

Mech 4141

Chapter 4141 Black Kitty

One of the more interesting aspects about Andraste was her companion spirit. Just like Aurelia, Andraste's other half was a spiritual kitten as well.

"Yaika, can you go outside so I can take a look at you? I need to inspect your growth stage and see whether you have developed in a healthy direction."

"Whhhuuuu?"

Little Andraste, who was wearing a cute yellow onesie, stared up at her father with no sign of comprehension at all. She was still far too young to understand human speech.

Even if she was a bit older, she still wouldn't have understood what Ves was trying to convey. Though Andraste was a designer baby whose genes imparted greater intelligence and learning capabilities to her, her overall design direction was different from that of her older sister.

Aurelia had been bioengineered to become an excellent and charismatic leader. Her brain development heavily leaned towards increasing her social skills and other related skills.

One of the side effects of this biased cognitive development was that the first-born daughter was able to talk and communicate substantially earlier than other babies!

Of course, activating her spirituality extremely early in her life also helped a lot. The speed in which she became self-aware was frighteningly quick!

Though Andraste also enjoyed a lot of cognitive enhancements, hers was biased towards mech piloting and combat, with only a little bit dedicated towards command and overall intelligence enhancements.

Part of this already became quite evident in how much faster Andraste was able to gain control over her own body and limbs.

Ordinary babies spent many months in a body that was too weak and feeble to move in a coherent manner.

Though designer babies were a lot better in this regard, it was too reckless to speed up this development too much.

Only an abnormal kid like Andraste was able to crawl with her own limbs at a time when she should barely be able to roll around her plump little in her crib!

"Look! Look, Ves! Isn't she adorable? She's so talented!" Gloriana cheered as she tracked her little girl's antics.

"I don't think she can keep that up. Her body and limbs are still too underdeveloped."

Ves was right. Andraste only crawled around for a couple of minutes before she took another nap on the spot.

In any case, getting Andraste to show her companion spirit when she was asleep was easier said than done.

Fortunately, Ves possessed several means to get Andraste's other self to appear.

Blinky silently exited from his head and dove into his daughter. Soon enough, Blinky reappeared while lifting out a black kitten that was hanging from his maw.

The cute black shorthair kitten looked so soft and adorable that Ves had to resist the urge to embrace Andraste's companion spirit.

"Hmm. Interesting."

The appearance of a companion spirit said a lot about the person, especially if Ves did not decide it in advance.

The reason why Mana appeared so white was because Aurelia developed a bias towards Lufa early on in her life.

His first-born daughter could have grown her companion spirits in many different directions.

Mana could have embraced another pure influence such as Goldie or the Solemn Guardian.

Aside from that, the spiritual kitten also had the option of embracing a mix of influences and developing brand-new powers.

In the end, Mana embraced purity and turned into a powerful protector against negative spiritual influences. The white kitten also started to develop other interesting powers, but it was too soon to know what the growing companion spirit could do for the time being.

"Mana is a good companion for someone who spends a lot of time with other people." Ves smiled.

As for Andraste, her companion spirit was already predisposed towards combat.

Just as with his first-born daughter, Ves inserted six carefully selected ingredients into Andraste's companion spirit seed.

The selection was different in order to fit Andraste's own proclivities.

Each of the ingredients were useful in multiple applications, but he made sure that they were all relevant in combat.

The first key ingredient came from himself, as usual. If Yaika embraced life, then Andraste could potentially develop into a mech pilot similar to Venerable Joshua.

The second ingredient came from the Phase King. The power of phasewater and spatial manipulation was quite evident to everyone in the Red Ocean. If Yaika was able to embrace this aspect of herself, then Andraste would definitely be able to perform brilliantly if she ever had the chance of piloting a transphasic mech!

The third ingredient came from Helena. The power of death was one of the most lethal expressions of spiritual power that he had ever witnessed. Seeing and hearing how Helena was able to bypass many forms of defenses and sap the life out of enemies was awe-inspiring!

A mech pilot or any sort of warrior that was able to control the power of death would definitely become a feared presence in any fight!

The Handmaidens of Death and all of the other Hexer expert pilots who had broken through while piloting any of his Valkyrie mechs could attest to that! Their ability to kill weaker individuals was especially horrifying!

The fourth ingredient came from Qilanxo. Though the defense-oriented design spirit had lost a lot of shine after the emergence of more powerful and exotic spiritual entities, that did not mean that the former sacred god was weak!

Ves would have loved it if Andraste's companion spirit embraced Qilanxo. Of course, he would have preferred it if his daughter did not develop an extreme personality shift like Venerable Jannzi.

The fifth ingredient came from the Illustrious One. While Ves had a few concerns about the luminar design spirit's alien influences, there was no better choice if Andraste ever wanted to excel in ranged combat in the future.

There was much about luminar crystal technology that still remained untapped. If Ves ever managed to uncover additional useful tech and applications, his daughter would be able to make great use of them if her companion spirit ever leaned towards the Illustrious One!

The sixth ingredient came from Zeigra. By now, the former Crown Cat had taken on traits that came from his father Ryncol. This caused the aggressive design spirit to become even more useful in mech combat.

It would have been nice if Andraste was able to inherit a portion of her grandfather's strength. If her companion spirit turned into a ferocious tiger that was capable of corroding enemy machines, she would gain a powerful advantage in any melee duels!

Ves expected Andraste's companion spirit to take her sweet time to choose an initial direction.

Yet what did he see before his eyes?

A black cat that already exuded the power of death!

This was despite the fact that the Larkinsons had never exposed Andraste to any threats!

Ves didn't know why Yaika, the name that he bestowed on the black kitten, turned so dark so soon.

"Did I accidentally kill any people lately?"

Definitely not! He had not engaged in any funny business ever since he settled on Davute. The Cat Nest where his daughters spent most of their time was no battlefield or executioner's ground either.

So how come Andraste developed such an early affinity towards death?!

"Out of all of the possible evolutionary directions that Yaika could follow, why did she take after Helena?"

He truly couldn't explain why this happened. He seriously suspected that his initial implementation of the companion spirit seed was seriously flawed.

Perhaps he had overlooked a glitch or a flaw that caused his companion spirit seeds to lock in an initial evolution direction far in advance!

"Ugh, I'll have to pay attention to this next time I impart a kid with a companion spirit seed."

Gloriana wanted to have six children in total, and so far she only fulfilled a third of that quota.

With four more kids to go, Ves had to make sure his subsequent kids received more say in how they wanted to develop themselves in the future.

"Put Yaika back, Blinky."

The purple spiritual cat briefly dove into Andraste's head and put the tiny infantile companion spirit back where she belonged.

Ves spent the next few minutes staring at his adorable daughter as she dozed off with no absolutely no concern.

As he recalled how much effort he and Gloriana put into setting their second daughter up to be a fantastic mech pilot, he grew more concerned.

Leaving aside the question whether Andraste would be able to develop the right genetic aptitude to become a mech pilot, Ves might not be happy if she did end up possessing the correct talent.

Due to the MTA's persistent efforts into shaping human culture and perception towards mechs, there were many parents who thought it would be great if their kids were able to pilot mechs!

In the Age of Mechs, there was no legitimate war weapon other than mechs in most parts of human society.

With warships ruled out as permissible options, the only way for states and groups of people to defend themselves and fight for their interests was by fielding lots of mechs.

Given the importance of converting potentates into trained and motivated mech pilots, a lot of states had done a good job at instilling the right values as

well as incentives to encourage many parents into sending their potentate offspring to any available mech academies.

Cultivating enough eligible manpower was a vital priority to a state. Although there might not be enough mechs to give every trained mech pilot a job, it was enough to have them in reserve in case a war broke out in the future.

The depletion of the pool of available mech pilots was one of the most common reasons why states lost wars!

While there were certainly risks to turning kids into soldiers who would one day fight on the battlefield, the incentives were quite abundant.

Aside from raising the status of both the future mech pilots and the families that produced them, the salaries and other compensation measures were highly attractive.

Average mech pilots already earned several times the amount of a well-educated civilian in most states!

Elite mech pilots and mech pilots enjoyed drastically higher remuneration than those sums!

So long as these mech pilots managed to survive their tours, they could easily retire in comfort and use their accumulated wealth to invest in a business or buy a big mansion.

Even if they died, their families and heirs would receive rich compensation. This had always been the custom in most states. After all, if the soldiers didn't feel they were being treated fairly by their employers, there was no way to motivate them to fight earnestly on the battlefield.

The maintaining the support and morale of their own mech pilots was a vital necessity to any state or group!

The Larkinson Clan was no different in this regard. As someone who grew up in the Larkinson Family, Ves knew how vital it was to make his own troops feel valued. He had personally ensured that the mech pilots in the clan received even more generous compensation packages than was the norm!

Yet what about Andraste?

"While all of this is good enough to encourage most of the mech pilots in our clan to make use of their talents and fight on my behalf, do I really need to send my daughter to the battlefield as well?"

Ves was different from the rank-and-file members of the clan. Though every Larkinson received generous treatment, they always desired more. Serving in the Larkinson Army was a good way to earn more precious rewards such as valuable augmentations quickly.

"My little girl doesn't have to go through all of that." Ves realized. "I can just buy or make what she needs."

Despite the irrelevance of the existing incentive structure for him and his daughter, a strong part of him still wanted to help his daughter become a successful mech pilot.

Why did he feel this way?

Why would he actively want to push his baby girl to risk her life on the battlefield when there were easily thousands of clansmen who were more than willing to take on this burden?

Chapter 4142 Genetic Aptitude Angst

It did not take long for Ves to come up with an answer why he was so willing to raise his second daughter into a mech pilot.

"Our family needs to be able to defend itself."

Ves understood that there was a lot more to life than piloting mechs.

He had accomplished vastly more as a mech designer than if he retained the ability to pilot mechs and went on to serve in the Mech Corps!

If he truly lived such an ordinary trajectory, then he would have likely turned into one of many Larkinson mech pilots who blindly risked his life for a state that did not care for him and his family.

There would have been no opportunity for him to earn increasingly greater sums of money. He wouldn't have been able to build an entire clan from scratch that vastly exceeded the power and wealth of the Larkinson Family either.

He was made to be a mech designer.

Yet despite how much Ves valued his identity as a mech designer, that did not change the uncomfortable fact that he was ultimately a non-combatant.

His ability to affect the battlefield was limited to preparing the mechs and organizing his clan beforehand.

Once a battle started, there was little he could do to tilt the outcome in his favor.

Sometimes even that was not enough, as evidenced by the painful deaths his clan suffered over the years.

All of the battles that Ves took part in had emphasized the need to control as much military might as possible.

It took a lot of trouble and effort for him to build up his clan and his own mech army.

The Avatars of Myth, the Living Sentinels and all of the other mech legions that were at his disposal today might be under his beck and call, but if it came down to it relying on others to safeguard his interests was not as good as taking care of business himself.

This was why Ves envied Patriarch Reginald Cross!

The Cross Patriarch might not know a thing about running a business or designing a mech, but he didn't need to learn all of that complicated stuff.

He only needed to be stronger than anyone else to get his way! He could fight anyone who wanted to take his stuff and he could attract a lot of mech pilots and other qualified manpower by virtue of his strength!

Ever since Patriarch Reginald broke through, the status of the Cross Clan had risen like a rocket.

No longer was the Larkinson Clan the only group in the Golden Skull Alliance that mattered.

A clan that was led by a genuine ace pilot often had boundless prospects, especially in a dangerous region like the Red Ocean where martial strength was even more essential to survival than in a more peaceful locale like the Milky Way!

"If times are good, then mech designers and other civilians can play an important role. If times are bad, then the only people that can ensure everyone's survival are soldiers."

This was ultimately the reason why Ves wanted to raise at least one powerful mech pilot within his own little family.

