

Mech 3931

Chapter 3931 Terran and Rubarthan Mechs

At the end of the day, Master Dervidian collected enough data and formed enough insights to possess a greater understanding of the transcendence glow.

Aside from tossing Terrans and Rubarthans into the testing chamber and seeing whether they would perish or persist, the incredibly curious MTA Master also conducted a lot of other useful tests.

For example, commandeered the main mech sparring grounds of the Paracelsus Optimus to simulate what had happened during the Battle of Purgatory.

In order to provide the greatest stimulation to the mech pilots that were supposed to fight each other to death, Master Dervidian set up a deathmatch that pitted Terrans and Rubarthans against each other!

"We will give you back the mechs we have confiscated and give you time to refamiliarize yourselves with them as we have partially limited their power. After that, you will fight as a team against another team. This match will only end when your team has completely slain your opponents! Show no mercy and do not hold back. It is kill or be killed!"

The five Terrans and five Rubarthan mech pilots all gained a sense of crisis after this announcement. Each of them already knew that their fates were pretty much sealed after they had fallen into the hands of the MTA, but none of them were eager to throw themselves to their deaths!

Although they didn't have the power to retaliate against the mechers, they could at least bring down their rivals!

After that, Ves and the mechers witnessed a small spectacle. Powerful shields encompassed a huge hall that was solely devoted to allowing mechs to fight against each other under controlled conditions.

If Master Dervidian wanted to, he could activate special life-saving tech that shielded or teleported mech pilots when they were at risk.

He did not do so, though. In order to increase the chance of breakthroughs as much as possible, he wanted to stimulate the mech pilots by making them feel closer to death than they had in their lives!

The battle that burst out in the arena turned into a desperate fight for survival. Even though the educated mech pilots all knew they were all being puppeted by the MTA,

they simply didn't have the luxury to care about that. Compared to complaining about how they were being used, they needed to worry about surviving this day first!

"All of those mechs..." Ves sighed as he stared down as the Terran and Rubarthan mechs all collided against each other.

Due to the limited space of the arena, there wasn't much room for maneuver for the sophisticated mechs. Instead of trying to play clever maneuvering games, they just charged at each other and tried to blast their opponents with as many melee and ranged solutions as possible!

Despite the outbursts of power, none of the mechs succumbed easily. Each of them were made with alloys that were tougher and more resilient than the Unending alloy that Ves favored so much.

Although Unending alloy was hard enough to be considered a first-class alloy, in truth it was not that impressive compared to the more modern and expensive solutions the powerful Terran Confederation and the Rubarth Empire had developed over the years.

Their science and engineering prowess might not be as great as that of the Big Two, but their long history of technological development along with their formidable research infrastructure meant that they had built up a scary amount of accumulation!

Ves found it incredibly interesting to see so many different Terran and Rubarthan first-class multipurpose mechs fighting against each other up close.

Although the battle was incredibly limited in scale, Ves was able to sense the power and the fury behind each attack and move as if he was standing right next to the mechs.

He had always been a more tactile mech designer by nature. Being able to observe mechs fighting for real provided him with a lot more benefits than observing a stuffy recording.

"The Terran and Rubarthan mechs are truly different from the mechs of the MTA."

Ves gained a greater appreciation of the differences between first-class mechs. The mechs of the first-rate superstates may be inferior to the ones fielded by the MTA, but they possessed their own charms.

Although there was an incredible variety of both Terran and Rubarthan mechs in existence, the ones involved in this battle came from large standardized military units, so the models on display generally reflected the major trends of their respective states.

The Terran mechs were generally more conservative in their design approach. Their mech designers had to abide by a huge list of standards and requirements that heavily constrained their creative output.

Although this limited the diversity of Terran mechs, the advantage was that every Terran model was consistent and reliable.

The logistics of maintaining large amounts of Terran mechs also became a lot easier. Not only did the different models utilize a lot of common parts and materials, the expertise needed to handle them also remained the same.

"This is a good approach for maintaining a huge war machine that is already powerful and dominant." Ves judged.

The traits of standard Terran military mechs fully reflected the powerful state's tendencies.

The Terran Confederation always thought of itself as the center of humanity. Throughout the ages, the fortunes of the empire centered around Old Earth had risen and fallen, but it had always retained a lot of strength.

This had given the Terrans the delusion that they were the most powerful group of humans around.

Having witnessed the fall of many rival human nations and having almost suffered this fate as well, the Terrans were more concerned with avoiding mistakes than to take large risks to increase their power further.

"This is opposite to the Rubarthan approach."

The history and the heritage of the New Rubarth Empire wasn't as good as the star empire that it had rebelled against.

As a consequence, the Rubarthans were much more proactive and forward-thinking than the more risk-averse and tradition-bound Terrans.

This trait reflected on every aspect of their society, and their mechs were no different. The Rubarthan mechs not only contained a lot of new and barely-tested technology, but also featured a lot more diversity in their design elements.

Rubarthan mech designers had a lot more free reign as the laws governing their industry were much less oppressive.

Even though that regularly led to the release of radical mechs whose concepts rarely worked out in practice, the ones that hit the jackpot usually outperformed the competition by a considerable margin!

Although this sounded great, such an occurrence was extremely rare at this level of mech design. It was far too difficult to develop a winning formula that outperformed existing works that were already great.

"The Rubarthan mechs in this match are good, but not groundbreaking."

They didn't need to be. They all possessed their own quirks that granted them sufficient advantages to hold their own against the Terran machines!

As the brawl progressed, both sides chose to concentrate as many attacks as possible on the weakest and most vulnerable machine on the opposite teams.

As long as they were able to create a small numerical advantage, they could quickly grow their numerical advantage and crush their opponents utterly!

"It appears the Rubarthan team will not be able to hold too long." Master Dervidian accurately noted.

Mechs should have fallen by now if they were fighting in the confined arena in their original states. However, the MTA had performed numerous tweaks on them that deliberately lowered the attack power of their weapon systems.

This caused the mechs to inflict considerably less damage to their targets than normal, which subsequently allowed the machines in trouble to survive a lot longer under the onslaught.

Soon enough, the Rubarthan mech that possessed a lighter configuration than the other machines finally suffered a serious armor breach!

If the Terrans and Rubarthans fought against each other in space, then this swift and agile first-class mech should have been a lot harder to cripple.

It was too bad that the Paracelsus Optimus did not offer that much space for this match!

The damaged machine soon suffered a powerful hit to its exposed internals which quickly caused the machine to slow down. This spelled its doom as it was unable to evade or block the subsequent wave of attacks.

Soon, the machine exploded, causing hot and partially-burned parts to rain down on the surviving machines!

Now that the Rubarthan mech pilots lost a teammate, they began to feel a lot more desperate than before!

"Finish off the weakened Terran mech quickly! We must even out our numbers at all costs!"

As for the Terrans, their small victory gave them a lot of hope of surviving this death match! As long as they cleaned up the remaining opposition as quickly as possible, none of their own would have to die today!

"Pilot Denton, pull back your machine and focus on providing ranged support for the remainder of this match. We will buy as much time for your mech's self-repair systems as possible!"

Second-class mechs rarely came with self-repair functionality. Even if they did, it was questionable whether they could restore their damaged systems quickly enough to make a difference in battle.

In contrast, pretty much every first-class mech possessed at least a limited ability to repair or stop the deterioration of their damaged parts!

Even the worst first-class mechs were able to close up any gaps and stop any leakages by themselves.

Ves called up a projection and configured it to provide a close feed of the damaged Terran mech's internals.

He could see hundreds of tiny bots crawling through the insides. Each of them were acting in unison to remove debris and fix minor faults.

"Interesting."

More advanced mechs possessed more potent repair systems than this, but for a standard military mech, the deployment of miniature repair bots was also a good feature!

The battle between the Terrans and Rubarthans proceeded exactly according to expectation.

The differences between two sides weren't all that great, which meant that any disparity in numbers could not easily be made up! The Rubarthan mech pilots became more and more frantic as they lost a second and a third comrade soon afterwards!

The Terran mechs did not come out of this unscathed, but they cleverly allowed their most damaged machines to fall back so that they would not suffer any further damage!

As the surviving Rubarthan mech pilots endured a lot more pressure because of this, one of them finally reached the critical point!

"I WILL NOT LET THESE TERRAN SCUM KILL US ALL!"

The intense pressure of the battle along with the influence spread by the Aspect of Transcendence placed below the arena deck, one of the Rubarthan mech pilots surprisingly broke through to expert candidate!

As soon as his mech overflowed with forced resonance, the temporarily-empowered machine suddenly burst out with a huge amount of power!

The amplification provided by forced resonance to first-class mechs was even more exaggerated than in the case of second-class mechs!

This was because first-class mechs were much more robust and more capable of handling the huge increase in might!

Due to this, the breakthrough mech became so powerful that all 5 Terran mechs simply couldn't resist the counterattack!

One after another, the breakthrough mech sliced them into pieces with its sword or melted them into big chunks of slag after firing its powerful plasma guns!

In the end, there were no mech pilots left alive aside from the two surviving Rubarthan mech pilots.

Master Dervidian looked incredibly satisfied at this result. "Excellent. The addition of another expert candidate among our captives will provide us with more diverse study opportunities."

While the mecher thought about all of the interesting experiments he could conduct now that he had gained a batch of expert candidates, Ves was glad that the Aspect of Transcendence had proved its worth.

Although it was difficult to prove that the Aspect of Transcendence enabled the Rubarthan mech pilot to advance this time, he had no doubt that the MTA would fully be able to confirm this feature after repeated tests.

This was perhaps the most crucial trial of the Aspect of Transcendence!

Master Dervidian would definitely make a favorable offer to Ves now that it had produced a favorable result!

Chapter 3932 Tier Comparisons

After a long day of conducting experiments and analyzing the huge trove of data they provided, both Ves and Master Dervidian gained a much more comprehensive understanding of the properties of the transcendence glow.

"There is so much empirical data! This is more than I could have dreamed of! The high-quality test subjects have also made a huge difference!"

With such favorable circumstances, even a troglodyte would be able to learn a lot of lessons!

As for Ves, his gains were massive! He not only confirmed many theories and came up with a couple of new ones, but also developed several promising ideas to increase the transcendence glow's success rate while reducing its risk factor.

He had a feeling that he had achieved years worth of research progress in just a single day!

Though he still harbored mixed feelings about Master Dervidian and his controversial views, he could not deny that the superluminal drive specialist was a stellar researcher.

The accomplished mech designer not only had access to superior research facilities, but also possessed the intelligence and imagination to make the most of his favorable circumstances.

If Master Dervidian failed to complete the leap towards Star Designer in his life, then Ves felt it was wholly undeserved!

"This guy truly deserves all of the resources and privileges he has earned!"

Though Ves grew more and more envious at Master Dervidian's superior research conditions, he did not harbor any desire to grow closer to the MTA.

The Association was way more dangerous and complicated than he thought. He already learned to be on guard in the presence of the mechers, but the events he witnessed today strengthened his vigilance towards the powerful organization.

Its mech designers were a lot less innocent than he thought!

The situation was fine as long as Ves was on good terms with them, but how long would this remain the case?

If Ves suddenly fell out of favor with a powerful mech designer, he did not think his treatment would be any better than the hundreds of Terrans and Rubarthan test subjects that had lost their lives today!

He couldn't wait to get back to his fleet and distance himself from the Paracelsus Optimus!

Before the MTA let him go, he first had to conclude his private agreement with the Transhumanist Faction which Master Dervidian represented.

The Master Mech Designer led Ves back to the secure meeting compartment where they could finally conclude this extensive session.

"Well. The results we have gained today no longer leave any doubts to your claims." Master Dervidian said with a smile. "Compared to all of the other breakthrough solutions

that I have had the pleasure of witnessing, I can tell you now that none of them ever come close to your Aspect of Transcendence. Not only does your invention produce an immediate increase in the chances of breakthroughs, but the risks and dangers are also much more controllable than those other extreme methods."

The MTA's research teams never gave up researching ways to allow mech pilots to advance at greater rates than normal.

