

## Mech 3921

### Chapter 3921 A Common Interpretation

"I understand that I have been trying your patience." Master Dervidian eventually said after he lectured to Ves for half an hour more. "I could not resist enlightening you to a cause that has many relations to your work. As you continue to move up in the mech industry, you will gradually come into contact with people who will associate your living mechs with transhumanism. You will not be caught flat-footed now that I have explained the essence of our cause. No matter what others may say about our faction, never forget that we are always working towards the betterment of our race."

Ves certainly gained a more thorough understanding of the Transhumanist Faction, but they weren't all positive.

"Uhm, I think I get it now. Can we... you know... proceed with discussing more relevant business?"

The Master slowly nodded. "I have given you enough lessons on a part of the Mech Trade Association that you were not familiar with before. You will need this information to navigate your future interactions with us. For reasons that will soon be known to you, our faction will be in regular contact with you and your people."

That sounded reassuring. Not.

There was nothing Ves could do if the Transhumanists insisted on butting into his life. The Survivalists may have already called dibs on him, but they could not prevent others from approaching him while extending a hand of friendship.

Although Ves did not develop a great impression of the Transhumanist Faction, Master Dervidian's behavior towards him showed that the Transhumanists greatly valued him and his work.

In order to survive and be able to carry out his work with as few hindrances and interruptions as possible, Ves needed to cultivate as much support from the MTA as possible.

He would gain a lot more leeway to introduce more radical inventions if there were more mechers providing cover for him. He really wasn't in a position to reject the overtures from the Transhumanist Faction.

"Let us make our way to a more suitable meeting venue." Master Dervidian finally said as he briefly glanced down at the massive super whale. "Moby Dick here will stay put here. I will return later and conduct extensive studies on how this massive body is able to integrate so much phasewater and not collapse."

As the pair started to make their way out of the massive hall, Ves threw one last look at the super whale that tried but failed to escape from the Garimel System.

He had stayed here long enough to study Moby Dick's spirituality extensively.

Despite the massive creature's awesome might and size, Ves had the creeping suspicion that it may be less than what it appeared.

He had made several guesses on the identity of Moby Dick, but he didn't think that any of them were right now that he examined the creature's spirituality at this relatively close distance.

The super whale's physical characteristics partially resembled that of the Cerebral King, but Ves did not recognize any of the ancient fish-whale in Moby Dick's spirituality.

The massive beast did not possess the characteristics of an intelligent, long-lived tyrant like the mythical Flesh Conqueror.

Instead, Ves had the impression that Moby Dick possessed a new but feral spirituality!

He had encountered a similar case back in the Life Research Association. Was it coincidental that Moby Dick was also dominated by a newborn consciousness like Uranus?

What happened to the Cerebral King? What was the Flesh Conqueror's plan in setting all of this up? Ves seriously doubted that Moby Dick was supposed to turn into a brute devoid of wisdom and intelligence!

Oh well. It wasn't his problem. It was up to Master Dervidian and his researchers to puzzle all of this out. From the moment the Paracelsus Optimus entered the Garimel System, none of this was his responsibility anymore.

Master Dervidian eventually led Ves back to the battlecarrier through the same seamless teleportation process that did not give any warning.

Soon enough, they entered a rather plain compartment that vaguely resembled an interrogation room more than anything else. A table and two elegant chairs slowly rose up from the floor.

"Please take a seat, Mr. Larkinson. This is one of the most secure compartments on this ship. I have brought you here so that we can discuss matters that may touch upon controversial subjects or secrets that should not be spread. I think you should understand why the need for discretion is great."

Ves had a few ideas, yes. "I am eager to get this over with. Where do we begin?"

The gray-haired Master raised his hand and summoned a projection. It showed various clips of Task Force Fisherman plundering a lot of phasewater and harvesting dozens of organs from the bodies of slain Phasers.

"According to my understanding, our Association previously struck an agreement with you that grants you 2 weeks to make as much gains from the pocket space that you have discovered before we arrive to take possession of your discovery. In exchange for surrendering 90 percent of your spoils, we will grant you permission to keep the remainder as well as 15 million MTA merits as a reward for introducing us to this discovery. Is that correct?"

Ves nodded but leaned forward. "That is true, but I would like to note that we only made this deal with the assumption that my men and I would be exploring the Royal Tomb. What actually happened is that our Golden Skull Alliance entered a new space that we have taken to calling Purgatory. I've read the exact wording of the contract several times and it does not explicitly deal with a second pocket space that is completely separate from the Royal Tomb."

"That is not our interpretation of this agreement." Master Dervidian looked amused. "Any reasonable observer would conclude that Purgatory and the Royal Tomb are related to each other. In fact, I would go as far as saying that they are two peas in a pod or two facets of the same coin. The ease in which the alien entity known as the Cerebral King managed to access the Royal Tomb shows that the two spaces are highly related to each other. You cannot state that Purgatory is completely unrelated. Even the entrances are superimposed upon each other."

Although the MTA Master raised a few logical points, there was no way that Ves wanted to acquiesce so easily!

His spoils were at stake! If he just let the MTA steal 90 percent of his hard-won plunder, then he might as well sell his mechs for free!

He coughed. "The ease in which an individual can move from one space to another does not mean that they are the same. We have already ascertained that the Royal Tomb is actually anchored near Garimel II while Purgatory is much closer to Garimel I. They are separated by several light-hours! How can they be the same if that's the case? If we follow your argument, then the Red Ocean is not a separate dwarf galaxy but a seamless extension of the Milky Way. After all, the greater beyonder gates located in Maryun Ultima in the old galaxy and Bridgehead One in the new frontier allows for direct and nearly instant travel between the two! However, I would think that no reasonable observer would claim that the Milky Way and the Red Ocean are one and the same."

"That is a clever reply." Master Dervidian admitted while looking amused. "The exact meaning of the contract is subject to interpretation. Since both of us cannot agree to a common interpretation, we should settle our differences in court. I should warn you that this is a cumbersome and time-consuming process, especially in a case of this

magnitude. Might I remind you that a judge might not look favorably on you for the various actions you undertook while you led your troops in Purgatory. Our Association does not look kindly on trading valuable goods and knowledge to alien races. We look even poorly towards an act of gross negligence that almost released a powerful phase whale into the Red Ocean."

"I... knew you mechers would be able to handle any unfortunate incidents that might spill out." Ves slowly replied while trying his best not to look nervous. "With the Simile Halifax in my fleet and Mr. Armalon stating that your Association has already laid claim to the Royal Tomb, I figured that anything that might happen in the Garimel System will ultimately be your responsibility, not mine. I mean, you effectively tried to impose a 90 percent tax on my spoils. There is no reason for your Association to claim remuneration if you are not willing to discharge the responsibilities that go with it. Besides, you have shown great appreciation towards Moby Dick. The giant phase whale is no threat towards the MTA. It is a highly valuable research object that you have obtained for free!"

Ves was no lawyer, but even he felt that his arguments were a little spurious. There were lots of holes in his words that Master Dervidian could easily poke if he wished.

"We do value Moby Dick even if it took great firepower to subdue this escaping alien threat. I suppose it is also fair to expect us to help given that we have claimed the phase whale enclave for ourselves."

The older man's relatively relaxed tone and lack of force was rather telling. It was as if he was not that serious about representing the MTA's rights in this particular case.

This was a far cry from the MTA's earlier directives that Jovy was forced to convey to Ves two weeks earlier!

There was only one clear reason why the MTA made such a drastic change in attitude.

Ves was a lot more valuable now than before.

This assumption gave him the confidence to fight back and defend his interests in a more assertive manner than usual.

If the MTA still thought he was a relatively minor figure like before, then he would never have the guts to adopt this tone towards an important and authoritative MTA Master Mech Designer!

"Can't we just dispense with bringing this case to court and settle our differences right now?" Ves requested. "I will give you Moby Dick as well as the pocket spaces and whatever is left inside. In exchange, I hope that you will allow us to keep our modest gains from Purgatory. We have only obtained a couple of scraps during our brief explorations. The little bit of phasewater and organic materials are nothing compared to the immense quantity of resources that we haven't been able to touch."

Master Dervidian looked into Ves' eyes for a few seconds before he dismissively waved his hand.

"You make a good argument, although you are heavily underselling how much phasewater you have managed to take away. I will be magnanimous today and agree to your expedient proposal. I will allow your Golden Skull Alliance to retain its full spoils, although I must insist that you exchange 90 percent of your phasewater into their equivalent worth in MTA merits. Our Association has an urgent demand for phasewater and we cannot allow so much of it to go to waste in your hands. You do not need to be afraid that we will disadvantage you. We will not force you to exchange your phasewater at a discount."

"Is it as simple as that?" Ves blinked in surprise.

This was too easy!

"Yes." The Master stated with confidence. "I have full authority to decide over this matter, so you do not need to fear that another department or decision-maker will override my verdict."

Ves expected the MTA to get its grubby hands on much of his plundered phasewater through one way or another, so he did not feel that upset about this verdict.

What he really wanted was to get a fair price for the phasewater that he would have to surrender, and Master Dervidian happened to oblige his wish!

This was a huge concession!

Losing all of that phasewater hurt, but the prospect of obtaining hundreds of millions MTA merits instantly wiped away his resentment!

## Chapter 3922 Salivating Reward

Although Master Dervidian was an annoying older gentleman who tried to push his Transhumanist ideals a bit too eagerly, to Ves the mecher had suddenly turned into the spirit of charity at this time!

With just a couple of sentences, Master Dervidian settled the matter of remuneration and compensation in a verdict that clearly favored Ves and the Golden Skull Alliance!

Aside from escaping any culpability for any alleged crimes and misdeeds that the alliance had committed, the Larkinson Clan and its allies were also entitled to the full MTA merit value of the phasewater that they had to submit!

Though the MTA acted a bit domineering by forcing the Golden Skull Alliance to surrender the vast majority of phasewater that its task force had plundered from

Purgatory's natives at great risk and danger, Ves did not truly mind giving that much phasewater away.

He was well aware that holding over 2 metric tons of phasewater at any time was just asking for trouble!

The Larkinson Clan simply wasn't big and powerful enough to store that much phasewater safely. Even if the expeditionary fleet returned to the Vulit Star Node right away and deposited all of the valuable substances in some sort of bank vault or something, the clan would still have a big fat target on its back!

All kinds of greedy troublemakers would come out of the woodwork and enact their designs on the Larkinson Clan in order to steal away a couple of hundred kilograms of phasewater here and there. Ves simply couldn't withstand all of the heat of possessing so much valuable materials all at once!

In contrast, exchanging the bulk of it for MTA merits was much safer. Unlike phasewater, merits weren't transferable, so it was much harder to 'steal' it away.

Additionally, as long as Ves was willing to pay a price, he could exchange a portion of his newfound wealth on different forms of protection that would be sufficient to make the Larkinson Clan untouchable for the time being.

MTA merits were not just money. It represented one's relationship with the Mech Trade Association. The more MTA merits anyone had accumulated, the more the mechers treated them favorably!

It was never a wise choice to attack a person with a lot of MTA merits on record!

Of course, Ves did not intend to retain much of the MTA merits that he was about to gain.

In his situation, it was much better to convert intangible wealth into tangible strength and development!

As long as Ves was willing to spend big, he could instantly accelerate his personal development and the development of his clan by a couple of decades!

Better tech, exclusive knowledge, greater might and expanded access to exclusive services were just a couple of the benefits that he could obtain for himself and his people.

This was his golden opportunity to entrench himself in the Red Ocean and build a solid foundation for the Larkinson Clan!

As long as his clan managed to digest all of the goodies exchanged from the MTA, the Larkinsons would become stronger than ever!

Ves wouldn't have as many concerns anymore when his expeditionary fleet ventured into the deep frontier half a decade later!

Compared to all of these gains, Ves was not so eager to hang on to 2 metric tons of phasewater.

