of a breakthrough machine. I don't think I need to emphasize how revolutionary this sounds. What I want to know is this. Can you replicate this phenomenon?"

Gloriana cared a lot about this question. So much so that she leaned closer to Ves than ever so she could look closely into his eyes!

Ves slowly nodded. "This isn't like the exceptional circumstances back in the Nyxian Gap. The reason why a lot of mech pilots broke through back then was likely due to the abnormal environmental circumstances they were fighting under. While I can't reproduce the variables that make the Nyxian Gap so weird, I worked at this problem from a different angle and have finally succeeded in creating a method of inducing different circumstances that can achieve similar results."

"Are you sure you know what you're talking about, Ves?"

"It's like using a ranged mech or a melee mech to defeat an enemy fish-whale. Either mech can do the job, but if I happen to be a lot better at designing the former, my chances of success will be greater if I focus on ranged mechs. I know what I am talking about. What I managed to pull off in Purgatory is a more advanced form of emotional manipulation, which is an area that I have always been good at, as you very well know. A lot of people underestimate how much emotions can affect combat since they don't directly increase a mech's performance by 10 percent, but these folk always forget that the mech pilot is also a crucial factor."

Gloriana adopted a skeptical look. "It's one thing to make mech pilots more brave or more fearful. It's another thing to increase their chances of breaking through by 10 or 20 times! The gap between these results is too big!"

"I don't see it that way, honey." He nonchalantly shrugged. "I have interacted and worked with a lot of different expert pilots, you know. Combined with my expertise, I have long figured out that the state of mind of mech pilots is one of the most crucial variables that determines whether they can undergo apotheosis. According to my developing theoretical framework, manipulating their mood and emotions in a specific manner does not guarantee a breakthrough, but can bring it a lot closer to mech pilots than normal!"

"Can any mech pilot break through with this method?"

Ves laughed. "Impossible! There are no incompetent expert pilots! Before any pilot wishes to break through, they need to meet all of the basic qualifications first! If they are not competent in their job, then they can forget about going any further. Besides, there are also other variables such as 'talent' that can decide whether a pilot has the potential to go further down this path. The issue of talent is a major stumbling block to me and is the primary reason why I don't think that Commander Melkor will ever be able to go further in this regard."

"Will you be able to guarantee that our second baby can advance to the rank of expert pilot one day?"

Ah. This was the main reason why she made this inquiry. She was greatly concerned about the future of the unborn fetus that was growing in her belly at the moment!

"If... if our second-born daughter truly wants to become a mech pilot, then I will provide as much help that I can provide." Ves promised. "That said, her talent is a major variable that can limit what I can do. If she is as 'gifted' as Commander Melkor, then maybe you should lower your expectations."

His wife didn't look pleased after he gave this answer. She likely had ambitions to turn her daughter into a god pilot!

Not even Ves was arrogant enough to promise that he could turn even the most talented and gifted mech pilot into an apex warrior that surpassed the likes of Saint Mikel Spindar!

Besides, he hadn't been entirely forthcoming in his previous answer. Once he repeated what he had done to Aurelia and implanted a companion spirit seed into the unborn baby, the chances were great that their second daughter would already be spiritually active on the day she was born!

There was no reason for him to share this crucial detail with either his wife or his unseen MTA eavesdroppers.

The wedded couple talked a bit more about the magnitude and the implications of the so-called transcendence glow.

"The MTA will want to master this technology." Gloriana pointed out. "What will you do if the Association makes a politely-worded request?"

Ves helplessly shrugged. "I'll give it to them, of course. I just hope that the mechers will uphold their reputation for fairness and continue their habit of issuing rich rewards to those that make major contributions. I could use an incentive or two to refine this innovative new tech further. While you might think that I have already succeeded in creating a fantastic method to produce more breakthroughs, it's far too rudimentary in my eyes. I am confident that I can increase the success rate and decrease the risk of fatal accidents if I continue to conduct further research in this direction!"

The only way he could make his implicit appeal more obvious was if he turned his head in another direction and winked for no particular reason!

"Did you just say 'fatal accidents', Ves? I've studied the logs and footage of the battle. None of the mech pilots affected by the Everchanger during that time showed any signs of rejections towards its current glow. How do you know your transcendence glow is dangerous?"

"Let's just say that a lot of lab animals had the unfortunate tendency to explode when exposed to the glow for too long." Ves answered as straightforwardly as possible. "If anyone else aside from me thinks they can make unrestricted use of this special glow, then good people will die sooner or later. This is why I still consider it a product in development. If not for the desperate circumstances in the last battle, I wouldn't have ordered the Everchanger to apply this glow in field conditions!"

It was in his best interests to hype up the dangers and risk factors of the transcendence glow. A method to produce breakthroughs without any significant costs was way too valuable for a small Journeyman!

Making it sound as if there were lots of restrictions, limitations and risks to using the transcendence glow was a good way of curbing any excessive attention from the MTA.

It also increased the value of his continued cooperation!

Chapter 3914 Resumed Business

The MTA didn't appear to be in a hurry to summon Ves for a good discussion, so he spent quite a few hours on additional preparations.

He mostly asked for advice from his wife, Calabast and Minister Shederin.

Each of them gave him a lot of ideas and recommendations that further prepared him for whatever stratagems the mechers might present.

Of course, Ves did not ignore the fact that the mechers tracked all of his preparations and could adjust their own approach based on what they learned.

This was a game that Ves was bound to lose. At the very least, he aimed to limit his losses as much as possible. He did not want the MTA to roll over him without worrying about encountering any resistance!

"To be honest, I believe you are painting your upcoming talks with the MTA in a far more adversarial light than is warranted." Minister Shederin gently told him. "You are the goose that lays the golden eggs. What the mechers want to see the most is seeing you continue to lay more eggs. The best way to do that is to cater to your needs and make you feel as comfortable as possible."

"I'd like to believe that, Shederin, but my prior experiences with the MTA haven't exactly been as pleasant as you described, you know. I mean, they basically browbeat me into giving up 90 percent of my spoils from the Royal Tomb, although I don't think the original deal extends to my spoils from Purgatory. They're two separate places."

Shederin cast a dubious look towards Ves, but did not comment on this matter any further. He instead returned to his original point.

"The Ves they talked to before is different from the Ves that is currently sitting before me. Your value and significance has undergone a transformation, much as how those 27 mech pilots completed their own transformations. Just as how our clan provides completely different treatment to expert pilots, the MTA will also revise its treatment towards you. Pay close attention to who the mechers will send and what tone they will adopt towards you. If they approach you with an official attitude, then your suspicions may be right, but if they take the effort to greet you with a friendly attitude that is part of a purposeful effort to make you feel at ease, then you should not hold too many unreasonable thoughts."

"I guess it depends on which part of the MTA is in charge here." Ves stated. "The Association is not a monolithic group. I hope that whomever is handling my situation belongs to one of the friendlier camps."

Time passed as Ves constantly guessed which face of the MTA he would meet today. Even a friendly personality was not easy to deal with. No matter how much he aligned with the mechers, he would always be considered an outsider to their close-knit bunch.

Soon enough, Ves received another notification. He had already changed out of his Unending Regalia and donned his formal patriarch outfit, sans cape, in preparation for his upcoming meeting.

"Well, wish me luck, honey."

"You'll do fine, Ves." Gloriana said while holding their daughter in her arms.

Ves grinned as he leaned in to plant a kiss on his baby's head.

"Hihihih!"

His entire form teleported out of the Spirit of Bentheim shortly afterwards.

He quickly reappeared in a familiar lounge compartment on the Simile Halifax.

The small frigate had warped all the way from the inner system to the coordinates of the expeditionary fleet to fetch their invited guest!

Just as expected, Jovy Armalon was ready to greet Ves first.

"Hello again, Ves. I knew you would make gains inside that pocket space, but I never imagined that your actions were so great that you successfully caught the notice of our top figures. You've caused quite the stir within our circle, to say the least."

Ves could already figure this out on his own. He needed to learn more information, though.

"By top figures, do you mean the Galactic Mech Council, or do you mean the head of your little clique?"

Jovy snorted and chuckled. "Do you think it is that easy to get on the agenda of the highest governing body of the MTA? You wish! The galactic mech councilors only convene and discuss matters of grave import such as the decision to invade the Red Ocean or allowing indigenous human populations to build their own minidrives. The Association isn't as centralized as you think it is. The vast majority of issues are handled by sector branches, planetary branches and so on. You are in friendly company right now, or otherwise we wouldn't have called over the Paracelsus Optimus."

The MTA Journeyman effectively conveyed the most crucial information that Ves wanted to know.

He already relaxed a bit after he interpreted the hints he received in a positive light.

"What is special about the Paracelsus Optimus?" He asked.