Ves even guessed that the mechers already succeeded in developing a couple of methods, but never spread them out because they were too costly or produced too many side-effects.

However, if a core figure of the Transhumanist Faction talked like this, then Ves might have overestimated their research prowess!

All of this gave Ves greater assurances that he could gain more benefits from the other party. After all, the transcendence glow was just the beginning. As long as he continued to work on it while also progressing his design philosophy, it was not impossible to overturn the entire landscape of the mech community one day!

"It is a pity that you are still far from becoming a Master Mech Designer." Dervidian sighed in regret. "There is so much we can discuss and cooperate on if you have realized your design philosophy, but since that is not the case, we will have to defer those crucial talks in the far future. Hm, on second thought, it is not bad to take our time on this matter. Your invention is still too dangerous and immature to propagate it to the public."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I don't want to be responsible for unleashing a weapon that might be used to kill countless people. I'm rather relieved that you have managed to discover numerous solutions that can block the lethality of transcendence glow."

This was one of the bigger surprises of today. Master Dervidian conducted a series of experiments where he brought out many different kinds of protective technology.

The goal was to see whether there were any non-glow based methods to guard humans against the dangerous consequences of the transcendence glow.

While the protection generated from conventional human technology proved to be ineffective, certain pieces of alien technology produced different results!

For example, an energy shield generated by an extinct alien race from the Red Ocean was surprisingly able to completely block out much of the influence from the Aspect of Transcendence!

Although it did not prove to be totally effective, this was nonetheless a sign that certain aliens must have encountered similar phenomena in the past.

In fact, Master Dervidian even tested an experimental shielding system that was also effective at weakening glows.

The Master didn't say much about this system other than that it was in development to counter another possible threat.

The existence of all of these potential solutions caused Ves to become a lot more respectful of humanity's ability to harness technology to its advantage.

Though Ves found it a shame that his mechs might not be able to unscrupulously abuse all of his enemies by taking advantage of suppressive glows, he knew that it was for the better.

As Master Dervidian had mentioned earlier, if Ves was able to develop a new weapon system, then so could humanity's enemies!

"Let us proceed with crafting our agreement. Please inspect this draft contract and tell me your thoughts."

A projection appeared in front of Ves that displayed a long and extensive legal document.

Its format and contents looked similar to the contract that he had already signed with the Mech Trade Association earlier.

The difference this time was that Ves was cooperating with the MTA Transhumanist Faction this time.

Before he dived in the details, Ves asked an important question.

"I don't have any objections to cooperation with your faction, but will the Survivalists be okay with this arrangement?"

"You do not need to be concerned about that, Mr. Larkinson. We are in regular contact with the Survivalists and we have already agreed on the extent of our cooperation with you. The reason why they referred us to you in the first place is because they wisely recognize that they do not have the expertise to maximize what you can offer."

"I see."

This made a lot of sense. The Polymath might be well-versed in every discipline, but she was only one person.

In contrast, the Transhumanist Faction was filled with capable researchers who conducted a lot of research on pilot breakthroughs!

Ves dove into the draft contract and tried to interpret the complicated legal terms into more understandable meanings.

It quickly became clear that the Transhumanists firmly wanted to pull Ves into their orbit!

The proposed cooperation went beyond a simple technological exchange. This contract formed a true basis of an alliance between the two sides.

Once Ves signed this contract, it wasn't so easy to disentangle himself from the Transhumanists before!

This realization caused him to question the wisdom of becoming bosom buddies with this faction.

On one hand, getting entangled with the Transhumanists meant that he would also make enemies with those who were opposed to this camp. Ves did not have any desire to piss off more people than necessary!

On the other hand, building more support within the MTA was a necessity to him. The closer he came to reaching his ambitions, the more he needed the backing of different groups of people.

Obtaining the support of a powerful MTA faction also provided him with a lot more assurances that the mechers wouldn't turn against him one day!

The last point alone was powerful enough for Ves to proceed with this cooperation.

He continued to read the terms and thought that many of them looked good.

He briefly paused when he stumbled upon a surprising and far-reaching clause.

"Sir? It says here that your faction will upgrade my galactic citizenship from tier 10 to tier 6."

"That is correct."

"It's just... what difference does this make?" Ves asked. "Forgive me for saying this, but I became a tier 10 galactic citizen a long time ago. Ever since then, I hardly notice any difference in my treatment. Aside from a few minor perks, it appears that no one is treating me any differently."

Master Dervidian shook his head. "This is indeed a regrettable circumstance. When we originally formed the galactic citizenship system, we intended to bring order to human civilization by more concretely defining a person's worth and contribution to our society. In the beginning, it worked as intended, but over the centuries, it has grown increasingly

hollow, especially at the bottom tier. There are too many humans and institutions that no longer give tier 10 galactic citizens the basic respect and courtesy they deserve."

Rules were dead but people were alive. Ves thought that the current state of low-tier galactic citizens had deteriorated so much that there was no point to call them like this anymore.

If different people were willing to kill a 'galactic citizen' like Ves without any hesitation, then he would rather drop the pretense and go back to calling himself a space peasant!

"Will there be any meaningful changes if you turn me into a tier 6 galactic citizen?" Ves skeptically asked.

"The differences are massive." The Master seriously answered. "The full details are too many for me to explain in this brief session. I will transfer a number of documents to you so that you can familiarize yourself with the full rights and privileges of a tier 6 galactic citizen. Do not look down on it just because there are 5 more tiers ahead of it. It becomes exponentially harder for both mechs such as myself and indigenous humans such as you to climb any higher. Correspondingly, the treatment you receive from our Association becomes exponentially greater."

"What tier are you in at the moment?"

"I have recently been promoted to a tier 3 galactic citizen. This was a major event. Many prominent members of the galactic community congratulated me for my rise." Dervidian grinned.

Ves was impressed! Although he had no idea what a tier 3 galactic citizen could do, he recognized that it was not common for people to reach this height!

His estimation of Master Dervidian's status within the MTA was not wrong.

"Can you tell me the tier of Master Moira Willix?"

"She is a tier 4 galactic citizen."

That was still quite high! Ves had already noticed that Master Willix wielded a substantial amount of power and authority within the Association.

"What of Mr. Jovy Armalon?"

"He is currently a tier 6 galactic citizen, just as you will be if you sign this contract."

Ves raised an eyebrow. This was remarkably high!

"Is that normal?"

"No. A Journeyman from our Association is still a developing mech designer in our eyes. The reason why we value him more than usual is due to pioneering a new field in mech design. He has also started making valuable contributions to our understanding of probability manipulation. His existing accomplishments along with his future potential has merited him a rare promotion."

Jovy was apparently a much bigger deal than Ves expected!

"Can you look up the citizenship tier of Master Carmin Olson? She's a Master Mech Designer from a state called the Friday Coalition."

"I am already familiar with your former Master. She is a tier 8 galactic citizen, which is a normal development for an indigenous mech designer who has not made any major accomplishments as of yet. This is already a good tier."

Ves found the situation rather funny all of a sudden. If he agreed to this deal, he could instantly surpass Master Olson and become a more valuable asset to the MTA in a single leap!

This was a remarkable accomplishment, especially when he was still a Journeyman!

Chapter 3933 Senior Contributor

Galactic citizenship represented a human's status in human society.

It was divided into 12 tiers, of which the vast majority ranked in the bottom 3 tiers.

Every individual who advanced to the rank of Journeyman or expert pilot automatically became a tier 12 galactic citizen. This also contributed a lot to the devaluation of the galactic citizenship system.

In contrast, any average citizen of a first-rate state automatically became a tier 10 galactic citizen at birth.

The implication of this was that before this day, the galactic community thought that Ves was just as important as a worthless bum who just happened to have the luck of being born in a rich and powerful state!

This was absurd!

Another major fault of the galactic citizenship system was that it did not even have any room for the vast majority of ordinary people living in human space!

The snobby mechers and fleeters called this massive group 'indigenous humans' when they were being polite, but otherwise used the more derogatory term 'space peasants' when they were voicing their true thoughts!

Naturally, Ves had a lot of objections to this biased and inaccurate system of dividing people into different tiers. It was a pity that the people with all of the decision-making power exclusively originated from the top of human society!

These circumstances resulted in a reality where no one took tier 10 galactic citizens and lower seriously anymore.

This also caused him to ignore his own galactic citizenship. Aside from a few rare official interactions, he truly saw no difference!

Master Dervidian was observant enough to notice that Ves harbored a lot of contempt towards the galactic citizenship system. He therefore took the initiative to explain it further.

"Becoming a tier 9, tier 8 or tier 7 galactic citizen is not as trivial as you may think. Although it may sound unfair for every first-rater to start off at tier 10, the overwhelming majority of Terrans and Rubarthans will never be able to reach the higher tiers in their lifetimes. Birthright and origin is of no use at all. It takes genuine contributions for people to gain more recognition in this system. This is why a prodigy as young as Jovy Armalon has attained tier 6 even as an accomplished mech designer such as Master Carmin Olson has only reached tier 8 up to this point."

This sounded rather absurd at first, but Ves understood why this was the case.

From the perspective of the Mech Trade Association, Master Olson's contributions were not that exceptional. She specialized in locomotion systems and while she could develop a lot of useful and powerful applications because of her rank, most of her innovations hardly improved the current state of mechs.

A Journeyman like Jovy Armalon was different. Despite his youth and early stage, he already achieved a rare success by successfully forming a design philosophy centered around a difficult but powerful specialty!

It took an extreme and highly specific mindset for mech designers to turn a specialization as weird as probability manipulation into a real design philosophy.

Many others would probably get stuck at the Apprentice stage for the rest of their lives if they tried to do the same!

Once Jovy started on this unique and unprecedented path, every step he made was incredibly significant. Since he was pioneering a brand-new field, each of his discoveries and innovations provided the MTA with plenty of new knowledge!

Even if Jovy eventually failed to realize his design philosophy, he could still teach and pass on his accumulated research to his disciples, thereby allowing future generations of mech designers to complete his unfinished work!

In the long run, the MTA gained mastery of a new and innovative new technological branch, one centered around the highly elusive and abstract concept of manipulating probability!

Of course, that didn't mean that Jovy Armalon could stay ahead of Master Carmin Olson forever.

Jovy had to work extremely hard and rely on himself to pioneer a new field.

In contrast, Master Olson pursued a more common specialty that made it a lot easier for her to exchange and collaborate with others in her field.

If the latter managed to advance to Star Designer, she would instantly turn into a tier 1 galactic citizen regardless of who she was before!

"The top tiers of galactic citizenship represent the ultimate group of individuals in our great society." Master Dervidian said with an admiring expression. "They include Star Designers and god pilots not because these distinguished heroes need additional titles or official recognition, but because we already afford them the treatment of our top citizens."

In other words, folk would still show incomparable respect towards a Star Designer or a god pilot even if they were still space peasants!

Galactic citizenship was practically redundant for people at this level.

"Forget about tier 1 galactic citizens. Reaching tier 2 is a dream that only a miniscule proportion of humanity can ever reach in their lives." Master Dervidian continued. "The majority of people at this tier are current or former galactic mech councilors and grand admirals. Even if they retire from their high positions one day, their tier 2 galactic citizenship still ensures that they receive incomparable welfare and protection."

This made a lot of sense. Unlike Star Designers and god pilots who retained their strength and value for the rest of their long and extensive lives, those who reached tier 2 galactic citizenship may have only reached this height due to more temporal circumstances.

If a galactic mech councilor retired one day, it would be pretty bad if their status plunged all of sudden!

In that sense, tier 2 galactic citizenship was basically a retirement package to them. Even if they relinquished all of their power and responsibilities, they still received life-long protection that protected them against the enemies they made in the past.

At least, that was what Ves thought was the case. Who knew what went on at the top of humanity's power structure.

After a bit more explanation, Ves gained a much more comprehensive understanding of the galactic citizenship system.

All of the good stuff was concentrated at the top, but that did not mean that a tier 6 galactic citizen was a trivial status!