Aurelia was the eldest sister and a natural fit to become a leader. As long as she was willing to follow the trajectory that her parents had prepared for her, the first-born daughter was in a great position to become the future leader of the Larkinson Clan!

This would ensure that the leadership of his own organization would remain within his sphere of influence even if he no longer attended to its affairs.

The only reason why Ves remained a patriarch to begin with was because he did not want another leader to hijack his own clan from under his nose.

There weren't many people he could trust with ultimate power over the clan, but his own offspring were definitely different!

Yet relying on authority and respect was not enough to ensure that his lineage remained dominant inside and outside his clan.

He needed to provide himself and Aurelia a more solid backing.

If he could raise Andraste into a powerful mech pilot or greater, then his lineage would have the military power to ensure their dominance for centuries!

Those that did not respect his design and business accomplishments would most certainly acknowledge Andraste's martial prowess.

Those that did what Ves could do for the mech community would not hold any crooked ideas with a supremely powerful daughter at his side.

In short, there were too many upsides to nurturing Andraste into a future expert pilot or ace pilot.

Even if she did not develop the right genetic aptitude in the end, then there were always other chances.

With four more children on the way, Ves did not believe that none of them would have the fortune of developing a good genetic aptitude!

Still, Andraste possessed so many favorable conditions in this area that it would be a horrendous waste if she was unable to pilot a mech.

As a father, he could not bear the thought of letting her down once she became ten years old.

"There should definitely be a way to raise a kid's genetic aptitude! I don't believe the Mech Trade Association is as helpless as everyone thinks. How

can such a powerful organization that was completely dedicated to mechs achieve no results at all in this vital research direction?"

Perhaps Ves wouldn't have been qualified to hear about this possibility in the past, but his status was much different in the present day.

He had done too much for the Mech Trade Association already. Not only did he provide the mechers with a transcendence glow that could artificially induce mech pilots into breaking through, he also invented a spiritual training program that could do the same job in a different way!

Not only that, but his future potential was also great.

For example, the aforementioned spiritual training program could potentially provide high-ranking mech pilots the option to conduct simulation training that could fully reproduce the actual performance of their powerful mechs.

Ves and the T Institute were also researching more ways to empower and facilitate the growth of mech pilots. From spirit fruits to companion spirits, he promised to offer more to humanity in a decade than entire MTA research teams had contributed in centuries!

Though it might sound a little conceited, Ves was convinced his status among the people in the known within the Association surpassed that of many of their own Master Mech Designers!

This was evident in how openly the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction favored him and pulled strings on his behalf.

Though Ves did not have as many experiences in interacting with the MTA than many Masters, he was pretty certain that getting in touch with the likes of Master Willix, Master Bouderon, Master Dervidian and the Polymath herself did not happen to any ordinary Journeyman!

As Ves continued to worry about Andraste's potential chances of piloting a mech, he simply couldn't settle his unease.

"I deal with uncertainties every day. Why can't I settle down regarding this specific issue?"

He looked down at his cute and tiny red-headed daughter. His paternal instincts encouraged him to do everything possible to pave the way for Andraste to reach her potential and enjoy the most of what life had to offer!

Not being able to interface with a mech would be devastating if her parents and her environment spent years on preparing her to become a mech pilot.

This was also why most parents generally did not build up the expectations of their children so much.

The crushing disappointment that most children felt after they tested their genetic aptitudes after their tenth birthday was too great for them to endure!

Should Ves and Gloriana pretend that Andraste wasn't set up to become a mech pilot over the next decade?

"Perhaps this is better, but..."

As someone who interacted with many mech pilots and once dreamt of becoming one himself, he felt it was a huge pity of Andraste ultimately missed the opportunity of her lifetime.

"Do I truly have no power to affect my daughter's chances?"

Ves became so obsessed by this matter that he spent the next few days in a research frenzy.

He first read a lot of academic literature on this subject matter. Even if most of the medical and neurological theories and jargon went right over his head, he managed to understand the broad conclusions of the studies.

"There is no systematic method to instill genetic aptitude onto people."

In fact, the most predominant theory in the branch of neurological sciences was that almost every human was born with at least some viable form of genetic aptitude.

The problem was that as these children grew up, they would get subjected to many different environmental variables. Their nutrition, their exposure to different temperatures, their sleeping patterns, their head injuries and so on all imposed a positive or negative effect on a child's genetic aptitude.

Due to how quickly young children tended to grow, their genetic aptitudes swung so wildly that there was no point in measuring them at this stage.

It was only before the onset of puberty that their brain development no longer swung so wildly in this particular aspect.

If a kid possessed D-grade aptitude at the age of 10, then the chances were overwhelmingly great that this would be the aptitude that they would remain stuck with for the rest of their lives!

One group of neurologists believed that achieving the best genetic aptitude was a matter of raising a child as well as possible. If the positive influences outweigh the negative ones, then a kid had a high likelihood of developing decent genetic aptitude!

However, their theories were not convincing enough to other scientists. There were plenty of cases of children who grew up in poor and awful environments that nonetheless turned into highly talented potentates.

The contradicting theories and empirical data provoked a huge fight within the academic community that still raged on to this day!

Ves eventually sighed and shut down his terminal. "This is useless."

If the neurologists developed a secret formula that vastly increased the chances of developing the right genetic aptitude, then he was pretty sure that none of them were a part of the mainstream scientific community.

The acrimonious fight between the different schools of thought made it clear that most of these self-professed experts possessed no actual clue about this subject matter!

"If conventional science can't provide any answers, then what about unconventional science?"

Ves decided to pay a visit to the Larkinson Biotech Institute and the T Institute in order to find out whether any of the scientists under his employ possessed any viable ideas.

Unfortunately, there were few people within the two research institutions that possessed any expertise in genetic aptitude, and none of them possessed the guts or ambition to increase a child's chances of becoming a qualified potentate.

"What did you expect, Ves?" Director Ranya Wodin-Larkinson placed her hands on her hips. "There is no way that we can embark on such a difficult research project! It is easier for our clan to develop a minidrive than to invent a method that can guarantee that our offspring will develop good genetic aptitudes! What you have been puzzling over has driven so many neurologists and other biotech researchers crazy that it has pretty much become a taboo to dive into this rabbit hole!"

It was far too difficult to produce any results in this field. If Ves invested millions of MTA credits into building a specialized research institute that solely dedicated its efforts to studying genetic aptitude, the likely outcome was that he would have wasted all of that money while gaining absolutely nothing in return!

Ves didn't even have any hope that spiritual engineering might be able to handwave the problem away because there was no foundation for this kind of transformation.

"Stop dreaming, sir." Pesca Aduc, the recently appointed director of the T Institute, replied to Ves. "Let me put it in terms that you can understand. Biology is equivalent to the hardware of a mech while spirituality is the software of a mech. Genetic aptitude is solely determined by the quality, configuration and condition of the hardware. While there are ways for software to affect hardware, the possibilities are relatively limited and I cannot see how this interaction can solve such a difficult problem."

"Damn. It was worth a try."

Chapter 4143 Can L Ask A Question?

Since not even the T Institute offered any practical solutions to the genetic aptitude problem, Ves finally gave up the faint hope that he could resolve it by himself.

He lost much of the hubris that he built up after accomplishing so many successes as of late. Though it was arrogant for him to believe that he could do anything about this issue, he still experienced a hard smack to his face for daring to believe he could ascend a mountain that so many people failed to climb!

He had little choice but to approach the MTA and hope that the mechers had cooked up a solution. Out of all of the people in human space, there were none who were more invested in developing a solution than the ones who relied on mechs to make a living!

"Let's see whether the MTA is willing to divulge its true capabilities to me this time."

Once Ves took the initiative to contact the Association, he did not simply activate his comm and contact one of the MTA Masters he was acquainted with. All he would accomplish was get into a conversation with an impatient secretary who would tell him that the Master was too busy to entertain a mere Journeyman.

Ves sent a brief message that conveyed his request to hold a sensitive conversation with Master Dervidian.

Once he received an approval, he had to take a shuttle ride to the local MTA branch headquarters that was based in Davute VII.

Even though the facility was still new and rather understaffed, the mechers had already taken into account that Davute would likely become a major trade hub and possibly the political heart of a future state.

Therefore, the MTA invested in a major fortified compound that was located in the heart of the Commercial District.

The choice of location was quite deliberate. Instead of basing its headquarters in the elite and wealthy Austere District, the MTA chose a more accessible location that emphasized its commercial nature.

After all, the MTA was first and foremost a trade association, so why not establish a strong presence next to many commercial enterprises that were active in the mech industry?

Despite the fact that the branch headquarters also served as a military base that protected Kotor City and the rest of Davute VII against alien incursions, large parts of the compound was open to the public.

Hundreds if not thousands of mech designers, mech pilots and workers employed by many different mech companies visited the MTA branch every day for various reasons.

Ves just happened to be one of the many outsiders who dropped by in order to make use of one of the MTA's many services.

A bot greeted him upon arrival and led him deeper into one of the large structures.

He soon had to leave his bodyguards behind and go through several thorough security checks before he could get any further.

He had no concerns that he would get in trouble at this stage. He already anticipated that he would be checked from top to bottom so he left all of his more dangerous and unusual equipment at home.

He didn't even dare to bring his Hammer of Brilliance for fear that the MTA would confiscate it because they treated it as an actual weapon!

It took twenty minutes for Ves to finally get through this ordeal and enter an ultra-high security communication chamber.

After reaching the center, he waited until the chamber's sophisticated communication system established a secure channel with Master Dervidian.

As usual, the Master looked as if he had been in the middle of an engaging research project. It must be quite annoying for him to take a break from his schedule in order to take a call.

"Mr. Larkinson. It has been some time since we have last spoken in person. Are you here to report your research progress?"

"Yes." Ves answered even if that wasn't his primary intention. "I have achieved additional progress in two major projects. First, I have refined the Mental Simulation Training System to the point where it can simulate all of our expert mechs at much greater accuracy than before. Our expert pilots have experienced fewer glitches and have become a lot more satisfied with what they can gain out of the simulation sessions. Though the fidelity of the

improved simulation program is still not enough to fully portray battles between different expert mechs, it is only a matter of time before we can remedy this shortcoming."

He wasn't stupid. If he immediately issued his request to Master Derividian from the beginning, he would make a bad impression.

It was better to show his value first and remind the Master that he could provide more value over time.

This was why he patiently spent the next half hour on explaining the ins and outs of the MSTS and what he had in store in the future.

Ves didn't actually spend much time tinkering with the MSTS. He was far too swamped with design projects to debug and expand this complicated spiritual training program.

Fortunately, Vulcan was more than competent enough to do all the work. The MSTS was mostly the incarnation's work to begin with so there was no better spiritual entity that could improve this important training system.

It was quite handy to have an incarnation of himself. No matter how hard Vulcan worked, Ves himself did not feel burdened at all! This was despite the fact that Vulcan was actually himself in another form!

After Ves meticulously explained and exaggerated the gains he made with regards to his MSTS, he began to report on the progress he had made in various other research projects.

The T Institute may not have been in operation for long, but with the help of the researchers that the Aducs had sent to staff its departments, the research groups already started to produce intermittent results.

Though none of the gains sounded groundbreaking, they still showed that the T institute had a lot of potential!

As Ves continued to tell his audience about both his major and minor research gains, a part of him felt as if he was a subordinate reporting all of his actions to his immediate boss.

He did not like this impression. Officially, Ves was only cooperating with the Transhumanists. He did not agree to become their vassal or lackey.

However, as long as he needed anything from the Transhumanist Faction, it was better for him to play nice with these mechers.

There was little harm in divulging much of his research results. He figured the mecher had already bugged all of his labs and workshops so they already had a good guess of what Ves and his research teams had accomplished as of late.