What could he and his fellow Larkinsons possibly do with all of that jazzed-up liquid substance?

It was impossible to swim in it! Any pool filled with this potent exotic would generate so much dimensional instability that those who dove into it would have their bodies torn apart before they even touched water!

The Larkinson Clan did not possess the expertise or infrastructure to fabricate warp drives or superdrives by itself.

Perhaps the Larkinson Biotech Institute might be able to develop a potential application for phasewater by successfully reverse engineering the Phaser fish-whale organs in its possession, but this was a dubious and unprofitable venture.

Retaining a hundred kilograms of phasewater was more than enough for the Larkinsons. They could transfer a part of it over to various companies in order to obtain superdrives and minidrives, both of which would massively upgrade the mobility and versatility of their starships and important mechs.

The remaining phasewater could be put in reserve or be used to trade for lots of money or important favors.

As Ves thought about how to spend all of that wealth as wisely as possible, Master Dervidian activated another projection that listed out the terms he mentioned in the form of a ready-made contract.

"Let us go over the agreement to ensure that every party will be satisfied." The man said.

The two proceeded to do just that. Even though they had just made a quick verbal agreement, the enormous amounts of phasewater and MTA merits involved in this exchange made it extremely important to get everything right.

Neither of them wanted to make a mistake at this juncture!



The contract drafted by Master Dervidian was extremely thorough and went into plenty of detail about all of the exact events that took place in Purgatory and the Garimel System.

It took half an hour to review all of the points. Although Ves found all of this bureaucratic nonsense to be boring, he was not careless enough to skip over these proceedings.

"There is an important reason why we must go over each and every point in detail." Master Dervidian explained to Ves. "Aside from making certain that the written contract conforms to what we have agreed, we must also ensure that it does not leave open any vulnerabilities that others may exploit."

Ves frowned. "What do you mean by that, Master?"

"Do you believe that everyone from our Association will agree to treat you leniently? While it is officially within my discretion to decide how to handle this incident, there are... other institutions that may wish to interfere and overrule my decisions. For example, they can make use of the fact that your actions inadvertently led to the release of Moby Dick as a reason to levy punishment on you. They can rightfully confiscate the phasewater that you have obtained in the phase whale enclave without giving you a single MTA merit in return."

What?! Would the mechers truly be willing to taint their credibility and override Master Dervidian's will on this matter?!

"This will not happen on a normal occurrence, but this incident is too great." The older man continued. "The amount of phasewater is too great and there are many groups within the Association that have an enormous need for it. Do not think that issuing hundreds of millions of MTA merits for your harvest is easy to arrange either. Every major transfer of MTA merits must personally be approved by high-ranking officials within our Association. If those officials see fit to question our arrangement..."

"Then the deal won't go through?" Ves gulped.

"Let us make certain that the contract is both proper and acceptable to the parties involved."

Ves became more diligent after that and made sure to question each and every clause that he didn't fully understand or agree with. Once he became certain that he was covered in a legal sense, he finally relaxed when they neared the end of the contract.

This was where the good part started!

"Let us define the quantity of phasewater that your pioneering alliance has obtained in total. According to your records as well as other sources, your Golden Skull Alliance



have managed to harvest 2346 kilograms of pure phasewater from the phase whale enclave known as Purgatory, is that correct?"

Ves nodded. "That is correct. They're all stored in different containers."

In truth, 2346 kilograms was a rounded tally of the total harvest. There should have been a few decimal numbers behind the comma, but the records conveniently left them aside.

Aside from that, there were also more quantities of phasewater locked inside many of the Phaser fish-whale organs salvaged from the previous battle.

The only problem was that extracting these extra kilograms of phasewater would lead to the loss of those organs, and Ves wasn't willing to do that unless there was no better use for these exotic alien bioproducts.

Ves briefly smirked. As long as this was the case, there was no reason to add this extra amount of phasewater to the sum of pure and freely accessible phasewater in the records!

Though Master Dervidian must have certainly figured out that the Golden Skull Alliance must have certainly fudged the numbers, the older man clearly didn't mind.

With over 2 metric tons of phasewater at stake, what was the deal with keeping a few hundred extra grams of phasewater off the books?

"You agreed to submit 90 percent of this harvest to our Association, which amounts to 2111.4 kilograms of pure phasewater. This means that your Golden Skull Alliance retains 234.6 kg of pure phasewater. Do you object to these figures, Mr. Larkinson?"

"The numbers are correct."

"The current going rate for phasewater in our Association is 200 MTA merits for 1 gram of phasewater. This means that we will award your pioneering alliance a total of 422,280,000 MTA merits for the phasewater that you agree to submit. Are these figures correct?"

Ves quickly recalled the exchange rate of phasewater. According to his memories, a pioneer who submitted 5 grams of phasewater was entitled to receive 1000 MTA merits.

This meant that 5 kilograms was worth 1,000,000 MTA merits, a sum of which most people would never be able to earn in their entire lives!

"They're... correct."

422,280,000 MTA merits!

Ves was practically salivating at this point! He did not bother to maintain his composure because anyone in his position would become ecstatic at hearing they could get their hands on so many precious MTA merits!

He still remembered the times where he had to dive into the Nyxian Gap and take insane risks just to earn tens of millions of MTA merits!

A lot of other people had to work for centuries or become a highly capable Master Mech Designer in order to earn a comparable amount of MTA merits!

This stupendous exchange highlighted the promise of the Red Ocean. Sure enough, pioneers could grow insanely wealthy in a single leap as long as they succeeded in an exploratory venture.

Of course, Ves was well aware that the dangers were much greater as well. The fish-whales or the super whale could have easily annihilated everyone under different circumstances!

He sighed as he became overcome by emotions. This single adventure had already exhausted his risk tolerance for the time being. He just wanted to return to Davute and spend the next few years in peace and quiet.

With so much MTA merits in his hands, it would take a long time for him to digest all of his recent gains!

Ves soon remembered that he wouldn't be able to claim all of the awarded MTA merits for himself.

"Ah, can you split the MTA merit award in three?" Ves asked. "The phasewater harvested from Purgatory doesn't belong to the Larkinson Clan alone. The Cross Clan and the Glory Seekers should also receive their own share of MTA merits."

Task Force Fisherman did not entirely consist of Larkinson mechs, after all. The Cross Clan and the Glory Seekers both contributed several hundred mechs to this risky venture. It was only right that they should be compensated for their respective contributions.

"That should not be a problem." Master Dervidian replied. "How should we partition the merits?"

"We already agreed to the proportion before we started this campaign based on how many troops and assets we have invested in Task Force Fisherman. If I recall correctly, the Larkinson Clan should receive 50 percent while the Cross Clan is entitled to 30 percent. The Glory Seekers should get the remaining 20 percent."

"Very well. I will add that to the contract." Master Dervidian said as the clause was already being updated.

Ves inwardly winced as he saw that he would only get half of the original sum of MTA merits, but he did not feel too sorry about it. The Larkinsons couldn't have done this alone. Their allies truly helped them out, not just this time but also many times in the past.

Giving them their rightful shares was not only fair, but also a form of compensation for all of the losses they suffered for supporting Ves and the Larkinson Clan for so long!

### Chapter 3923 Huge Windfall

There was no way to stop the Golden Skull Alliance's rise after receiving enough MTA merits to exchange four separate second-class fleet beyonder tickets!

MTA merits might not be as versatile as MTA credits, but they could be spent to obtain many more exclusive, high-quality goods and services from one of the Big Two!

Even if the Larkinson Clan only obtained half of the total award, this was still enough for Ves to comprehensively empower his entire power base!

If Ves wanted to, he could bring his Larkinson fleet back to the Milky Way Galaxy and still have enough MTA merits left to buy passage to the Red Ocean!

Of course, only a fool would squander so much MTA merits on a useless vacation back to his home galaxy.

Calabast herself would probably whack Ves over the head with a stick and put him in a torture chamber deep inside the Blinding Banshee until he finally came to his senses!

There were smart ways and stupid ways to spend a windfall of MTA merits.

Ves greatly preferred to spend the MTA merits on benefits that strengthened him and his clan in the long-term.

These included highly-prized catalog items such as access to restricted knowledge, permission to utilize alien technology, obtaining teleportation devices and replacing existing cranial implants for superior models!

He was already satisfied with how much goodies he could obtain with the Larkinson Clan's share of MTA merits. There was no need for him to get greedy for more and ruin his relationships with those he considered friends.

His credibility was extremely important and was potentially worth a lot more than a few million MTA merits.

The windfall from the Purgatory Campaign had inflated his ambitions. With so much additional wealth, Ves could forge a lot more relationships with powerful people and organizations.

He intended to take advantage of this condition to expand the Golden Skull Alliance and build a more formidable power bloc around the Larkinson Clan!

Of course, Ves also planned to expand his clan as well. This was his foundation and it needed to become at least five times greater in order to keep up with his growing ambitions!

"Please inspect the amended contract. It should accurately reflect the share of MTA merits awarded to each alliance partner." Master Dervidian said, causing Ves to turn his attention back to the present.

Ves carefully reviewed the numbers. He references his own internal calculations to make certain that they were in order.

[Ves Larkinson: 211,140,000 MTA merits.]

[Reginald Cross: 126,684,000 MTA merits.]

[Galina Rovon-Hartul: 84,456,000 MTA merits.]

"The numbers all look fine to me." Ves said. "Can you transmit this contract to the Cross Clan and the Glory Seekers so that their leaders can review it as well? While I can speak for the Golden Skull Alliance, my alliance partners should also have an opportunity to provide their input. That said, I don't think they will object to any of the terms of this agreement."

The terms were way too generous, after all. The Crossers and the Glory Seekers weren't stupid enough to reject such a favorable deal.

Master Dervidian nodded. "Very well. We have already teleported over our personnel to their respective flagships so that they can thoroughly go over the full contract. We will probably hear back from them fairly soon. If there are no further issues, we can proceed to sign it so that we can officially put this matter behind us. Congratulations, Mr. Larkinson. Many mech designers would kill to be in your place."

"Many mech designers are lab geeks who can't hurt a fly. They can dream all they want, but if they want to obtain a similar windfall, then they should first step out of their high-security design facilities and venture into the deep frontier."

The MTA Master held no interest in this topic and directly addressed another matter.

"We are not done with settling matters, Mr. Larkinson. We have only gone over the most direct issues that needed to be resolved in a formal manner. There are also other incidents that we would like to discuss with you. The difference is that I will be speaking on behalf of the Transhumanist Faction as opposed to the Mech Trade Association as a whole. Do you understand this distinction?"

Ves already expected this to happen. Previously, Master Dervidian only brought up the most necessary points in order to satisfy the MTA's obligations and responsibilities.

Now, the MTA Master wanted to negotiate with Ves on a more personal and less official basis.

In short, Dervidian wanted to engage in private business!

Ves had no objection to this. He knew quite well that the Association as a whole was too big and too impersonal for him to befriend at this stage.

It was much better to collude with a handful of factions or individuals who clearly knew Ves better and had a vested interest in his success.

"Let us start with the most important and also the most interesting subject." Master Dervidian said as he summoned another projection. "The means to which you have induced a large amount of breakthroughs in a short amount of time."

The projected feed showed a sped-up clip of the most crucial moment of the Battle of Purgatory.

It displayed the Everchanger changing its design spirit to Lufa before radiating its transcendence glow.

Shortly after that, breakthroughs happened left and right. Mech after mech exploded with forced resonance as if they could easily be bought on the market like nutrient packs!

The most drastic display of extraordinary power was the instance when Vincent Ricklin not only broke through with his B-Man, but also achieved the legendary Unity of Man and Machine.

The sight of the giant energy projection of Bravo charging over to land a powerful punch of the Phase King was already seen as Vincent's crowning achievement!