"You must have noticed her specialized configuration. Officially, the new battlecarrier operates as part of the 307th Pacification Fleet of the MTA that is headquartered in Krakatoa, and is currently assigned on a roving patrol and cruise through the hinterland of occupied space."

"And unofficially?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"Unofficially, the Paracelsus Optimus is mostly a private initiative of a high-ranking mecher who possesses a great degree of fascination towards the biotechnology and unique racial strengths of the phase whale race. He is of the opinion that humanity can make further revolutionary technological advances by studying and absorbing everything the phase whales have ever learned and created. You can imagine that he is immensely pleased with the phase whale enclave and what came out of it. You have given him a pleasing gift."

This bigshot must have a lot of clout in the Association for him to organize and use a well-equipped battlecarrier as his personal research lab or exploration arm!

"Does this great figure hail from the Survivalists or another faction?" Ves carefully asked.

Jovy shook his head. "He's not a part of us, but we have had numerous dealings with him. We share many interests and have developed a good relationship over the years. He will introduce himself to you in person soon enough, so I will refrain from saying too much. I can only tell you that he is part of the Transhumanist Faction."

"I see..."

The Transhumanist Faction!

This was probably one of the factions that was most relevant to Ves! After all, much of his work emphasized the growth and evolution of the users of his products. This happened to conform with the main aim of this influential faction!

Jovy threw a scrutinizing glance towards Ves. "Do you remember what we told you about the Transhumanists?"

"They're the people in the MTA who are most obsessed with evolving into a higher state of humanity." Ves answered. "They're responsible for driving many of the advancements in human augmentation. They are also highly involved in matters relating to high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers. While mechs are still important to them, they are seen as a vessel to achieve human evolution rather than a tool for war."

"That is an accurate explanation, but not a complete one. There are many nuances to the Transhumanists that you will surely learn more about in the future. Not only will you

be meeting with the man who is in charge of the Paracelsus Optimus, you will also be working more closely with his faction in the foreseeable future."

"Oh? Why would you say that?"

"Do you remember one of the requests you made a number of months ago?" Jovy asked. "You sought our help in finding a trustworthy and qualified director as well as any additional specialists that we can spare to man your new T Institute. Well, they're all aboard the Paracelsus Optimus. It took a lot of negotiations and preparation work to make all of the arrangements, but now that the battlecarrier has arrived, we can finally move forward again."

The importance of this trip was greater than he thought!

Perhaps the Paracelsus Optimus was already on her way to Garimel System before the mutations in the phase whale enclave ever became known.

The Cerebral King's forced entry into the Royal Tomb and the instability detected at Auralis merely hastened the battlecarrier's arrival.

"I think you will like the people that the Transhumanists have gathered." Jovy smiled. "Anyway, before it is time to deliver you to the Paracelsus Optimus, can you tell me what it is like for a mech designer to experience a rousing battle in the cockpit of a mech? I have never met anyone of our profession that was willing to go to this extent to learn more about mechs. Were you ever afraid of suffering an accident?"

"There are always risks to everything. I have never denied this. I was confident in the Everchanger, though. It is one of my best works and a mech that I am more than willing to entrust my life to. If you aren't willing to make the same decision when you stand in front of your own best works, then I think there is something seriously wrong."

"Anything can happen in combat. Even an ace mech such as the Margenna can meet its doom one day. Most mech designers do not think it is worthwhile to take any risks with their lives. It is not necessary for them to do so in the first place."

"That's fine. I don't blame them for making the smart choice. They will most definitely be able to live longer as a result of their prudent choices."

"Are you indirectly calling yourself stupid?"

Ves smirked. "Nope. I just have my own ideas on what I want. I would rather live a shorter but fuller life than a long but boring existence."

What the fish-whale race had gone through in Purgatory strengthened his resolve on this even further.

For all of the years the king fishes had lived, their pace of advancement was agonizingly slow!

The Cerebral King may have learned a lot and upgraded its body extensively over the course of a million years, but a more brilliant individual from a more developed race would have been able to make similar achievements in a fraction of the time!

There was no way that Ves wanted to emulate the Cerebral King and try to bide his time. He was too impatient to wait so long!

He needed to improve faster and increase his capabilities so that he could solve his latent problems that were always looming over his head like a Sword of Damocles.

As Ves and Jovy continued to talk about topics that carefully kept a distance from the more serious subject matters, the Simile Halifax quickly returned to the side of the Paracelsus Optimus.

Jovy stood up and straightened his posture.

"We've arrived. We will teleport you over to the battlecarrier any second now. Remember my instructions and try your best to leave a positive impression behind. The head figure that you are about to meet is a respected inventor and a major leader within the Transhumanist Faction. He can help solve a lot of problems for you if you can gain his support."

What Jovy didn't say was that this bigshot could probably make life incredibly difficult for Ves if he screwed up this meet-and-greet!

"I understand. I am keeping your advice in mind." Ves seriously replied.

"One last thing. Do not forget that you are officially an associate of our Survivalist Faction. Try to couch your answers and shape your decisions from our standpoint and principles. Don't hesitate to say no or to defer any cumbersome requests to myself. The Transhumanists are highly passionate about their ambitions, but this has also caused them to go overboard from time to time."

"Wait, you're not coming with me?" He asked Jovy.

"I would love to come with you, but only you have received an invitation. I cannot step aboard another MTA ship without official permission."

Before Ves could ask another question, his form suddenly teleported away from the Simile Halifax.

He quickly arrived inside one of the mobile bulwarks of the Transhumanist Faction!

## Chapter 3915 Pioneers of a New Age

The first observation he made after Ves regained his bearings after getting teleported was that he had ended up in yet another hangar bay.

Many of the impressive first-class multipurpose mechs that he had seen in action through the live feed were right in sight!

Ves held a breath as he looked up to a nearby MTA mech. He recalled that this specific auxiliary model was the one responsible for receiving the shield link beam transmitted by the Paracelsus Optimus, thereby providing strong protection to over a hundred nearby mechs!

"Impressive, is it not? This model is part of a new wave that seeks to further expand the strength and utility of mechs on the battlefield."

He turned around to face a figure that was quietly floating towards his position.

The man that appeared in front of him did not wear the lab coats that mech designers typically wore. Instead, he wore a hypermodern utility suit that provided excellent protection and functionality in a package that was not that much bulkier than a vacsuit.

It also happened to come in a bright orange shade with even brighter lines.

Whatever Ves expected from the Transhumanist, it wasn't this! The man wore his garishly loud orange suit with no apparent discomfort over his appearance. It was as if such concerns were beyond his considerations!

When he studied the man's face, he saw that it was unnaturally smooth, making the fellow appear as if he was of the same age as Ves.

This was impossible.

The posture and demeanor of the new arrival already told Ves that he was dealing with an old geezer!

Having met plenty of older and distinguished men, Ves had developed a keen ability to recognize them based on various clues.

Besides, he developed an even more reliable measure of someone's age and importance.

The man's spirituality was like a blazing sun! Only Master Mech Designers possessed such powerful strength!

"Hello, Master..."

"Ah, let me introduce myself." The grey-haired man smiled and made a shallow bow. "I am Master Termaneo Dervidian, currently stationed on the Paracelsus Optimus. I do not expect you to recognize my appearance, but if you have been keeping up with the latest developments in the mech industry, I believe you should recognize my name if nothing else."

To be honest, the MTA Master's name did not ring a bell at all. Ves quickly had to use his cranial implant's search function to dig up any memories where he had encountered this odd name in the past.

His eyes quickly widened. "You... you are one of the lead developers of the minidrive!"

Ves was shocked that he was meeting with someone who had successfully affected the course of human history and development in a major fashion!

While Master Dervidian's invention was not as grand as the beyonder gate, the work he had done on miniaturizing warp drives and FTL drives was crucial in granting mechs the ability to move a lot further without needing any help from starships!

Though minidrives were still too expensive to allow for widespread adoption, just the fact that the tech became available meant that it could always be improved in the future!

The starting point was the hardest. Ves couldn't imagine how much work and effort Master Dervidian poured into leveraging phasewater to make drives work at a much reduced size.

"Hehe." Dervidian chuckled in a good-natured manner. "I fear you are overestimating my individual contribution to the minidrive projects. I am one of hundreds who have contributed to their development. I became much more involved in the early stages of the combat drive project. The indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean already developed many fine applications of warp drives. Reverse engineering them was the first step to understanding and improving their tech. Much more brilliant developers than myself deserve most of the credit for making several breakthroughs and allow us to miniaturize the drives to the point where they can be mounted onto mechs."

The MTA Master probably referred to Star Designers such as the Polymath, though he did not mention them by name.

Just the fact that he was able to work in major research initiatives where the best mech designers of humanity intimately became involved was still a major honor!

All of this meant that Jovy was right. Master Dervidian was most definitely an influential bigshot within the MTA!

"I see." Ves replied as he controlled his tone. "I take it your specialty is related to mobility, correct?"