Ves was also careful to hide his truly sensitive ideas and research initiatives. He had been working on numerous powerful applications that could provide his clan with a major advantage on the battlefield, but might cause a lot of disruption if exposed.

Whether Master Dervidian knew about this or not did not matter. Ves had already been more forthcoming than most researchers in this position.

Master Dervidian conveyed ample appreciation for the status update.

"I do not expect you to invent any groundbreaking new solutions every year. I am already satisfied that you have achieved notable progress in your existing research progress. Stagnation is death to innovators such as us. No matter how little you have accomplished in a given month or year, as long as you put in the effort, you will keep moving forward. I hope to hear that you have made more substantial progress in the next few years."

"I will try my best to meet your expectations, sir." Ves humbly replied as he deliberately adopted a lower posture. "By the way, can I ask you a question to

you? It is not related to my current research, but it is still a subject that is rather dear to my heart as of late."

Master Dervidian immediately noticed that the topic that Ves wanted to bring up was of great importance.

Since the older man was in a good mood, he was willing to indulge the young but brilliant mech designer.

"Ask your question, Mr. Larkinson."

"I will be honest. I have a baby daughter who we intend to raise into a mech pilot..."

Ves quickly but honestly conveyed his situation as a father who was concerned about the future of her daughter and potentially his future children.

Though he understood that it was inappropriate to bring up a personal matter to someone as important as Master Dervidian, Ves had decided to be shameless and convey his selfish thoughts anyway.

The Master Mech Designer did not look that surprised after Ves had presented his case.

"Hehehe." The mecher chuckled. "You are far from the only parent who feels this way. We even have a name for this condition. We call it genetic aptitude angst. I have heard thousands of similar requests from many different people who suffer from the same affliction. They all seem to believe that our faction is able to resolve their concerns. I cannot tell you how many times I have to disappoint them. Our technology, while advanced, has not progressed to the point where we have cracked the secret to genetic aptitude."

Ves felt crushed. Though it may be possible that Master Dervidian wasn't being truthful or that he wasn't important enough to get in touch with this kind of secret, it was highly likely that he was speaking the truth.

"So the MTA truly cannot provide any help on this matter?"

Just as Ves thought about ending this call and give up on his quest to find a solution, the man on the other side of the communication channel suddenly activated a silent command.

The secure communication chamber suddenly beeped out an alarm and began to activate additional systems.

The air buzzed with energy as powerful localized jamming systems came to life!

"Ah!"

Ves also felt as if he had been kicked in the head as the strange interference forcibly neutralized his cranial implant, causing him to abruptly lose access to his digitized cognitive functions!

More security measures came to life as additional signal-blocking panels materialized into form. They reinforced the walls and made it even harder for outsiders to eavesdrop on the current conversation!

Though Master Dervidian hadn't said anything as this transformation was taking place, Ves had a growing feeling that he was about to get his mind blown in the next few minutes!

Now that the communication chamber became significantly more secure, a document projected in front of his face.

"What is this, Master?"

"It is a non-disclosure agreement." Dervidian answered. "I am aware that you have signed dozens of such agreements before, but this is different. I urge you to read through it carefully and decide whether it is worth the price to hear more."

The more Master Dervidian made a big deal out of this affair, the more Ves wanted to sign the NDA on the spot!

Of course, Ves did no such thing. He followed his instructions as a good boy and carefully read through the lengthy document even though much of the language was dense and almost indecipherable.

There was not much new or different about the NDA. The only truly serious changes were related to leaks.

The punishment for divulging any information that Ves was about to obtain in this conversation was severe!

If he ever violated the NDA, then not just himself, but his entire family and organization would get wiped off the map!

There was no ambiguity about the MTA's determination to punish Ves and suppress any leaks.

No matter how far he ran away, the mechers would never give up on the chase!

This was clearly different from how the MTA usually acted around other fugitives such as the former Skull Architect.

Given how much importance the MTA placed on this particular secret, how could Ves possibly say no to this offer?

He never expected that issuing a long-shot request to an important figure of the Transhumanist Faction would actually get a positive response, and one of such great magnitude that it had its own special super-NDA!

Ves signed the contract as soon as he could feasibly do so. The projection quickly disappeared, leaving him filled with anticipation as he waited for the next step.

"It seems that you have made your choice." Master Dervidian said in a serious tone. "Do not forget your commitment. What I am about to divulge is highly classified. Ordinarily, a tier 6 galactic citizen and senior contributor of restricted technology such as yourself should not be qualified to come into contact with this secret, but we both know that your true standing within our faction is significantly higher than that. In light of the major contributions that you have made to us and the rest of the mech community, I have made the executive decision to initiate you into the small circle of people who are aware of this possibility."

"Thank you, Master. I am honored by the trust and appreciation that you have given me. I will make sure to report additional research gains to you in our next communication session."

"Excellent." Dervidian smiled in a more personable manner before he turned serious again. "Let me start with what I have said a moment earlier. I was not lying that our technology has not progressed to the point where we can impart genetic aptitude upon people. However, that does not necessarily mean that we have no solution to the problem."

Ves grew confused. "I don't understand. First you tell me you don't have the ability to address this issue. Then you tell me you do have a way of meeting this demand."

"That is not correct, Mr Larkinson. Let me explain..."

Chapter 4144 The Power Of...

Before Master Dervidian unveiled the great secret to Ves, the Transhumanist first started with a short recounting of the problem.

"Since mechs initially emerged as a viable combat weapon, many people have focused on one of its most serious limitations. Many studies have statistically determined that roughly 3.5 percent of all humans are capable of interfacing with a mech."

"Only roughly, Master?"

These studies are all flawed and cannot take every variable into account."

Dervidian smiled. "The actual figures can be considerably higher or lower. The 3.5 percent figure is only accurate on a fairly normal population group from a generic state that has not become embroiled in any major wars as of late. States that engage in frequent fighting can actually lose so many mech pilots that the proportion of living potentates relative to the total population can actually change."

"Ah. I understand."

"There are also cases where populations of prosperous but active states and organizations can actually produce more potentates than normal. Genes, training and specific environmental stimuli can increase the odds of children developing favorable genetic aptitudes. However, this is how far our science has come. We have made very little progress in determining the positive factors that can encourage a positive outcome. Centuries have gone by without any breakthroughs on this front."

This fell in line with the academic literature that Ves had studied recently. The neurologists and other experts spent more time on guesswork and assumptions than on proven theories and frameworks.

"How far away is the MTA from achieving substantial progress, do you think?"

"I am unable to provide an accurate estimate to you." Dervidian replied. "This is not my field of specialty and I am not deeply versed in this matter. What I do know is that the many research teams that we have assigned to this research topic are not optimistic about their chances. It may take centuries at best and millenia at worst for them to discover or develop any meaningful progress. Believe me that this is truly the best that our Association is able to manage. As you can imagine, there is no faction that is more invested in this problem

than us. Many of the key members of those research teams belong to our circle."

Ves already suspected as much, but this did not explain why Master Derividian made it seem that the situation was not as bad as it looked.

"If all of those scientific endeavors have failed to yield any progress after all this time, then how are you able to address the genetic aptitude issue? Wait, if human technology can't provide the solution, then what about alien technology?"

Master Derividian smirked when he heard this possible.

"That is a logical guess to make. It should not be a surprise that a mech designer that is fascinated with exotic and alien technology would think in this direction."

"Am I correct, Master?"

Derividian sighed. "The truth is that if human technology cannot provide us with the answer, we would have rather wished that an advanced alien race that is well-versed in biotechnology such as the phase whale race can provide us with a viable alternative. At least in this case the solution is systematic and reproducible through independent means. If an alien device that can bestow compatible genetic aptitudes to individuals truly exist, then we would have stopped at nothing to reverse-engineer this contraption and decipher its working principles. Alas, we have never stumbled upon such a wonder tool as far as I am aware of. Neither human nor alien ingenuity can avail us in this sense."

If the alien technology that the MTA managed to get its hands on did not provide the answer that everyone was looking for, then what other alternatives were left?

Ves thought of another possibility.

"Then... if technology can't do it, then what about nature? The power of nature and evolution is powerful in its own right. Whether it is the Milky Way or the Red Ocean, an endless variety of powerful exobeasts and sentient alien races have emerged throughout history. A small proportion of them are naturally adept at biological growth and enhancement. Have you discovered a species that can improve or alter a human's neurology?"

"It would be fantastic if that were the case." Dervidian shook his head. "You are correct. Nature is both powerful and diverse. Our bioresearchers have derived countless brilliant lessons and applications by studying the unique properties of interesting organisms. However, the majority of alien life overwhelmingly consists of weak and trivial creatures. The amount of apex races and peak exobeast races in both of the galaxies that we have settled in are very much finite. None of the ones we have encountered possess the power to do what we would like to see the most."

"I see. It would have been a lot more convenient if there was a convenient beast available." Ves remarked as he looked glum.

Compared to technology, Ves loved to work with other living organisms the most!

As long as they possessed spiritual potential, then he could convert them into design spirits, which made it a lot easier for him to bring them over to his camp!

Even if the alien or beast in question did not possess spiritual potential, then that was okay, because he and his clan had many ways to control such creatures.

In fact, it would be even better if the organism wasn't strong in spirit. This was because their unique and powerful abilities were entirely biological in nature.

There was always a way for biotech researchers to extract, decipher and reproduce those exotic powers as long as there was enough support!

Ves scratched his head. "If neither technology or nature is the answer, then what is left? Perhaps the answer rests in a more extraordinary direction..."

"That is an interesting train of thought." The MTA Master smirked on the other side of the communication channel. "Most people would have stopped looking further at that point. It takes someone who has become thoroughly exposed to the less explainable side of reality to expand their vision to this extent."

The man's remark made Ves suspect that he was definitely getting closer to the truth!

Suddenly, an awful possibility came to mind!

"Don't tell me the answer lies within a certain cult..."

Dervidian immediately denied this notion. "Definitely not. The cultists of the Compact have a passionate hatred for mechs and mech pilots. They reject our cause and our method of fighting. As stupefying and exotic as their abilities may seem, their researchers have very little reason to waste their efforts on devising a method of raising one's genetic aptitude. They have no use for it and they do not want to develop any solution that will make their enemies stronger."

There was strong animosity between the Big Two and the Five Scrolls Compact. They built up a lot of bad blood in the past and their ideologies were highly incompatible to each other.

"From a philosophical standpoint, the Five Scrolls Compact places a high importance on talent." Dervidian clarified for Ves. "Many humans are not worth anything at all to the cultists. Ordinary people are pests and vermin in their eyes. The only people who are worth training and respecting are those that possess the talent and bloodline to become adept at their distinct power

system. Those that cannot succeed in this aspect will either be discarded or be relegated to menial work."

That sounded extremely harsh, but that fit exactly with what Ves knew of the Compact. There might be a lot of oddballs within the Compact, but those who dared to work together with the MTA would definitely become sinners to the rabid organization!

Ves was out of answers at this point. He had thought of every possible solution that could artificially impart the right genetic aptitude to those who lacked this quality.

"Can you tell me the true answer, now?" He asked. "I've exhausted every possibility that I could come up with. I can hardly imagine what else is left that can make you implement additional security precautions."

Fortunately for Ves, Master Dervidian did not tease him any longer.

"The answer may be a surprise to you. It is not what I expected either when I first learned about this explosive news. You should know that only a small circle of high-level personnel have received the privilege of learning this great secret. There are many reasons why we have not spread it out. The demand is too high while the supply is low. The solution that you are looking for also alludes to a greater phenomenon that is of extreme value and places the principals at the center of it in greater danger. This is why you needed to sign that NDA. The course of human history as well as the MTA's rise to power are at stake."

Ves understood the unspoken message. The Transhumanists valued him and his contributions so greatly that they were willing to bring him into their inner circle!