Ves would finally get rid of his status as an up-jumped space peasant if he broke into the middle tiers!

"There are numerous reasons why we are pushing to grant you this tier." Dervidian stated. "The most crucial factor is that it is much easier for our Association to work together with you. As you are undoubtedly aware of, we are all obliged to maintain our neutrality, which means we cannot interfere with the lives of indigenous humans such as yourself. However, people who have already climbed up the tiers are usually figures of greater importance. It is much more reasonable for our Association to have more frequent interactions with people such as Master Mech Designers and ace pilots."

Did that mean that Patriarch Reginald Cross would interact with the MTA a lot more often as well if he ever succeeded in breaking through?

"Aside from this reason, a tier 6 galactic citizen also receives greater protection. I cannot detail them in full today, but in short there will be far greater penalties for killing you. If you feel you are under a justifiable threat of life, you can even request us to escort you for a time and offer limited and restricted protection, much as the Simile Halifax has been accompanying your fleet for the last months. At this tier, you are not limited to paying MTA merits for this service. If you are truly desperate, you may also pay MTA credits for our protection, though the price will likely be prohibitive to you for a long time."

Ves' eyes lit up. This was actually quite a valuable benefit!

He was already operating under the MTA's protection for a time, so he fully appreciated the value of having the Association's cover.

The mechers didn't even need to act overtly while they were performing their escort duties. Their presence was already a huge deterrent!

Though Ves really wanted to put more distance between himself and the MTA, if a powerful group of people really wanted him dead, he would not hesitate to take advantage of his service!

"Furthermore, we will also be able to manage your record and public information. We can classify large parts of what we have registered and prevent others from learning more than they should about your work. This will prevent you from catching the wrong sort of attention."

This was another essential benefit! Ves truly did not want to become too notorious too quickly. He and his clan were still in a period of rapid growth. He needed to wait at least a few decades before he was ready to embark on grander initiatives.

"What else do I get as a tier 6 galactic citizen?"

"The remaining benefits are rather standard, but all beneficial to you. For example, we can grant you expanded access to our restricted technologies and our exclusive products. You will also gain access to exclusive marketplaces and other facilities. For example, you can stay at a Central Star Node such as the Vulit System for an extended time."

Ves grew hopeful. "Do I get any discounts for exchanging the exclusive goods and services you've mentioned?"

"No. Ordinarily, higher-tiered galactic citizens are fully capable of earning more MTA merits and MTA credits by themselves. They have no need for discounts."

That might be the case for impressive Masters, but Ves was still a small and destitute Journeyman! A discount of 50 percent could make a massive difference in his growth plans for the next 5 years!

Perhaps Ves should seek out and join another club like the Rim Guardians. Even though he mainly hooked up with this organization in order to buy a fleet beyond ticket at a discount, he still appreciated the many benefits they provided.

Now that he recalled, the Rim Guardians were actually expanding their presence in the Red Ocean, but Ves wasn't sure whether he should continue to associate with them. Their center of power as well as their priorities centered around the weakest and most impoverished group of humans.

He shook his head. He could think about this later.

"I think I understand what tier 6 galactic citizenships provide. Can we go over the other terms of the agreement?"

"Certainly. What do you wish to talk about?"

Ves tapped his finger at a certain clause of the projected document. "I don't understand what this means. It says here that you wish to turn me into an 'unofficial associate' of your Transhumanist Faction. Is this even a real thing?"

"As you expect, an unofficial associate is not a formal title. It is more of an implicit statement that you are related to us. We cannot turn you into an official associate because the Survivalist Faction has already preceded our attempts, but we can still make an informal statement that essentially declares that we are friends."

Ves wanted to scratch his head when he heard this. An unofficial association sounded way too vague for his liking.

"Won't it be harder to hide what we are working on if we openly declare our friendship?" He asked. "I mean, it becomes a lot harder for me to keep my transcendence technology a secret if I am openly working with people who have made it their life mission to increase the rate of breakthroughs."

"We have already prepared a measure that can camouflage the truth. If you scroll further down the document, you will see that we are upgrading your status as a contributor of restricted technology. You will now be known as a senior contributor of restricted technology. This is also a way for us to explain why we are promoting you to a tier 6 galactic citizen."

When Ves read the relevant term, he became surprised!

"You... are trying to claim that I am an incomparable authority on luminar crystal technology? I am merely dabbling in this field. I don't even specialize in energy weapon systems!"

Master Dervidian chuckled. "That may be the case, but that will not be the story that we will sell to others. You can downplay your research results all you want, but your advancements in luminar crystal technology are real. We only have to exaggerate your innovations to give others the impression that we are cooperating with you because we see the greater potential in luminar crystal weapons."

This... was a workable solution.

"I don't object to this per se, but it's a bit of a stretch for me to become a tier 6 galactic citizen on the basis of messing around with alien technology." Ves replied. "How can we maintain this deception when my application of luminar crystal technology still remains unimpressive?"

"We have already accounted for that. In order to make our story as convincing as possible, we will grant you immediate access to first-class luminar crystal technology. I believe a mech designer as hard-working and ambitious as you will seek to master this knowledge and produce brand-new innovations by leveraging your unique specialty to this field."

Ves grew shocked! The MTA actually granted him the right to study and make use of first-class alien technology for free?

This was quite a gift!

He could make a head-start into mastering first-class mech design if he was able to digest all of this restricted knowledge in advance!

Chapter 3934 Research Team Support

First-class technology!

The proposed deal not only granted Ves near-full access to all of the MTA's considerable research on the most distinctive technology of the extinct crystal builder race, but also gave him access to all of the prerequisite knowledge needed to master this alien tech!

What did this mean?

Essentially, Ves would be able to learn the most complete foundation of every field related to luminar crystal technology, which included optics, crystallography, directed energy weapon systems and energy theory!

Although the System had given him a thorough understanding in these fields, the information content of its Skills were relatively constrained at the lower tiers.

If he still had access to the System, then Ves would have to splurge on a lot of Design Points as well as meet other possible requirements to learn those Skills and Sub-Skills.

Of course, the advantage of taking this route was that it took no time at all to learn and acquire at least basic proficiency in these complex fields.

That said, Ves did not neglect the utility of learning knowledge the old-fashioned way. A mech designer must always exercise his learning ability in order to progress his design philosophy and understand mechs at a deeper level.

In addition, the System's database was filled with neutral and flavorless theories. Sometimes, the accumulation of specialized mech designers such as Professor Benedict Cortez may be much more useful even if his ideas didn't conform to mainstream science.

Aside from that, Design Points were way too precious. There were many desirable goodies that he could spend it on. It would be nice if he could save hundreds of thousands of DP by spending a bit of time devouring academic literature.

What Ves valued a lot this time was that the MTA promised to grant him the latest and most advanced technological framework on luminar crystal technology!

These were theories and advancements that were way more profound than the knowledge compiled in textbooks and taught in university classes!

The Mech Trade Association's top-level science and engineering research departments were famed as the most advanced and forward-thinking pioneers of humanity's

technological development. Their research capabilities were insanely high. They had to be in order to sustain the high pace of mech development.

Although mech designers carried the primary responsibility of advancing the state of mechs, it would be difficult for them to design better mechs if they did not gain access to new materials, new mech components and newly discovered scientific theories.

The reason why the MTA was the undisputed holy land of mech design was because its mech designers all had access to the support and contributions of its renowned research teams!

Now, Master Dervidian stated that Ves would gain the opportunity to cooperate with one of those pinnacle research teams on a long-term basis!

This was like having guest access to an entire first-class research institution!

However, the Master soon made it clear that Ves would not have all of those respected top scientists at his beck and call.

"We are not promoting you to a senior contributor of restricted technology, opening our libraries on luminar crystal technology and allowing you to be on speaking terms with one of our research teams just for you to play pretend. While the primary reason for taking these steps is to camouflage our true purpose, the pretense must look real enough in order to fool those with ulterior motives. The longer we can keep them at bay, the more time we have to flesh out our transcendence technology and allow us to introduce it to the public on our terms. Do you understand my meaning?"

Ves slowly nodded. "I think I do. You expect me to put in the work and master this tech as quickly as possible so that I can contribute to actual advancements in this field. It's just... how much time and effort does it take for someone like me to master all of the first-class technology required to harness the highest level of luminar crystal technology? This is top-level science we're talking about. I wouldn't be so concerned if I am already a Master, but right now I am still a Journeyman. Even with all of the knowledge that I have already learned, I have the feeling that I am way out of my depth in this case."

"You'd be right to think that." Dervidian replied and acknowledged this issue. "Based on my studies of your existing mechs and mech designs, your mastery of the fields related to luminar crystal technology is much more extensive than what a Journeyman of your position should possess. However, even with the formidable learning ability that you have demonstrated, it will still take five to seven decades for you to barely qualify as an intern to one of our top research teams."

"Seven decades?!"

"There are numerous measures you can take in order to shorten this learning period." Dervidian replied. "First, you can take the initiative to persuade the researchers or a top authority in the relevant fields to tutor you on an individual basis. This can shorten your learning time by half depending on various factors. Second, you can shave a handful of decades off if you have installed a powerful first-class research or mech design-oriented cranial implant in your central nervous system, but if not you are at a severe disadvantage."

Ves grew sour as he heard this judgment. A second-class mech designer attempting to master the highest level of luminar crystal technology and related first-class technologies would literally have to waste decades of his life in order to barely get started!

This should not be a surprise. This was the kind of research that only Master-level figures could engage in. Mech designers below this rank had to put in an exponentially greater amount of effort and time just to reach this point!

The biggest problem with this was that luminar crystal technology ultimately wasn't a central research focus to him. It would be one thing if he was a specialist in energy weapons. It was another thing if he specialized in a completely different aspect of mech design!

Ves couldn't justify the sheer amount of time and effort spent on completely mastering all of the requisite knowledge! He would take far too much time away from his mech design projects and more relevant research priorities!

This arrangement sounded more and more of a burden to him. Although it was great for him to master first-class technology in advance, if it came at the cost of slowing down his progression as a mech designer, then it wasn't worth the trouble!

Although Ves bet that he could leverage the System to skip a lot of years of study, he still had to pay a big price.

How could he agree to assume this burden so easily?

"I understand your concerns." The MTA Master said with a knowing look. "The arrangement is not as difficult as you think. From what we can see, your ability to harness luminar crystal technology is not as sophisticated as us, but your expertise allows you to harness the more esoteric properties of luminar crystals to a greater degree. This makes this issue much simpler. You merely have to contribute your unique methods to our research team. Our scientists will apply your teachings to their existing work, thereby producing better applications or deciphering another working principle of this tech. Until you have caught up to their level of expertise, this is the most convenient approach that you can adopt."

"Ah." Ves flatly replied. "I see how this can work."

It amounted to nothing but sharing his trade secrets to the MTA research team responsible for reverse engineering luminar crystal technology!

Apparently, this deal wasn't as one-sided as he thought. It basically amounted to an exchange of benefits and knowledge.

The MTA would get what it most desired and gain a more thorough understanding of how spirituality interacted with luminar crystal technology.

Ves gained the benefit of calling himself a senior contributor of restricted technology and would slowly be able to master advanced technology without too many hurdles.

Although the deal looked fair on the surface, he had the feeling that the MTA was the biggest winner for scamming another trade secret from this odd arrangement.

Sure enough, the greedy mechers never lost a negotiation!

There was little that Ves could do about it, though. He truly needed this camouflage in order to maintain a low profile. The story might be different if he was a Master, but for now it was better for him to avoid getting caught up in the power plays of the upper echelon of human society!

No matter what, Master Dervidian and the Transhumanists were earnest in their desire to cooperate with Ves. They were just acting like typical mechers who wanted to extract as much new and original research from an indigenous mech designer.

Since this was the case, Ves felt the need to gain more concessions. He did not want the MTA to get the impression that he was that easy to exploit!

"If I become a senior contributor of restricted technology and get to work with all of those top scientists, then I better have a good incentive for going through all of this trouble."

"What do you require?"