The other man nodded. "I specialize in superluminal travel systems. I may not enjoy sole credit for the invention of the minidrives, but I was one of the few who helped to get them off the ground by building up a theoretical basis for them and convincing the relevant parties that the concepts are viable. It gladdens me to no end to see them appear on more and more mechs."

The pair began to take a short tour through the hangar bay. This allowed Ves to see and admire the various MTA mechs from a much more intimate distance.

While the machines were all devoid of life as he expected, they were still impressive and brilliant in other ways. Master Dervidian hardly needed to give Ves an explanation for him to understand and appreciate the charm of these first-class multipurpose mechs.

As the two continued to talk, Ves slowly grew more comfortable in the presence of the Master. The fellow did not act pompously or maintained a clear separation of status.

Instead, Master Dervidian approached Ves without too many airs and with plenty of goodwill.

This meant that the man saw value in building a relationship with Ves, just like what Master Willix had done.

"I don't quite understand what your specialty has to do with your faction." Ves said. "Your work is great for making mechs more mobile and versatile, but I don't see how that helps humans get better."

Dervidian folded his hands behind his back as he continued to float forward. "Your perspective is too limited, Mr. Larkinson. While it is true that much of the focus of our faction is aimed at promoting the development of high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers, we are also looking for other alternatives that can help our race become comprehensively stronger. What do you think about the role of FTL drives in our society?"

Ves didn't know why the man brought up this question, but he could easily answer this question since he discussed a similar topic in the past with Minister Shederin.

"The FTL drive is the most crucial tool that enabled the rise of humanity. We wouldn't have been able to spread across the stars and reach the end of the Milky Way if we did not have a crucial piece of tech in our hands that allows us to travel from star system to star system without spending thousands of years in transit."

Master Dervidian nodded. "That is a clear answer. However, have you ever thought how much our race has grown dependent on technology? What if every FTL drive ceases to work one day?"

"Half of our society would collapse overnight." Ves winced. "Our civilization is so interconnected that if we lose our ability to use a cheap and affordable means of space travel, we will not be able to facilitate galactic-wide trade and keep our interconnected economies alive."

"This is a frightening scenario, is it not? This is a function of our reliance or overreliance on technology. Any external object or tool can fail us one day. Our ships, our mechs and our FTL drives are ultimately external objects that we can never fully master and control. As long as it is tech, it can always be subverted and corrupted by hostile alien races."

Ves partially agreed with the sentiment, but he did not take it this far.

"Humans are tool users." He pointed out. "Compared to many other alien races, we depend more on technology to overcome our intrinsic biological shortcomings. Our drive to improve and cast off our many weaknesses is so strong that it has allowed our race to achieve amazing success in our home galaxy."

"I do not disagree with you, but who says that we humans have to stick to our original biological imperatives? Since when are we slaves to our own ancestral genes and configuration?"

The MTA Master's words briefly caused Ves to pause. He recalled his original question and thought about why Dervidian broached this general topic all of a sudden.

He finally connected all of the dots.

"Wait... are you telling me that you want to make humanity travel through the stars without relying on starships, shuttles or mechs?!"

Master Dervidian responded with a brilliant smile!

"Correct! It is true that we Transhumanist do not see mechs as the beginning and the end of our technological journey. Whereas the Mech Supremacists are already satisfied with our ability to miniaturize FTL drives for their favored platform, we only consider our job to be half-done. It is only when I can accomplish a practical and reliable means of superluminal travel for individual humans that I consider my work to be complete!"

"This!"

Ves was shocked at the audacity of this ambition!

Although he questioned whether it was appropriate for a mech designer to work on such a research project at all, the potential benefits of realizing this ultra-miniaturized form of warp or FTL travel was immensely valuable!

If people like Ves or Gloriana could travel from Davute to Chance Bay with their own bodies rather than rely on large and cumbersome starships, then the mobility of humanity would reach an entirely new level!

While it was true that there were numerous alien races that had developed the capacity to travel across the stars by relying on their own individual capabilities, the aliens tended to be as large as mechs or small starships.

The phase whale race was a good example of this. There was no way that a puny human could imitate a phase whale by integrating a miniature version of one of their phasewater organs.

The tech was way more complicated than that! Scaling down any form of superluminal travel introduced a huge number of problems.

From what it sounded like, even a renowned authority in the field such as Master Dervidian was still far from realizing his ultimate ambition!

"I truly admire your dream." Ves sighed in appreciation. "It truly sounds nice to be able to hop from planet to planet without needing to board a shuttle or starship first. A lot of people would have been able to evacuate from their doomed planets in a hurry if they did not have to compete for access on one of the few starships that can take them out in the limited time available."

He had witnessed far too many tragedies like that for him to remain indifferent to these shortcomings.

It was also one of his primary motivations to keep the core of his clan in a mobile fleet!

"I think you understand now why I have become a part of the Transhumanist Faction." Dervidian smiled. "The ability to move is one of the primary drivers of societal progression. Being able to jump out of our ancestral star system and expand across the Milky Way has led to an explosive degree of growth and prosperity. Being able to cross hundreds of thousands of light-years so that we can continue our expansion to dwarf galaxies such as the Red Ocean will lead to another wave of growth and advancement. If... we can grant each individual human the ability to travel from star system to star system by themselves, then I predict that humanity will truly enter a new age at that point, the Age of Transhumans!"

What big words! Although Ves didn't believe that Master Dervidian and his like-minded buddies could ever realize such a stupendously unrealistic ambition, he fully approved of their attempt to pursue their dreams.

Perhaps it was not realistic for them to be able to enable FTL travel for every Tom, Dick and Harry, but they might make it accessible to the rich and powerful!

Considering that Ves humbly counted himself among this small and exclusive club, he fully hoped that Master Dervidian would be able to succeed one day!

## Chapter 3916 Great Appreciation

Ves felt more and more at ease as Master Termaneo Dervidian continued to show him around.

The Master did not hide his appreciation for Ves nor show too much arrogance or condescension.

This should not be a surprise to Ves. He had long exceeded the scope of a regular Journeyman. The capabilities he had shown along with the innovations he made already marked him out as a successful and productive inventor.

The MTA loved inventors!

Although there were a huge number of mech designers in the mech industry, only a miniscule proportion of them succeeded in making breakthroughs that could even arouse the interest of the upper echelon of the Mech Trade Association.

How could the mechers possibly present a dismissive or even insulting attitude towards these gems?

Indigenous or not, Ves had already gained the qualifications to be treated in a more serious and thoughtful manner by the MTA!

Perhaps the CFA might still treat Ves as if he was an odious fly buzzing around a pile of crap, but that was because the fleeters did not think highly of mechs in the first place.

The MTA was different! Mechs and mech pilots served as the core of its foundation, so any exceptional people that were able to make them stronger in any way needed to be won over even if it came at a considerable cost!

If Master Dervidian somehow left a bad impression and caused Ves to become more repulsed towards the MTA or a specific faction of it, then he would certainly receive a punishment for his mistakes.

Minister Shederin had already told Ves that the mechers might approach him with this attitude in mind, but Ves still found it surreal for him to receive such open appreciation from a high-ranking Master.

Although Ves was not a mech insider who possessed a clear understanding of the MTA's hierarchy, Jovy's vague explanation gave him the sense that Master Dervidian's status within the organization exceeded that of Master Willix.

It was not that hard to figure out why. Master Dervidian's work on minidrives had already achieved concrete results. With warp-based combat drives and FTL-based cruise drives already being put into operation in more and more places, the man already deserved great credit!

As for Master Willix, she was still in the process of chasing after her own big breakthrough in the remote Komodo Star Sector. What little she shared about her work to Ves made it sound as if she was willing to gamble an entire century of her life in order to complete a groundbreaking research project!

If she succeeded, she would be able to make a contribution that most likely equaled that of Master Dervidian!

If she failed, then she would essentially waste much of the years she spent on chasing after her illusive dream!

Even if she came away from all of this hard work and effort with a much greater understanding of several useful phenomena, the opportunity cost she incurred by forgoing many other opportunities to advance her career would undoubtedly be massive!

Perhaps this could mean the difference between advancing to Star Designer or remaining stuck as a Master Mech Designer for the rest of her extended lifespan.

Master Willix's situation proved to Ves that mech designers at this height were hardly done with making greater accomplishments. Realizing a design philosophy was no reason for Masters to become content and live out the rest of their lives in luxury.

There was a greater horizon up ahead and not even Masters working for the most powerful mech organization of human civilization dared to slack off in the slightest!

All of the clues that Ves had managed to gather up to this point prompted him to make a bold conclusion.

Master Dervidian... might be a Star Designer seed.

Although he was still relatively young as far as multi-century Masters were concerned, the man's accomplishments along with his great authority within the Association showed that he most likely entered its true core!