This was the upside to sharing so much of his research and benefits to the MTA. Though it pained him a lot to give away a few of his trump cards and

unique advantages, he knew it was vital to build up a good relationship with a dominant power that had the ability to crush him whenever it liked!

Master Dervidian did not delay any further. Instead to explaining the answer to him head-on, he summoned a new projection that displayed a grainy recording.

Ves frowned. He could hardly distinguish anything at first. Slowly but surely, he was able to distinguish a vague silhouette that somehow exuded a lot of power.

However, the poor quality of the footage heavily interfered with his perception. Not even his instincts were able to tell him much about this obscured mech other than that it was really strong!

A dozen seconds passed by until a change took place.

A single child who was probably ten to twelve years old floated into view.

The little boy was dressed up in a suit that contained a lot of ceremonial elements. His expression was extremely respectful and maybe even worshipful towards the mech in the distance.

Once the floating boy reached a set distance, he halted in place and began to prostrate while remaining suspended into place.

Ves had the idea that the earnest looking boy was speaking out words.

Unfortunately, the awkward visual angle and horrendous recording quality prevented him from figuring out what was being said.

A whole minute passed by as the boy came under a strange influence.

Despite doing his best to maintain his composure, the kid could not control himself. He shook and failed to maintain his prostrating posture.

Just as Ves thought that the kid would lose control entirely, the pressure had disappeared, giving the child a much-needed reprieve.

After bowing even deeper while conveying his heartfelt gratitude, the boy slowly floated backwards before completely disappearing from sight.

The strange recording ended at this time.

"What do you think you have just witnessed, Mr. Larkinson?" Master Dervidian asked in a deceptively light tone.

The footage that Ves just witnessed was pretty bad, so he could only derive a few clues out of the murky clip.

First, the boy that approached and prostrated before the mech was clearly a kid that learned that he did not have the right genetic aptitude when he reached the age of 10. Whatever he did during the recording was most likely a procedure that could allow him to gain what he lacked due to his birth and circumstances.

Seeing that the answer lay in the distant mech-like object that was obscured in mist and shadow, Ves tried to think what sort of machine could perform such a heaven-defying feat.

Was it a biomech?

No. Biomechs were products of science, and what just took place went far beyond that.

Was it a high-ranking mech?

That was a much better guess. Expert pilots were known to bend reality.

However, Ves could hardly imagine any expert mech that could possess the power to precisely rearrange a fragile child's brain, neural system and other biological elements so that a norm suddenly gained the ability of a potentate!

"Is it an ace mech?!" Ves asked as he came up with his strongest guess to date!

Not a lot of time had passed since he witnessed the completed Mars crush each and any opposition with the help of Patriarch Reginald's timely breakthrough.

Though a lot of the impressive combat power displayed by the Mars was due to its extravagant parts and systems, the fact that it was piloted by an ace pilot as opposed to an expert pilot also played a large role!

Ves had come away from the testing sessions with an extremely high appreciation of ace pilots.

Their power level was on another level!

Not only that, but their ability to affect reality also became a lot stronger!

Depending on their domains and other factors, ace pilots were able to develop all kinds of distinct abilities in combat.

Unfortunately for Ves, Master Dervidian shook his head yet again.

"Your guess is close, but it is not correct. Ace pilots are indeed powerful and capable of performing miracles when paired with powerful ace mechs.

However, their unique abilities are largely biased towards combat. They also possess many other shortcomings. In short, they are not qualified to accomplish the feat that you have just witnessed."

"If ace pilots are not strong enough, then..."

Ves completely froze. There was only one answer left, but it was so high and so far away from him that he could not bring himself to speak out his definite guess!

"Your suspicions are correct, Mr. Larkinson. The party responsible for bestowing the child in the recording with the aptitude for piloting mech is none

other than a god pilot. When the power of science has failed us, we can find salvation in the power of the gods."

"..."

Chapter 4145 A Greater Power

Ves truly needed a moment to come to terms with this answer.

,m If the power of science was unable to solve a problem, then the power of gods may be able to provide a solution.

Just this statement alone was enough to detonate the mech industry!

Many mech designers started off by becoming strong believers that science and engineering could make anything possible!

By learning and applying the tech that humanity mastered, mech designers steadily came up with stronger and more versatile mechs.

Science and technology also offered a plethora of expanding possibilities to other engineers. Every generation, new and improved products came out that changed the lives of many people for the better.

Human society was built on the foundation of technology. Almost everyone involved in any industry relied on millenia's worth of technological accumulation to further the progression of human civilization.

Although humans as a race also clung to religion and superstition to this day, it was undeniable that science and technology had become a necessity to any human society.

There was no way for people to live and compete against their rivals by rejecting the power of technology!

This was the mainstream stance that had gripped most corners of human civilization. Everything that people relied upon to survive and enjoy a comfortable life was based on one combination of tech or another.

Mechs, warships, terraforming and so on were the vital building blocks that allowed humanity to escape Old Earth and spread across the stars!

From the Age of Stars to the Age of Conquest, it looked as if humanity's future rose as brightly as the tech that it mastered.

It was a pity that this meteoric rise abruptly came to an end.

The Age of Mechs was a brand new era to humanity as a whole. The rise of the Big Two and the rules they introduced to the galaxy triggered many different changes.

One of the more profound changes was the sly and gradual introduction of extraordinary elements into human society.

The MTA began to expose and unveil the existence of high-ranking mech pilots and mech designers. Their powers seemed to be derived from technology, but those who looked further understood that technology and materials could only explain so much.

If the public knew how much the MTA tried to push a form of psionic power to them from the beginning, a lot of people would have protested due to their unflinching belief that science and technology was the only truth in the cosmos!

However, because the introduction of extraordinary elements proceeded on a gradual basis, more and more people who were born during the Age of Mechs slowly adjusted to the new normal established by the mech industry.

As a result, the MTA succeeded in warping modern human civilization from a society that solely based its power on its mastery of technology to a society that still centered around technology but added a dash of metaphysical mystique on top.

Most people seemed to accept this new addition to human civilization without asking where it originated.

Not even members of the scientific community bothered to ask more on why the new extraordinary phenomena were solely limited to mech designers and mech pilots.

This showed that science and technology still maintained their primacy in people's hearts. No matter the recent developments, most people ultimately believed that reality was made up of logical and consistent rules. The natural laws were universal and even the most unexplainable miracles could eventually be explained by scientific theories and lots of math.

As a child of the Age of Mechs, Ves held the same stance.

However, he couldn't deny that there were a lot of spiritual phenomena that could not be so easily explained. There were entities that were so powerful that they masqueraded as gods and got away with it for the most part.

Ves never really took them seriously because he knew that they were merely energy life forms that happened to be a lot more powerful than most individuals.

When the difference in power grew too great, it was all too easy for those at the bottom to deify the ones at the top!

This was not a behavior pattern that was limited to those who profess themselves to be gods.

There were many cases where high-profile leaders enjoyed such renown that their followers became indistinguishable from worshipers!

These unflinching devotees may be simple rural residents but they could also be highly educated and successful themselves. These lawyers, engineers,

artisans and doctors were all knowledgeable and knew how to approach their professions with a systematic approach based on facts and logic.

Yet as soon as they became charmed by a successful businessman or a charismatic politician, all of their praiseworthy logic and critical thinking disappeared for no explainable reason.

Their intelligence literally degenerated as soon as they became gripped by the power of fanaticism!

The truth behind the myth may not be that far away from public perception, but it was most definitely a lot more mixed and not always flattering.

Yet because an entire group of people had given in to their less logical instincts, they became gripped by modern tribalism that caused them to behave no differently than cultists.

Ves felt that this was a corrosive phenomenon in human society. It was highly inappropriate for people to develop the reflex of turning to worship and believing that a higher power might solve their problems.

How would humanity be able to defeat its enemies and grow more powerful if more and more people stopped believing in their own potential?

During the Age of Conquest, humanity bumped into many alien civilizations that had centered their society around religion and the worship of greater beings!

Many of these alien societies happened to be among the most favorite targets of human conquerors.

The reason?

Too many of these aliens spent too much time praying to their illusionary gods rather than trying to come up with better means to resist the invasion of human warfleets!

Of course, there were still plenty of individuals among the aliens that showed a lot of initiative, but depending on how their societies were constructed, many of these bright and promising talents did not gain the power and influence that they deserved, but were instead ostracized and relegated to the margins of their flawed civilizations!

All of these examples further pushed humankind towards embracing logic and science. Perhaps this was also an important reason why the MTA still maintained this principle even as it openly began to introduce the wonders of extraordinary mech designers and mech pilots to the public.

Ves would have thought that the mechers would maintain their rationality and good sense when they worked with the more metaphysical aspects of reality.

Even a brilliant researcher and innovator such as Master Termaneo Dervidian should have been able to retain their scholarly demeanor.

After all, the man had an excellent track record of reaching past the limits of known technology and inventing new ways to accomplish feats previously thought unfeasible.

Yet what happened after Master Dervidian supplied the definitive answer was completely out of Ves' expectation.

All sense of calm and rationality disappeared from the highly knowledgeable and highly accomplished MTA Master!

If not for the fact that Ves knew for certain that Master Dervidian was a core leader of the Transhumanist Faction who directly answered to some of the highest figures within the Association, he would have mistaken the older man for a Compact cultist!

Right now, Ves had a hard time accepting the complete change in demeanor.

Every Master Mech Designer that Ves had met up until now were all passionate and eager to unlock the mysteries of reality.

Despite the fact that they had developed their spiritualities to a formidable degree, their foundation as mech designers remained rooted in the sciences.

Though their work had expanded in scope and complexity, many of their brilliant innovations were always based on systematic logic and solutions that were reproducible through technological means.

Yet as soon as Master Dervidian started to talk about the awe-inspiring god pilot that had rearranged a child's neurology through the power of true resonance, he completely tarnished the image of a mech designer!

"God pilots are the living embodiment of how far humanity can transcend their humble beginning. Each and every living Divine is a testament to our limitless potential and how we as a species can overcome every adversity and evolve into an existence that is powerful beyond measure!"

"The Transhumanist Faction was founded around the ideal of evolving humankind to a higher state of existence. Though we are still far from uplifting every member of our race into more superior versions of ourselves, the few god pilots in existence are all role models that have presented us with numerous examples on how we should proceed!"

"The Common Fleet Alliance are conservative old fools who are stuck in the past and uncaring of the weakness of the human race. All of our tech and materials are eventually external objects that can always be taken away from us. Only by evolving our bodies and minds will we be able to get rid of this vulnerability and rely on our own intrinsic power to defeat hostile alien races and stave off the threat of extinction!"

"As you have seen in this classified footage, the title of god pilot is not an empty allusion. Each and every mech pilot that has transcended to this

exalted stage can no longer be described by theoretical models or mathematical formulas. Reality and the laws that govern it have become playthings as soon as they enter the vast and powerful domains of our god pilots."

"It is difficult to fully convey the transcendent majesty of god pilots in a single conversation. God pilots are beyond human in every other category including their forms. Unlike ace pilots, the Divines possess limitless energy and are inexhaustible. No matter how poor and barren their environments, they can utilize their supreme willpower to generate energy from nothing, thereby allowing them to keep operating without ever running out. They can fight for months and years!"

"God pilots are so far beyond the parameters of baseline humans that they are truly gods in definition. Their mentalities are firm and strong beyond measure, allowing them to process an enormous amount of input without growing tired, weary or exhausted. Their cognitive functions have improved to such an enormous degree that they can learn advanced sciences. They can even repair and apply simple modifications to their own god mechs. They are so close to perfection that treating them as mere mortal humans is a huge disservice."

"The existence of god pilots is a validation of the direction that we are moving towards. Science is great and powerful, but as long as we become too dependent on a single power base, we will develop vulnerabilities and lack the insight and ability to address problems that go beyond what technology can explain."