"I want to expand my right to make use of luminar crystal technology." Ves stated. "Whether it is third-class, second-class or first-class luminar crystal weapons, I don't want my clan and I to be hindered in utilizing my own innovations. Previously, the Survivalists imposed restrictions on how extensively I can make use of this tech. I want those restrictions gone."

Master Dervidian frowned as he used his implant to access the relevant information.

"There are good reasons why we wish to restrict people's dependence on alien technology. I am certain the Survivalists must have explained that to you already."

Ves nodded. "That is correct, but it makes no sense if I work together with the MTA on exploring the limits of luminar crystal technology while still being restricted to fielding standard-sized mech weapons for my mech designs or imposing hard limits on the amount of weapons of a particular caliber that I can make and put into use. I want to get rid of these annoying limitations."

"I will see what I can do. I need to consult with the Survivalists to obtain the details of your agreement with them and see how we can best adapt it to our current circumstances."

A few minutes passed as Master Dervidian quietly teleported away in order to contact another faction.

He soon reappeared with a heavy expression. "I have held a brief discussion with the Survivalists. I learned that they have given you a test that you need to pass before you are allowed to develop and field larger, heavier and more potent luminar crystal weapons. This rule still applies."

Damn. Ves did not have much hope that he could get rid of the Polymath's requirement, but he still felt disappointed that the mechers refused to budge on this issue.

"I understand." He sighed. "What else?"

"We do not mind accommodating you in other areas. For one, as long as you can ensure that your more advanced luminar crystal weapons cannot be harnessed or abused by external parties, you can apply them without special restrictions in your own pioneering alliance. You only need to abide by the usual rules."

"I promise I won't arm my starships with upsized luminar crystal weapons." Ves sincerely said.

"Aside from that, you are still prohibited from arming your second-class and first-class mech models with luminar crystal weapons that are not for internal use. However We are willing to grant you an exception to this rule. As long as you can work together with our research team to reverse engineer enough principles and develop applications of this tech that is fully based on conventional human technology, we will allow you to propagate your 'humanized' luminar crystal weapons to the public."

This... did not sound so bad. In fact, Ves would have already been able to do this without any special deals, but he could develop products for the market a lot faster this time if he had the cooperation of a top MTA research team!

As long as those clever MTA scientists did all of the heavy lifting, it was not impossible for Ves to publish lots of powerful ranged mech models in a decade!

Chapter 3935 Aduc Family

Ves was fairly satisfied with the minor concessions he gained this time.

Although the Transhumanists and Survivalists hadn't budged too much on this issue, the right to make much more extensive use of luminar crystal weapons within the Golden Skull Alliance was an important win!

This meant that he was able to arm all of his ranged mechs with heavier and more potent luminar crystal weapons that could pose a much more substantial threat against enemy expert mechs!

He could finally realize his dreams of converting the Battle Criers into his most elite expert mech killer unit!

Ves smirked as he thought about all of the hell and fury his enemies would be faced with in the future.

Not just the Fearless Project, but also other formidable ranged mechs such as the Transcendent Punisher Mark II would be able to fire much more powerful and threatening energy beams!

Combined with the varying beam effects that different types of attack phase crystals could produce, his mech forces did not have to fear as many enemies as before!

In any case, Ves never expected the MTA to make an exception to the taboos and grant him the right to mount warship-grade luminar crystal guns on his starships. This was way too excessive and would also attract way too much attention to him from everybody. This was contradictory to the goal of avoiding suspicion!

He didn't really mind this restriction. If the rumors were true and the Big Two decided to lift the taboos on fielding warships one day, Ves would definitely be ready to mount super-sized luminar crystal cannons on every ship that could accommodate the hardware!

After coming to a consensus on the matter of luminar crystal technology, Ves and Master Dervidian discussed the remaining points of the expansive contract.

The other clauses were relatively straightforward.

The MTA Transhumanist Faction gained the right to 'borrow' the Aspect of Transcendence for an indefinite period of time so that it could perform its own research on its glow and other properties.

Although Master Dervidian already had the power to do this without signing any paperwork, it was better to follow a more proper procedure.

The Transhumanists could not conduct this research alone. Dervidian fully realized that the help of the originator was indispensable to achieve further progress.

For this reason, Ves was obliged to contribute to the development of 'transcendence technology'.

"We do not expect you to put everything aside and help us further our understanding and application of transcendence technology extensively at the beginning." Dervidian clarified. "You are still a Journeyman at the moment and your priority should be directed towards designing mechs and progressing your design philosophy. We will not burden you with collaborating directly with myself and other notable researchers from our Association. Instead, we believe it is better if we convert your proposed T Institute into a joint venture."

"A joint venture? You mean a new company or organization that is owned and operated by two different parties?"

Master Dervidian smiled. "Correct. Our Association cannot work directly with you on this. What we can do is push forward a family led by one of our trusted associates to invest in your T Institute and supply the specialized expertise that you have requested."

This was an important issue. Since Ves intended for the T Institute to be the center of his research on spiritual engineering and breakthroughs, not just any random group of people were qualified to cooperate with him in these fields!

The Transhumanists had to know this, so the selection of the party that would be cooperating with Ves on a long-term basis was of critical importance!

"What can you tell me about this family?"

"The Aduc Family has a long heritage. It originated from the Greater Terran United Confederation and experienced many different events during the Age of Conquest. It eventually declined and suffered a crisis that forced it to depart from Terran space. The family only made a slow resurgence after the Age of Mechs had arisen. The family's main business is terraforming planets. At this time, the Aduc Family has already expanded its business operations in the Red Ocean."

This was a brief story that revealed almost nothing special about the Aduc Family. Other than the fact that it had Terran origins, Ves couldn't really figure out what made the Aduc Family special enough to work together with him. Were they truly capable of helping him conduct research on spiritual applications?

Master Dervidian shook his head. "The Aduc Family is not simple. Its actual history is much more involved than you can imagine. Due to its prior entanglements, I cannot divulge as much as I need to make you understand why partnering with the Aduc Family is a good choice. You will have to meet with its members and discuss your cooperative

venture with them in order to learn more. For now, it is enough for you to know that the Aducs are more than simple terraformers."

The terraforming industry was actually a massive and difficult sector. It was a business activity with an extremely high barrier to entry.

This was because terraforming companies were tasked with transforming planets that were devoid of life into globes that could sustain human life!

A single person could never complete such an enormous project. Any terraforming project involved a huge amount of professionals. They needed to analyze a planet and calculate what steps they needed to take in order to make it livable.

Then the terraformers had to leverage a lot of capital to perform the expensive terraforming procedures. Depending on the conditions of the planet, it took a lot of expensive and time-consuming steps to slowly turn the environment more friendly towards native human life.

The difficulty of terraforming planets vastly exceeded the difficulty of building starships!

The two industries weren't even on the same level!

Terraforming had the potential to be insanely profitable, but the high costs and lengthy years needed to complete the transformations also produced a lot of risks.

A single delayed project or botched transformation could cost the terraforming company dearly!

In short, it took a lot of guts, capital, personnel and expertise to succeed in the terraforming industry.

No matter what, the Aduc Family was probably quite formidable to gain a foothold in this lucrative but difficult sector.

Ves just wondered what terraforming had to do with spiritual engineering. Were the Aducs tied to the Five Scrolls Compact? Did they manage to retain unique skills and applications from their past entanglement with the secretive cult?

Why had the Aduc Family fallen into the orbit of the Transhumanist Faction?

What value did the Aducs provide to the mechers that allowed one of them to become an associate of the Transhumanists?

Ves had a lot of questions about this sudden family that he was supposed to partner with in the future, but he recognized that Master Dervidian wasn't willing to say too much.

He just had to wait and meet with the Aducs himself to satisfy his curiosity. He just hoped that his new collaborators weren't too weird.

After Ves gained more clarification on how he was supposed to contribute to the development of transcendence technology by using the T Institute as a vehicle, he no longer had any pressing questions about the contract.

The remaining clauses of the legal document weren't that important. Ves already understood everything he needed to know and had no objections about how the Transhumanists wished to cooperate with Ves and his clan.

"Very well. Let us proceed with signing the contract." Master Dervidian proposed. "It will take immediate effect as soon as you have taken this step. This is the last time for you to back out. If you have any points you wish to raise, please speak up now. This is a life-changing agreement that will impose many rights and obligations to you. Our faction will also become a permanent fixture in your life."

Ves suddenly recalled he wanted to know more about the Transhumanists. Since he was about to partner up with them, it was only right for him to obtain more information!

"I have a question. You have explained a lot about your faction today, but you haven't told me anything about its enemies. Which factions are opposed to your Transhumanists?"

Master Dervidian crossed his arms. "That is not a simple question to answer. You must know that the different factions are not always opposed to each other. Different coalitions will form each time a new issue has emerged. However, there are a number of factions that have always opposed our ideology and initiatives more often than usual."

"Can you reveal them to me so that I know who to watch out for in the future?"

"Our chief political opponent within the Association is the Preserving Order Faction. I think you can understand why these arch-conservatives and reactionaries are opposed to our policies. The Preservers do not wish to disrupt or alter the state of human society. My fellow Transhumanists and I heavily disagree with this direction. In our opinion, the human race is far from reaching its full potential. We must constantly develop ourselves further and seek new solutions that can make us stronger than before."

This made a lot of sense. The Preservers were actually incompatible with many factions due to its insistence on keeping everything the same.

"Are there any other opposing factions?" Ves asked.

"Well, you should be careful around the members of the Terran and Rubarthan Faction. The proponents of reconciliation and greater cooperation with the first-rate superstates

harbor a great degree of animosity towards Transhumanists such as myself. It is best not to catch their attention."

Ves grimaced again. This was a good point. Having seen how 'humanely' a research-obsessed man like Master Dervidian treated his involuntary test subjects, it was no wonder the cheerleaders of the Terran Confederation and the Rubarth Empire hated the Transhumanists!

Allying himself with the Survivalists was not a big deal since they pursued noble goals and generally did not make a lot of enemies, but the Transhumanists were different!

Much of their research was centered around humans and mech pilots. In order to gather the richest and most relevant data, they needed to perform dangerous experiments on high-quality test subjects.

The better the training and background of the test subjects, the better!

Obviously, the Transhumanists couldn't kidnap the members of the CFA without starting a war of untold proportions.

They couldn't experiment on fellow mechers either.

The best available choices left was to conduct their experiments on the most powerful first-raters around. As long as they managed to find proof that groups of Terrans and Rubarthans broke the taboos, their respective states could not justifiably object to their treatment!

Although the first-rate superstates couldn't do anything to prevent the MTA researchers from behaving unscrupulously on this matter, it was certain that the Terrans and Rubarthans built up a lot of grievances towards the Transhumanist Faction!

And now, Ves was just about to turn into one of its 'unofficial' associates!

No matter whether he was not formally an associate of the Transhumanists, everyone else in the know would probably think he was best friends with these folk.

This might complicate the rise of the Larkinson Clan and his future interactions with the Terrans and Rubarthans.

He shook his head. From the moment he exposed his transcendence glow, he already fell into the camp of the MTA.

Although the relations between the Big Two and the first-rate superstates were tense and complex, they were not completely hostile. It was not impossible for him to maintain superficial friendship and cooperation with Terran and Rubarthan parties in the future.

"Are there any other factions that I should take note of, Master?"

"Not particularly. We have our usual differences with the Dissolution Faction and do not always agree with the Longevity Faction's vision for humanity's future, but these disputes should not involve associates such as yourself. As long as you succeed in evading everyone's attention, you do not need to be so concerned."

After Ves learned what he needed, he was ready to sign the contract.

When he raised his hand and used the autopen to automatically place his signature onto the virtual document, he finally formalized his extensive and far-reaching agreement with the Transhumanist Faction!

He was finally done with this lengthy and life-changing visit!

Chapter 3936 Return to Home!

When the Simile Halifax finally returned to the expeditionary fleet, Ves teleported back to the Spirit of Bentheim.

"I'm finally home again!"