However, Master Dervidian did not show any of this to Ves. He presented himself in a more amiable and approachable fashion that was full of goodwill towards his guest.

This not only showed the MTA's great attention and appreciation towards a mech designer who was still an outsider all considered, but also emphasized the accomplished Master's personal interest in building up a relationship.

"It is a great shame that the Survivalists got to you first." Master Dervidian lamented for a moment as they neared the end of this brief but highly illuminating tour through the mech hangar. "You have seen the mechs here. We are proud of their performance and they are among the best standard mechs we can deploy against the phase whale race. However, when it comes to assisting the cultivation of their mech pilots, I am afraid these machines are significantly inferior compared to your clan's increasingly more developed second-class mechs."

Ves blinked. This was extremely high praise, especially coming from an MTA Master with a status as high as that of Dervidian!

He did not dare to let all of this praise and attention get over his head. No matter what, he was still an indigenous second-class Journeyman Mech Designer!

"I do not dare to claim that my mechs are the best in any area." Ves modestly replied. "I am still far away from realizing my design philosophy. I am still in the early stages of my design career. I still have to design a lot of mechs and refine my design solutions further before I feel I deserve any praise."

Dervidian shook his head. "You do not need to show any false modesty towards the MTA. We are all knowledgeable about mechs. What you have managed to create in a few years surpasses the lifetime works of many of my peers. Despite your low origins, your firm decision to pursue an unorthodox design philosophy has opened up a drastically different design field that has already delivered unique dividends."

"I took a lot of risks that happened to pay off. I also do not deserve all of the credit. I have merely added a little progress to what the mech industry has already achieved." Ves smiled as he continued to downplay his accomplishments.

No matter what, he did not want to reveal any hint that he had managed to make so much progress with the help of an assisting tool as miraculous as the Mech Designer System!

He had no illusions about what would happen if Master Dervidian discovered that his guest came in touch with the Metal Scroll.

Ves would instantly turn from an honored talent that needed to be won over to a prisoner whose secrets needed to be pried away!

This latent threat was enough to keep him sober and prevent his head from growing too big from Master Dervidian's constant appreciation.

The older man let out another sigh as he gazed down at Ves.

"With how much your work pays attention to the mech pilot side of the equation, you truly would have been a great fit for our Transhumanist Faction. It is regrettable that we

normally do not pay much attention to the periphery of human space. Too many of us believe that we can only advance our cause by focusing on the most prosperous and developed regions of human space."

"I don't blame them." Ves replied. "The level of development in the galactic rim is really poor. Now that I have entered the Red Ocean, I finally learned what I have been missing out upon. There are so many more possibilities in regions that have access to much more funding, resources and better researchers."

"If all of those factors are the sole determinants of success, then our Mech Trade Association would have long allowed our mechs to surpass warships." Master Dervidian shook his head another time. "We pour an unimaginable sum of money, resources and manpower in research fields that have already been pushed to their extremes. We frequently ignore diminishing returns in the hopes that beating a dead horse a hundred times will yield a different result than the previous ninety-nine times. Cases like yours make me believe that we are not allocating our resources wisely enough. In my opinion, we continue to throw good money after bad. We should be much more open-minded towards investing in research that aims to open up new and different avenues of human evolution."

This conversation was starting to get political, and that made Ves nervous. He did not want to commit to any side and make needless enemies with those who held the opposite opinion.

"Not every ambitious research project is able to succeed." Ves answered in a clear-minded tone. "Even if they do, the gains rarely justify the time and resources put into them. I know that I have met my fair share of skeptics that do not understand my work at all or think that my assumptions are so crazy that they are never able to believe that I can deliver on my promises. I don't mind this response. Our mech industry has always been about proving our worth through our work. It is only up until now that I have managed to present a few design solutions that are able to catch the attention of your Association."

The Master threw Ves a look that indicated that Dervidian greatly valued those 'design solutions'.

"That is true, but our Association is not monolithic. In the end, it is the Survivalists who managed to recognize your work first. This is not a surprise as the Survivalists are always paying attention to humanity's external threats. I can say that you are in good company. Although they have a reputation for scaremongering, their intentions are noble and they are always earnest in their dealings. People who are convinced that the human race is only one calamity away from extinction have no time for scheming."

Ves nodded in agreement. That was also one of the reasons why he felt at ease with his continued association with the Survivalist Faction.

People like Jovy Armalon, Master Moira Willix and the Polymath were all fairly predictable and easy to figure out. Their mission was clear and they all dedicated themselves towards the same cause.

As long as Ves placed himself in a position where he advanced their interests, he would never have to worry about getting discarded or betrayed.

Despite Master Dervidian's claims that the Transhumanist Faction was a much more fitting home for Ves, its internal situation was probably a lot more complicated.

Unlike the Survivalists who only cared about the continuation of their race, the Transhumanists probably pursued countless different ideas on how to advance human evolution!

There was no single method to make humans better. From education to different forms of augmentation, there were many proven and unproven ways to make people stronger and more capable than others.

With so much variety, cliques would inevitably form within the Transhumanist Faction. Perhaps Master Dervidian represented his own subfaction as his notions about advancing human evolution by enabling people to perform superluminal travel with their naked bodies was an extreme idea!

Ves turned towards his guide. "Master, can you give me a more thorough explanation of what you Transhumanists do and how you fit within the MTA? On the surface, it isn't entirely clear why you are part of an organization that centers around mechs. I would imagine it would make much more sense if you form your own group that solely dedicates itself towards your mission. Doesn't that make more sense?"

The Master did not exhibit any unusual reactions, but his momentary silence was telling.

In truth, an organization that was dedicated towards the ascension of humanity already existed. Its origins far preceded that of the Mech Trade Association and it also happened to have made a lot more accomplishments throughout its long but hidden history!

That organization happened to be called the Five Scrolls Compact!

Although Ves understood it was risky to step on this landmine, he deliberately did so because of a good reason.

He wanted to test Master Dervidian's response and get a better idea of how the Transhumanists were related to this infamous cult!

Chapter 3917 The Value of Phase Whales

To his credit, Master Dervidian did not pause or show any unusual behavior for long.

He was a Master who studied a lot of knowledge, collaborated with a lot of mech designers and knew how to play the political game. With his high standing within the ranks of the MTA, there was no way that he was socially inept!

"I can understand your confusion." The gray-haired man slowly replied. "Those with a shallow understanding of mechs do not comprehend how working on mechs allows us to progress humanity's evolution. While there are people who believe that the special traits of high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers can be spread to the general public, this is a nigh-impossibility in my opinion."

"Then... what do you Transhumanists actually do with mechs, then?" Ves asked with genuine confusion in his voice.

The pair slowly moved away from the mech hangar. The Master led Ves through a mostly empty corridor that evidently led to a different section of the massive battlecarrier.

"Let me begin by asking you an important question. Why do most mechs adopt the human form?"

That was a deep question. Ves could supply a thousand different opinions on this profound issue.

He decided to be truthful and explain his earnest thoughts.

"Shaping a war weapon in a humanoid form is not always the best choice, especially in environments where having a pair of legs doesn't necessarily make sense such as in space or in the air. Nonetheless, we are accustomed to designing humanoid mechs because that is what we humans are familiar with and know best. In my work, I have learned that the best choice is not always the one that is objectively the most optimal one. We work with mech pilots after all, and all of them are limited by their human perspectives and limitations. Allowing them to work with mechs that move and fight like humans will often lead to better results than if they pilot a mech with a weirder shape."

"You are not wrong, Mr. Larkinson. Although we hope that mech pilots can be better than that, many of them are not as comfortable and cannot fully adjust to piloting mechs that adopt forms that convey more advantages from an objective standpoint. Nonetheless, we Transhumanist do not pay as much attention to this argument. I believe it is better for me to show you a different example."

The Master fell silent as he continued to lead Ves to a different place.

After turning a few corridors and passing through a few hatches, they suddenly entered a gigantic hall that was far larger than any of the previous compartments of the Paracelsus Optimus!

In fact, a quick glance told him that the internal dimensions of this gigantic hall far exceeded that of the internal volume of the battlecarrier!

They had stepped out of the MTA capital ship and entered a completely different place, all without Ves noticing the differences!

This was a scary realization. He was no stranger to teleportation technology. The sensation was obvious and could not be mistaken for anything else. He always felt as if his body was erased in one place before being reformed in another place.

This time, he shifted over to a different location without any warning or obvious transitions! It was an application of teleportation that was probably a lot more advanced than ordinary teleportation.

It probably wasn't anything exotic for a specialist in superluminal travel like Master Dervidian. He might even be involved in this particular development!

This invisible show of force was yet another reminder that Ves was in the presence of great company!

It didn't take long for Ves to deduce where he had arrived. There was only one place in the Garimel System that warranted such an enormous space!

Ves walked towards the edge of the transparent panels and looked down on what lay below.