"Impressive." Master Dervidian spoke as the sped-up footage reached its end and started to replay from the beginning. "Rarely have battles of this scale produced so many breakthroughs. It is extremely unlikely for so many expert candidates and expert pilots to emerge at once. What exactly have you done to defy the odds?"

Ves noted that the footage of the battle was from a perspective that provided a good overview of the battlefield.

If he recalled the previous circumstances correctly, there shouldn't have been any friendly units at this angle. The quality and resolution of the footage was also way too high considering all of the heat, energy, spatial warping and other interference flooding the battlefield.

Only an invisible device dispatched by the MTA should have been able to make this recording.

"The key is the glow." He answered. "It takes a bit of time for me to explain the theory and mechanics behind it, and I am not completely certain whether all of it is true."

Dervidian made an encouraging gesture towards Ves. "Go ahead and explain your theories to me. I have immersed myself in more theories than you can count. You do not need to be apprehensive about sharing your personal understanding of what has happened. The outcome of this action is the strongest proof that your work is not a fantasy."

"Very well. Let me start by summarizing glows and how they affect people in general before I get more specific."

A top mech designer such as Master Dervidian probably did his homework, but it didn't hurt for Ves to go over his work according to his own understanding.

Although he made sure not to bring in more trade secrets than necessary, he spoke rather plainly and without too much obfuscation this time.

Master Dervidian had shown a lot of goodwill and favoritism so far. The man's sincerity prompted Ves to be sincere in return as well.

Besides, Ves was no longer afraid of revealing key details about the mechanics behind glows and even design spirits. The mechers had spied on him and his mechs for so long that they must have figured much of this out by themselves.

Since the MTA never stepped in and restricted Ves from relying on glows or design spirits, he figured that Master Dervidian probably wouldn't say anything either.

The older man's reaction towards glows and design spirits was actually more positive than Ves anticipated!

"Fascinating. We are already aware of the existence of these so-called design spirits. Internally, we refer to them as psionic life forms. They are a rare case of sentient life that are almost completely detached from the material dimensions. That is also what

makes them so elusive. They come in many different varieties, but they rarely intersect with humanity, though there are exceptions."

Ves only reacted with mild surprise towards this response. There was no way the MTA was ignorant about the existence of spiritual entities.

In fact, he even guessed that Master Dervidian was heavily downplaying the MTA's encounters with them! Ves did not believe that a splinter organization of the Five Scrolls Compact only bumped into spiritual entities on a sporadic basis!

"My design philosophy and expertise allows me to... talk to them, pretty much." Ves modestly said. "By communicating with the nicer ones, I have been able to gain their cooperation. By allowing them to inhabit the mech designs that I have completed, they can grant a portion of their presence and power to every copy of those designs. Don't ask me how this even works. I can't even explain it myself."

It didn't stop him from taking advantage of this phenomenon, though!

Master Dervidian looked completely taken in by this interesting phenomenon. "That's a shame, because I am truly curious at the principles behind these metaphysical interactions. Perhaps I should wait until you have advanced to Master before I come back to you to obtain a proper explanation. I expect you to fully comprehend this abstruse method at that time."

"I would be willing to oblige you, though I fear you must wait quite a number of years." Ves modestly replied.

"Let us get back to the subject. Please tell me how these design spirits and glows are able to induce mech pilots into breaking through."

"Ah, that's fairly simple."

Ves quickly explained about Lufa, the organic statues he had made that presented variations of him and the effect of the last and most remarkable Aspect he had made at the time.

In order for his explanation to make sense, Ves also divulged his personal theories on what it took for mech pilots to break through.

"From what I have learned over the course of my career, for someone to become an expert pilot, they need to possess both talent and undergo extreme mental tempering." Ves stated. "My design solutions can't do much for the first part, but the glow that I have mentioned can do a lot to facilitate the latter. I designed and made the Aspect of Lufa with the assumption that fueling and amplifying a mech pilot's greatest obsession is a viable way to induce them into evolving their willpower. The successes so far make me believe that my theory is correct."



"A breakthrough cannot solely be encouraged by manipulating a mech pilot's thoughts and emotions." Master Dervidian replied. "Many of our research groups have developed similar theories to yours, but all of the means they utilized to artificially manipulate the mental states of mech pilots have failed. From injecting them with stimulants to subjecting them through years of neural programming, none of their experiments have bore fruit. Why did you succeed? What are the variables or influences that have allowed your design application to achieve a result that is far above the norm?"

"...I can't say." Ves said. "As I have said, I only have an incomplete picture of what I do. It just works."

That was a rather frustrating answer for Master Dervidian!

"You can speculate if you wish. Why do you think our finest specialists and researchers have failed while you have succeeded? What are the differences that you believe have made a difference? Please be as forthcoming as possible no matter how uncertain you are in your answers. As the most successful authority on this subject, even your guesses are of great value to our Association."

"...Can I earn extra MTA merits if I do?" Ves tentatively asked.

#### Chapter 3924 The Secret to Affecting Hearts

"We can talk about rewards and concessions later." Master Dervidian said. "You have already earned enough MTA merits today. Do you truly need more?"

"Well... there is always a use for more MTA merits. What if I want to give a friend or relative the opportunity to undergo life-prolonging treatment? There are lots of people who are of such great value that I would like them to be of service a while longer."

Ves could think of plenty of people. His children, for example.

While he hoped that each of them would be brilliant enough to be able to earn the MTA merits required to secure their own life-prolonging treatments, he was willing to step in if any of them failed to live up to his expectations.

Venerable Joshua was also a good candidate. There were numerous ways for expert pilots to earn a lot of MTA merits or even a direct opportunity to undergo a round of life-prolonging treatment, but none of them were easy to obtain.

It was far more difficult to extend the life of a mech pilot and specifically an expert pilot due to their abnormal brains and other factors. This subsequently made it a lot more expensive for expert pilots to afford this exclusive treatment.

Unless Venerable Joshua did something that could amaze the MTA, Ves anticipated that he would likely have to make a costly investment in order to make his compatible mech pilot stuck around for a few additional centuries!

Sure, the expert pilot hadn't even reached forty years old as of yet, but it was never too early to start saving!

Aside from Joshua, there were many other people who might also need his help in order to extend their natural lifespans.

People such as Venerable Tusa and Calabast may provide a lot of benefits if Ves continued to keep them around. As long as the return on investment was great enough, he would definitely spend his MTA merits if he had any left to spare!

However, Master Dervidian did not look eager to pass on even more MTA merits.

"Please wait until I am done. You will find that what I am willing to offer to you will be more relevant and valuable than mere MTA merits."

Ves had no choice but to take Dervidian at his word.

He wasn't afraid that Dervidian would scam him at this point. The man had shown great sincerity and obviously wished to build a good relationship. It would be illogical to ask much of Ves only to give little in return.

He let out a deep breath as he leaned back on his chair. He briefly glanced around this large but spartan chamber.

The compartment looked nice enough, but it was devoid of furniture and absent of life. Ves supposed that made it easier for the mechers to sweep the place of bugs and make sure that none of the discussions leaked.

Ves decided to be more forthcoming about his own theories even though he lacked empirical backing for many of them. The Battle of Purgatory was the first truly successful use of the transcendence glow, after all. His previous lab experiments were all failures in his eyes.

"I don't know what the research groups you have talked about have done exactly. I don't have

access to their research files and research logs either. I have no clue what kind of theories that they have based their experiments upon. I can only make inferences based on what little information you have provided to me. If these elaborate and sophisticated experiments are close to what I imagine, then I think that they are all flawed in one important manner."

"In what aspect are they lacking, Mr. Larkinson?"

"Authenticity."

Dervidian raised his eyebrow. This was a short answer that nonetheless conveyed a lot of meaning. The MTA Master most certainly possessed his own understanding of this word.

What Ves had just given was a massive hint. A mech designer as intelligent as one of the key developers of minidrives must certainly be capable enough to develop his own theories after hearing this single prompt!

The gray-haired man looked incredibly thoughtful as he evaluated Ves' answer.

"Authenticity." The man said. "We know that pitting mech pilots in non-lethal combat rarely engenders breakthroughs. For whatever reason, there is a high correlation between putting them in actual battle and the occurrences of breakthrough. This is known to us. However, much of the research that I have referred to have indeed subjected the test subjects to actual combat situations, but their results are barely better than that of the control group. There are even instances where the test subjects perform worse than those that did not undergo any special treatment."

"That's because these attempts aren't authentic enough." Ves confidently stated. "All of these attempts to manipulate people's thoughts and emotions do not make much sense to me because anything the researchers program into them simply won't be authentic enough anymore. Using measures such as brainwashing or pills won't change mech pilots for the better. They simply turn the test subjects into people who aren't originally like this. This is what I mean by inauthentic."

The explanation did not make complete sense to Master Dervidian.

"Earlier, you told me that the glows of your mechs produce the same effect. They are invisible energy fields that induce specific swings in mood, emotions, thought and more. Why is your method authentic while all of the other methods devised by other researchers, many of which have accumulated much more knowledge than you and have won prestigious awards in their respective fields?"

"That's because they are targeting the wrong variables." Ves shrugged. "In my theoretical framework, what these failed experiments are doing is trying to affect the consequences rather than the root cause. The source of an expert pilot's extraordinary strength is not what is in his mind. The source is in their hearts."

"Hearts...?"

"Ah, forgive me. I often think of it in this way. It makes sense to me in my own perspective." Ves replied. "To me, a person's figurative heart is defined by their deepest

essence. It is what they are when all of the surface stuff is stripped out of the way. It is the core of their existence and it is the most accurate reflection of someone's true self. The hearts of most people are unremarkable, but those with the talent and potential to become expert pilots are considerably more substantial in my view. In order to make these promising mech pilots advance to expert candidate or expert pilot, you need to stimulate their hearts."

There was a lot of profound content in Ves' explanation. Even though he worded it in a simple manner, the theory that he explained was quite consequential if it was an accurate reflection of reality!

"I have heard similar theories in the past." Master Dervidian revealed. "Although they do not use the word 'heart'. I find it to be a fitting term, if not the most precise. I can intuitively understand what you are talking about. Every mech pilot who has successfully advanced has developed strong and straightforward personalities. You can say that they wear their hearts up their sleeves because this quality of theirs has grown much stronger."

Ves grinned. "That is what I think so as well. I think that a person's heart or 'spirituality' as I like to call them is equivalent to the main body of a 'psionic life form'. It is the purest concentration of a life form that is not separated by any barriers or filters. It is the source of someone's personality and behavior. While I cannot show you pages and pages of empirical research results that back up my words, I have... experimented enough times to possess great confidence in my theories. My threshold for proof is much lower than that of other researchers. As long as it works, I'm fine with assuming that all of it is true."

For his part, the renowned MTA Master and veteran researcher did not mind this attitude.

"You are not the only mech designer who thinks this way." Dervidian smiled. "The mech industry moves quickly and competition constantly spurs on innovation. It takes too long to do each and every invention. Although I find this approach to be flawed, our mechs would be a lot less varied today if everyone displays much more caution. I only fear that our industry may be following in the footsteps of the biotech industry during the Age of Conquest."

Despite saying that, Master Dervidian did not sound eager to halt the breaks on innovation. He still showed a lot of excitement for Ves' dubious and unverified theories and assumptions!

Of course, Ves knew that most of Dervidian's confidence had to do with the concrete results that he achieved in the last battle. Solid proof was the best backing for any theory!

"To get back on the original topic, it is much easier for researchers to affect a mech pilot's surface thoughts and mood. However, a person's heart is much harder to

manipulate since it is buried a lot deeper. In my view, it is not a tangible or material object. Only very few phenomena are able to affect a person's heart."

"And you just happened to master a number of these rare phenomena?" The MTA Master guessed.

"Yes. It might sound arrogant, but I have at least two strong design solutions that can affect people's hearts. First, I can design a living mech that directly interacts with mech pilots on a deep level. The man-machine connection greatly facilitates this interaction, although how exactly all of this works is still unclear to me. I do not possess a lot of depth in neural interface technology."