The Larkinsons were already aware that their patriarch had personally visited the big MTA battlecarrier for a time, so they did the best they could to handle the aftermath of the Purgatory Campaign.

A lot of hours had passed since he disappeared. Ves knew that a lot had changed, but right now he wasn't in the mood to preside over the situation.

"It's already night time." Ves tiredly sighed as he quickly referenced the time.

Task Force Fisherman's evacuation from Purgatory and the MTA's successful capture of Moby Dick marked the end of the crisis period.

Ves already noticed that the fleet had stood down from red alert to yellow alert. The only possible threat that could happen was if the remaining fish-whales from Purgatory suddenly managed to break out and chase after the expeditionary fleet.

The chances of that happening was so low that Ves practically dismissed the possibility.

"The MTA has already laid claim to Purgatory, so this is none of my business anymore."

The excitement had passed. Ves had already made the decisions that mattered. He was more than ready to return to his stateroom and take a long and deserved break.

Soon enough, his honor guard arrived and verified his identity before taking up their usual positions.

As Ves studied the equipment of his guards and wondered how he should upgrade them in the future, he headed back to his place of rest while contacting various people.

He first called General Verle to learn how his forces were faring.

"The mech pilots who were lucky enough to advance to expert candidate or expert pilots are all being monitored at the medical ward of the Dragon's Den." Verle answered. "We had to leave a large amount of non-essential hardware and assets behind in Purgatory when we departed in haste, but we did not abandon anything truly important aside from our damaged and destroyed mechs."

Ves furrowed his brows. He recalled that after his forces along with the Evolvers defeated the Phaser fish-whales, they left behind a lot of salvageable and repairable mech frames.

All of those living mechs could have been saved and returned into service, but the dire situation did not give the Larkinsons enough time to retrieve the fallen mechs.

This left a sour taste in his mouth. He wouldn't have felt so conflicted if they were ordinary mechs, but each of them were alive. They had already started to develop their unique characters and had the potential to become formidable legacy mechs in the future!

He inwardly shook his head. Casualties were unavoidable. Both mechs and mech pilots accepted the risk that they might never return once they stepped on the battlefield.

Rather than agonizing over the living mechs that his forces had cruelly left behind, he would rather focus on the ones that had gained a greater degree of importance than before.

"Have our troops preserved the mechs piloted by the clansmen who succeeded in breaking through during the last battle?"

"Our protocols already provide instructions on what we should do. I have made certain that the mechs in question are separated and put under special guard. The biggest issue is that many of the mechs have incurred substantial degrees of both external and internal damage. Our mech technicians have tried their best to prevent the damaged machines from deteriorating any further, but they have made sure not to make any unnecessary alterations."

This was an important instruction. If Ves' suspicions were true that many of the mechs involved in breakthroughs had either evolved into third order living mechs or at least come closer to it, the machines in question were all invaluable assets!

Ves could do a lot more with living mechs that had become a lot more powerful and developed than before!

"That is good to hear. Keep the mechs in place and don't allow too many to get close to them. If any of their mech pilots recover, you can allow them to approach their machines."

"Understood."

"What is our fleet doing at the moment?"

"We are currently resuming our journey to the edge of the Garimel System. We are already trying to determine whether it is safe to transition into FTL travel a few days later. The... destruction of the planet of Auralis has produced minor disturbances and disruptions in the orbital movements of the star system's satellites. This has produced gravitic ripples that have likely made any form of superluminal travel more turbulent than normal."

"Will we have to delay our departure?" Ves asked with a frown.

After going through a lot of events in this star system, he was eager to leave and return to civilization!

"From what I hear, it won't be necessary to do so. The gravitic ripples are already subsiding. By the time we are able to begin our departure, everything will return close to normal. We are merely investigating to make certain we have not overlooked any risk factors."

After asking a few more questions, Ves was satisfied with the state of his clan and fleet and closed the connection.

He called a few more important figures and received reassuring news. Nothing had exploded while he was gone.

Once he finally stopped before the entrance to his stateroom, he completed his final call and loosened his shoulders.

"I'm back."

He finally stepped inside and noticed that the lights were dimmed before his arrival. He smiled as he quietly moved to his daughter's bedroom.

Since Aurelia was in deep sleep, the lights stayed dark. He slowly moved towards the crib and gazed lovingly at his sleeping baby.

Clixie, who happened to be laying beside her body, stared up and lifted her paw.

"Miaow..."

"Shhh. I'm just here to check up on my baby girl."

Ves leaned down to plant a kiss on Aurelia's head before he softly caressed her head. The baby remained absolutely undisturbed. Her expression was so cute that he had to resist the urge to pick her up and give her a deep hug.

"I missed you so much, Aurelia."

He briefly petted Clixie's furry back before leaving the two to their own devices.

When Ves left Aurelia's bedroom and entered his shared chamber with Gloriana, his wife had already woken up after receiving a notification of his return.

She had raised herself up to a sitting position on her side of the bed and stared at Ves with a tired and expectant expression.

"You have finally returned."

"Yup."

"Well?"

"Let me freshen up and change my clothes. I had a long day and experienced a lot of events, many of which will change our lives forever."

"That makes it all the more important for you to brief me on what you have done."

"I'll give you the short story after I return."

Ves first headed over to the bathroom and emerged a short time later while wearing pajamas.

Once he slipped into his side of the bed, Gloriana turned her body around to stare squarely in his eyes.

"It doesn't take a genius to infer that the MTA is interested in Purgatory and your work. Now tell me what you have discussed with the fine mechers over at the Paracelsus Optimus."

"I signed a new agreement with the MTA's Transhumanist Faction. Let me give you a brief description on what this entails."

Ves quickly explained the context of this new partnership and outlined the various terms of the new contract.

One of the questions he asked to Master Dervidian earlier was how much he was allowed to share the truth to others.

Since Gloriana was not only his wife but also his closest work collaborator, it did not make sense to hide too many secrets from her. She would learn about much of what he was working as they went back to designing mechs.

Since that was the case, Ves might as well fill her in on the basics.

Gloriana became increasingly more incredulous as she learned what kind of arrangement that her husband had made with the Transhumanists.

"You didn't negotiate well enough, Ves! The Transhumanists haven't made enough concessions to obtain a method to induce breakthroughs. Do you know how much money and benefits others are willing to bestow to us in order to master this secret?! Imagine what would happen if we held an auction. Different MTA factions or even other powers such as the Terrans and Rubarthans would instantly uplift our Larkinson Clan into a first-class organization if they could gain access to what we have!"

Ves softly laughed. "We would be dead or in a hidden cell before that can happen. Don't you understand how many interest groups we'll disturb with what my Aspect of Transcendence can do?! The implications of my work are much greater than you can imagine. I would rather settle for less and maintain autonomy over my own life than to turn into a pawn of various peak human powers."

"Isn't that what Master Termaneo Dervidian has essentially done to you?" Gloriana skeptical retorted. "It sounds to me that you have succumbed to his layout without much resistance."

When Ves thought about Master Dervidian's impassioned speeches along with how many Terran and Rubarthan test subjects exploded during the experimental sessions, he truly could not imagine how he could have made a firmer stance.

Perhaps Dervidian deliberately acted up his more intimidating side in order to gain the upper hand during the subsequent negotiations, but Ves still would have been reluctant to adopt a more assertive attitude.

He shook his head. "You don't understand. The MTA had me over a barrel. If the mechers really wanted to, they could have taken fault with how we traded with a dangerous alien race or how we accidentally unleashed a 12-kilometer super phase whale into the Red Ocean. These crimes are enough to land me in jail, if not execute me right away. The only reason why Master Dervidian was willing to sweep these crimes under the rug was because he wanted me to share my work with his faction."

"That means you still had leverage over the mechers. Surely this Master Mech Designer could have given you additional MTA merits or a handful of extra fleet carriers."

"Hey, we should already be happy with getting the full MTA merit price for the majority of the phasewater we have harvested from the pocket space. I'm already about to receive an astronomical amount of MTA merits. I don't want to jeopardize this transaction by acting too greedy."

"You could have at least told the Master to split a portion of those MTA merits to me!" Gloriana insisted. "Aren't they supposed to be awarded to the Larkinson Clan as a whole? Why should you be the sole recipient of this windfall? Give me my merits!"

"I can't! MTA merits are non-transferable, remember?"

His wife leaned over and grabbed his neck in an attempt to shake him back and forth!

"THEN CALL MASTER DERVIDIAN AND TELL HIM TO SPLIT THE AWARD BETWEEN US! WE'RE PARTNERS, YES! I DESERVE AN EQUAL SHARE!"

"I can't!" Ves coughed! "It's already a done deal! I can't arbitrarily alter an agreement after I signed a formal, legally-binding contract!"

"YOU IDIOT! Have you taken any legal courses? Any contract can be altered after obtaining the consent of all of the involved parties! I don't think that any contract is forever set in stone!"

"This is the MTA you're talking about! People like us can't simply walk up to the mechers in order to make a frivolous request."

"FRIVOLOUS?! IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT MY DEMAND?!"

It took several minutes for Ves to make it clear that he was not about to oblige his wife.

Gloriana grew incredibly glum after seeing that her attempts of persuasion had failed. She crossed her arms and sulked as she turned her body away from his direction.

"By the way, there is one more point I haven't mentioned yet." Ves spoke out.

"What is it, Ves?"

"The MTA will soon promote me into a tier 6 galactic citizen. Sounds impressive, right? I'm way ahead of you once this change goes through."

"WHAT?!"

Chapter 3937 Dum-Dum

"Open your mouth and say 'Ahhhh', Aurelia."

"Ahhhhh!"

Glomp!

Gloriana performed her duties as a mother and fed her baby her custom-synthesized meal of high-density nutrients.

One of the burdens of raising designer babies was that it was inadvisable to feed regular food to them. Their special genes added a lot of advanced capabilities to them that ordinary human bodies did not possess.

When designer babies grew up, they exhibited all kinds of superior performance parameters depending on the configuration of your designer genes. Enhanced strength, accelerated thinking, improved healing and efficient metabolism were just a handful of the inhuman benefits that they acquired.

However, before designer babies acquired these envious benefits, their bodies first needed to grow the requisite organs and physique before they came online.

This necessitated a specialized diet that was tailored to provide just the right nutrients at different stages of growth. Any interruption or misalignment in the provision of rare or high-quality nutrients synthesized from organic exotics could lead to severe malnutrition and deformations!

Although they looked no different from humans, from a biological perspective designer babies had already diverged from the species they were derived from! Each of them consisted of a separate species or subspecies that were reproductively isolated from baseline humans!

All of these complications and burdens represented an investment in the future of a child. As long as the parents were able to cope with the considerable cost of raising a transhuman money pit, they would almost always be rewarded with an excellent descendant that was already ahead of the vast majority of people!

"Ahhhhh!"

"Hihihi!"

Glomp!

As Aurelia continued to take bite after bite of her cranberry-flavored nutrient jelly, Ves finished up his own plate of high-density breakfast.

He needed to absorb a lot more calories than the average human due to his own abnormal physical conditions. Despite not being born as a designer baby, his Jutland

organ and other half-alien modifications demanded a lot more food in order to sustain his heightened energy consumption.

Ves briefly paused and concentrated his senses inward.

The mysterious Worclaw energy cycle remained stable and did not exert any excessive pressure on his body. It hadn't shown any abnormalities for years and Ves did not expect it to act up without outside interference.

That did not mean that Ves had lowered his vigilance towards it. Dr. Jutland might have been an insane bio researcher who had died a long time ago, but Ves knew first-hand that one's work often outlived their creators!

Before, Ves essentially had no way of investigating or 'fixing' his Jutland organ any further. The doctors employed by the CFA and MTA both examined his condition and essentially threw their hands in the air.

If Ves wanted to make real progress in figuring out his biomodifications, he needed to consult a top specialist in this field.

This was prohibitively expensive!

There was no way that a small second-class Journeyman could pay for the services of a renowned authority in human-alien organ implantation!

He smirked. "Well, luckily enough I'm not that small anymore."