On and on the older man kept talking. Master Dervidian became so completely overtaken by his admiration of the most transcendent pilots in existence that he no longer became prudent about holding back information.

Ves was pretty sure that he wasn't supposed to learn this much about god pilots.

He learned more about these supreme mech pilots in five minutes than he had in his entire life up until this meeting!

Yet the strangest part about this situation was that Ves was hardly able to pierce the mystique surrounding god pilots.

Everything that Master Dervidian said about these peerless soldiers and warriors did not actually help Ves understand how god pilots worked and how they were able to accomplish powerful and impossible feats.

"God pilots can do what our tech cannot do." Dervidian continued. "Their powers are so beyond comprehension that most of our attempts at replicating their feats have simply failed. The reason for that is that they have become so formidable that they can skip every step of the way and simply obtain the end result in an instant. The example that I have just shown you is a good example of that. The process of turning a norm into a potentate is entirely omitted. The child simply transformed to a better version of himself in an instant. Throughout this entire sequence, the conservation of mass and energy is entirely ignored. This is so unexplainable that we can only admit that we are dealing with the power of a god."

"..."

Chapter 4146 The Chosen Human

"Do you have any questions, Mr. Larkinson? You appear confused at this moment."

What could Ves say to all of this? He had become so overwhelmed by Master Dervidian's change in attitude and unflinching praise of god pilots that he felt as if he was speaking to the wrong person.

Did he mistakenly call it a religious cult?

Had the MTA pulled off a prank where they connected him to a doppelganger of the MTA Master who had no compulsions about spouting nonsense?

Ves even began to suspect that this was all an elaborate ruse!

Perhaps the mechers set up an elaborate and convincing test where they wished to see his reaction towards this sudden and unexpected shift away from science and rationality.

Was this their way of determining whether he held sympathies towards the ideals and methodologies of the Five Scrolls Compact?

If this was the case, then it was all the more important for Ves to retain his reason and good sense!

No matter whether this was a ruse or not, it was extremely important for Ves to keep presenting himself as a mech designer rather than a deranged worshiper of god pilots.

In order to minimize instances where he could possibly lose control over himself, he ignored the wider and more profound issues surrounding god pilots and focused on a more limited subject.

"Can you tell me the god pilot that was responsible for turning the boy in the footage into a potentate? Is this an ability that each god pilot possesses, or is it only limited to a single individual?"

Master Derividian's look of devotion did not recede at all. Instead, he displayed even more reverence towards the god pilot that he was about to introduce!

"You have the great honor and privilege to witness our most important god pilot in action. While it is true that all god pilots are supremely powerful in their own right, their ability to express their might is largely based on their specializations. They are most adept at changing reality that they have grown

familiar with for many years. That is not to say they can perform feats outside of their own preoccupations, but the difficulty is so high that it is not efficient for them to spend their time on broadening their powers. They can do much more by deepening their existing specialties and developing different and more powerful applications of their divine strength."

Once Master Dervidian got that out of the way, he no longer tarried any further and introduced the identity of the god pilot in question.

"The god pilot that you have just witnessed is a visionary and a leader that is of great significance to us. He is none other than Divine Hussain Albedo, the Chosen Human."

As soon as the MTA Master spoke the god pilot's name and title, he looked as if he was about ready to bend to his knees and press his palms together.

That was how high of a regard that Dervidian held towards this specific god pilot!

To be fair, Ves couldn't blame the older man for displaying this conduct.

Every god pilot known to the public was powerful and utterly exceptional. The public biographies surrounding these peerless soldiers might not contain every detail that had shaped their unique and remarkable journeys, but they contained enough content to give everyone a shallow impression of what they were about.

Divine Hussain Albedo was one of the more notable among the group of pilots who had also attained the pinnacle of their shared profession.

"The only mech pilot to have ever attained S-grade genetic aptitude." Ves softly gasped.

Even he couldn't maintain his composure anymore. The Chosen Human was just that impressive in the mech community!

Ever since humans started to measure the genetic aptitudes of people, they adopted a uniform and standardized system of measurement.

Ves had no idea how it exactly worked and how it defined the different grades, but everyone simply accepted that people could all be categorized by their letters.

The conventional grading system ranged from A to F, though there were some experts that claimed that the bottom needed to be extended with G for whatever reason.

In any case, every single human that was put through a measuring device, which was actually just a neural interface apparatus that slightly simulated the act of forming a man-machine connection with a mech, performed differently due to many different reasons.

It was too complicated and convoluted to express a person's ability to interface with a mech through all of these complicated neurological factors, so the scientific community as well as the general public embraced the grading system that was used to this day.

Of the two extremes, F or maybe G denoted zero chance of being able to interface with a mech.

The vast majority of humans fell within this unfortunate category. Ending up with at least F-grade genetic aptitude was basically a declaration that piloting mechs was never an option for the individuals in questions.

Since there were people who lacked the talent to pilot mechs, there were also people who possessed an abundance of this quality!

A-grade genetic aptitudes were long considered to be the gold standard in the piloting profession. The brains as well as many other aspects of a mech pilot's body and mind adapted so well to forming man-machine connections with mechs that it was as if they were made for the purpose!

Of the potentates that were lucky to develop such excellent conditions, they were further divided into three sub-categories.

Those who scored A- were maybe a bit further away from perfection, but for all practical purposes they were more than talented enough to rise with ease.

The ones who attained a plain A-grade were much fewer in number, but more more desirable by every employer of mechs. Each of these talents were so unreasonable that they could advance to the rank of expert pilots with ease as long as they did not make any stupid mistakes.

As for the extremely rare case that a potentate emerged with a genetic aptitude that scored A+, so many organizations would fight over this heaven-blessed talent that it was crazy!

Not even the MTA was above competing against its lessers in order to attain these exceptionally talented mech pilots!

From what Ves had learned, those whose genetic aptitudes reached A+ had pretty much reached the physical limitations of how high it could go. Their brains, nerves and other physiological parameters were as good as they could be. There was no further way for them to improve and thereby form a stronger and more comprehensive man-machine connection.

It was no surprise that mech pilots A+ genetic aptitudes not only possessed great assurances of advancing to the rank expert pilot, but also possessed much better chances of advancing to the rank of ace pilot!

This was the primary reason why everyone scrambled to fight for these peerless mech pilots!

The chance an ordinary mech pilot was able to advance to ace pilot was similar to the chance of winning a lottery.

The chance that an A+ genetic aptitude mech pilot was able to accomplish the same feat was similar to the chance of winning a dice roll or a coin flip.

There were no absolute guarantees that anyone with such excellent genetic aptitudes could undergo two major breakthroughs in their lifetimes, but those who had the luck of attaining A+ were definitely in the best position to race through the ranks!

For a long time, the mech community assumed that A+ genetic aptitude was the upper limit of what was possible.

That was until Hussain Albedo came into the picture.

Several generations after the start of the Age of Mechs, no one suspected that a potentate could emerge that performed far better than the few lucky children that achieved grades as high as A+.

In fact, the original testers of an ordinary third-rate state in the galactic heartland first thought the testing apparatus had glitched.

It took extensive trials and examinations before the experts were able to determine that Hussain Albedo was able to establish a man-machine connection that was so much better than anything recorded in history that it surpassed the previous record!

"The talent exhibited by this young man cannot be categorized as A+ anymore. His genetic aptitude has attained a state above this... my recommendation is that we should expand the existing scale of genetic aptitude and introduce a new S-grade to do justice to Mr. Albedo's unprecedented performance!"

The existence of Hussain Albedo was a miracle. No studies could explain how he was able to achieve such high performance.

If A+ genetic aptitude mech pilots already reached 100 percent of what was possible in mech piloting, then Hussain Albedo actually broke through this limit and achieved 120 percent or even higher!

The most remarkable fact about all of this was that Albedo was a pure baseline human!

Many researchers had studied his DNA and traced his entire family tree all the way back to the Age of Stars and never found any hint of artificial tampering.

The planet and city where he grew up in was ordinary and was not affected by any strange and energetic exotics.

Eventually, everyone concluded that Hussain Albedo was a product of coincidence. A coincidence that only occurred once an era!

No potentate had ever reached S-grade genetic aptitude after Albedo's explosive emergence, at least in public.

The man rose quickly after that, though much of what he experienced after confirming his supreme talent was rather murky.

Before envoys from the Terran Confederation or the Rubarth Empire could arrive, the MTA already recruited Hussain Albedo and packed him off to a secure location where he could be trained according to the highest standards!

After that, Hussain Albedo slowly faded from public attention as he did not show up again.

It was only a century later that his name became completely known throughout human space!

This was because Hussain Albedo successfully broke through a third time and became the newest as well as the youngest god pilot in human history!

"What?! How did he ascend so quickly?! He should be 75 years old at this time. I have never heard of a god pilot coming into shape so soon!"

Now that he had attained the highest rank known to the mech community, Divine Hussain Albedo no longer remained in hiding.

He began to make more active use of his immense clout and influence to fight for certain causes.

His advocacy of human supremacy combined with his unique and record-breaking talent had earned him the moniker of the Chosen Human.

Many people were convinced that Hussain Albedo was the protagonist of the era. His ridiculous talent as well as his insane strength in battle were so impressive that it was as if he had been blessed with the potential of their entire race!

These days, the Chosen Human earned a lot of fame and admiration for his steadfast protection of humanity's borders.

He consistently took up guard duty at the most contentious borders where human space directly pressed against the alien civilizations of the Milky Way that existed to this day.

In the occasional but extremely dangerous border incursions that happened from time to time, the Chosen Human made a powerful impression upon those who were lucky enough to see him in action.

One of his most remarkable powers was how well he was able to control biological organisms!

Any alien or bioconstruct that fell within his grasp simply melted apart as their very bodies disintegrated in Divine Hussain Albedo's powerful presence.

It was for this reason that the Chosen Human had long been considered to be a nemesis to every powerful astral beast or alien civilization that embraced biotechnology!

Of course, Divine Albedo was almost just as powerful against inorganic opponents. He just needed to invest a little more effort into crushing the warships fielded by the enemies of the human race.

As Ves recalled everything he knew about the most talented human mech pilot in history, he suddenly made an explosive guess.

"Is Divine Albedo... tied to the Transhumanist Faction?"

"His Holiness is more than that, Mr. Larkinson. He is the current leader of the Transhumanists."

"Oh."

Chapter 4147 Myths And Truths

"What... do you mean exactly when you say 'His Holiness' is your leader?"
Ves carefully asked.

"I mean exactly what I said. Divine Hussain Albedo is our leader. Ever since he attained his current rank and took charge of our faction, he has set our rules, our vision, our principles, our goals and our research directions. The Transhumanist Faction that exists today is largely aligned with his views on what humanity must do in order to attain greater power and surpass any alien races that exist today and may emerge in the future."

"That... is quite hands-on for a god pilot." Ves remarked.

Master Dervidian understood why Ves sounded so dubious. "Did you think that a faction as large and important as ours should be led by highly accomplished administrators and intellectuals such as Star Designers or galactic mech councilors?"

"It would make more sense to me." Ves carefully said. "Mech pilots excel in battle, but they tend to be on the dogmatic and stubborn side when it comes to matters outside of the battlefield. Those traits generally aren't as desirable in politics or administration. There are very few if any states that allow their high-ranking mech pilots to rule over them. The few that do are often embroiled in... turmoil."

"Expert pilots and ace pilots are deeply flawed beings. I am readily willing to admit that, Mr. Larkinson. They do not make for the best leaders because they are still in transition. They are much better off by focusing all of their time and energy in developing their skills, tempering their character and growing their resonance strength. However, your understanding of god pilots is insufficient. Did you not recall what I just said a moment earlier?"

Ves had to rewind his mind to the past, which was much more difficult now that the secure communication chamber forcibly repressed his cranial implant. Slowly but surely, he recalled a detail that he had brushed past because of the overflow of shocking information.