"Understandable. Do you know that you can exchange MTA merits to gain our permission to study this field and design your own neural interfaces? Given your specialty and your design focus, I highly recommend you to consider this option."

Ves briefly frowned. Neural interfaces were fiendishly complex and highly controversial to say the least. The stigma surrounding them was great, so much so that he feared attracting a lot of criticism and accusations if he happened to make a serious mistake.

What Ves was especially concerned about was getting accused of committing the same crimes that culminated in the Farund Affair!

Glows could easily be mistaken for brainwashing tools, but as long as Ves did not mess with neural interfaces, it became a lot harder for critics to tie him to the infamous case in the past.

"I will consider it." Ves cautiously replied. "I have many other plans and my advisors will certainly make their own suggestions on how we should spend our windfall of MTA merits. Spending any of it on gaining access to neural interface technology is not our highest priority."

"You will need it if you want to get more serious about designing your own expert mechs. Each of them must contain customized neural interfaces that are uniquely configured for individual expert pilots."

"I am aware of that detail."

If it came down to it, Ves was more than willing to pick up a neural interface specialist from the job market.

As long as the Larkinson Clan grew large and prominent enough, it shouldn't be too difficult to hire excellent talents in many rare fields.

Ves continued with his original explanation.

"Anyway, the second method that I can use to affect people's hearts is through glows. The theory why they can do this is rather complicated and a lot more speculative. Suffice to say, glows can affect mech pilots on a deeper level than all of those other surface methods. By stimulating their hearts in the right way during an intensive battle where they are already agitated, I can essentially tip them over an invisible threshold that enables them to reach a critical state."

"And this critical state is apotheosis?"

"Correct." Ves nodded and grinned. "This is how my transcendence glow works in a nutshell. Please take into account that it only produced a successful result once. I still need to perform a lot more 'tests' before I can be sure my theories are correct."

"What are we waiting for, then? Let us test your design solution and form a solid conclusion."

"Wait, now?!"

Chapter 3925 Fatal Invention

"Uhm, pardon me for saying this, but testing the transcendence glow is not a simple matter." Ves tentatively said.

"Oh? What appears to be the problem?"

"It has... risks. Fatal risks. I mentioned it before, but I think I should emphasize it once again. People's hearts are the most core part of their existence. It is fine to affect them in a faint and shallow manner, but the transcendence glow goes beyond that. If it keeps affecting someone for an extended period of time, then that person would be subjected to so much excessive stimulation that... the mismatch between body and spirit will grow too much."

Master Dervidian became interested by this warning. "What result does this mismatch produce?"

"If people cannot break through their current limitations and reach a stronger phase of existence, then... something has to give. In every case that I know, that means that the body will fail first. The person affected by the transcendence glow will die because their bodies cannot handle the pressure building up inside their cores."

"That... does not sound logical." Dervidian frowned. "The two elements may be related to each other, but according to you they do not directly interact with each other. If this supposed psionic essence is being stimulated beyond its normal capacity, then it should be the first to fail. How can a person's corporeal body fail first? Is there a process where the build-up of psionic power produces a real and tangible force in someone's body?"

Ves looked shocked! Sure enough, a Master Mech Designer was extremely sharp and clever. Dervidian instantly picked out the logical fallacies and holes in the explanation.

These questions did not sound unfamiliar to Ves. He once asked many of the same questions himself after conducting his streaks of fatal experiments. What happened didn't entirely make sense to him either, and after exploding the heads of hundreds of test subjects, he came no closer to a logical explanation than before.

"I... cannot really say how and why this happens. As I have prefaced before, my theoretical framework is spotty, incomplete, flawed and most certainly distorted by my limited perspective and bias. Although it makes sense to me, I am not arrogant to assume that my theoretical models are an accurate-enough reflection to reality. All I know is that people's bodies and more specifically their heads spontaneously explode after being subjected to the full transcendence glow for an extended amount of time. The exact period varies a bit, but it usually only takes one-and-a-half minutes to create a mess."

"And how do you know that, Mr. Larkinson? Have you subjected mech pilots to this transcendence glow before? Of course you did. Who wouldn't want to trial an epoch-changing innovation that could change the lives of many mech pilots? What results have you achieved thus far in your well-constructed and clinically sound experimental studies?"

"Uhh... before the battle that took place in Purgatory, I had not subjected a lot of human mech pilots to the transcendence glow." Ves slowly answered. "I do admit that accidents occurred when I tried to help mech pilots attain their wish and advance to the next rank, but I quickly suspended my attempts after learning the fatal cost of mistakes."

Everything Ves said was true. A lot of his test subjects consisted of opportunistic captives, not all of whom were mech pilots. Naturally, he had no reason to specifically mention to Master Dervidian that he also subjected a lot of non-mech pilots to the transcendence glow just to see what would happen.

Besides, a large proportion of his test subjects happened to be dwarves rather than humans. Although heavy gravity variant humans were officially classified as humans, their abject treatment in society along with the Iron Emperor's strong beliefs that dwarves were no longer a part of humankind meant that even Ves was convinced that dwarves had effectively become an offshoot!

"Due to a severe lack of testing and trials, I don't have a lot of data to describe exactly what is going on." Ves quickly continued to shift the topic away from where those test subjects came from in the first place. "Over time, I came up with several ideas to conduct safer studies by diluting the transcendence glow or only exposing mech pilots to it for short periods of time. I don't expect these experiments to produce instant results, hence why I wish to set up the T Institute."



"Ah, yes. I have already read the proposal concerning this ambitious new institute of yours. We will discuss that later." Master Dervidian smiled. "Your alternative ideas sound interesting. Lessening the exposure of the transcendence glow in order to avoid a potential overload situation is an approach worth exploring. However, in the previous battle that you have mentioned, it does not appear that you instructed your Everchanger to hold back on projecting this glow. In fact, your expert mech even took the initiative to amplify it so that it reached further and with greater strength than normal. Why did you go to such extremes and subjected so many of your precious clansmen to a potentially fatal influence?"

Ves winced. "The situation was getting pretty dire. If you have observed the progress of the battle against the Phaser fish-whales, then you should know that our opponents were putting up a tough fight. Since our mechs kept falling over time, I became increasingly more desperate to introduce a change. I eventually came up with using the transcendence glow because I had an epiphany."

"An epiphany?"

"According to my theoretical framework, mech pilots break through when they undergo a lot of mental tempering. From my experiences, mech pilots tend to experience this most profoundly during life-threatening battles. I hadn't realized the relationships between the variables before, but when I was experiencing a battle much closer than before due to my decision to lead my task force from the cockpit of an expert mech, I personally felt the changes and observed similar traces in other mech pilots. That was when I realized that I had been using the transcendence glow in the wrong way all along."

Master Dervidian looked thoughtful as he parsed these words. He did not need Ves to say anything else to figure out the crucial point.

"I understand now. There is a major difference between subjecting this transcendence glow of yours to mech pilots at rest as opposed to mech pilots in the middle of battle. Many of the research conducted by different groups within our Association also focused on manipulating mech pilots as they fought in realistic battles. They made the same assumption as you that the amount of work needed to induce a critical change will be considerably less if the circumstances are already favorable."

Ves nodded and sighed. "This theory indeed makes a lot of sense, but I never thought about it before because I was too focused on inducing breakthroughs in safe and controlled conditions. It would be best if mech pilots can turn into expert pilots by entering a lab chamber for a few minutes. In hindsight, this was an incredibly naive notion. Expert pilots are excellent warriors and soldiers who are defined by their strong willpower and conviction. Humans can't produce this kind of an extreme temperament if they are not subjected to the rigors of battle."

"And that is when you theorized that the transcendence glow will succeed at that time?"

"Correct. In fact, I was already taking failure into account at the time. I made sure to instruct Venerable Joshua to move the Everchanger across the battlefield and only expose mech pilots to its glow for a maximum of 60 seconds or so. This is well below the margin where the risk of fatalities sharply rises. It turns out that the battle has already stimulated many mech pilots to the point where they needed a single push to get over the threshold. After this event, I have made the tentative conclusion that this is the correct usage of the transcendence glow. It cannot make expert pilots out of the blue, but it can provide critical assistance to those that have already moved close to their own breakthroughs but failed to get past their bottlenecks."

Master Dervidian fell silent for a time. Ves had been honest in his words and did not hold back into providing the mecher with his own understanding of the situation.

The information content of his explanation was high and revealed a lot of interesting theories, assumptions and directions for future research.

This was an incredibly valuable revelation to people such as the Transhumanists who have a vested interest in developing methods to increase the rate of breakthroughs!

Even if Master Dervidian did absolutely nothing with the transcendence glow developed by Ves, the brilliant mech designer and researcher could take what he learned and achieve similar results through his own methods!

This was the value of Ves' information!

However, Ves was still confident the MTA needed his cooperation in the long run. There were still far too many problems with other methods because they simply could not influence a mech pilot's spirituality as well as his own design solutions!

This was the confidence borne out of his own success. While Ves tried his best not to underestimate the rich and extensive means of one of the Big Two, he figured that the MTA was not good in this aspect.

Otherwise, the Transhumanist Faction wouldn't be treating him so generously at this moment!

"I have a question for you, Mr. Larkinson." Master Dervidian suddenly said. "You have stated multiple times that the transcendence glow is a grave threat that can directly kill mech pilots and presumably other humans if they are subjected to it for roughly 90 seconds or longer if they fail to break through."

"That is what I am saying, yes."

"Is there a possibility that this glow can be weaponized? What if your Everchanger projects this glow not as a tool to facilitate the breakthroughs of friendly mech pilots, but

instead tries to eliminate enemy mech pilots directly? What is the viability of this combat method in your opinion?"

Ves froze. This was yet another possible scenario that he had yet to explore, but he realized that it was not that easy to dismiss!

He instantly recognized that this line of questioning led to dangerous territory.

How would the MTA react if Ves released a new 'weapon system' that could kill almost every normal mech pilot within 90 seconds irregardless of their mechs, their defensive systems and their own training?

The entire mech industry would get upended in an instant!

Short of destroying the vessels that project these lethal glows, there weren't many other measures to prevent them from affecting mech pilots in a highly adverse fashion!

Ves realized that if the transcendence glow could truly be utilized this way, the MTA would no longer wish to embrace it any longer.

This was because its threat to the mech community was too great!

What if the CFA got its hands on the method of reproducing and propagating this double-edged sword?

The fleeters would surely take advantage of it to restrain every mech!

In fact, if anyone unscrupulous enough wanted to take it any further, the transcendence glow could even be utilized as a weapon of mass destruction!

Entire populations of both humans and aliens could die off en masse by exposing them to the same glow for more than 90 seconds!

Aside from a few exceptions that were strong and fortuitous enough to break through under pressure, the vast majority of individuals would die off as their heads exploded by the trillions!

The atmosphere in the isolated compartment grew colder and darker after Master Dervidian raised this highly dangerous possibility.

Ves had to think carefully in order to avoid implicating himself.

If the Aspect of Transcendence was not an angel that led people into heaven but instead tossed them into hell, then its creator would definitely bear the fault of bringing such a damaging existence into life!

## Chapter 3926 Life Can Kill

After his initial panic, Ves settled down to an extent.

Accidentally inventing a brand-new weapon of mass destruction was not that big of a deal in modern society.

Any microbiologist could formulate a killer virus that could take hold in the bodies of many humans and spread death on a large scale.

A physicist with enough resources and no scruples could secretly create a homebrew anti-matter bomb and detonate it on a planet and kill off an entire population.

A captain of a capital ship could hijack total control of a kilometers-long vessel and crash it straight into a bustling metropolis, thereby inflicting untold ruination.

In short, there were so many different ways to rerun the darker days of the Age of Conquest that it was quite remarkable how many people showed restraint in modern times.