He sucked in his breath as he beheld the great monstrosity occupying the majority of this gigantic space!

The enormous hall was large enough to fit one of the biggest CFA battleship classes, but now it was dedicated to containing the greatest phase whale known to humanity!

Master Dervidian floated over to his side while directing a grin towards the giant captive beast.

"I must thank you for delivering us this unexpected but timely present. The phase whales are highly relevant towards my ongoing research projects. We have already captured numerous different specimens, but none are as large, powerful and atypical as Moby Dick."

"Moby Dick?"

The Master looked amused. "This specimen deserves its own name. I plan to conduct extensive research on its body, so it will be more convenient to refer to this creature by a name that is not a serial number."

The super whale might not be white, but it was more than deserving of this classical name!

Master Dervidian led Ves out of the protective compartment and down to the catwalks immediately surrounding the super whale's exposed bulk.

The main space was still in vacuum, so Ves' formal suit automatically activated a transparent helmet around his head. This along with other coverings made sure that he could breathe in this environment.

As Ves slowly approached the massive whale's body, he gained a clearer impression of its enormous strength.

From a physical point of view, the super whale or 'Moby Dick' absolutely surpassed the physical prowess of any mech, juggernaut or warship!

From a less tangible point of view, the captive monstrosity was also formidable in mind and spirit!

Ves focused mostly on the latter as he had not been able to study Moby Dick's spiritual prowess before. The footage of its battle against the MTA did not give him a good opportunity to evaluate the creature's strength in this aspect.

"It's so powerful." He gasped.

"That it is." Master Dervidian replied. "Biological creatures cannot grow endlessly without passing many different requirements. Resources are only the basic conditions to allow an organism to grow to this extent. Any life form that can grow to this extent is absolutely exceptional and has most certainly reached this scale through artificial means. Studying the methods that have allowed Moby Dick to grow and sustain a body of this size will yield many precious lessons for our research teams."

The enormous phase whale was clearly put under a coma. Its body was so still that it looked almost dead.

In this dormant state, the phase whale hardly released any emissions and its body had also grown extremely cold.

However, none of its flesh looked frozen and its wounds were still leaking liquid blood.

Ves confirmed that the super whale was dormant by observing its extremely powerful but incredibly still spirituality.

There truly was no comparison. Compared to the Phase King that Ves had rescued at the end of the Purgatory Campaign, the super whale was on an entirely different level!

Its spiritual strength far exceeded that of his design spirits, so much so that Ves was almost ready to liken it to a god!

Yet it was this god-like creature that managed to suffer a quick and ignoble defeat against a single battlecarrier and her mech contingent.

Even if the Paracelsus Optimus had the good fortune to hit Moby Dick when it only recently grew to this state, it still did not change the fact that a supposedly superior monster got beat up by just a single independent military detachment of the Mech Trade Association!

"Gods can only be this strong." He murmured.

Master Dervidian adopted an amused grin. "Moby Dick should indeed be able to masquerade as a god in living form among the short-sighted aliens of the Red Ocean, but in front of our mechs, it can only be reduced to an object of research. I cannot wait to cut into its enormous flesh and study how its body can function under all of that mass and bulk."

Ves raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You are involved in studying this large beast?"

"Yes. Does that sound strange to you, Mr. Larkinson?"

"You're a mech designer. Shouldn't this job be left to more relevant experts such as exobiologists? Besides, I don't understand why a creature as enormous as Moby Dick has anything to do with miniaturizing superluminal travel devices. This big whale is pretty much pursuing the opposite of what you try to achieve!"

"Hahaha!" Master Dervidian couldn't help but utter a laugh. "Your logic is sound, but you do not possess all of the information. To you, it may seem that Moby Dick and other phase whales for that matter have little in common with more core research goals, but you would be absolutely wrong. They have everything to do with my ambitions!"

"How?"

The man waved at the giant blue-scaled body. "What is the most defining feature of the phase whale race?"

"They... have an incredible affinity with phasewater." Ves answered after he contemplated a few possible answers.

He had a feeling that this one was the most crucial to the MTA Master.

He was right!

"Correct, Mr. Larkinson! Phasewater is a powerful research that has incredible depth. It is not for nothing that we had led humanity into the Red Ocean. We have captured many alien prisoners and raided many alien databases. We have found that many of them claim that phase whales have a deep relationship with phasewater. Some claim that the race is the original source of phasewater. Others claim that phasewater literally runs through their veins."

Ves became incredibly interested in this topic. He leaned closer as if he wanted to pry out everything that Master Dervidian knew about phasewater!

"Are those claims...true, Master?"

Dervidian smirked. "Aliens hold many superstitious beliefs on phasewater. It is more than a resource that enables superluminal travel to them. The phase whale race is not that exaggeratingly powerful or exceptional. Nonetheless, the claim that phasewater is a part of their blood makeup is not entirely false. They are not born in this way, but their intensive contact with this substance along with their focused biological modifications allows the more accomplished individuals of their species to change their physiology."

Ves looked back at the super whale in shock! "You mean this giant whale's blood is actually made up of phasewater instead of regular water?!"

"Yes! Your guess is right! Astounding, is it not? Phasewater is highly toxic and dangerous to other forms of life. They can literally tear bodies apart due to the unstable spatial fluctuations they provide. Even if phasewater is stabilized by mixing them with other substances, their toxic nature means that they pose a lethal threat to many organic systems. It is simply an insane idea to use phasewater as the principal material for blood."

"Why do they do this? What is the reason for them to go such extremes? Can't they perform warp travel by containing phasewater into specialized organs?"

"The reason the phase whales make this modification is obvious. They wish to attain more power. While we do not possess a full understanding of all of the changes of this remarkable blood transformation procedure, we do know that the deadliest and most formidable phase whales have taken this step. Their warp speeds are much faster and their spatial manipulation abilities are also vastly stronger. This is an essential step in their progression. Without spreading phasewater through their entire bodies, they will never be able to unlock the next stage of their growth."

"This..."

Ves gained a completely new perspective and appreciation for a phase whale like Moby Dick. If the super whale had truly integrated phasewater in all of its flesh and blood, then it must have attained impressive biological qualities!

He started to understand why Master Dervidian was so interested in Moby Dick.

"Then.. your research... are you studying the phase whales so that humans can have phasewater running through their veins one day?"

This was a crazy idea! It was as if someone was trying to use uranium to replace the principal material of someone's skull! Only a lunatic would come up with such an impossible notion!

Master Dervidian's smile grew wider. "My most hopeful research direction indeed centers around replacing human blood with a derivative based upon phasewater. Just imagine it. If our bodies become closer to that of a phase whale, doesn't that mean we are closer to achieving warp travel without external tools?"

The premise sounded logical, but Ves doubted it was this simple!

Chapter 3918 The Transhumanist Ideal

Ves was deeply impressed by Master Dervidian's ambition!

Turning integrating phasewater in the human body was both an extreme and impressive goal!

He could not imagine what people were capable of once they replaced the normal blood in their bodies with an upgraded variety based on phasewater!

Of course, such changes should not be limited to blood alone. The rest of the human body had to undergo an extensive series of adaptation in order to survive with such dangerous material running through their bodies.

Perhaps at the end of it all, the transformed humans would have more in common with phase whales than baseline humans!

As Ves thought about all of the implications of this ambitious research project, he suddenly recalled that Master Dervidian had yet to supply him with a direct answer to his previous inquiry.

"Master, I am highly impressed with your research direction." He spoke up. "However, this still leaves me with the question of what this has to do with mechs. It sounds to me that you are more engaged in human augmentation than furthering the state of mechs."

This was a rather bold statement, but Ves really wanted to understand the greater context behind the MTA Master's work.

"My work is not as unrelated to mechs as you think it is, Mr. Larkinson. The work we do in miniaturizing many different technological functions to the scale of a human is a major challenge. Oftentimes, we can only scale down powerful tech so that they can be fitted onto mechs. This allows us to test our progress and study our products before we can shrink them down even further. Our work on minidrives is a good example of this. Even if our end goals are different from other mech designers, our contributions to the mech industry are just as great!"

Ves nodded. He accepted this argument.

It wasn't enough, though. He felt that there was more behind this story.

"You don't have to go through all of the trouble learning how to design mechs if you want to develop human-scaled implants. Why is it so important for people such as yourself to invest in mech design?"

The Master paused for a bit as he thought whether he should provide a more complete answer. Eventually, he decided to be more forthcoming.

"This relates to a profound philosophical stance. Let me summarize it as much as possible. As I have explained before, mechs mirror the human body for a reason. To Transhumanists like myself, the mech is not just an intermediate form between large and powerful technological platforms such as warships and the small and weak forms of humans such as you and I. The mech has a greater meaning, one that I think that may be far more relevant to your work than you think."

"Oh?" Ves grew curious. "In what way, Master?"