Thinking about the 211,140,000 MTA merits that were about to be credited to his name caused his mentality to undergo a substantial change.

He was no longer a pauper!

He could invest a huge amount of MTA merits on all kinds of exclusive goodies and services!

Although his cash savings hadn't increased at all, MTA merits was his gateway into true exclusivity!

With enough MTA merits, Ves would be able to obtain much of the rare and exceptional stuff that the upper echelon of human society only circulated among themselves!

He had so many different choices that he didn't know where to begin. He figured it was best to ask people for advice on how he should best spend his windfall.

A fortune of 211 million MTA merits might sound enormous, but Ves could easily splurge it in an hour if he wanted to! The mechers might offer a lot of benefits that weren't available elsewhere, but they were never known to be cheap!

"Papa!"

"Don't call him papa, Aurelia. Call him dum-dum."

"Papa?"

"Papa has been naughty lately and deprived me of the MTA merits that I deserve. He's a dum-dum because of that. Dum-dum. Got it? Say dum-dum."

"Dum... dum...?"

"Yes! That's it! Say dum-dum!"

"Hihihihi! Dum-dum! Dum-dum!"

Ves suddenly shook himself out of his thoughts when he saw that Gloriana was slandering him again!

"Honey! What are you doing? Don't brainwash our daughter! Aurelia, I am your papa, not your dum-dum!"

"Dum-dum!" Their baby directed an innocent smile towards her father.

"Papa!"

"Dum-dum!"

"No, it's papa!"

"Dum-dum!"

Further down the table, Lucky and Clixie looked up from their food bowls. Both of their eyes twinkled in amusement.

"Miaow~"

"Meow meow!"

Ves wanted to barf. "Not you two as well. I'm not a dum-dum for retaining the merits that properly belong to our clan. I'm smart-smart."

"Dum-dum?"

"Smart-smart!"

"Dum-dum, hihi!"

He gave up on trying to teach a lesson to his daughter.

As he finished up his cup of coffee, his comm suddenly sounded a chime.

"Hm?"

He activated his comm and noticed that he received a high priority message. When he opened it, he discovered that it came from his wife!

"What is this... a shopping list? Wait, what the hell? You want to spend 60 million MTA merits to obtain first-class cranial implants for yourself and our six kids? That's too much!"

"What's wrong with that? Don't you want the best for your family, Ves?"

"Don't try to guilt trip me into squandering our strategic resources! I am not squandering a third of the MTA merits on cranial implants that none of our children are ready for. Aurelia's head is way too small and our second child isn't even born yet! It's way too premature to acquire expensive implants at this stage."

"It's rare for us to have access to so many MTA merits, Ves! I'm afraid you will waste those MTA merits on other goods that will offer no help to our children at all. If we invest into the future of our children early, they will grow into brilliant professionals who can earn ten times the amount of MTA merits when they are in their prime! All we need to do is pave the way as best as possible."

Ves shook his head. Although he agreed with her argument, he did not think her spending strategy was any good.

"I think you're underestimating what I can do in a couple of decades. I'm not a tier 6 galactic citizen for nothing, you know. I bet that I can easily earn tens of millions of MTA merits if I set it as goals." He stated, which instantly caused his wife to snarl. "Besides, products such as first-class implants are not necessarily exclusive. You can buy them for a lot of MTA credits. Sure, our earning potential is not great right now, but once we become Seniors and design mechs that are much more fantastic than the ones in our mech catalog, I am sure we can purchase a set of excellent first-class implants."

"What if you overestimate the profit that you can generate? What if the mech market changes to the point where your products don't sell as much anymore? Anything can happen, Ves! The only way to avoid all of this uncertainty is to secure the implants early!"

"No." Ves firmly shook his head. "The windfall of MTA merits should be spent on products and services that don't take decades to manifest. Our long-term growth prospects are already great. What our clan truly lacks is a way to speed up our development and overcome our weak and vulnerable period as fast as possible. This is why I intend to spend most of our MTA merits on boosts and enhancements that can quickly increase our strength and foundation."

"How much of the MTA merits are you spending on the clan as opposed to us? It sounds as if you are willing to sacrifice far too many MTA merits just to benefit others!"

"Our clansmen fought to secure those MTA merits!" Ves barked back! "I didn't see you hopping into a cockpit and fighting against an entire kingdom of fish-whales! All of those mech pilots believed in our clan and believed in our goals. It is only right to reward the soldiers who have braved so many dangers on our behalf. Besides, strengthening our clan will benefit us in so many ways. It's an investment, Gloriana. Don't you understand?"

His wife looked glum at that. She couldn't very well talk back at her own argument.

Ves quietly sighed. Only a night had passed since he returned home and already his wife was gunning for his MTA merits!

Properly speaking, the entire sum belonged to the Larkinson Clan as a whole. Ves only deserved partial credit for the actions that resulted in the acquisition of over 2 metric tons of phasewater.

He was tempted to spend it all on himself.

He believed he could make himself a lot smarter and more knowledgeable.

He could equip himself with excellent equipment and renovate his entire personal workshop with a first-class superfab and other useful equipment.

He could also forge a lot of relationships with many different mech designers and companies.

It was not that difficult to justify all of this personal spending. The Larkinson Clan was mainly propped up by himself, so if he became a lot stronger and capable all of a sudden, he could provide more benefits to his clansmen in turn.

Ves didn't think this was the best course of action, though.

Just as how Ves fueled the Larkinson Clan's growth, the Larkinson Clan also facilitated his own growth.

People such as his wife, Venerable Joshua, Commander Casella and so on all provided him with a lot of assistance over the years.

Ves was willing to invest in his people further with the expectation that he could obtain a greater harvest in return.

"Don't tell me how to spend our MTA merits. I'm the one in charge around here. I will consult with my own advisors to form a sound and logical plan on how we can best spend this newfound wealth."

If Gloriana developed her own ideas on how to allocate the merits, then so did other people!

Ves quickly finished his breakfast and approached his wife and daughter to say goodbye.

"Hmph!" Gloriana turned her head away from her husband.

Ves ignored his wife's irritation and bent down to kiss Aurelia's head. "Papa will be going to work now. Have fun and stay nice!"

"Dum-dum!"

"It's papa!"

He let out an exasperated breath as he left for his office.

Once there, he sank into his chair and leaned back while his personal assistant arrived to give him his daily brief.

"Yo, Benny! Long time no see. It feels like it has been ages since I last went through this routine."

"Your absence has been sorely felt, boss. There have been a lot of developments in the weeks you spent on the Purgatory Campaign. A lot of issues have piled up on your desk. None of them are critical, but you should still go over them as each of them require your input." Gavin Nuemann professionally replied.

Ves sighed. "Go ahead, then. What's first?"

"I think you should know that the Komodo War is winding down. The Hexadric Hegemony is on the verge of collapse, especially now that all of its border strongholds have been overrun. Originally, the state should have been able to put up a resistance for a few more years, but..."

"What's the matter?"

"Many Hexer dynasties and organizations have already pulled out in advance." Gavin said. "The departure of so many elites and cadre have hollowed out the defenses of the star systems and territories that they have abandoned. The Friday Coalition's mech armies are essentially sweeping them up without encountering too many speed bumps. If this trend continues, the Hexadric Hegemony will soon cease to exist."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "You don't need to tell me about the Komodo War any longer. We have long departed from our native star sector. We don't have anything to do with it anymore. Besides, the Hexadric Hegemony was doomed years ago. This outcome is already set in stone. Just skip this news and bring up topics that are actually relevant to our clan. Is that clear, Benny?"

His assistant nodded.

Chapter 3938 Monster Slayer Sales

It turned out that he did miss on a lot of developments while he was gone.

Ves learned that the sales figures of a few mech models started to pick up. The Enlightened Warriors weren't selling so hot, but the Ferocious Piranhas started to get noticed after customers learned how useful they were against both human and alien opponents.

What actually surprised him was that the Monster Slayer had quickly gained momentum!

"The mech, despite being paired with a fairly uncommon weapon type, has become increasingly more popular in several communities." Gavin explained. "The Wild Fighter Association actively promoted the Monster Slayer after its own mech critics started singing its praises. Plenty of members have placed their orders on the new model, especially when they heard it was designed by a mech designer who could actually fight better than themselves."

The Wild Fighters were pretty much the perfect target audience for Ketis. They participated in a lot of arena competitions and they had a preference for melee mechs.

The Monster Slayer model stood out for wielding an unreasonably large sword and for being able to defeat stronger and better-equipped landbound mechs!

However, a lot of customers initially held off because the Monster Slayer was exclusively optimized to fight with a greatsword. This was not an easy weapon to master and many melee specialists needed to take refresher courses in order to get up to speed.

Although the Monster Slayer was able to wield all kinds of other weapons, its structural configuration prevented it from making the most out of the alternate weapons.

This was why the Monster Slayers armed with spears, shields and maces only performed adequately.

While this sounded fine, there were many competing mech models that offered superior speed, agility, defense or attack power!

The only real advantage the Monster Slayer possessed over the competition was that mech pilots, particularly those who fought with swords, felt a lot more comfortable and in tune with their new machines!

It took time for the Monster Slayer to develop more appeal.

The pilots who stuck to practicing and fighting with the greatswords eventually showcased why the mech designed by a Swordmaster was worth the investment!

After several weeks of training, each of them began to showcase greater proficiency and more fluid movements in the arena matches!

Although their sword techniques were still rough compared to the fast and efficient moves of the Swordmaidens, it was pretty impressive that all of those novices in greatswords started to show great momentum!

The more talented among them displayed even greater mastery in wielding greatswords. Their skill increased every day and they became more and more domineering whenever they matched up against other mechs in the arena!

As Gavin continued to narrate the trajectory of the recently released mech model, Ves quietly listened while he observed the footage of a few arena matches.

Even though Ves had doubled the playback speed, he was still sharp enough to feel the ferocity and momentum of the Monster Slayer's moves.

No matter whether they fought against light skirmishers, knight mechs or other swordsman mechs, their momentum-based attacks always whipped up a lot of air while pushing back their opposition with undaunted power!

Ves might not be a mech pilot, but he possessed a decent understanding of the skill progression of mech pilots.

He could see that the pilots of these Monster Slayers managed to display at least twice as much proficiency than usual! The more talented mech pilots even showed as much as five times as much skill!

If Ves was able to pick up these details, then so did many other Wild Fighters.

Each of them fell in love with the domineering nature of the Monster Slayer and its increasingly famous ability to facilitate the swordsmanship of its pilots!

"The Wild Fighter Association projects that it will sell at least 7,000 units at the end of this month."

"7,000!?"

Ves looked surprised at this figure. Although it did not sound nearly as impressive as the LMC's sales figures in his home galaxy, the Monster Slayer was a second-class mech!

It was a lot harder for products to stand out in the second-class mech market.

The competition was fiercer and the standards were a lot higher. Many brands had long captured the hearts of customers for multiple generations, making it extremely difficult for new market entrants to gain a foothold in this lucrative market!

Ves already had high expectations for the commercial viability of Ketis' first commercial product, but this was unreasonable!

"The product life cycle of the Monster Slayer is still in the initial stages." Gavin excitedly explained. "The Wild Fighter Association not only has a lot of members, but also wields a considerable amount of influence. The customers who have ordered the Monster Slayer so far are all early adopters who were the easiest to convince. There is still a large base of potential customers that is still untapped. Once positive word of mouth about the Monster Slayer continues to spread, we project that it will sell 20,000 copies in the next month and 50,000 copies in the month after that! As long as the Monster Slayer doesn't expose any major faults or shortcomings, we believe it will not be difficult for it to become a mainstay model in many second-class competitive circuits throughout the Red Ocean!"

"This!"

Though Ves found it ridiculous that the work of a Journeyman who was younger and more inexperienced than him could achieve so much success, he quickly realized that this trajectory might actually come true.

Just like his own work, the mechs designed by Ketis offered value that far exceeded the products designed by other Journeymen.

In fact, with the unique training benefits provided by the Monster Slayer, not even the mechs designed by Masters could match this rare and unique selling point.