The Big Two played a major role in making sure that a lot of smart and powerful people continued to abide by the rules.

The MTA and CFA were so powerful that few if any people dared to violate their bottom lines!

If the transcendence glow indeed turned out to be an effective weapon of mass destruction as Master Dervidian speculated, then Ves as its inventor might not immediately be in trouble.

As long as its existence and usage remained restricted, the threat to human society would not be great.

Besides, a weapon that was deadly to humanity could also be deadly to many different alien species. The Survivalist Faction would probably love to obtain a trump card that it could pull out if the fate of mankind was at stake one day!

All of these reasons and more granted a bit of reassurance to Ves. At the very least, he became confident that he could still negotiate with the MTA.

Besides, despite its considerable threat, the transcendence glow could also be a great boon to the mech community.

If nothing else, its effects on mech pilots was likely very real!

Controlled use of the Aspect of Transcendence and its glow would allow any mech force to multiply its roster of expert pilots by at least ten times!

The chances of ace pilots emerging over time would also skyrocket!

Ultimately, this would also increase the amount of god pilots that were active in human space over time. This was a huge priority to the Mech Trade Association and one that was critical to the interests of the Transhumanist Faction!

As Ves studied Master Dervidian, he tried to figure out the powerful mecher's intentions.

Master Mech Designers were too powerful in a spiritual aspect for him to read. This was especially when they received training on how to hide their thoughts and intentions.

High-ranking mech designers were completely unlike high-ranking mech pilots in this regard.

The latter were honest to a fault due to their single-mindedness.

The former were much more complex due to the need for elaborate thinking.

However, all of the time he had spent in Master Dervidian's company was not in vain.

Ves gained a more thorough understanding of the prominent Transhumanist and did not believe the older man was rash enough to overreact.

Master Dervidian made his name within the Association as an innovator and a visionary.

This was a familiar mindset to Ves. The MTA Master could even be regarded as his older brother in a sense!

People who engaged in groundbreaking research tended to look down on problems that others found difficult or intractable. That was because inventor types like Ves and Dervidian never settled for the status quo and always tried to solve any issues with new solutions!

Ves relaxed when he figured out that his situation wasn't as precarious as he feared.

That said, the support of benefactors within the MTA became more important than ever!

If the Survivalists and the Transhumanists both decided that he and his inventions were more trouble than they were worth, they would probably agree to get rid of Ves in the name of safeguarding human civilization!

"It would be too exaggerated if the transcendence glow can be used to kill a lot of people." Ves stated after he quickly came up with a coping strategy. "I truly don't know

whether it can be utilized this way as I have never used it in this fashion. I think that if it can be used this way against humans, it can also be utilized against aliens."

"That does not absolve the fact that it can do much more harm to our own society before we ever begin to deploy it against alien societies." Master Dervidian retorted.

"That is because you don't know how to defend against it." Ves quickly replied. "I have already developed various means to protect my own mech pilots against any of the adverse glows that I have implemented. There are several design spirits that are particularly good at offering protection. In fact, I think that my living mechs as well as all of the other design spirits are able to shield mech pilots from the adverse or deadly effects of the transcendence glow."

"Do you have any proof to back your assertions?"

"No, but it makes sense according to my theories."

Master Dervidian looked pleased that Ves already had a way to protect people from dangerous glows. At the very least, the existence of a counter meant that a potential threat wasn't as difficult to resolve.

Nonetheless, if the only counter to the transcendence glow was another glow, then that turned Ves into an even more important individual than before!

"Aside from this transcendence glow, how easy is it for you to harness another glow that can also damage or kill other humans?"

Ves thought about it for a moment. "An effect that can outright kill people is rare and difficult to obtain. The transcendence glow only kills individuals by accident because it produces a runaway effect. There are other glows that can inflict serious debilitation and trauma to people if they are exposed to it, but they are much easier to guard against. Well-trained and strong-willed mech pilots are able to resist them easily enough. I think that people can also be taught how to resist the deadly effects of the transcendence glow if they know what it does and how to best prevent themselves from going too far. There should also be other ways to defend against adverse glows."

Glows were still too new. Aside from the Yeina Star Cluster, his work had yet to penetrate other parts of human space on a wider scale. This meant that there weren't a lot of people developing counters to his glows and living mechs.

This would undoubtedly change as his products continued to proliferate. Ves had no doubt that even Star Designers would allocate their time to develop their own clever solutions against glows if the need was great enough!

Master Dervidian was probably thinking in this direction as well. The MTA's research prowess was too great and hardly any threat stumped its many top researchers and mech designers for long!

"Thank you for being forthcoming about the danger posed by your glows." Master Dervidian said. "This unwelcome but necessary revelation forces us to alter our plans. It is good that you have related this critical piece of information to you in this secure chamber. As of now, I do not want this information to spread any further. While I am obliged to pass what I learned to my superior, I can promise you that it will spread no further for the time being. The rest of the Mech Trade Association simply is not ready to learn about benefits and risks of your transcendence glow. How many people are currently aware of its effects?"

Was the MTA Master asking this in order to determine how many people needed to be silenced on a permanent basis?

This was a terrifying possibility!

Ves could not keep his mouth shut, though. At this point, the only way for him to get out of this serious predicament was to cooperate with his backers within the MTA.

"I am sure that the mech pilots that participated in the battle suspect what is going on, but they shouldn't know any details. Even if they do, they will not spread our secrets around. Aside from that, Venerable Joshua Larkinson and Madame Ketis Larkinson probably understand the Aspect of Transcendence's glow on a deeper level."

In fact, there were more that were aware of the truth as well. Many of his design spirits such as the Golden Cat and the Superior Mother probably knew about this aspect of Lufa.

Then there were all of the living mechs that participated in the previous battle. The nature of their existence meant that they shouldn't have been blind to what the Everchanger had done.

Ves even speculated that the transcendence glow had also affected his living mechs!

Anyway, there was no need for Ves to mention these extra entities. Master Dervidian specifically asked how many 'people' knew about the transcendence glow.

"I see. The spread of any news can be contained if this is the case." The older man looked a bit more relieved. "No secret can remain hidden forever, but we can buy as much time as we can to lay the groundwork and prepare sufficient protection against these possible threats. As long as you cooperate with us and advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer as soon as possible, I expect that we can harness this great invention of yours as a gift to mankind as opposed to a scourge to our civilization."



Ves smiled. He was right! Master Dervidian and his group wanted to deal proactively on this issue. This was the kind of far-sighted approach that the MTA had often exhibited in order to advance its long-term interests.

"I will try my best to increase my understanding of this phenomenon and develop better and more convenient methods to guard against its potential dangers. I can already supply you with a range of solutions, though they are all derived from my own work. Better yet, I can tweak and alter the transcendence glow so that any manifestation of it will be subject to numerous restrictions."

"That is good to hear, Mr. Larkinson. We can explore all of these potential measures at a later date. For now, we need to formulate a new action plan to prepare for the time when we are finally ready to make widespread use of your transcendence glow. Absent any alternatives that are either safer or more effective, the benefit your invention provides to the mech community is too great for us to ignore. If the risks are still considerable, then we will confine its usage to our Association and no further."

"I can make it so that only authorized people can activate this glow."

This was a relatively good way to handle the risks, although a lot of mech pilots in human space would feel left out. This would generate its own fair share of problems.

"One more question. Can other humans or aliens reproduce the transcendence glow or develop similar versions of it to use as a weapon?"

This was an important but difficult question. Ves slowly shrugged.

"I truly cannot say as I do not know what others are capable of. In my opinion, the source of this glow is a rare and unique existence and it is extremely unlikely for a similar entity to arise. However, I believe it is possible for entities or purpose-built weapons to arise that can harm or kill humans through similar means. Those who wish to create them just need to possess the right knowledge and expertise."

"So the rise of these threats cannot be stopped, is that what you think?" Master Dervidian asked.

Ves had every incentive to say yes! If there were more people and aliens that could kill people through similar means, then his cooperation became all the more essential to the MTA!

Perhaps this was the Transhumanist's deliberate attempt to give Ves an extra lifeline.

Ves responded with a grin. "In my opinion, the threat has already arisen. Those who are versed in the same fields as myself may have already built up an arsenal of killer weapons that are difficult to defend against. If my guess happens to be true, then it is imperative that we develop and propagate solutions that can protect humanity."

"And you just happen to have a solution at hand?"

"As I have already stated earlier, I recognized the need to defend against my glows a long time ago. Have you ever heard of my Sanctuary models?"

Chapter 3927 MTA Habit

After a lengthy talk, Master Dervidian finally stood up and floated above the deck.

"We have spent enough time talking and speculating about your transcendence glow. Before we go into detail about our action plan, I must insist you demonstrate your invention to us first. We would have a much better understanding of what we are dealing with if we can see how the topic of our discussion works in a controlled environment."

Ves frowned. "The thing about the transcendence glow is that it works best in less-controlled environments. I doubt that it can succeed at inducing breakthroughs on mech pilots that are just sparring against each other."

"That should not be a concern. We have already made the right preparations to conduct a number of illuminating experiments. Even failed attempts to induce breakthroughs can provide us with useful information. Let us proceed to the first testing area."

Ves stood up and followed the floating MTA Master to the exit.

They instantly entered a lab compartment after passing through a secure hatch. Ves was befuddled for a moment because he was pretty certain that they should have entered a corridor instead.

It was that dratted seamless teleportation tech at work again!

The lab was already prepped to conduct a small-scale experiment under the highest security protocols. The place was already secure by default, but the people in charge had dismissed most personnel and implemented additional guarantees to minimize the risks of leaks.

Only a handful of lab personnel were still present to assist with the tests. Ves cast a questioning look at the MTA Master.

"They can be trusted, Mr. Larkinson. They have worked for me for decades without issue. The reason why I am willing to confide in them is because I have taken special measures to ensure that they cannot divulge sensitive secrets."

Ah. Ves almost forgot that Dervidian was a Transhumanist. That meant he should be extremely good at modifying people. If not, then he could surely hire the right specialists that could perform this job.

There was no need to question the word of a Master further. Ves instead directed his attention back to the hypermodern lab facilities. Although much of the equipment and machines were hidden, he was sure that this was a great place to conduct all kinds of scientific trials!

Right now, the set up of the laboratory was roughly similar to his own. There was a large control chamber that provided a good overview of the main testing chamber.

As Ves and Master Dervidian approached the transparent windows, they both spotted a prominent organic statue in the far side of the main chamber!

"I see that you have already taken the initiative to bring over my Aspect of Transcendence." Ves said with an annoyed twitch.

The MTA's mastery of teleportation technology was so great that it could take away any material possession at any time without asking first!

"We have taken the initiative to transfer this crucial object to our ship so that we can conduct extensive studies on its properties and its glow." Master Dervidian stated. "Do you mind if we retain possession of it? We need a direct carrier of this glow and I do not believe you wish to surrender the Everchanger and its expert pilot to our care."

"It's... fine." Ves answered while trying to maintain his cool as much as possible. "Feel free to borrow my Aspect of Transcendence as much as you like. I can make similar copies of it in organic and inorganic forms if you would like."

While that might be true, the significance of the Aspect of Transcendence was still great!

It was the original source of this particular glow. Not only that, the organic statue and its three 'brothers' were all special and remarkable because they hadn't rotted away despite the biotechs claiming that they should have decayed shortly after he departed the Life Research Association.

Ves had a strong hunch that any subsequent totems he made would never possess the special qualities of the original four Aspects of Lufa! Each of them were relics in his eyes that had only accumulated more properties as their glows continually affected their half-organic forms.

Still, it was not necessary for him to retain possession of this organic statue. He could reproduce this glow through multiple means, including channeling it directly by asking Lufa to temporarily descend upon himself.

"One is enough." Master Dervidian replied. "More is helpful, but it becomes exponentially harder to preserve their secrecy. In the interest of discretion, both of us should limit the amount of carriers that carry this specific glow at any time."