"Are you referring to the description that god pilots are much smarter than normal?"

"Correct." Master Dervidian smiled. "Expert pilots and ace pilots have largely earned a bad but deserved reputation for being brutes that only sees reality through absolutes. God pilots are similar in a sense, but that is tempered by their vastly increased intelligence and ability to absorb and accept information. There is a huge divide between ace pilots and god pilots that cannot be described in a short amount of time. You cannot simply extrapolate the abilities of an ace pilot to a higher level. There is one crucial factor that completely changes the way we think and perceive reality."

It took a bit of time for Ves to understand the Master's point, but when he recalled an important detail that he heard about god pilots, he suddenly became enlightened.

"Ah! Is it because god pilots have essentially merged with their god mechs?!"

Master Dervidian smiled. "That is a clever deduction that you have made, Mr. Larkinson. Indeed. If you know this much, then I can tell you that the fusion between pilot and mech is truly complete. The form doesn't necessarily matter

anymore. God pilots can appear as humans, mechs or more fantastical creatures. or into anything else. They are mostly energy life forms at that point."

"Energy life forms that can think like supercomputers?"

"Yes. God pilots have fully integrated all of the power and capabilities of their god mechs. That includes the latter's logical thinking and incredibly high processing power. When you combine a human that is supremely powerful due to their extreme willpower with a machine that is the apex of what we can make in this form, you will end up with an amalgamation that combines the advantages of both while covering for each other's weaknesses. The product has become so strong that it is not without reason that they are called gods."

Ves and many other people did not know what god pilots were like at all. They possessed more information about how expert pilots and ace pilots were like in general, and assumed that god pilots followed the same trajectory.

It turned out that they were all wrong. Only insiders know the actual truth. The true fusion between god pilots and god mechs introduced so many massive changes to how the resulting products thought and behaved that they were truly an entirely different species!

"Wait, does this mean that god pilots can become mech designers as well?!"

Dervidian chuckled. "No. You do not have to be afraid that god pilots will take over our jobs. Though they can become excellent engineers and scientists if they wish, their course is already set. God pilots are unable to develop the psionic abilities that make our own profession special. This means that god pilots are unable to design their own god mechs. They still need the assistance of Star Designers to design and update their machines."

This was a good balance.

If god pilots became self-sufficient, then the status of mech designers within the mech community would doubtlessly drop!

If mech designers became dominant, then mech pilots would probably be relegated to pure cannon fodder.

Compared to those possible realities, it was much better for both of them if they achieved an equal balance. Both of them were dependent on each other and neither of them would be able to stand up to the CFA and other powerful forces if they tried to keep to themselves.

Seeing how Master Dervidian not only knew so much about god pilots, but also spoke freely about this mythical subject, there was no way that Ves would waste this opportunity!

This was probably the best chance for Ves to learn more about the most powerful group of mech pilots in existence!

Who knew when Master Dervidian would be in such a generous and open mood next time.

"Is it normal then for god pilots to engage in politics or take a more active hand in leading organizations?" Ves curiously asked.

"Every god pilot is unique and different from each other." The MTA Master explained. "Whether they choose to involve themselves in matters outside of their immediate combat duties is largely based on their goals and other motivations. Some choose to dedicate themselves solely to guarding essential human locations. Others have decided to train and educate as many mech pilots as possible. A proportion of god pilots have sought to spread their ideals through leading factions or other organizations. Our Transhumanist Faction is proud to be led by one whose consciousness is strongly biased towards human supremacy and evolution."

"Is that rare within the MTA?"

"It is not particularly rare. There are many god pilots, and they all have their own beliefs and ideals. When they attain so much combat strength that they can wipe out any planet by themselves, they gain enough confidence to pursue the goals that they previously suppressed due to insufficient strength, status and influence."

"Ah. That makes sense."

Ves understood now why god pilots weren't as detached as expert pilots and ace pilots. The latter two were powerful alright, but they were ultimately not prominent enough to defy the rules of powerful states or human civilization as a whole.

It was only after they became god pilots that they possessed the right to speak on a civilization-wide scale!

The high status of god pilots as well as their insanely high threat was enough to force a lot of other parties to compromise with these supreme beings.

After all, if someone as powerful as god pilots continued to get denied, they always had the option of overturning the table and relying on force to push their ideals!

By allowing them to exert their influence in a more proper manner by becoming a part of an official faction or organization, they at least had to abide by the rules of the game.

"How powerful are god pilots relative to Star Designers?" Ves curiously asked.

This was a controversial question that could provoke a lot of contentious arguments on the galactic net. Nobody knew what either professions were capable of, so their points were largely based on assumptions and speculation.

Compared to anonymous speakers on the galactic net, Ves believed that someone as high-ranked and knowledgeable as Master Dervidian definitely possessed more accurate information!

The older man smirked. It appeared that he was well aware of how many people wanted to know the same answer.

"There is no straightforward comparison between the two. Comparing them is no different from comparing apples and oranges. That said, the differences between the two are not as great as you think they are. When people reach their tier of power, they become capable of more than what they initially trained to do. Mech designers are no longer as harmless as before and mech pilots are useful for far more purposes than fighting."

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

"Let me ask you a question, Mr. Larkinson. As a child, did you ever dream of becoming a mech pilot? Tell me honestly, Mr. Larkinson."

"I did hold this dream once." Ves plainly admitted. "I no longer have any desire to do so. I can do much more as a mech designer than as a grunt on the battlefield."

Master Dervidian chuckled. "Then what I say is that while Star Designers nominally have no combat power on their own, they can develop their own equipment to compensate for that. Think about everything you heard about their design capabilities. Do you think it is possible for a Star Designer to develop a personal suit of armor that is equipped with the most powerful offensive, defensive, mobility and utility systems and wear it in order to fight mechs or warships?"

Ves widened his eyes!

He never thought about this possibility before!

"You mean... there are Star Designers that have actually fought against enemies in this way?"

"Correct. Star Designers are high-profile individuals, Mr. Larkinson. They attract a lot of scrutiny and there are many enemies who wish to eliminate them in order to weaken our Association or humanity as a whole. It is essential for each and every Star Designer to be able to fight against mechs at the very least. With their knowledge, wealth and design capabilities, they can easily develop a personal war armor that will allow them to crush ordinary mechs with ease and compete against expert mechs on a fair basis. If they encounter anything stronger, then they can utilize their many means of escape to avoid getting caught. You cannot imagine how difficult it is to pin them down."

What he just heard completely defied Ves' impression of Star Designers!

It was well-known that mech designers were nerds that possessed no talent or potential for combat.

Aside from outliers such as Ketis, there was no expectation that mech designers could make any direct contribution in any battle.

However, Star Designers were completely different. They were not only good at designing mechs, but could transplant many of their design principles and specialties to other products, including combat armor!

Even if they did not resort to any special solutions, their insane wealth and abundant influence was enough for them to acquire the rarest and most expensive resources which they could build self-protection gear.

The more Ves thought about it, the more he truly thought it was viable for Star Designers to fight against powerful mechs without piloting one themselves!

He soon calmed down. Although it was nice to dream about being able to fight against mechs, it was a horrendous waste and a completely unnecessary risk for Star Designers to engage in such brutality!

The few people who managed to make it all the way to Star Designer developed an extremely deep affinity and affection for mech design. Whatever desire they used to harbor about piloting mechs or at least being able to compete against them would have long melted away at that point.

"Star Designers can never compete against god pilots on an individual basis." Master Dervidian added. "The disparity in combat power is too great. The only case where Star Designers have any chance of doing so is to develop vast warfleets or fortifications and rely on brute force to deter god pilots. However, the cost is too great and any weakness can lead to instant defeat."

In other words, god pilots were too unreasonable to fight against. Although producing them was insanely hard, once they reached this level of strength, they instantly crushed every other means of defeating them in open combat.

They were rightfully considered to be the kings of the battlefield!

Chapter 4148 Beyond The Possible

Ves learned so much about god pilots during this insane conversation that he felt incredibly awed and inspired.

He felt awed because god pilots were much more powerful and versatile than he thought.

Though he always felt admiration towards their great strength and accomplishments, now that he learned the actual details, he understood a lot more why every major organization treated them so seriously.

God pilots were seriously frightening.

Not only that, they actually became a lot smarter as well.

Combined with the fact that most of them pushed themselves insanely hard because they pursued a massive goal or agenda, they knew how to leverage their great power to good effect!

If that wasn't enough, Master Dervidian also shared another revelation.

"Do you know why we value god pilots?"

"Uh, because they are insanely powerful in combat?"

"That is true, but that is far from the only reason." Dervidian shook his head.

"It is true that their power is a sight to behold, but do not forget that there is only a small number of them in existence. Certainly, more will definitely join their ranks over time, but their rate of emergence is incomparable to the rate of how fast everyone else can produce warships. If a conflict ever broke out between our Association and the CFA, the war would rapidly go against our favor. Can you tell me why, Mr. Larkinson?"

"That is because... the CFA have too many warships and most notably battleships." Ves answered. "Even if god pilots are powerful enough to defeat most warfleets, they can only be in so many places at a time. I don't suppose they can split themselves up and defend thousands of star systems at once, right?"

"God pilots are capable of many feats, but what you have described is beyond them. I do not know of any Divine that possesses the ability to clone themselves." Dervidian regretfully answered. "Since this is the case, the combat value of god pilots as a whole is actually quite limited. They are powerful enough to defend critical star systems and raid critical enemy bases, but their numbers are so small that their overall strategic value has a ceiling. The reality is that we have to rely more on ace pilots, large quantities of mech armies and warships to compete against the CFA."

He made a good point. From what it sounded like, god pilots were truly invincible in any battle, especially if they grouped up and tackled major enemy concentrations at once.

They could make any star system of the MTA unassailable and they could smash any defenses occupied by the enemy.

However, it was well-known that the CFA was less attached to fixed locations than the MTA!

The fleeters actually possessed a similar mindset to Ves and concentrated all of their core personnel and assets into mobile warfleets. Their actual strongholds were their battleships and much of their production took place on immense factory ships.

Since their warfleets were easily able to move around from place to place, it was probably incredibly difficult for god pilots to hunt them down and destroy them one after another!

Ves looked at Master Derividian. The older man essentially implied that god pilots, though supremely powerful in battle, were not that valued for their ability to turn the tide in any major war.

If this was the case, then what other use did god pilots have?

"Did you forget the reason why we originally started this conversation?"

"Ah!" A lightbulb switched on above Ves' head! "You mean they possess special abilities that human technology cannot reproduce?"

"Exactly." Master Dervidian adopted a devoted expression again. "Divine Hussain Albedo is the only individual that is capable of imparting compatible genetic aptitude in a child that is not a potentate. This is only a fraction of his full capabilities, and he is only one among many. What do you think the other god pilots can achieve with their own impossible abilities?"

Ves thought about all of the famous and unique god pilots known to the public and quickly became dazzled by the possibilities.

Divine Hussain Albedo had given Ves a good baseline of what other god pilots might be capable of. Feats that were previously thought impossible such as creating energy and matter out of nothing and reversing time may not be out of reach for these supreme warriors.

No wonder that everyone insisted on referring to them as gods!

"Perhaps their lifelong vocations may have given you the impression that god pilots are only useful for their destructive potential, but in reality they can be fantastic engines of production. One of the most notable abilities they possess is that they can create impossible matter out of nothing. This is of vital importance to our Association."

"Can you explain that further, Master?"

"Think about all of the powerful mechs that we can develop. I have learned that you have recently completed a powerful second-class expert mech, so you have first-hand experience that much of its power is based on rare and potent exotics. Would you be able to design a mech that is just as strong if phasewater was not available?"