After all, how many of those Masters excelled at sword fighting?

How many of them could develop tailored sword styles for their own swordsman mech designs?

Did any of them ever hack their enemies apart on the battlefield in person?

There was no way that a second Ketis existed in the mech industry!

Ves grinned. A part of him might be jealous at her commercial success, but he keenly recognized that her quick rise came at a good time!

"Our clan has long been stuck in a financial hole. If the Monster Slayer starts selling big, we can finally speed up our investment plans!"

For the next five years, Ves wanted his clan to complete an extensive rebuilding and expansion program. None of the ships, mechs and infrastructure he intended to acquire were cheap. It would be incredibly helpful if his former student could immediately help with paying for all of the bills!

"How much money will we get for all of these early sales?"

"Not as much as we wish." Gavin replied. "The Monster Slayer is sold at 1.4 MTA credits, which is a typical price for the mid-range segment. However, since the Wild Fighter Association assumes all of the responsibilities for producing, selling, shipping and providing after-sales support for the Monster Slayer model, what we get is rather small."

Ves remembered the details of the initial agreement. This was merely a test for both sides. Neither the Larkinson Clan nor the Wild Fighter Association dared to commit too heavily on this cooperative venture. They first needed solid proof that working together was lucrative enough before going any further.

"I think the Wild Fighter Association should already be convinced that partnering up with Ketis is more than worthwhile, don't you think, Benny?"

Gavin nodded in agreement. "The designs of Ketis may be rough around the edges, but her future potential is high. Any rational executive from the Wild Fighter Association should be able to recognize that it is best to deepen their cooperation with her. You should discuss carefully with her on her upcoming design projects. With the successful example of the Monster Slayer, she stands a good chance of shooting into fame if her subsequent commercial mech models also gain widespread appeal."

"It depends on her wishes." Ves replied. "Earning a lot of money will make her feel validated, but I have the feeling she isn't interested in designing mech models that have the most mass appeal."

A swordsman mech designer like Ketis should be more interested in realizing more radical and exploratory mech concepts.

Any decent mech designer could design a serviceable swordsman mech, but it took a true lover and enthusiast to excel at this job.

A mech designer who purposely limited her product variety to a single mech type needed to put a lot more effort in coming up with new and original mech concepts. It was not necessarily good for their development to design similar machines over and over again.

In one of his previous talks with Ketis, Ves already gained the impression that she was done with designing swordsman mechs that specialized in wielding greatswords.

The Monster Slayer and the Second Sword models already allowed her to learn a lot of lessons.

She wouldn't be able to learn nearly as much if she designed a second batch of greatsword-wielding machines.

It was much better for her development if she went off the beaten track and explored different facets of swordsman mechs!

After Ves got up to speed on the Monster Slayer model's market performance, Gavin moved on to the other items on the agenda.

Ves displayed mild interest in the steady growth and expansion of both the Creation Association and the Open Consortium.

Both off-shoot organizations were still young and only started operations for a couple of months at most. Their development so far wasn't all that impressive, but Ves felt that both of them had a lot more future potential.

Originally, he didn't intend to intervene too much in their operations, but now that he had become a lot wealthier, he started to change his mind.

Perhaps it was a good idea to invest in both of his pet projects so that they could quickly get up to scale!

Once the Creation Association started to bind together hundreds of excellent craftsmen and artisans, his spiritual incarnation would probably develop new abilities that could offer him a lot more help in his own projects!

As for the Open Consortium, Ves wanted to increase the Larkinson Clan's weight in Davute. If he could indirectly tie more middle-sized companies to his network, his clan would no longer face as many difficulties in procuring specialty goods and services!

"Has the Open Consortium been able to lure in a second shipbuilding company?" Ves idly asked.

"I'm afraid I have to disappoint you, boss. After we have successfully managed to win over Murphy & Sons, the other local players have learned their lesson and have begun to court other shipbuilders more aggressively. Our Open Consortium can't match the benefits promised by the large regional alliances."

"A pity. We need to encourage Murphy & Sons to expand its business operations as fast as possible."

Before the Larkinson Clan managed to rope in Murphy & Sons, Ves would have been happy to develop an accord with any shipbuilding company.

Now that he had obtained what he wanted, he started growing increasingly more dissatisfied with Murphy & Sons.

Sure, the company's starship output was decent, but it was woefully insufficient for the Larkinson Clan! This was especially considering that Murphy & Sons took orders from dozens of customers!

"Benny, give me some advice. How can we convince Murphy & Sons to speed up its delivery of starships to our clan?"

The assistant frowned in thought. "The Murphies are already working as hard as they can. I can see two possible ways for them to supply more ships to us. We can convince them to build new starships exclusively for the Larkinson Clan. I doubt Mrs. Gelly Murphy will agree to that because it will make her company entirely dependent on the whims of a single party. I think it is much better if we inject a lot of cash into the shipbuilding company and offer other forms of support. This can get expensive though, and we need to make sure that Murphy & Sons reciprocate our actions."

"Hmmm..."

Chapter 3939 The Versatility of Phasewater

"If you ask me, it is better to intensify our efforts into partnering up with a larger shipbuilding company." Gavin said. "Murphy & Sons was just right for us a few months ago, but now that we are returning with a mother load of MTA merits and phasewater, we can do much better."

"Elaborate, please."

"As long as we are willing to spend enough money, it is not impossible for us to become friends with a shipbuilding company that used to be out of our league. This will be an expensive relationship, but as long as we supply enough money and phasewater, we

should be able to get a lot of priority on ship orders. If speed is of the essence and if you urgently want to add more capital ships in our fleet, then this is a much more attractive option than waiting for Murphy & Sons to get up to scale."

Gavin was right. Ves and the rest of the Larkinson Clan shouldn't be growing too attached to a single shipbuilding company.

However, Ves felt that there was greater potential in deepening his cooperation with Murphy & Sons.

As long as the Larkinsons could invest in the company, they could gain more influence over its operations.

It would become easier for Ves to steer the development and production of the company's starships, thereby making them more suitable for the Larkinson Clan.

This was not the time and place to make such a decision, though. Ves decided to shelve this topic and bring it up with Vivian Tsai at a later date.

He continued to ask Gavin about the state of the Larkinson Clan. The remaining issues weren't as important or noteworthy. Ves merely said a few words before he considered the next item on the agenda.

"There is one more thing, boss. You should address the clan about the Purgatory Campaign. A lot of Larkinsons have died, but a handful of them have also managed to break through. We managed to make it off with a lot of phasewater as well, so the clansmen all expect us to convert that into a lot of wealth and other luxuries. You need to convey a message that you respect the sacrifices of the soldiers and pledge to reward everyone for making this success possible."

"Hmm, you're right, but right now is too soon. We just returned from Purgatory and still need to handle the aftermath. In addition, I haven't made any concrete decisions on our future strategy and how to spend all of those MTA merits. Let's wait until we return to Davute. I can hold a more comprehensive speech on what we have achieved and where we shall be going forward."

"That will work. Just don't leave us guessing for long. The clansmen need clarity from the top."

"Understood."

These days, Ves no longer needed to address the losses they suffered or facilitate the mourning process. The Larkinson Army had enough leaders to perform this depressing but necessary chore.

Once Gavin finally finished his daily briefing, Ves dismissed his assistant and spent an hour checking a few files before deciding to pay a visit to different people and departments.

His first priority was to visit the ship's vault. When he arrived at the right place, he encountered a lot more guards than before.

The strategic materials reserve stored a lot more valuables than ever before!

"So... this is what happens when we store 120 kg of phasewater in a single place." Ves commented.

The vault underwent considerable renovations in order to store the phasewater more securely. Small metal crates that could contain up to 2 kilograms each were spaced as wide from each other as possible.

It became exponentially harder to store a lot of phasewater in a single place. In order to prevent this troublesome exotic from producing more violent spatial fluctuations, the Larkinsons had to resort to this improvised solution to minimize the risks to the Spirit of Bentheim.

When Ves personally inspected this arrangement, he thought that this was quite a clever layout. The alloy used to hold the phasewater was known to contain the spatial activity generated by this substance, but accidents could always happen.

By splitting them up in different containers and spreading them apart from each other, any accident was unlikely to produce a chain reaction.

To be honest, it would have been safer to split up the phasewater stash and store them in different compartments on numerous ships, but Ves rejected that approach.

He did not want to lose sight of all of this wealth!

Even though 120 kg of phasewater was not as precious as the 2 metric tons that his forces had originally retrieved, it still represented an immense amount of value!

As Ves personally checked whether the Larkinson Clan retained its fair share of phasewater, Sara Voiken arrived at the vault.

It turned out that she was the one who had made the specific arrangements to safely store the phasewater.

"Thank you for your work. All of this phasewater could have produced a disaster if no one was attentive enough."

"You don't need to thank me. Gloriana assigned me this duty." The defensive specialist replied. "Besides, the containers we have aren't all that bad. The materials are far from the best, and I recommend that we purchase a better storage solution once we return to Davute, but I don't think the phasewater will produce any accidents for the time being."

Ves turned around and swept his gaze across the vault. He still needed to wrap his mind around possessing so much phasewater.

He already started to think about what to do with so much resource wealth.

One of his goals was to acquire a lot of super drives and minidrives to grant additional superluminal travel capabilities to his starships and mechs.

100 kilograms was plenty enough phasewater to add superdrives to all of his capital ships and minidrives to his key mechs!

However, was this truly the best way for him to allocate all of that phasewater? This material had many other applications. He could also sell it for a huge amount of money or trade it for all kinds of rare and exclusive goods.

Phasewater was no longer a pure resource to him anymore. When he managed to gather this much of the exotic, it became a currency of sorts.

Each kilogram of phasewater was effectively worth 200,000 MTA merits!

While there were a lot of goodies that Ves could acquire for MTA merits, the problem with them is that he could only spend them on the institutions of the Mech Trade Association.

There was no way he could directly pay MTA merits to a private company in order to obtain an expensive product!

Phasewater was much more convenient in this regard. As Ves thought about it, its status as a resource where demand was incredibly high but supply was abysmally low meant that it could function as an alternate form of high-value currency!

Ves could buy all kinds of high-value goods from companies that would ordinarily turn him away for lacking sufficient capital or prestige.

Phasewater was the most desirable resource of the Red Ocean and its availability was enough to open the doors of many companies!

Aside from that, the ability to gather a lot of phasewater in the first place was an enormous reputation booster!

Best of all, the MTA's willingness to directly exchange phasewater for MTA merits meant that this exotic was actually a way to circumvent the non-transference rule!

Ves ever wanted to grant a couple of million MTA merits to Gloriana for whatever reason, he could not touch the 211 million MTA merits that he was about to obtain.

What he could do was transfer 10 kilograms of phasewater to Gloriana, who subsequently proceeded to walk into one of the branches of the Association in order to submit her newfound bounty for MTA merits.

For a moment, he considered whether he should throw his wife a bone. While she didn't directly participate in the Purgatory Campaign alongside many of the other clansmen who remained in the Garimel System, she did contribute indirectly by helping with the design of all of the Larkinson mechs.

Most notably, she made important contributions to the Everchanger, which made all of the recent breakthroughs possible, and the B-Man, which happened to be so excellent that Vincent Ricklin achieved the state of Unity of Man and Machine during his legendary apotheosis!

As Ves imagined handing over a bottle of phasewater to Gloriana only for her to splurge it on a second handbag or a pair of overpriced designer shoes, he quickly shook his head.

On second thought, it was best if he was the only person to decide on what to do with all of this phasewater!

"Sir?" Sara asked.

"Yes, Sara?"

"Forgive me for being presumptuous, but... what do you intend to do with all of this phasewater."

"I haven't decided yet. It's way too soon for me to decide." Ves replied as he gazed in her direction. "It sounds like you have a few suggestions. Well. Out with it. What do you think we should do with all of this phasewater?"

"I think there are many worthwhile uses for this phasewater, sir. The most obvious application is to supply them to a drive manufacturer so that we can equip all of our capital ships and possibly our sub-capital ships with super drives. It's just... this might not be the best use of this rare resource."