"I have learned that your design philosophy is working towards making mechs 'alive'. Up to this point, you have succeeded in creating mechs that fit certain definitions of this word. How much do they have in common with humans?"

Ves didn't expect that this deep topic would suddenly turn towards his own work, so he quickly had to gather his thoughts and offer a reply that would satisfy a Master Mech Designer.

"My living mechs... are far apart from humans. It was never my goal to make them more human. To me, the human race is unique and should stay that way. The living mechs that I have designed and nurtured have indeed taken after the humans that they interact with on a daily basis, but they ultimately make up their own separate species. If my living mechs aren't so intricately connected to humans, they would probably turn into completely different forms of life."

"Interesting." Master Dervidian said with obvious interest in Ves' answer. "Your answer is more sober than I anticipated. It is good for you to maintain a restrained and conservative perspective towards your own work. I am afraid that mech designers with more delusions and less self-control might gain a god complex due to their inflated thoughts about their achievements."

"I'm still a Journeyman. How can I have the capital to think that I have already succeeded at my stage?"

"Well said, Mr. Larkinson. Your living mechs are of considerable interest to certain groups within our Association. There are also other groups that feel threatened by them. The existence of living mechs raises questions that can evoke both fear and hope."

Ves grimaced. One of the reasons why he wanted to stay away from the MTA was because he didn't want to get caught up in this argument, but as he and his work became more prominent, it became harder to avoid this collision.

He wasn't too worried, though. If the MTA really had a problem with letting mechs gain self-awareness and even a bit of control over themselves, then the mechers would have stepped in a lot sooner.

Besides, Ves had met the Polymath in person and managed to win her over to an extent. With the backing of one of the top figures of the MTA, he doubted that the authorities would deliberately hinder his current research direction!

"How do Transhumanists such as yourself view living mechs?" Ves lightly asked.

"Your work is not yet widely known to our faction, but in my personal opinion I am pleasantly surprised by them." Master Dervidian smiled. "You see, their existence and their apparent traits already confirms a number of my hypotheses about transhumanism."

Ves wanted to scratch his head when he heard this answer. What did mechs have to do with transhumanism?

"I do not follow..."

"What are the differences between a mech and a human?"

"There are lots of differences between them. They are two completely separate existences." Ves replied.

"What are the differences between a living mech and a human?"

"Uhm... there is still a huge gap in between them, Master. It's just that living mechs are a bit closer to humans than before..."

Ves grew suspicious at this line of questioning. After a bit of thought, he suddenly came up with a radical suggestion!

"You... are you treating mechs as if they are human?!"

Master Dervidian smiled and nodded. "Now you understand why we Transhumanists engage so much with mechs. To every other person, a mech is a tool and completely separate from a human. This is an understandable perspective, but to many of my ideological compatriots, we do not view mechs in such a shallow light. To us, mechs and humanoid mechs in particular can be more. They can be surrogates of the human body. They can be replacements of the human body. They can even become our alternate forms if we choose to abandon the small and weak bodies that we are born with! Just imagine it! Imagine a future where our society is made completely out of humans in the form of mechs!"

What?!

If Master Dervidian's previous ideal of injecting phasewater into human bodies was already crazy enough, this one was even more extreme!

Ves truly couldn't understand or accept the notion of him and everyone else shedding their familiar human bodies so they could assume the form of mechs!

He could see the advantages to doing this, though. No matter how much he agreed with this extreme notion, he understood that the transformed human race would probably enjoy a great leap of strength.

Many of the more powerful races in the cosmos tended to be large and formidable. Bigger bodies could exert greater strength by themselves, which was why larger life forms did not have to rely on technology that much.

Usually, the greatest flaws of bigger species are the greater consumption of resources, the longer growth rate and the lack of intelligence.

However, Ves did not think that many of these shortcomings would hinder the human race if it made this conversion.

Humanity not only conquered vast regions of territory, but also developed its technologies to incredible heights. With these advantages, Ves believed that it was viable to convert humans to a larger and more superior race!

His mind suddenly flashed a bit. All of this sounded familiar to him. When he thought back on what he experienced in the Life Research Association, didn't the Supreme Sage attempt to undergo just this sort of transformation?!

The man invested more research and resources into this goal than almost anyone else, but it was a pity that he became too greedy and ambitious.

The Uranus would have definitely turned into the most powerful 'human' body to have ever existed if the Supreme Sage succeeded in completing the consciousness transferral process.

Yet the mental and possibly spiritual strength acquired by this exaggeratingly strong biological monster was far too great for the former top researcher to handle!

Thinking about this calamity gave Ves a bad impression of the notion of trying to convert humans into mech-like life forms.

He rejected this idea! He was a strong believer in the classical relationship between mechs and mech pilots.

Mechs should not replace humans and humans should not replace mechs. It was only when they worked together and achieved symbiosis that they would be able to attain much greater strength due to synergy!

"Do all Transhumanists work towards turning humans into existences similar to mechs?" Ves carefully asked as he wondered how many people supported this insane notion.

Master Dervidian likely noticed that Ves did not think highly of this ambition. The man didn't mind.

"You do not have to be afraid that our faction seeks to coerce everyone to turn themselves into large mechs or biomechs. Only a fraction of us support this ideal, and I do not count myself among them. I am among the majority who is still attached to our current human forms. I would not want to give it up even if I am presented with the option to convert to a superior physical body. I am afraid that many of us will start to wonder how much humanity we have left."

Ves frowned. "Why would people want to pursue this goal at all? Do they look down on our humanity so much that they want to move away from what makes us human?"

"I do not wish to speak ill of my fellow Transhumanists." The Master replied. "They can present their goals and ideals much better than I. While I do not have that much in common with this specific subgroup, I do share a part of their approach. A mech can be viewed as a derivative of a human body. What we can do with mechs can also be done with humans. That is our hope. My work on minidrives is just one example of that. There are other projects that aim to transfer other aspects of mechs into humans. Think about expanding our sensory capabilities or allowing us to fly and move in space. In short, to us, mechs are test dummies that are scaled up to allow for more convenient experimentation."

This perspective made a lot of sense, but it caused Ves to view Transhumanists in a stranger light than before.

He still had a hard time understanding why Transhumanists were so obsessed with equating mechs to humans!

In fact, he felt more grateful than ever that the Survivalists managed to rope him in first. He had no idea what he would become if he started to buy into the abnormal ideology of the Transhumanist Faction!

"I see..." He slowly replied. "What is the goal of people like you, then? If you don't want to turn humans into mech-sized giants, then what are the other Transhumanists working towards?"

"It is not that difficult to understand, Mr. Larkinson. Imagine the mechs such as the first-class multipurpose mechs that I have shown you in my previous tour. They are large and powerful, are they not? Now imagine if they are thirty percent smaller. Are they still mechs in your eyes?"

"They most definitely are. They will just be a lot weaker because of their lower capacity, but I can imagine that most medium mechs will simply perform akin to light mechs in this instance."

Dervidian waved his hand. "Imagine if we downsize these mechs yet again. Are they still functionally the same?"

"They should be... I think. The ones that have previously become light mechs will now turn into even smaller machines, but they should still be able to perform in a familiar fashion for the most part. They will just be treated as ultralight mechs this time."

"What if we shrink these mechs a third time?"

"That... will make this hypothetical scenario a lot more difficult." Ves replied as he struggled to imagine this scenario. "I don't really know if the mechs can still be seen at mechs at this point."

"You are not the only mech designer to think in this manner. Let me spare you the trouble and complete this thought experiment for you. If we shrink mechs another time, they will start to lose the identity of mechs and begin to assume the identity of powered armor suits. People will no longer 'pilot' them as if they are mechs but begin to 'wear' them as if they are personal pieces of equipment."

Ves widened his eyes!

"I see! This is quite a radical progression!"

"This is not our ultimate goal, young man. We Transhumanists are not interested in making humans wear artificial suits of equipment all of the time. What we truly want to accomplish is to upgrade our human bodies. So imagine if we downsize these cumbersome suits of armor again so that their scales completely match our human dimensions. Instead of wearing them, we become them. Do you understand why we are mech designers, now?"

He did. He also thought the Transhumanists were even crazier than he previously thought! Only nutjobs would regard the act of designing mechs as preparations for designing their own future bodies!

### Chapter 3919 Ves the Transhumanist

The Mech Trade Association certainly attracted its fair share of weirdos.

From radicals that sought to disband the Big Two to reactionaries that wanted to freeze the status quo forever, the MTA was filled with ideologies of almost every stripe!

After a bit of thought, Ves did not find this strange gathering to be incomprehensible. The absence of a traditional governing institution did not result in the removal of politics.

It simply adapted to the latest structure and continued to ply its trade!

Whenever there was a situation where resources were scarce, different groups and people had to compete against each other to determine how to allocate them. The reality of politics was that a win for one faction often came at the expense of another faction.