"No." Ves immediately shook his head. "The Mars would have become a much more inferior expert mech if we did not pump kilogram after kilogram of phasewater into the frame."

"What you have experienced with this design project is not that different from the situation that we face in high-end mech design and product development. The more powerful and advanced the product that we intend to make, the harder it is to find the right exotic materials that can translate our ambitious vision into reality."

That was indeed a major limitation and shortcoming. Competition was harsh. In order to defeat the strongest mechs, warships or alien monsters, a mech designer must be able to design a machine that performed better than what was already possible.

Technology and design could only get mech designers so far. No matter how brilliant Ves became in designing mechs, it was hard to develop any machine that could compete against a warship if he only had access to mundane materials like iron, lead and copper!

It was due to their high dependence on more powerful exotics that mech designers developed an obsession for them. Any mech designer that had the intention to design high-end mechs spent a disproportionate amount of time, money and effort on gathering all of the ultra-rare materials that were needed to make their desired mechs viable.

When Ves thought of how god pilots could utilize their awe-inspiring power to create specific objects that did not exist before, he fully understood Dervidian's point.

"You mean god pilots can function as material producers for mech designers?"

"That and more." The MTA Master nodded. "I do not need to mention that their services, while highly desirable, must only be utilized for the greatest and most critical products. We also cannot disturb them too much with our requests as these are exalted warriors who are juggling many different responsibilities."

"I see."

"Do not underestimate the role they play. Their existence has changed our civilization forever. Part of the reason why we are able to compete with peak powers such as strong alien civilizations and other major enemies is because

we are able to develop peak products such as god mechs and other fantastic tools and war machines. Only when Star Designers and god pilots work together can our civilization produce these peak products that collectively comprise our top combat and non-combat power."

Ves widened his eyes. He never truly thought that such an amazing cooperation took place. The possibilities were endless if these two peak transcendents worked together to create products previously thought impossible.

"Can... can you give me an example?"

"There are many wonders that can be brought to life by pooling together the expertise of Star Designers with the boundless power of a god pilot."

Dervidian said with awe in his tone. "I have been informed that you are familiar with Senfovon's Ladder of Craftsmanship, is that correct?"

"Uh, yes."

"According to your work and track record, you have already climbed up the second rung of the ladder numerous times. This should allow you to possess a good understanding of the power and mystery behind masterworks."

Pride welled up inside Ves. "I do not dare to say that I have gained proficiency in producing masterwork mechs, but climbing up the second rung of the ladder has indeed become significantly easier over the years."

Though creating masterwork mechs was still a matter of luck and engagement, he no longer needed to rely so much on Lucky's gems to make up the difference.

"To the vast majority of mech designers and producers, the second rung of the ladder is the apex of what they can realistically reach in their lifetimes. However, have you ever wondered why there is a third rung of the ladder and how it actually came about?"

Ves quickly made the connection. "You mean... the cooperation between Star Designers and god pilots allow for the production of grand works?!"

Masterworks were not the end of the road. The recent completion of the Mars showed that there were differences in quality between masterworks.

Whereas mechs such as the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger only passed the threshold to masterwork quality, the Mars had leapt far beyond that point!

If Ves had to describe it in more categorical terms, then the Amaranto, Shield of Samar, Everchanger and Minerva were merely low-tier masterwork mechs.

The Mars on the other hand felt more like a mid-tier masterwork mech!

The reason why Ves did not dare to label the Mars a high-tier masterwork mech was because he instinctively felt there was still a lot of room for improvement.

While he felt reasonably confident that he could fabricate a high-tier masterwork mech through his own efforts one day, he was less assured about his ability to leap to the next stage.

He would no longer be working within the confines of the second rung of the ladder which he would have thoroughly mastered at that point.

Instead, he had to find a way to climb up to the third rung of the ladder, something which was supposedly only possible for Star Designers.

Dervidian nodded. "Theoretically, grand works can be made out of relatively common materials. However, you should already know how difficult it is to create powerful and highly useful products with limited resources. The best tech and the best results can only be achieved if everything is at the highest level. The design, the components and the materials can all play an immense role in boosting the quality and overall soundness of a creation. Although

utilizing peak materials is not an essential requirement, improving it is actually the easiest way to directly boost the quality of a product."

Ves understood what the Master was talking about. It took a lot of ingenuity and brainpower to come up with the best overall design and component designs.

On the other hand, replacing a low-quality material with a high-quality material required little thinking. He just had to make sure to actually obtain the desired resource, which was an entirely different challenge that prevented many mech designers from realizing their dreams.

However, what if there was a god pilot on hand that just happened to be able to produce a top-grade exotic that had been depleted a long time ago or did not exist in the first place?

All of those Star Designers who came up with impossible projects would be able to produce marvelous grand works that far exceeded the products made by their rivals from the CFA!

Ves' eyes lit up. This was probably the true advantage the MTA held over the CFA!

Though the Common Fleet Alliance most probably possessed an absolute advantage in quantity due to relying on easily-mastered technology, the Mech Trade Association excelled at breaking the boundaries of quality!

What he had just learned was probably one of the core components to grand works!

If Ves ever wanted to create his own grand work and climb up to the prestigious third rung of Senfovon's Ladder, then it was likely that he would have to gain the cooperation of a god pilot!

He soon began to frown. How easy was it to approach a god pilot and convince such an awe-inspiring individual to spend his valuable time and effort to produce large quantities of extravagant materials?

Chapter 4149 The Price Of Power

"Let me give you one concrete example of how grand works can significantly change the course of human civilization for the better." Master Dervidian said.

"Have you ever wondered how we were initially able to set foot in this dwarf galaxy?"

"Uhhh..."

"Think about it, Mr. Larkinson. The distance from the closest point of the Milky Way Galaxy and the closest point of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy is around 350,000 light-years. Do you think our best starships can possibly cross this immense divide in a matter of decades or centuries?"

"I am not an expert in FTL technology, so I can't say for sure."

"We cannot. No form of human or alien FTL technology is sufficient. The faster forms of superluminal travel are unable to bridge the enormous gap while the slower forms of FTL travel will delay our arrival by thousands of years at the very least. So how do you think we have been able to enter the Red Ocean?"

If humanity did not embark on a journey to the Red Ocean many centuries ago, then there was only one possible answer.

"A grand work."

"Correct." Dervidian enthusiastically smiled. "We are not talking about just any grand work. I cannot divulge too many details about this epoch-changing device, but it is not that big of a secret that it needs astronomical quantities of phasewater to make it work. Let me remind you that this is before we truly

gained access to the Red Ocean. Do you think the Milky Way has enough phasewater to meet our demand?"

Ves shook his head. "No. Every source I've read told me that phasewater is scarce to the point where most people didn't even know it existed before the opening of the Red Ocean. Wait, are god pilots able to create phasewater out of nothing?"

"How else did we get this revolutionary grand work to work?" Dervidian replied. "Do you understand now how much value god pilots bring to our civilization? Crossing the Red Ocean was impossible to us before because we simply did not possess the technical capabilities to reach it in a feasible manner. However, by relying on the divine abilities of our living gods, we were able to leap past our tech level and gain a capability that we were not supposed to possess. This is only the tip of the iceberg, Mr. Larkinson. Once you approach this level, you will gain the qualifications to learn more. You will truly be able to understand the splendor of god pilots at that time."

Though Master Dervidian did not provide any further examples, Ves obtained enough information to gain a much better understanding of the MTA's overall goal and philosophy.

Just as he figured out, the Mech Trade Association was the more pragmatic party between its other two rivals, the Common Fleet Alliance and the Five Scrolls Compact.

Whilst the latter two organizations pursued the opposite extremes, the MTA embraced the advantages of both approaches and came up with a fusion that possessed its own brilliance.

Technology still formed the base of the MTA, and the mechers did not abandon it at the top level.

Instead, the MTA did all it could to foster the emergence of god pilots. Each and every one of them presented many new technological possibilities that were not feasible in the past!

As different god pilots with different domains and specialties continued to emerge over time, the MTA became increasingly more versatile and powerful as it was able to produce more and better grand works!

Ves' eyes grew a bit sharper.

If the MTA continued to accumulate like this over many generations, the ability for Star Designers and god pilots to produce technological wonders might ultimately rise to the point where they could potentially attain the mythical fourth rung of Senfovon's Ladder!

Although Ves had absolutely no idea on what such a speculative creation might look like, he could easily guess that its power would vastly outstrip that of grand works.

After all, if just a single grand work was single-handedly able to enable humanity to invade the Red Ocean, then how much more would a superwonder of unsurpassed power be able to change the lives of every individual?

Perhaps its introduction to the cosmos might truly be able to trigger a brand new age for human civilization!

Eventually, the conversation wound back to the original topic that Ves wanted to talk about.

All of this talk about grand works and Star Designers were way too far away for Ves. As much as he became inspired by all of these brilliant possibilities, it would probably take at least a century or maybe several before he could seriously get in touch with this circle.

There was no use jumping ahead when he was still a Journeyman. He had many design projects on his plate that were much more digestible to him at his current stage. That was where his true focus should lay for the time being.

"About Divine Hussain Albedo's power... what are the requirements to obtain his services?" Ves carefully asked.

Master Dervidian did not immediately answer. He gazed deeply at Ves for a moment before he opened his mouth.

"God pilots are not to be trifled with, Mr. Larkinson. They are busy people who have great power but even greater responsibilities. The amount of people who wish to make use of Divine Hussain Albedo abilities is extensive, and though he is a living god, he has yet to escape the limitations of time. The vast majority of people are able to enjoy their lives just fine without ever getting exposed to this option. If a child of yours does not have the fortune to develop adequate genetic aptitude, then you should direct your hopes to your other offspring. A man of your wealth and means can have as many children as you like. Eventually, one of your sons and daughters will develop the potential to become a mech pilot."

This was what pretty much every sensible parent did when they were truly invested in this goal.

Having lots of children was not that burdensome to most people as long as their jobs were good enough.

States also subtly encouraged the practice to an extent because they were more than happy to welcome more potentates in their territories.

Of course, the chances of raising a potentate was so low that most parents did not even try. They merely raised as many kids as they liked and hoped for the best.

Though Ves was leaning towards this attitude as well, he felt that he owed it to Andraste to try harder.

Unlike ordinary people, he was a brilliant mech designer and was already changing the lives of many people in the Red Ocean through his innovative products.

He would only grow more powerful and capable in the future! He did not believe that he would be unable to gain access to the Chosen Human and be able to request the impressive god pilot's services one day!

He just wanted to know the conditions of contracting Divine Hussain Albedo's help so that he could make preparations in advance.

None of Ves' thoughts and considerations escaped the sight of Master Dervidian. The old and experienced mech designer had met so many people who held similar aspirations.

"If you are still determined enough to pursue this course, then I will not stop you. However, I suggest you brace yourself, because the requirements to get into contact with His Holiness and plead for his intervention are high. Officially, the service that he provides is called Genetic Aptitude Reparation. The minimum price to receive it is 1 billion MTA merits."

"1 billion MTA merits?!" Ves called out in shock as he lost his composure!

There was no way he could remain calm after hearing this absurd price! He had worked so hard and risked his life many times in order to scrape up tens of millions of MTA merits.

Though he was able to earn over 200 million MTA merits by trading in an astronomical amount of phasewater that he obtained at great risk during the Purgatory Campaign, that was just a one-off fluke that could not be replicated.

Unless he and his clan were able to hunt down another hidden phase whale enclave, there was no hope of plundering the thousands of kilograms of phasewater needed to earn over a billion MTA merits!

The only other viable way for Ves to earn a lot of MTA merits was to develop a lot of new innovative methods and solutions, and while he did earn a few million MTA merits here and there, the rate was far too slow for his liking!

"Before you ask, we won't offer any discounts." Dervidian said. "Don't think that 1 billion MTA merits is a great sum. This is a preferential rate that we charge exclusively towards the members and close associates of our faction. Everyone else must be willing to pay a much higher sum of MTA merits."