"Hm?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "Equipping our starships with super drives will not only increase the mobility of our fleet, but also increase our safety. Our chances of evading or outrunning unbeatable opponents will be much higher if we can use warp travel to zip

through deep space and enhanced FTL travel to cross from one end of Krakatoa to the other end of the zone."

"You have a point, sir, but... think of how many fantastic mechs we can design and build with this phasewater! This is a resource with the same significance to all of our mech designers as Unending alloy is to you. It is a magnificent material that we can use to design a lot of high-quality mechs that are normally impossible for us to develop and build."

It sounded like Sara Voiken had a large personal stake in how the Larkinsons should use all of the phasewater.

As a fellow Journeyman, Ves quickly understood her motivations.

There were two attractive benefits to using phasewater on mechs.

The first was that the Design Department could design all kinds of unique and extravagant minidrive-equipped mechs.

From expert mechs to elite units of high-mobility machines, the possibilities were incredible!

If a mech as powerful as the First Sword or the Shield of Samar suddenly gained cruise drives, their biggest weakness no longer existed! Distance would no longer be a major hindrance for mechs equipped with miniature warp drives.

The second benefit to designing minidrive-equipped mechs was that every Journeyman involved in their design would be able to expand their design horizons.

The novelty and stimulation of designing mechs with much more powerful mobility options was enough to make people like Ves excited!

To design a mech that not only traveled quickly but also leveraged this rare function to achieve a decisive advantage in battle was an incredibly interesting challenge!

His imagination already started to go wild with all of the special mechs that he could design.

From designing an assassin mech that could reach the enemy's backline in an instant to designing a scout mech that could explore much further from the expeditionary fleet than before, there were a lot of useful mech concepts that Ves wanted to explore!

"I think... I will take your suggestion under advisement." Ves replied to Sara. "The design possibilities are fascinating and I truly wish to explore them further. Perhaps we might succeed in putting our own spin on warp-capable mechs."

He just remembered that he had harvested the Phase King's brain during the Purgatory Campaign.

If he converted this half-dead king fish into a design spirit, wouldn't he gain the perfect spiritual support for minidrive-equipped mechs?!

Ves was curious to find out whether the Phase King could make a material difference to these kinds of mechs!

Chapter 3940 Instilled With Confidence

"Nyeow nyeow..."

"You hear that? Minxie has been worried sick while you were gone! When I think of all of the mech pilots who died in Purgatory, I worry I might be one of those unlucky spouses who become widowed all of a sudden."

"C'mon babe, I'm fine. With my strong physique and good diet, I'll be up and running in no time."

"You don't sound like it. Just look at you. You're barely able to sit upright in your bed!"

When Ves entered one of the recovery rooms of the Dragon's Den, he encountered one of the newly-emerged expert pilots along with the rest of his little family.

A white Persian cat rested on Vincent's lap while rubbing her head against her owner's hand.

Director Raella Larkinson stood beside the bed with a concerned and exasperated expression.

"Oh hey, look who's here! The big man finally paid us a visit!"

Ves ignored Vincent and nodded towards Raella. "How are you doing, cousin?"

"I'm doing better." Raella flatly said. "This dummy here is as stubborn as ever. Advancing to expert pilot hasn't seemed to wisen him up at all. He's still as overconfident as ever."

"Hey! I'm an expert pilot now. I'm stronger than ever. Once Ves over here delivers an expert mech to me, I will show you that my performance last time was not a fluke! I have found my calling now! I am a master puncher!"

"You idiot! You pilot a hybrid mech! Fighting up close is only a last resort! You should stick to using ranged weapons!"

"I don't like them anymore." Vincent shook his head. "Back when I broke through, I finally learned my true calling. I've been moving back and forth between different mech types because I never really found what I was good at. In the last battle, I finally found my calling. Screw rifles and cannons. Screw swords and shields. A real man fights with his fists! It's punching time for me from now on! Once I can pilot an expert mech that's a pure punching machine, you can just sit back and cheer whenever I shatter starships in half with my punches and wrestle phase whales into submission!"

"Nyeow!"

Raella did not even deign to comment on her husband's mad ideas. She turned to Ves with a pleading expression.

"Please don't indulge my idiot of a manchild over here. I have a suspicion that his apotheosis hit him so hard over the head that his mental age has regressed. As the responsible adult in the room, I hope you can smack some sense in his head and get him to pilot a normal mech again."

Ves shrugged. "I'll see what I can do. You should get used to this, though. In my extensive personal experience, expert pilots are stubborn and deaf to persuasion."

"I know that. I grew up in the same family as you, remember? Just do what you can. Vincent respects you because you're his mech supplier."

"I understand. Can you step outside for a moment? I'd like to talk to Vincent in confidence."

"Very well. You boys go play by yourselves."

"Nyeow nyeow."

Raella picked up her furry white cat and left the recovery room. Once the hatch closed up, Ves approached and sat down at one of the bedside chairs.

Now that he came close, he briefly swept Vincent with his spiritual senses.

The man he used to know had undergone an extensive transformation in mind and will. Although his personality didn't appear to have changed, he had gained a strong core of confidence and self-belief that persistently propped him up. All of his insecurities and his doubts about himself had disappeared!

Before his apotheosis, Vincent often acted brave in front of a crowd, but Ves knew that this was partially a facade.

Vincent was not an elite mech pilot. He did not undergo military training. He never truly specialized in a particular set of piloting or fighting skills.

In Ves' opinion, Vincent was just a messy mech pilot who lucked out and broke through to the rank of expert candidate under admittedly dire conditions.

That still did not make him ready for the next step. Aside from polishing his piloting skills, Vincent also needed to undergo an extensive mental evolution before he could think about becoming a demigod.

Ves estimated that it would have taken five to ten years before Vincent grew 'mature' enough to assume the power and responsibilities of an expert pilot.

However, the Everchanger's stunt had given this lucky bastard a shortcut that allowed him to resolve his confidence issues in advance, allowing him to undergo apotheosis at a crucial time!

Though Ves was happy that one of his expert candidates finally broke through, he felt that Vincent had only undergone the bare minimum of mental evolution before he became an expert pilot.

Perhaps it would have been better if he spent a few more years as an expert candidate in order to mature his mentality over time!

Now that he thought about it, Ves felt that a lot of mech pilots who broke through too quickly were too prone to developing mental disorders.

He could think about that later. First, he needed to finish his round of talks with all of the new expert candidates and expert pilots that had emerged.

"How are you feeling, Vincent, or should I say Venerable Vincent? Breakthroughs can be violent and exhausting, and you went through an even more dramatic event than usual. To be honest, I did not expect you to wake up so soon."

Ves almost felt sick as he used the word 'Venerable' together with the name 'Vincent'. For some reason, he felt as if the multiverse had taken a terribly wrong turn by creating the conditions where the two words became a fixed phenomenon!

"Heh, as I said, I take care of my body." Vincent grinned. "I'm not as soft as the others."

Plenty of mech pilots regularly exercised their bodies, but their recovery speeds were not necessarily as good as that of Vincent. Perhaps there were other factors at play.

Ves called up an information panel that briefly listed Vincent's current condition. The data all looked fine to him. Aside from feeling tired and needing at least a week or two of rest, there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the new expert pilot.

His inspection of his spiritual state also revealed fairly few problems. Ves would have thought that sustaining the state of Unity of Man and Machine would have exerted an immense mental burden on him. His force of will should have been weak and ragged.

Instead, aside from feeling a bit drained and listless, Venerable Vincent's willpower had become a lot more solid and unshakeable!

After Ves asked a few more questions about Venerable Vincent's physical and mental state, he finally chose to move on to the most critical subject on the agenda.

"Now that you have successfully broken through, the B-Man that you have piloted for a while is no longer a good match for your newfound strength. We need to provide you with a new solution in order to better draw out your power on the battlefield and give you ample room to develop your resonance strength."

"The B-Man... how is my mech doing?"

"It's in poor condition, but that is not a big deal. Enough of its frame is intact that we can easily repair it without losing too much in the process."

Before he began to meet with all of the new expert candidates and expert pilots, he had taken the time to visit where their old machines were stored in order to determine their actual states.

He activated a small projection that showed Venerable Vincent a snapshot of his B-Man.

Compared to the B-Man in its prime, the custom hybrid mech looked as if it had gone through a giant blender before getting beat up by hooligans.

The most dramatic signs of damage was the extensive amount of cracks adorning its exterior.

The B-Man's muscled chest and abdomen no longer conveyed a sense of masculinity as all of the broken and deformed surfaces made it seem as if the custom mech had turned into an abuse victim!

The stresses that the B-Man had undergone in the previous battle also caused it to lose large amounts of the gold coating that made it look like a god in the form of a mech. The loss of coating exposed the dull and scratched gray alloy plating underneath.

The B-Man already looked sorry from the outside, but Ves had already confirmed that its internal architecture was filled with even more cracks!

However, Vincent did not pay attention to the damage that he couldn't see. From the moment the projection appeared in front of his face, his eyes were glued towards his hybrid mech's crotch area.

"My B-Man! My codpiece! What happened to my big and beautiful codpiece!"

It appeared that Vincent had overloaded the B-Man's systems during his breakthrough event.

The codpiece not only served as a protective layer for the custom mech's shield generator, but also functioned as an external heatsink and radiator.

This meant that it could grow quite hot if the B-Man was running at or above full power!

Ves didn't need to look at the battle footage to know that Vincent had probably gone overboard and pushed the codpiece beyond its limits.

Not only had the excess heat caused the alloys to grow soft, the intense physical stresses also caused parts of it to crack and chip away!

The result of Vincent's violent and brutal handling was that half of the B-Man's codpiece had fallen apart!

"It's not as bad as it looks, Vincent. We can put it back together."

"A codpiece isn't supposed to fall apart! You need to put on a stronger one. I don't want it to fail again!"

"That is related to what I wanted to talk about, Vincent. As you know, you need an expert mech. Before we proceed, I need to hear your decision on how to go forward. You have two possible options. First, we can retain the essence of the B-Man and upgrade it to an expert mech. Second, we can retire your custom mech now that it has done its job and start on a clean slate. What do you prefer?"

"Do you need to ask?" Vincent looked at Ves as if this was a stupid question. "Of course I'm sticking to my battle buddy! We became soulmates during the last battle. I wouldn't have been able to punch fish-whales left and right if I didn't become one with Bravo and the B-Man! I am not a man who is ungrateful to the friends who helped me become stronger. I want both of them to continue to fight by my side, no matter whether I'm an expert pilot or a god pilot. We are best friends forever! You can call me the second coming of Venerable Jannzi!"

Ves slowly nodded. He already expected this answer, but he needed to ask the question anyway in order to make sure.

"We... can accommodate your wishes. As I've said, the B-Man is not in good shape, but there is plenty left that we can upgrade it to an expert mech without changing its essential character. This won't be a quick and easy project, though. Before we embark on this labor-intensive upgrade process, we need to decide on the basic concept and configuration of your expert mech. Do you prefer to keep as much of the original B-Man as possible while lifting up its performance to expert mech standards, or do you want to morph it into a different or more specialized machine?"

Venerable Vincent defiantly crossed his arms. "Didn't you hear me earlier? I have found my calling as a warrior now! I don't need to pilot a hybrid mech anymore. All I need is a mech that can punch! I feel like that as long as you can turn my expert mech into a brawler mech, I can one day enter that wonderful state again!"

"...Are you sure about that, Vincent? The B-Man is a hybrid mech from beginning to end. Turning it into a melee mech and especially one that is focused on bare-handed fighting is an extreme transformation. The design challenges are considerable and the results might not be as impressive as you expect. It is better to start over and design an expert brawler mech from scratch."

Unfortunately for Ves, his client stuck to his demands!

"No! Unacceptable! I won't abandon my combat partner, not after everything that we have been through! I will have my punching mech one way or another! My B-Man, no, my C-Man will be the most manliest mech to ever exist in the Larkinson Clan!"