Ves wondered where the Transhumanist Faction ranked.

Given their interest and involvement in promoting high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers, he did not believe the Transhumanists were marginalized.

On the other hand, people like Master Termaneo Dervidian made no secret of how they equated mechs to human bodies and vice versa. This was a rather extreme stance that deviated from the core premise that mechs existed to work for humanity.

Instead, the Transhumanists wanted mechs to become humanity!

This was a whole different belief that generated a lot of difficult and uncomfortable questions.

Ves couldn't help but change the way he regarded the Transhumanist Faction. Before this meeting, he still thought that the Transhumanists were rather reasonable. After all, they were the main interest group behind the development of god pilots and Star Designers.

Now, he learned that this was not their only preoccupation. Their core focus was nothing less than promoting the wholesale evolution of the human race!

Whether the Transhumanists wanted to turn everyone into sentient mechs or human-sized monsters, it was clear that they did not value humanity in its original form in the slightest!

Master Dervidian was sharp enough to recognize the discomfort and rejection in Ves' demeanor. This was not an unusual reaction from people who learned how far the Transhumanists were willing to go to shed their weak human forms.

"What do you think transhumanism means, Mr. Larkinson?"

Ves furrowed his brows. "Transhumanism stands for transcending human limitations. The goal is to become more than what we originally were. I can understand why people would want to get better to the point of breaking past our baseline parameters, but why take it this far?"

"Why not? Why settle for a smaller improvement when a larger improvement is within reach? Turning humans into life forms that more closely match mechs conveys many more advantages than a simple gene optimization treatment. If you can choose between becoming two times smarter or ten times smarter, why not settle for the latter?"

"Because the more you move away from your original form, the more you lose your humanity."

"Hahaha! That time is already past, Mr. Larkinson!" Master Dervidian laughed. "Look at us! I am a Master Mech Designer while you are a Journeyman Mech Designer. Do you truly think that we could have reached our ranks and made so many accomplishments if we were normal human beings? Could we truly master so much knowledge and apply them in ways that most humans cannot even begin to understand with all of the advanced genetic treatments, organ replacements and cybernetic implantations that we have received?!"

Ves was taken aback! While he instinctively wanted to refute the Master's words, he knew in his heart that he would only be lying if he spoke out in this fashion.

"You... may have a point, Master. That doesn't mean we should recklessly change the nature of our existence without any restraint or caution. The Age of Conquest has taught us many awful lessons about the dangers of going too far with human augmentation. We turned many humans into monsters that had become so detached from humanity that they turned into beasts that only maintained the facade of humans. What your faction is working towards can turn out just as bad if not worse!"

Master Dervidian sighed. Critics always brought up the Age of Conquest as a cautionary tale. It was one of the greatest arguments that hindered the interests of the Transhumanist Faction.

"There is no denying that too many scientists who were eager to shed their weaknesses have moved too quickly and failed to account for the repercussions of their rushed innovations. The climate is much different nowadays. Several hundreds of years have passed since those abuses came to an end. Our faction is actually one of the greatest proponents of regulating the market for human augmentation. We believe in sustainable development and would never wish to subject humans to changes that turn them into monsters. By and large, we have succeeded. The market for genetic treatments and implants is thriving more than ever and the proportion of augmented humans in our society is growing with each passing generation."

Although the Master sounded reasonable, Ves could not shake off his inherent suspicion and disgust towards excessive augmentation.

Dervidian gestured towards Ves. "Your attitude towards this issue is a relic of your humble upbringing. Research shows that citizens who grow up in less prosperous regions are often more negatively predisposed towards augmentation. Your third-class rimlander background is limiting your perspective. You still retain much of the ignorant opinions of those who reject augmentation not because they are disgusted by it, but because they envy individuals who can more readily afford them. Since augmentations are rare in remote third-rate states, it is natural for the general public to hold a negative sentiment towards this issue. I would have thought your experiences and your exposure to other facets of human society has led you to correct your outdated cultural norms."

Was the Master calling Ves a hillbilly?

"Look, I am not opposed to every kind of augmentation. I just think we should maintain reasonable limits to how extensively we should mess with our race." Ves replied.

The Master was not willing to settle for this lame answer. "Do you not see how much your stance contradicts your circumstances? Have you not noticed that as you move up in human society, it becomes more and more common for people to accept the necessity to upgrade their human parameters in order to keep up with the best? We live in a competitive environment, Mr. Larkinson. We cannot afford to slow down and settle for being second-best. Not only do we have to compete against our fellow human rivals, we also have to compete against formidable alien opponents that are always trying to exploit our weaknesses."

"Humanity did fine against the aliens in the past. I don't see why we should urgently push ourselves to improve at the cost of losing what has originally made us great."

"This is a flawed argument." Master Dervidian replied while shaking his head. "Hasn't the Survivalist Faction warned you against becoming complacent? Everyone is eager to

achieve progress. The mistakes of the Age of Conquest have not suppressed people's desire to upgrade their capabilities at all. Look at yourself for example."

"Me?" Ves blinked.

"Yes, you. You are a brilliant Journeyman that has made far more major accomplishments than almost all of your peers. While they are not the sole factors to your success, your extensive augmentations have definitely enabled your rise. Whether it is your extreme physiological makeover, the genetic optimization treatments you received from the CFA by chance, your untraceable but effective all-round cognitive improvements or your updated CFA implant, they have all made you more than your original self. Do you deny that they have made you a better mech designer?"

"I did not willingly undergo all of those changes." Ves replied with an irritated expression.

"Yet you have benefited from them, have you not? Your body has become stronger and more resilient. You are able to survive attacks that would have killed an ordinary human in an instant. No matter what, you have become more powerful than before."

"That is true, but..."

"You chose to accept all of the other augmentations that I have mentioned." Master Dervidian continued. "You chose to implant yourself with a cranial implant because you sought to improve your ability to design mechs, correct? Do you regret this decision? Do you truly think you could have risen up to this point without the convenience and amplification provided by your implant?"

"No." Ves reluctantly answered. "I owe much to my implant. I don't regret undergoing the operation either, though in hindsight I should have vetted my people more thoroughly."

"What if I tell you that you have already moved a lot farther down the path of transhumanism than you think? You have already stepped away from your original humanity and moved closer to becoming an existence akin to a mech!"

What?!

Ves understood the MTA Master's words, but he could not place himself in this image!

"Is this observation so difficult for you to accept?" Master Dervidian smirked. "You and I are the same. We have both made similar choices. While I am ahead of you, that does not change the fact that you are already a transhumanist at heart. Think about it, young man. The alterations to your organs and physiology has moved you closer to a biomech. The addition of a cranial implant to your brain has enabled you to perform calculations and process data akin to an actual mech. Whether it is 'body' or 'mind', both

of these parameters of yours have undoubtedly moved you closer to the machines that you have dedicated your life towards! Is this not a beautiful sight? Soon enough, you will be capable of designing your own future form, thereby truly allowing you to take control of your own evolution!"

This line of argumentation was so shocking and subversive that Ves wanted to reject it. Yet the logic behind these words were so strong that he could not do so. His own choices and behavior affirmed his own implicit rejection of his weak humanity.

In other words, Ves wasn't so different from Master Dervidian and his buddies. He just wasn't as radical and willing to go through extremes as most members of the Transhumanist Faction.

This did not change the fact that Ves agreed with at least 50 percent or even 80 percent of their principles.

He grew more uncomfortable and confused about himself the more he acknowledged this fit.

"I really can't accept this characterization, Master." He sighed. "Your words are just too extreme for me. It is never my intention to turn myself into a mech. My love and attachment to the identity of a human is too strong for me. I am aware that this sounds hypocritical and illogical of me since I have undergone extensive modifications and augmentations, but that is just the way I am. I am a human. I am a mech designer. No matter what I do or how far I go, I will never abandon those core identities. I would no longer be Ves Larkinson if I no longer identify myself in these ways."

His earnest answer might not earn Master Dervidian's approval, but it had earned the older man's respect.

A hand patted Ves' shoulder.

"It is okay." Master Dervidian said in an understanding tone. "You are still young, and you are not accustomed to thinking at this level. You should mull over what I have said. I suggest you also read on this subject matter in your own time."

Ves wasn't feeling enthusiastic about spending any further thought on this thorny and uncomfortable topic. He just wanted to go back to designing mechs!

The MTA Master seemed to believe that Ves wasn't done with improving himself, though.

"I anticipate that you will become more frustrated by your existing limitations as you grow older. Once you stop making as many achievements as before and once your rapid progress begins to stall, you will feel the despair of many ambitious mech designers who are being held back by the lingering weaknesses of their humanity. I

hope that you too will make the correct choice at this point and lose your inhibition towards further augmentation. You can always approach our faction for assistance if you wish to take your evolution to the next step. We have many different solutions for you to embrace."