"I will keep that in mind. I will make sure not to create any additional carriers of this glow unless our studies truly require them." Ves promised.

It was in his best interest not to spread them around too much. The threat they pose to people and by extension the powers that be were too great. Ves would probably be in deep trouble if all of it came out one day!

After a short wait, the mechers conducted the first experiment.

A dozen lab animals ranging from ordinary mice to goats entered the testing chamber. Invisible force fields pushed them closer until they were well within the range of the Aspect of Transcendence.

Nothing happened to them despite exposing them to this dangerous glow for many minutes. Ves knew that there were many glows that were much more harmless that had a more obvious effect on animals!

"The transcendence glow has no effect on ordinary animals." Ves explained. "Non-sentient life and extremely simple life forms do not have the complexity of thought and awareness that can lead them to developing greater ambitions. They might not even have spiritualities that are sensitive towards this glow."

Dervidian nodded in understanding. "We have no reason to doubt you, but we wish to verify this result in person. It appears that you are correct thus far. None of the animals exhibit any unusual reactions."

A force field quickly pushed the animals out of the testing chamber.

Moments later, the next test subjects arrived.

Ves was surprised to see twenty different humans teleporting into the chamber at the same time!

Each of them wore simple, plain pale blue vacsuits that were stamped with serial numbers.

None of them looked too disturbed at being teleported to a different place all of a sudden. Ves believed that this was a regular phenomenon aboard the Paracelsus Optimus.

Although it was logical to move on with human trials, this setup was way too reckless!

"Uh, sir?"

"What is the matter, young man?"

"I think you are moving too quickly by exposing these people to the Aspect of Tranquility without any protection or preparation. Those people are at grave risk!"

"We know."

"You... know?"

"Did you not claim that extended exposure to this Aspect of Tranquility will cause a serious mismatch between different properties that eventually leads to a violent and fatal body reaction?"

"I did..."

"We need to reproduce this reaction and gather as much data as possible to research how and why it happens. We cannot conduct a proper study based on hearsay and thought experiments alone."

A lot of powerful sensor and scanning systems trained their arrays on the twenty hapless people that the battlecarrier had teleported into the testing chamber all of a sudden!

The chosen individuals all looked like a random mix of people with military training. They didn't look like mechers, but they didn't carry themselves like the people that Ves had met ever since he entered the new frontier. He vaguely guessed that half of them were mech pilots.

They didn't look like they had volunteered to take part in this experiment.

In fact, they didn't look like they were aware of what was going on at all! They just looked at each other before staring up at the mysterious life-like angel statue that adopted a hopeful expression while spreading its arms upwards!

Ves' mood grew turbulent as the seconds ticked by. The unwitting test subjects might not know what was going on, but as they became more and more exposed to the Aspect of Transcendence, they began to feel hotter and more excited.

They no longer thought about various matters but instead became lost in their own thoughts as the glow steadily aroused their strongest desires and obsessions!

Ves glanced at the timer. More than 60 seconds had gone by without an incident. The mechers should have teleported the test subjects away if they did not want to make a mess.

Master Dervidian did not issue any instructions. Instead, he kept studying the projected data panels that each displayed the detailed life signs of all twenty individuals that continued to be bathed in Lufa's glory!

"The timer is nearing eighty seconds." Ves couldn't help but say as his throat grew drier. "I truly advise you not to expose these people to the Aspect of Transcendence any longer. Their lives are at stake!"

None of the mechers reacted to his words. They carried on with what they were doing even as the timer reached 85 seconds!

Ves grew tense as he expected a bunch of red explosions to take place at any time!

Surprisingly enough, nothing happened after the timer reached 90 seconds!

Even though the sensor readings showed that all of the test subjects were exhibiting increasingly stronger reactions, they remarkably held out where many other people would have succumbed at this time.

The quality of the MTA's test subjects is significantly higher than his own!

However, no matter how superior they were, they could not hold out their own demise for too long!

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

Dull explosions happened down below on a rapid and continuous basis. Ves closed his eyes and turned away as he lamented the senseless deaths of so many high-quality test subjects.

As soon as the series of explosions ended, Ves opened his eyes again and carefully gazed at the place where the exposed individuals once stood.

It did not surprise him that there weren't any messes at all. The MTA possessed much more sophisticated methods to clean up the bloody bits of exploded flesh and bone.

What surprised him was that one of the mech pilots actually survived the experience!

Even without piloting a mech, the surviving man exploded in power as his willpower became condensed!

"Interesting." Master Dervidian looked intrigued as he called up a few additional data panels to study the sole survivor's condition. "One of our participants actually broke through under these unfavorable circumstances. Mr. Jacques, please transfer him back to a secure containment cell so that he can undergo a medical examination."

"On it, sir."

Ves was speechless.

How could the MTA be so cruel and callous to violate medical ethics and use humans as disposable guinea pigs?

Master Dervidian seemed to pick up on Ves' discomfort. The older man turned around and gave a reassuring smile.

"Are you concerned about the individuals we have selected for this trial? Fear not. They are not worthy to stay alive. They are all first-raters that have entered the Red Ocean only to abuse their power against the pioneers in Krakatoa such as yourself. They are criminals that have been judged guilty and have forfeited their human rights. Their consent or wishes no longer matter. We consider it a form of waste utilization. By donating themselves to science, they can at least make up for their sins and contribute to the advancement of humankind."

"..."

"Many of our research vessels tend to hold a few hundred prisoners in their holding cells at all times." Master Dervidian continued without batting an eye. "Whenever we wish to conduct risky research where the participation of humans is desirable, we bring our any prisoners we have on hand. Convenient, is it not? Personally speaking, I have a habit of going through my stock far too quickly, so I must put in additional effort to acquire larger batches. Our ship currently holds 1256 more prisoners, so we can conduct many additional trials before we need to restock. That should be enough for us to gain a much more thorough understanding of your transcendence glow. Don't you agree?"

"..."

Ves finally realized why the Big Two propagated a rule that stated that pirates and violators of any taboos lost their human rights.

The main purpose of this rule turned out to be different from what he imagined.

It wasn't about deterring humans from going bad.

Instead, the mechers wanted to create a justifiable excuse to subject human criminals to wildly immoral and unethical experiments!

Chapter 3928 Major Davies Reidhorn

Ves never stopped twitching since the researchers initiated a whole regiment of testing.



There was nothing wrong with the testing per se. The Mech Trade Association was known for its stellar research and development capabilities.

According to the rumors, not even the Common Fleet Alliance could catch up to its archrival with regards to innovation!

The CFA was a more traditional and conservative institution. Although its members did not deny the importance of advancing technology, its leaders and important decision-makers overwhelmingly started off as line officers and sometimes staff officers.

Innovation was important but stability was even more crucial. The CFA may have tried to chart a new course after many different nation-bound warfleets merged together at the end of the Age of Conquest, but it still couldn't escape the trappings of its weighty heritage.

The MTA was a much younger and newer organization. It wasn't as weighed down by tradition as its frenemy and had to rely much more on supporting cutting-edge research in order to accelerate the technological development of mechs as much as possible!

The mechers had to play catch-up ever since their Association came into existence. Their relative weakness and their overwhelming drive to make mechs as strong as warships caused their entire organization to become a lot more frenzied about research!

The pressure of all of these conditions shaped the MTA into a massive institution that universally supported research and development activities.

Mech designers as well as other researchers and developers were heavily represented at every level!

Not only that, but Star Designers were pretty much worshiped by any member of the MTA!

Given that Star Designers were known to be the most avid and prolific researchers in the entirety of human civilization, it should be no surprise that their massive influence had caused the MTA to become even more slanted towards research!

Such an intense focus on research trickled down to many different facets of the MTA.

For example, the Paracelsus Optimus dedicated a third of her entire capacity towards research and exploration!

This was a substantial commitment for any warship, particularly a capital ship of this size and scale!

Since Master Dervidian pretty much had free reign over the research operations aboard the Paracelsus Optimus, the powerful and accomplished mech designer made sure to bring them up to his exceedingly high standards.

Only Star Designers had access to better-equipped research facilities!

Of course, that was too far away for someone as Ves. He already became dazzled by the multitude of capabilities at the disposal of the scientists and engineers who had the privilege of working aboard this ultramodern ship.

Ves swiped his hand to call up a detailed information panel. He tapped it a few times to call up the full details of one of the test subjects that had just been teleported into the testing chamber.

"Damn, there's so much detail!

The MTA's sensor systems were so powerful and precise that they could track the activity of individual body cells!

As Ves tapped the projected panel and moved his hand around, he could even summon a complete cross-section of the prisoner's body. All of the person's veins, bones and disgusting body fluids were rendered in such life-like detail that he quickly grew sick.

"Damn, you can see through anyone's body with this tool."

It was a pity that he did not possess a biotech background. Much of the rich and detailed sensor readings looked like gibberish to him. It wasn't really necessary for him to know the coordinates of each and every pimple on a test subject's body.

Compared to remotely peeking inside the prisoner's fleshy form, Ves was much more interested in learning the identity and background of this particular fellow.

The red-haired gentleman stood out from the crowd ever since the latest batch of test subjects appeared in the testing chamber.

It wasn't just his firm bearing and strong demeanor that entranced Ves. It was also the way that the remaining nineteen test subjects all formed ranks and gazed at the red-haired man with a mixture of hope, respect and worship.

Despite their imprisonment and despite falling into the hands of the mechers, these soldiers and mech pilots clearly held true to their impeccable training and the pride they accrued during their upbringing and service.

When Ves finally called up the record of the prisoner, his body almost jerked!

"This is a Rubarthan officer!"

Mech Major Davies Reidhorn was a 120 year old citizen who came from a well-off family in the heart of the New Rubarth Empire!

The Reidhorn Family was not a significant power in the first-rate superstate, but it had a history of sending a portion of its progeny to one of Rubarth's many military branches.

This allowed the family to send Davies Reidhorn to an elite mech academy, where he managed to earn good grades and qualify for officer training.

Davies Reidhorn then entered into service as a second lieutenant and slowly worked his way up. It was not easy to attain promotion in Rubarth's military establishment.

If the mech pilot in question was not a scion of a major family and if he was not insanely talented or brilliant, then a lot of other people got ahead instead.

In a supremely wealthy state like the New Rubarth Empire, the amount of wealthy scions that enjoyed some of the best tutoring and augmentations was quite large!

It was not easy for Davies Reidhorn to stand out compared to his betters. This meant that he had to be patient and accumulate merits over many decades to be in consideration for promotion.

Reaching the rank of mech major after almost a century of constant service was a respectable accomplishment for someone of his background!

Although he might not be too brilliant or skilled in piloting mechs, his rich experience and incredible familiarity with handling mechs, managing people and navigating the politics of his organization meant that he was an immensely valuable human resource.

Davies Reidhorn should have become a general by now if he hailed from a lesser state and military organization!

The man accrued an extensive list of degrees, certifications, commendations, awards and honorable mentions.

If not for the mech officer's strong history and attachment to the New Rubarth Empire, Ves would have been tempted to request Major Reidhorn to be put under his custody.

The Rubarthan captive was an invaluable human resource!

Ves needed highly qualified and highly experienced senior military leaders to oversee the expansion and professionalization of the Larkinson Army.

Although General Verle had done a great job at acquiring new skills and fostering the key military institution's growth, it did not change the fact that he was originally just a third-class mech officer and intelligence operative.

Despite the differences in their rank, a first-class mech major possessed incomparably more knowledge and skills than anyone else in the Larkinson Army.

Not even Commander Casella Ingvar could match the competence and organizational capabilities of a Rubarthan of this stature!

If Ves had to put a price on the value of this human resource, then he would estimate Major Davies Reidhorn's total worth at around 100,000 MTA credits.

What did this mean?

It meant that Ves was willing to pay 100,000 MTA credits to obtain the permanent employment and loyalty of this high-value prisoner!