Ves started to feel sick.

"Are there actually outsiders who are willing to get taken advantage of by your faction to such an extent?"

Dervidian chuckled. "More than you know. Some of their children mean everything to them. It is important to note that we do not offer Genetic Aptitude Reparation to anyone. Both insiders and outsiders must adhere to numerous additional criteria."

"Can you tell me these additional requirements?"

"First, you must be in good standing with our Transhumanist Faction. You should have no problem meeting this demand, but there are outsiders who are part of groups and factions that we frequently collide with. Suffice to say, we have no desire to cooperate with them. This is actually one of the methods that we use to make friends and maintain friendly relations with different influences. A group cannot be a major faction within the MTA if it is not able to provide a unique and highly desirable service. The ability to force others to sit at the negotiating table is an essential requirement for others to take you seriously."

That was an interesting piece of information! Having negotiated numerous business deals after entering the Red Ocean, Ves keenly understood the power of leverage and possessing a desirable good or service.

"Second, gaining the approval of our faction is not enough. Since Divine Albedo must make a move in person, you must gain his personal approval. No matter how well you do in our faction, if you offend him in person or do not align with his values, he will never take action no matter how many MTA merits you are willing to offer."

Ves frowned. That sounded highly unfair. A professional organization would never allow the whims of a single person, even one at the executive level, to affect the partiality of its decision-making!

However, it was already clear that the status of the Human Chosen was incredibly high among the Transhumanists. Given how uncritical and worshipful Master Dervidian sounded whenever he spoke about the legendary god pilot, Divine Albedo practically ran the faction as his personal fief!

It was fairly understandable that this was a hard rule given the circumstances.

"So I need to make sure that I am in Divine Albedo's good books, is that right? How can I increase my favorability with the man?"

"Oh, that is easy." Master Dervidian smiled. "You need to make sure that your work, actions and conduct align with his goals, principles and values. Much of what you have accomplished and what you are currently engaged in already satisfies this condition."

Ves relaxed a bit. Now that he thought about it, Divine Albedo's goals and motivations were simple to figure out. He was famed for his pro-human sentiments. He was also a huge supporter of transhumanism and wanted as many people to transcend their mortal limitations as possible.

Of course, Ves also needed to take care not to trigger any of Divine Albedo's pet peeves. Anything related to helping alien races, undermining human civilization and damaging the human race as a whole would definitely get on the god pilot's bad side!

"Sounds simple enough."

Chapter 4150 Reparation

Meeting the MTA's requirements was only one part of the equation.

Ves also had to make sure that Andraste was in a state to accept the treatment if he ever felt she needed this life-changing service!

"Are there any specific requirements that the recipient needs to meet in order to become eligible to undergo Genetic Aptitude Reparation?"

"Good question. As you can imagine, it is not easy for Divine Hussain Albedo to change the entire brain and body structure of a child." Master Dervidian patiently explained. "The closer a subject is to a model mech pilot, the less effort it takes to transform him or her. His Holiness has imposed a number of hard requirements for this reason. The most basic one is that he will not treat anyone older than 15 years old."

"Is there a reason for that?"

"There are multiple. First off, it is to cut off the hopes of people such as yourself. There are many adults who have gone on to enjoy successful careers in other vocations. They contribute much more to our society in their current positions than if they would start all over as an ordinary soldier who is also starting late. On the premise of keeping human civilization strong, it would be unconscionable for Divine Albedo to rob other sectors of their talents."

Though Ves tried his best to remain calm, a part of him still felt as if he had lost an opportunity.

"Is that the only reason for this age limit?"

"No. There are other reasons. For example, as the brains and bodies of people continue to grow over time, they become increasingly less malleable to changes. It is far too strenuous for Divine Albedo to turn a norm who is over 60 or 100 years old into a potentate. The price does not match the benefits. My advice to you is to start as soon as possible. Do not wait until your child has reached 15 before applying for this service."

"I see. That is good to know."

"The second requirement is that the recipient must also possess a sound and healthy mentality. This is rather difficult to define in words or numbers. There have been cases where His Holiness has refused to make a move because the child in question is too spoiled or possesses a distorted personality. In general, if our leader judges that turning the recipient into a potentate will do more harm than good, then he cannot in good conscience proceed with taking action."

Divine Albedo sounded like a particularly righteous and noble god pilot. For him to take morality and conduct so seriously meant that Ves had to be extra careful not to expose any of his uglier traits!

In addition, he had to make sure he raised Andraste properly. He already planned to invest more effort into molding her into a noble and righteous woman. It would not do for her personality to turn in a stumbling block at a critical moment!

"The third requirement is that the recipient must be human, or close to it." Dervidian spoke. "The closer a child is to a healthy baseline human being, the better."

Uh oh. When Ves thought of all of the deep and extensive genetic and spiritual modifications he applied to both Andraste as well as her older sister, he had a feeling that this was a much more serious issue!

"How much leeway do children have in order to remain eligible for this treatment?"

"That is difficult to say. It is completely up to His Holiness to define whether a child has strayed too far from the human norm. In general, augmentations are not necessarily harmful as long as they preserve the human condition. Try to avoid genetic modification that insert alien and inhuman genes into a child's DNA as much as possible. There are more restrained alternatives available that seek to improve and optimize a human's physiology and cognitive functions. They are much more harmless in our eyes."

Ves would have liked to learn about this detail before he agreed to produce a designer baby!

He did not know enough about Withshaw & Seneca's designer baby templates, but he hoped that the genetics company did not add too much alien crap in their genetic programming codes!

"Are there any further requirements?" He tentatively asked.

What he heard up until now made it clear that gaining access to Genetic Aptitude Reparation was anything but straightforward!

Fortunately, the MTA Master finally ceased to bring up further demands.

"Not per se. The final detail that you should know is what Divine Hussain Albedo can do for a child. You see, Genetic Aptitude Reparation encompasses more than just granting the right genetic aptitude to a child that lacks this quality."

"Oh?" Ves became even more attentive than before. He had a feeling that he was about to learn something very important! "Are you saying that His Holiness can also affect children who already possess the minimum qualifications needed to pilot mechs?"

"He can." Dervidian smiled. "Parents who are disappointed by the genetic aptitudes of their children can request His Holiness to improve or repair this property so that their offspring become a lot more talented."

What an extravagant measure! What was crazy about all of this was that Ves could fully understand why some parents were willing to pay astronomical sums in order to improve the piloting ability of their child.

Many aspects of a potentate can be improved, but genetic aptitude was one of the elements that could not be improved in the slightest!

The only person who could do anything about it was the Chosen Human. This granted the god pilot an invaluable monopoly on a highly desirable service!

Ves could imagine that there were many powerful parents within the Association that wanted their favorite offspring to possess the best chances in their piloting careers.

If there was a way to improve one's talent, then those with way too much money and merits on their hands would definitely be willing to pay a hefty price!

"Can you explain to me exactly how Genetic Aptitude Reparation affects the qualifications of eligible recipients?"

"Most certainly. Let us begin with those who are not capable of piloting mechs. Divine Albedo can repair their genetic aptitudes, but only up to a certain point. Before you ask, he cannot continually apply this procedure to the same individual more than once. Therefore, for the majority of children who present

themselves to His Holiness, their genetic aptitudes will make three major leaps forward."

This meant that a talentless kid with F-grade genetic aptitude would be able to obtain C-grade genetic aptitude at most.

That... was already enough for most people. While C-grade genetic aptitude was considered rather average or even insufficient to pilot the most advanced and complex first-class multipurpose mechs, being able to pilot mechs at all was already a fantastic step forward!

There was no need to be greedy for more.

"Will children with higher grades of genetic aptitude make three leaps forward as well?" Ves asked.

"Not exactly. It becomes more difficult to improve this aspect as it nears the most ideal state. In general, recipients with E or D-grades can reach B-grade. Those with C-grade can barely attain A-grade. As for the blessed children that already possess A-grade genetic aptitude, they can only attain a minor improvement at most. Children that score A- can attain A-grade. Children that already score A can possibly reach A+, but there are no guarantees."

These were revolutionary possibilities!

While genetic aptitude was not the sole determinant to a mech pilot's eventual success, being able to reach a higher starting point definitely made everything easier!

Given how much human society and especially the MTA valued high-ranking mech pilots so much, the demand for Genetic Aptitude Reparation must be insanely high!

Divine Albedo most definitely served as an immense source of income, favors and other resources for his faction!

Yet... as soon as Ves thought about the astronomical price of 1 billion MTA merits, he began to deflate.

How the hell was he going to earn so many merits in so little time?!

With a maximum time limit of 15 years, it sounded impossible for him to earn so many merits.

He would either have to produce the most groundbreaking invention in his life, or he would have to take a lot of risks in order to gather as much phasewater and other valuable curiosities for the MTA!

Ves narrowed his eyes for a moment. Given how easily he was able to obtain all of this information, he suspected that he was being manipulated into working even harder on behalf of the MTA.

After all, the only way to earn MTA merits was to make the organization in question happy!

All of this sounded like an elaborate scheme to get him to dedicate his entire life to the Association!

What was even more depressing was that the mechers did not even try that hard to hide this scheme. The reason for that was that they were not afraid that people would refuse what they had to offer.

This had been the MTA's modus operandi for a long time!

Ves softly sighed. There was no practical way he could gain access to Genetic Aptitude Reparation. Perhaps Star Designers and tier 1 galactic citizens might not even blink an eye at the cost, but someone as poor and weak as Ves had to work way too hard in order to get his foot in the door!

A part of him felt that he would have been better off if he remained ignorant of this possibility.

Still, a larger part of him felt grateful towards Master Dervidian for driving away a part of the fog that obscured the truth about god pilots.

Ves had no intention of contracting Divine Albedo's services, though. As much as he loved and adored Andraste, there were more vocations available to humans than piloting mechs.

Perhaps he could encourage his red-headed daughter to follow Ketis' footsteps and become a mech designer who just happened to know how to fight.

This way, she would still be able to make good use of her designer baby genes.

"There is one more piece of information that you need to know if you are ever considering to apply for Genetic Aptitude Reparation, Mr. Larkinson. In order to obtain the help of His Holiness, you must bring yourself and your child to him. That can be a challenge as he is currently stationed in the Milky Way for the time being."

That could be a major problem!

"Will... His Holiness travel to the Red Ocean in the near future?"

"I cannot say." Dervidian shrugged. "I am far from powerful enough to understand the deployment of god pilots. I can say in general terms that many of them are stationed where they are needed. They cannot cover an enormous amount of territory, but they can provide absolute safety to the local star systems and regions they are guarding. Currently, there is always a need to guard essential border systems in the galactic center. There are still many surviving alien races in the Milky Way that possess the strength to compete against our civilization."

"Does that mean..."

"In my judgment, it is unlikely that Divine Albedo will be transferred to the Red Ocean. Compared to the powerful threats of our home galaxy, the indigenous alien races of the new frontier are weaker in almost every conceivable criteria. We can easily defeat them in time without relying on any god pilot."

In other words, the MTA didn't take the major alien races of the Red Ocean seriously. If that was the case, then there was not much reason to bring over too many god pilots to this dwarf galaxy!

"I understand."

Ves already began to think beyond this option.

The most valuable piece of information he obtained from this discussion was learning about how much value god pilots provided in a more productive setting.

The second-most valuable piece of information that he received was that it was possible to improve or repair the genetic aptitude of different people!

Although the tech for it did not exist as of yet, at least Ves discovered that there was a possibility!

This was already enough!

If Ves was feeling truly desperate or ambitious, perhaps he could develop his own solution to the problem!

Hopefully, he wouldn't need it, though. It might be that all of his concerns about Andraste's genetic aptitude and piloting talent were unfounded.