## Chapter 3920 Crazy Convergence

Ves did not have a good impression of Master Dervidian and his faction at the moment.

Despite the man's sound logic and well-crafted arguments, Ves always felt there was something profoundly wrong about this train of thought.

He did not see anything wrong with performing a few upgrades to his normal human form, but going as far as making it equivalent to a humanoid mech sounded way too extreme!

How far could he push his own improvement before he lost too much of himself? At what threshold should he stop augmenting himself?

These were all difficult questions that he had yet to ask himself before. His own instinctive rejection on this issue along with his refusal to think far enough ahead had caused him to be woefully unprepared to hold his ground and keep up with Master Dervidian's arguments.

He needed to correct this as soon as he got back. It would have been fine if he never thought in this direction before, but now that another person directly confronted him on this matter, he could no longer bury his head in the sand.

A part of him even wondered whether he had already gone past the critical threshold. Ves was not ignorant of the fact that he was already far removed from baseline humans.

His unwilling physical transformation at the hands of Dr. Jutland was the single biggest transformation of his life. He had been just a regular human before that point.

He experienced so many changes and suffered so many problems from this turn of events that he had already begun to deviate from normality at that point.

His subsequent augmentations were not as extreme, but they all made him smarter and more productive at the cost of further removing him from the people he came from. It was a rather depressing truth.

What made his situation even more difficult was that the people around him were also distancing themselves from traditional humanity.

The two closest people in his life, namely his wife and his first-born daughter, had gone a few steps further!

Both Gloriana and Aurelia started off as designer babies. They did not come into existence through natural conception, but were instead synthesized in labs.

Their genetic codes started off as human but quickly diverged from this standard in the name of improvement. Many geneticists and other scientists tweaked and replaced the codes so that the babies would become smarter, healthier, more adaptable and more optimized!

The enduring success and popularity of designer babies in the more prosperous parts of human society showed that much of the public had embraced the benefits of their existence!

Ves himself had also gotten caught up in this hype. He already paid thousands of MTA credits in order to turn his second child with Gloriana into a designer baby!

Not only that, he intended to make the same choice for every other child that followed!

The thought of trying to conceive a 'normal' baby did not enter his mind at all. In fact, even if he wanted to, he couldn't.

His various transformations had already caused his body to mutate to the point where he was no longer able to reproduce naturally with other humans.

Gloriana also suffered from this problem in part due to her own genetic deviations.

Could they still call themselves human when they suffered from reproductive isolation?

This was yet another deeply uncomfortable question.

The culprit responsible for making him think this way showed no remorse. If not for the fact that Master Dervidian was a bigshot who could determine how the MTA should respond to the events in Purgatory and the Garimel System, Ves might not be so well-behaved!

Fortunately, Master Dervidian steered the conversation towards mechs, though still through the lens of transhumanism.

"Maybe you are not ready to accept that humans are slowly evolving towards mechs, but the other side of the equation should be easier for you to accept. Since mechs initially came into existence, we have improved them in many different ways. They have become stronger, tougher, faster, smarter and more versatile."

"Don't these changes make them further removed from humans?" Ves frowned.

"We are also making ourselves stronger, tougher, faster, smarter and more versatile." Dervidian retorted. "What is most important is that mechs are resembling us more and

more. You have produced one of the greatest breakthroughs in this regard. You have quietly achieved the greatest breakthroughs that certain mech designers have been trying to attain, and that is turning mechs sentient!"

Ves suddenly grew a lot more nervous than before. This was a rather controversial topic that he had been trying to avoid as much as possible. The MTA was not a fan of turning mechs into independent and autonomous existences that could rebel against humanity!

"There is no need for concern, Mr. Larkinson. You are not in trouble. Although there are groups and factions that oppose the nature of your work, our Association is not that close-minded. So far, your living mechs have brought many benefits. As long as their ability to subvert human dominance remains low, we are willing to see how far they can go. An increasing number of people within our Association have taken note of the special qualities of your living mechs and are curious to see how far they can go. Transhumanists such as myself are particularly fascinated with them because of how relevant they are towards our own goals and ambitions."

Ves grimaced again. "My living mechs are trying to become humans. That is not what they are designed and made for. From the beginning, each of my mechs are instilled with the mission to serve humanity and work together with their mech pilots. While I have elevated them from being regarded as tools to being seen as battle partners, I have always tried my best to maintain the separation between mech and mech pilots."

"Ah, yes. Despite elevating the status of mechs, you still hold on to the classical stance that your teachers have no doubt taught you. Are you truly of the opinion that your living mechs are not moving closer to becoming human? After all, your most advanced living mechs have gained an awfully large amount of traits that resemble us. They are becoming as self-aware as humans. Their thought patterns are becoming more and more human. They are even capable of communicating in a human fashion. How far will these changes go? I am certain that you are not satisfied with their current gains. How much longer will it take before they can make their own decisions?"

"Just because living mechs are able to do more does not mean that they are gradually turning into humans." Ves placed his hands on his hips. "Mechs are mechs and they will remain that way if I have anything to say about it. They may be becoming more advanced, but they can turn into anything, not just an alternate form of humans. There are more varieties of sentient life out there than just us. Mechs can also resemble phase whales, peulmers and voribugs, not that I want this to happen. As far as I am concerned, living mechs deserve their own separate category."

"Not everyone agrees with your stance on living mechs." Master Dervididian replied. "You may be the inventor of living mechs, but have you ever thought that other creators and users may want to turn living mechs into a different existence than you imagined? Eventually, there will be other mech designers who will take your living mechs and turn them into humans. There will also be living mechs that have become so immersed in human society that they might wish to become human. Do you want to deny their wish

and force them to live out as tools or 'battle partners' as you say, or will you grant them their long-cherished wish as a reward for their services?"

This was yet another difficult line of questioning! Ves did not want to engage in it at all, but there was no avoiding it this time!

Master Dervidian addressed a topic that directly related to his design philosophy. If Ves tried to take the easy way out and avoid issuing any opinion on this topic, then he would likely hinder his own progression!

Ves tried to calm himself down and think about what he stood for. Should living mechs always remain living mechs or should he give them the opportunity to change their identities?

"I think... life always finds a way." He slowly began. "It doesn't really matter what I want or what I try to impose on my living mechs. Since they have the capacity to grow, they also have the capacity to change, which in your parlance means to evolve. I anticipate that as more living mechs come into existence, they will begin to develop many different personalities as well as desires. Will there be living mechs that want to become human? I think so. Do we want to oblige them? This is a much more difficult question to answer."

"What do you think, Mr. Larkinson?"

"It depends on what human society wants." Ves answered. "The core purpose of mechs is to serve humanity and to help mech pilots fight. That is what humanity currently expects of its mechs. Whether people are willing to grant mechs the freedom to assume other identities is up to them. I can make it possible, but I do not think it is right to make this decision on their behalf. I suppose that factions such as yourself will need to bring this topic up for discussion in the Galactic Mech Council one day to enact a peaceful and orderly transition."

"Your answer suggests that you are already leaning towards a change you believe is inevitable."

Ves shrugged. "I do not know whether living mechs will be able to transition into existences that are so close to humans that they will formally be accepted as our kin. I will support them if that is what they want, but that does not mean I want them to abandon their initial jobs as war machines. I believe we can come to an accord that both sides can accept. The premise is that living mechs are useful enough to justify the effort."

This should not be a major problem in his opinion. Ves knew for certain that living mechs were so much better than ordinary machines that mech pilots and others would definitely be willing to make compromises to achieve better results!

Master Dervidian smiled and looked back out towards the captive and dormant super whale.

"What strange times we live in. We humans are constantly working to become closer to mechs. At the same time, your efforts and the efforts of others are turning mechs closer into humans. Do you realize what is happening?"

"Uh, no?"

The older man spread his arms. "A convergence is taking place! While it is unlikely for humans to literally turn into mechs and vice versa, it is much more realistic for both of them to meet each other half-way! Many Transhumanists such as myself are looking forward to this historic event. What will happen to both groups? Will we merge together and form a new race that brings together the best traits of both humans and mechs? If such a superrace can come into being, then we will all transcend to an unimaginably powerful state! There will be no lines between mechs and mech pilots anymore. Each individual combatant will be their own mech as well as their own mech pilot! The way we fight against our enemies will become a lot different when even our civilians can grow into powerful mechs!"

This was yet another crazy dream!

How many more wacky Transhumanist ideas did Ves have to listen to before Master Dervidian finally moved on to actual business?

Ves had the feeling as if he was stuck in the classroom while being forced to listen to a lecture that was solely designed to indoctrinate him. The worst part about it was that he wasn't allowed to skip this class or even take a bathroom break!

For whatever reason, Master Dervidian seemed hellbent on ramming down his Transhumanist ideology down Ves' throat!

Was it that important for him to convert Ves to the Transhumanist cause?