This was a vague approximation of the amount of money the New Rubarth Empire had invested in the man's education, training and long years of service.

The actual money spent on raising Major Reidhorn to the man he was today could actually be significantly more or less than this ballpark figure. Ves simply couldn't tell as the MTA's detailed records on the man did not go that far into detail.

Regardless, no matter what Major Reidhorn had done to land him in Master Dervidian's clutches, it was an enormous waste to treat him as a disposable test subject.

Ves could think of a hundred better uses for this high-value professional than to dump him in a testing chamber next to the Aspect of Transcendence!

He quickly glanced towards the timer and saw that it had reached 50 seconds.

A sweat broke out from his brow. Ves turned to Master Dervidian.

"Sir... are you sure you want to subject this Rubarthan mech officer to this specific experiment?"

The MTA Master remained unmoved.

"I am always certain about my experimental arrangements. We have already seen how your Aspect of Transcendence affects low-ranking personnel and mech pilots under varying circumstances. In order to gather more comprehensive research data, we must diversify the input so that we can obtain a wider range of responses."

The timer had reached 70 seconds.

"I understand that, but why would you subject someone like him to a test that has produced near-total fatalities with every batch?"

"Because we can." Dervidian replied. "Besides, I have given the Rubarthan test subjects a fighting chance this time. One of my assistants have briefed them all beforehand on what will happen and how they can best resist the effects if they want to retain their lives."

The timer had reached 90 seconds.

Master Dervidian paid more attention to the rising stress levels of every test subject. "The goal is to see whether the fine soldiers of a first-rate superstate are strong enough to resist the most serious effects of the transcendence glow. We will first see how they fare by relying on themselves. I intend for the next batch to endure the same conditions as they are interfacing with their mechs."

The timer had reached 110 seconds, but no head had yet to explode.

Ves became amazed at this result. He temporarily set his appreciation for Major Davies Reidhorn aside and paid closer attention to the physical conditions of the Rubarthan test subjects.

Each of them were still clinging on to their lives!

The transcendence glow had clearly stirred up their spiritualities to the point where storms were about to erupt, but the high-class soldiers relied on their formidable will, training and cognitive augmentations to resist the escalating pressure!

"Fascinating." Master Dervidian uttered. "Rubarthan soldiers generally possess superior grit and mental fortitude compared to their Terran counterparts. They are holding out 20 seconds longer than the preceding batch."

The timer had reached 130 seconds.

However, no matter how many advantages these well-trained Rubarthans possessed, their resistance ultimately failed to suppress the runaway reaction taking place within their vulnerable spiritualities!

**BOOM!**

The youngest and most junior soldier succumbed to the pressure first!

Amazingly enough, the first explosion did not shock the soldiers or cause any panic within their ranks.

They had endured a lot more grievous circumstances during their training and field deployments.

Combat between first-class mech forces were much more violent and destructive than combat between lesser troops.

A single first-class multipurpose mech armed with powerful weapons could easily lay waste to much of Davute's capital city if left unchecked!

The Rubarthan soldiers had therefore been extensively prepped and trained to remain unfazed even if the entire star system collapsed around them. Even now, they still stuck to their compulsion to remain cool and in control of themselves!

"Hold fast, men!" Major Reidhorn roared! "We are not animals who give in to our baser instincts! We are Rubarthans! We are the chosen people! We are the vanguard of human progress! For the Eternal Emperor!"

"For the Eternal Emperor!"

The timer had reached 160 seconds.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

As much as Ves became impressed by their attitudes in the face of certain death, their valor and their courage did not stop them from falling victim to their physical and spiritual shortcomings.

One by one, the soldiers all lost their heads and in some cases their upper bodies in the most violent ways possible.

Augmented flesh and implants that were worth as much as the Larkinson Clan's combat carriers continually burst in every direction, only to be blocked and captured by omnipresent force fields.

These protective fields spared the straight-backed soldiers from getting splattered by the remains of their comrades.

As the nineteenth test subject lost his head, only a single person remained alive.

The timer had reached 200 seconds.

Ves became more interested in the surviving test subject than ever!

He no longer considered it a waste to subject valuable manpower to this experiment.

This was an unheard of experimental result!

None of the test subjects in his own experiments ever managed to make it this far without breaking through!

"How is he still alive?!"

Though it became clear that Major Davies Reidhorn was not capable of breaking through to expert candidate, his formidable mind and will nonetheless withstood the most dangerous effect of the transcendence glow!

What a remarkable experimental result!

#### Chapter 3929 Qualities of Test Subjects

Ves developed mixed feelings towards MTA.

On one hand, he couldn't quite feel comfortable how one of the arbiters of human space engaged in such blatant human experimentation.

Not even the elite soldiers and officers of the New Rubarth Empire could escape the fate of becoming the MTA's experimental materials!

On the other hand, the highly detailed and substantially more varied research data produced by these unethical experiments exceeded his imagination!

Master Termaneo Dervidian was a much more thorough and experienced researcher than Ves. The man not only came up with much more elaborate and varied experimental designs, but also possessed the facilities and resources to enact them all without running into practical limitations.

As a result, Master Dervidian managed to collect a lot more research results in two hours than Ves had obtained in months!

Of course, much of that had to do with Ves' reluctance in engaging in human experimentation.

Over the years, he carefully controlled his impulses and tried his best to keep his research urges at bay.

He had always been taught that the Big Two were the protectors and guardians of law and order. There were countless different mentions of incidents on the galactic net where the MTA and CFA ruthlessly destroyed entire families and organizations for violating the taboos that had once led humanity to a darker path.



With the Big Two's good reputation and extensive history of enforcement, not a lot of people dared to flout the most important rules nowadays!

Every state obediently abandoned their dreams to operate warships and accepted the fact that they needed to utilize mechs and carrier vessels in order to wage war.

No military force dared to obtain any weapons of mass destruction, let alone harness them against their enemies.

Everyone assumed that one of the Big Two would quickly come and crush the violators to pieces!

Even though Ves learned that the MTA and CFA were not flawless and had slacked off in their enforcement duties, their heavy reputation still exerted a chilling effect on indigenous human populations.

Ves assumed that most mechers were honorable, well-meaning and upright for the most part.

Master Moira Willix was perhaps the most defining example of a model member of the MTA.

Though she was so proper and straitlaced that Ves felt uncomfortable around her, she was nonetheless worthy of his trust and respect.

Not every mecher was as restrained as Master Willix, though. He was aware of a portion of its darker deeds, he figured that it was the exception rather than rule.

Even if the MTA engaged in dubious actions and research initiatives, it would surely keep them in the dark or push them onto patsies like the Supreme Sage.

This way, the mechers could claim plausible deniability and avoid the stain to their valuable reputations.

Ves had clung to this assumption about the MTA for a long time that he could not quickly adjust to the reality happening before his eyes.

Nothing was sacred to the MTA!

Master Dervidian and his handpicked team of researchers went through the lives of captive humans as if they were annoying seeds that needed to be removed from fruit.

Ves had grown numb as he saw one of the most respected mech designers and researchers of the MTA condemn people who were much wealthier, stronger and much more impressive than he could imagine being driven to their deaths, all without showing any remorse or hesitation!

As 400 prisoners not-so-willingly sacrificed their lives in the name of advancing humanity's scientific progress, Master Dervidian finally halted the attempts to gather more data.

He was not being merciful towards the hundreds of imprisoned humans that were still languishing in their holding cells.

The Master simply wanted to take a breather so that he could inspect and process the data gathered so far. There were enough samples now that he could derive a lot of preliminary conclusions from analyzing the different outcomes.

"Intriguing. The lethality of the Aspect of Transcendence is truly difficult to block. Many of our conventional attempts to protect our test subjects from its lethal effects have failed. Neither energy shields nor meters of solid armor can prevent its glow from passing through and affecting the prisoners. The only solid measures that can prevent the test subjects from perishing is to maintain distance, rely on formidable tempering to resist the glow or obtain the strength or protection of a high-ranking mech pilot."

Ves already knew much of what the MTA researchers had discovered today, but the experiments also revealed nuances that he wasn't aware of before!

For example, he never verified how long it took for mech pilots to last when they were interfacing with a mech.

He already knew that mech pilots who were connected to mechs effectively became a lot harder to influence. This was because they could borrow a part of the formidable strength of their machines!

Although the experiments only involved normal mechs as opposed to his living mechs, the mech pilots interfacing with their machines lasted 20 seconds longer on average.

This was a considerable margin that provided mech pilots with much more chances to escape and survive exposure!

There were other points of data that also provided a lot of insights to Ves.

Most importantly, he gained more proof that there was a direct correlation between the quality of a person and their ability to persist against the transcendence glow.

Much to Ves' amazement, the holding cells of the Paracelsus Optimus were filled with first-class captives!

It was as if Master Dervidian disdained trashy test subjects and only wanted the best for his various experiments.

Although a dozen or so test subjects originated from weaker first-rate states, Ves found that the overwhelming majority of inmates originated from either the Greater Terran United Confederation or the New Rubarth Empire.

Seeing all of these wealthy, powerful and immensely noble figures being reduced to experimental materials was difficult for Ves to accept.

If Ves ever encountered a group of Terrans or Rubarthans, he would probably bow and scrape while looking up at them as if they were kings.

This was because they had the means and the backing to overwhelm any second-class powerful!

The Golden Skull Alliance was nothing compared to even a smaller first-class outfit.

Whereas the former was only able to perform an ambitious raid on Purgatory, a true first-class mech force would have been able to slaughter every single fish-whale and capture the phase whale enclave in its entirety!

Properly speaking, all of these Terran and Rubarthan dignitaries should have been drinking champagne aboard their first-class starships or directing their mechs to crush a well-equipped nuns' home fleet.

What were they doing here? How brazen must be the MTA to seek these powerful first-raters out and strip them of all of their rights?

Ves simply couldn't wrap his mind around this entire situation.

Though he considered adaptability to be one of his strong points, even he couldn't stomach the sight of people like Major Davies Reidhorn being subjected to torture that had killed all of his compatriots.

"Mr. Larkinson, are you having any difficulties interpreting the data?" Master Dervidian asked..

"Uh, no, sir." Ves quickly returned to the present. "While I don't understand the majority of these sensor readings, they're not as important as observing the process and outcome of the trials with my own eyes. It's just..."

"Are you disturbed by how little restraint we exhibit when we expose our fine prisoners to dangerous experimental conditions?"

Ves nodded.

Master Dervidian smiled in a patronizing manner as he turned around and distanced himself from his workstation.

The man walked up to the transparent windows and looked down on the clean and spotless white testing chamber.

Despite the large number of Terrans and Rubarthans dying in an explosive manner earlier, the place looked peaceful as the Aspect of Tranquility continued to present a false image of hope!

"Humanity as a whole has achieved a large amount of progress in the last four centuries. The Age of Mechs has given our race a necessary period of recovery and realignment. By breaking down once-great star empires and star nations into the states that you know today, we have substantially reduced the scope and scale of infighting that takes place."

"That is what I have been taught in school." Ves slowly nodded. "Not even the Terran Confederation and the Rubarth Empire were able to resist this trend."

"Is that truly the case?" The older man ruefully smiled. "Not everything in the textbooks is true. The truth is much more turbid and nuanced. We may have succeeded in clipping the wings of the first-rate superstates, but they have never let go of the glories of their past. Time after time, the citizens born in those states are being fed with stories that harken to the times where they dominated human space and controlled the trajectory of our civilization. What do you think they will do when these first-raters grow up and venture out into space?"

"I guess... they will start to throw their weight around."

Master Dervidian nodded. "Human nature can be ugly, and when individuals possess a substantial power disparity over others, it is difficult for them to resist the urge to take advantage of this fact. Here in the Association, we put great effort into instilling the importance of treating our dependents with care and respect. We enforce strict rules that prohibit us from exploiting average humans like you used to be. This is an important requirement for us to maintain our support within human space."

Most of what the Master said was true, but Ves seriously questioned whether the MTA was truly as spotless as he claimed!

There were bad apples in every organization and even advanced tech could not stop individuals from misbehaving!

Besides, Ves had seen first-hand how little MTA actually cared for its flock. The mechers could have prevented the deaths of trillions of third-raters in the Komodo Star Sector if they acted sooner against the sandman race!

This discussion was not about the mechers, though.

Ves looked up. "Are you saying that there are a lot of Terrans and Rubarthans out there that are making a mockery of the rules?"

"That is exactly what I am trying to convey to you." Dervidian nodded in confirmation. "The problem is not as significant in the Milky Way. The borders of different states are well-defined and it is much easier to track the movements of first-raters. Not so in the Red Ocean. Here, few states have emerged. Developing colonies are not able to project enough power to monitor what takes place within their sphere of influence. Bored Terrans or Rubarthans sporadically stray in regions such as the Krakatoa Middle Zone for less than noble purposes."

"You mentioned something like that before. Are all of the prisoners truly guilty of the crimes you're alluding to? I don't want to question you, but a lot of the people that I've seen today do not appear to be the sort that are depraved enough to commit grave injustices."

He could still remember how much courage and valor the group around Major Davies Reidhorn displayed. Even as their heads popped one after another, they never lost their nerves. Each of them embraced their deaths while remaining true to their dedication towards the New Rubarth Empire!

"A soldier can be both honorable and guilty. The Terrans and Rubarthans may be able to convince themselves that they have retained honor and dignity, but that does not absolve them from following orders that have caused them to stain their hands with the blood of those they consider lessers. They should know better than to abide by instructions that are illegal. It is regrettable that Terran and Rubarthan soldiers respect their hierarchies too much. Their inaction towards rule-breaking behavior has condemned them to this fate."

"So ships like the Paracelsus Optimus are actually patrolling occupied territory in order to catch these first-raters in the act?" Ves carefully acted.

Master Dervidian smiled. "That is one of our many duties, yes. Many of the first-raters that we have taken captive has committed violations that have earned them the death penalty. Instead of executing them outright, we prefer to keep them in our cells. Reclassifying them as scientific materials is the best possible use of their lives. Their luxurious upbringing and impeccable training turns them into desirable test objects. Many times, we utilize them as stand-ins for our own mech pilots."

This... might be the main reason why the MTA was so eager to arrest and experiment on all of those high and mighty first-raters!

While Ves struggled to obtain low-quality test subjects such as degenerate pirates or fanatic dwarves, the MTA performed its experiments on a luxurious lineup of high-class first-raters!

## Chapter 3930 The Latent Threat of First-rate Superstates

Master Dervidian's words and tone made it clear that he bore considerable ill will towards the first-rate superstates.

Ves already knew that the Big Two were not on good terms with the first-rate superstates, but this dignified and important Master made it sound as if the former dominators of human civilizations were one step away from imposing their rule over the rest of human space!

He knew what the Terrans and Rubarthans were like, so this was not an entirely implausible fear. The first-rate superstates were never truly convinced that the Big Two deserved to take over the mantle and guide humanity to a new future.

If the first-raters had their way, the MTA and CFA would make way so that every state could regain their full autonomy and right to operate as a sovereign nation!

"You cannot imagine how much of a threat the Terrans and Rubarthans pose to a human society that we have painstakingly reformed for the better." Dervidian said as if he was under a compulsion to explain his suspicion towards the first-raters. "At the end of the Age of Conquest, we had the option to dismantle the Terran Confederation and the Rubarth Empire entirely. We... did not choose to do so due to how fragile human society had become. Too much death and destruction has pushed our race to the brink of collapse, and we could not afford to wage a ruinous war against the legacy empires that still possessed access to entire arsenals of superweapons."

"Ultimately, the Big Two chose to prioritize the preservation of humankind over the need to remove the star empires that deserve much of the blame for the madness that they unleashed." Ves observed.

In fact, he was aware that a shadow war took place at the same time. The successful rebellion of the Big Two led to the downfall of the Five Scrolls Compact that supposedly controlled humanity behind the scene.

Ves bet that this ultimate confrontation inflicted even more damage to the MTA and CFA, causing their forces to become so depleted that they no longer possessed the confidence to prolong their aggression any further.

"We took the high road while the first-rate superstates used their reprieve to lick their wounds." Master Dervidian affirmed. "We made the only decision that was right back then, but this led to an outcome where the Terrans and the Rubarthans still retained much of their existing institutions and culture. In short, they may have acquiesced to the new order on the surface, but that is as superficial as a pair of murderers exchanging their suits of combat armor for civilian-grade vacsuits. No matter what they are wearing, this does not change the fact that death and conquest are still in their veins."

It sounded as if the first-rate superstates still possessed a lot of leverage against the Big Two.

The latter most certainly held the upper hand after taking over the mandate of guiding after human civilization, but it was possible that the Terrans and Rubarthans still retained enough remnant superweapons to inflict a lot of damage if the Big Two ever came to finish the job!

Ves picked up an extremely crucial detail. Master Dervidian essentially implied that the Big Two failed to disarm the Terran Confederation and Rubarth Empire!

If the power disparity between the two sides was not that great, then it made sense that the Terrans and Rubarthans possessed the guts to retain their possession of warships and weapons of mass destruction!

There was no way the former hegemon of human civilization would surrender their only deterrent against the tyranny of the MTA and CFA.

In any case, the Big Two's retreat at the time led to an unfortunate impasse between the two power blocs. The first-rate superstates were never really convinced that they had to bow their heads against the upstarts that managed to take advantage of the chaos to get on top.

"Do the Terrans and Rubarthans still pose that much threat to the current order?" Ves curiously asked.

This was a rare opportunity to get real insider knowledge on the actual state of human space!

It was clear that much of the lessons that Ves and other people learned in school only scratched the surface of what had actually taken place.

The galactic net was filled with fringe theories and outright lies. It was a lot better if Ves was able to extract crucial information from a more knowledgeable source.

He could hardly imagine getting access to a better source than a Master who was already part of the leadership cadre of the MTA and also happened to possess a working relationship with at least several Star Designer!

The only problem was that this source also happened to be biased towards the MTA. It was extremely unlikely that Dervidian would be willing to paint his organization in a bad light.

Ves already took this into account. He just wanted to know why the Master and his fellow mechers were so eager to subject the Terrans and Rubarthans to cruel and dangerous experiments.



"The Terran Confederation and the Rubarth Empire... are most certainly stronger than you think." Master Dervidian admitted. "We have never obtained solid proof of our suspicions, but we strongly believe that the first-rate superstates were less than honest when they promised that they had deconstructed all of their warships and superweapons. They may have discarded their illegal assets that were already exposed to the public, but we believe that both of the star empires still retain secret reserves of at least thousands of warships and millions of planet-threatening superweapons!"

"That... that sounds outrageous! Shouldn't it be easy to track down all of those warships and weapons? As far as I know, the infrastructure required to research, develop and build all of those huge capital ships and powerful anti-matter bombs is immense. Entire chains of star systems are needed to support the construction of just a single battleship. How could the Terrans and Rubarthans get away with claiming that they went through with disarming their most threatening war assets?"

Master Dervidian waved his arm in a certain direction. "We believe the first-rate superstates have hidden their covert warfleets in the same manner the phase whales isolate themselves from the Red Ocean."

"Are you talking about pocket spaces?"

"That is our primary suspicion. Pocket spaces are not unheard of in the Milky Way. It takes a prohibitive amount of resources, effort and technology to create artificial pocket spaces without phasewater, but the possibility still exists. Former star empires that used to be as powerful and dominant as the first-rate superstates most certainly possessed the means to create at least a handful of isolated pocket spaces in several different secretive locations spread across their territory. These hidden forces can serve as powerful reserves against alien invaders, but they pose an immense danger to our current order."

This was a massive piece of information!

Although it sounded weird that the MTA wasn't capable enough to confirm this crucial suspicion, Ves fully believed that the former star empires were capable enough to amass and retain a formidable amount of threatening weapons and assets.

"How much effort and resources did the first-raters put into updating and expanding their secret arsenals?"

"That is difficult for us to say." Master Dervidian replied. "The first-rate superstates cannot transfer as much resources and manpower to their arsenals as before, but they are so large that it is impossible to track every single minor transfer of goods and personnel. For example, a convoy filled with high-quality construction materials might be lost to pirates on day, but actually diverted to a secret location where they transferred the items needed to retain or expand the hidden warfleets."

"Much of those warships should be aging rust buckets by now, right?"

"A warship is still a warship, Mr. Larkinson. The power of a battleship that survived the Age of Conquest is still capable of destroying entire planets if they are fully equipped. Besides, first-class technology can easily be utilized to maintain the condition of older warships or update their specifics to modern standards."

"Ah."

In short, the battleships of the first-rate superstates may not be that far behind from the battleships at the hands of the Big Two!

This was a rather honest but also depressing admission from a mecher. Dervidian clearly despised the Terrans and Rubarthans, but that did not mean he underestimated their threat!

He was a lot better than the Hexers in that regard.

Ves still remembered hearing the Hexers express their hatred against the Fridaymen, but also refused to accept the fact that their archenemies were formidable opponents!

"Does all of this have anything to do with your policy of hunting down rule-breaking first-raters in the Red Ocean and putting them to use in human experiments?"

The Master nodded. "The Terrans and Rubarthans are rebellious and dishonest by nature. They do not see others as their equals. In their perspective, every other individual is inferior to them. Our efforts are meant to remind the first-raters of who is truly in charge of humanity in the current age. By keeping them on their toes, they will show more restraint towards others and more respect towards our demands."

That might be true, but Ves figured that all of these actions only bred further hatred and resentment towards the Big Two!

There was no way the Terrans and Rubarthans would look favorably at the dehumanization of their fellow citizens!

Ves had the feeling that this was not a sustainable pattern. While he understood that it took a lot of force to keep the first-rate superstates honest, beating them over and over again would eventually invite a reprisal!

Whatever might take place in future, Ves hoped to be as far away from the flashpoint as possible!

"I don't mean to question your Association's policies, but is it truly the right choice to strip the captive first-raters of their human rights?" Ves tentatively asked. "I

acknowledge that the criminals probably deserve this treatment, but shouldn't the MTA put more effort into setting a positive example to the rest of human society?"

Dervidian shook his head. "My conscience is clean, and so are the consciences of all of our fellow researchers. Killing a fellow human is murder. Killing an inhuman individual is no worse than killing an alien being. What we are doing is fully permissible according to our rules. There is no conflict or ambiguity in our laws. We hold humans as sacred, but that does not mean that anyone who resembles us is entitled to their human rights. Those that violate our most important taboos have voluntarily waived those very same rights. After all, one of our legal principles is that any individual who shows a callous disregard for another person's rights cannot call upon them for protection anymore."

This was a simple but drastic legal principle.

What if guilt or innocence couldn't clearly be determined?

What if the MTA didn't possess the full picture?

What if the mechers harbored such a great incentive to declare a group of first-raters guilty that they never seriously sought evidence that could absolve them of guilt?

There were so many potential problems and complications from this stance that Ves found it difficult to understand why the mechers thought it was a permissible approach.

They were one of the strongest defenders of human rights ever since they came into power after the end of the Age of Conquest!

Their advocacy of protecting humans against arbitrary attacks and injustices was one of the main reasons why their approval ratings remained high!

Ultimately, it came down to treating their enemies as outsiders.

To the MTA, every human belonged to a common group that was entitled to their rights.

If the mechers wanted to go against this principle without breaking them, then they could just kick an offending human from the in-group!

From the moment the mechers labeled a Terran or Rubarthan as an outsider, they could rightfully do whatever they wanted to any supposed criminals without feeling any guilt!

It was pure self-deception at the highest order!