

The Mech 4891

Chapter 4891 Object 431

"Why did you call me over, Ves?" Venerable Jannzi asked as soon as she entered the private workshop. "As far as I know, you are still many months away from completing the reborn expert mech that you have promised. If this is another one of your attempts to convince me to pilot a stopgap mech, then forget about it. The Shield of Samar is the only mech in my life."

"It's not that." Ves called as he continued to put the finishing touches on his latest experimental work. "I need your help in testing a new defensive concept that I recently came up with. It is rather complicated and unconventional, but if it works the way I anticipate, I can add a powerful new defensive tool to your upcoming expert mech."

"Won't this cause its completion to be delayed?"

Ves paused his work and turned to face the newly arrived expert pilot. "The progress of the Dullahan Project is not entirely dependent on the workload. It is also affected by other factors such as my personal motivation and passion. You've been with me for a long time. I am sure you have learned how I operate. In short, the more enthusiastic I am about a design project, the more productive I become. My latest experiment here is the latest product of my passion. As long as it is viable, I will become so happy that I can get stuff done 50 percent faster than normal."

Jannzi continued to stare at him with puzzlement in her eyes.

"...I can understand that people tend to work harder if they are happier, but I never heard of anyone boast they can complete a mech design in half the time."

Ves snorted. "You're a protector, not a creator, Jannzi. You don't understand how creators such as myself work. Much of the work related to mech design consists of solving a million different design problems. If I can come up with all of the answers as soon as I have grasped the details of those problems, I won't need a year to complete a complex project. I can complete a high-quality mech design within a month. Reality is not so easy, however. It can take days if not weeks for me to solve the most difficult design problems. One of the most effective ways I can speed that up is to improve my mood and put myself in a better state of mind. You would be surprised how much more productive I become when I work at my peak."

This was how his Hammer of Brilliance worked whenever he whacked it on a person's head. The false inspired state it was able to induce on mech designers and artisans supercharged his mind and massively reduced the difficulty of solving all of those design problems!

The female expert pilot gave up on questioning the validity of Ves' claims and simply took him at his word. He may be a reckless bastard who made crazy decisions every now and then, but he unquestionably knew what he was doing when it came to mechs.

He was a mech designer after all.

"So what is it that you need me to do?" Venerable Jannzi turned her attention back to the matter at hand.

"Give me a few seconds to finish this up. It is a bit big and heavy, but it can't be helped."

Once Ves had completed his last remaining task, he lifted up the item he had been working on and placed it upright onto the floor of the workshop.

The tower shield produced a large thump when its bottom side collided onto a surface. Its appearance immediately caused Venerable Jannzi to freeze as she sensed that there was a connection between herself and the piece of equipment.

Her heart throbbed as a few long-forgotten associations came to the forefront of her mind.

"You... made it out of the materials of my Sammie?"

"Only partially." Ves admitted. "The exterior layers of this shield consist of salvaged first-class alloys. It is what I have placed inside that is important. I designed and created over a dozen discrete pieces of Unending alloy and put them into the center of this tower shield in an array. I believe what you are sensing right now is an echo of the true resonance that you used to produce when you interfaced with your old expert mech. The Shield of Samar may be gone, but its remains still contain a trace of its existence."

He never really paid too much attention to this, but it became extremely obvious now that Ves had been studying the primordial human bones for a while now. The broken pieces of debris of the expert space knight had yet to be cleansed by the power of time!

Jannzi stepped closer and reached out to touch the front surface of the power shield. It featured an odd metallic chromatic facing that made it look as if she was looking at a prop for a fantastical drama show.

"What is this? What am I supposed to do with this? Don't tell me you plan to make a bigger version of this ridiculous shield for my new expert mech!"

"Hey, please hear me out before you pass any judgment! I swear it will be useful to you! Think about it, Jannzi. You lost your precious Shield of Samar after you got beaten by the Skorpion Kommando."

The expert pilot immediately scowled. The mere mention of that hated Fridayman high-tier expert mech triggered her trauma!

"Are you telling me that it was my fault that I lost against that mech?!"

"Calm down, Jannzi! I am not passing judgment on your skills. I am sure you did your best and all! The circumstances weren't ideal back then, and one of the greatest shortcomings was that the defensive power of your Shield of Samar wasn't adequate enough to resist the phasewater-infused acid released by the Skorpion Kommando. This is a problem relating to the configuration of your expert mech. While we cannot change the past, we can make sure that a tragedy like this will never happen in the future. This is why I am working hard to develop an experimental new physical shield for your upcoming expert mech that should be able to resist a lot more attacks."

His explanation along with his earnest tone caused Venerable Jannzi to put away her irritation and consider his idea more seriously.

"If you have a fancy new idea for a tower shield for my mech, why don't you fabricate one that is scaled for a mech?"

"It's really expensive." He told her. "This is a piece of equipment that is tailor made for you and only you. None of our other expert mechs are defensive in nature. They are completely unsuited to carry a tower shield, and even if they do, their pilots won't be able to interface with it properly. Forget about all of that. Right now, I need you to keep this scale reproduction around your person and spend a few hours every day trying to resonate with it and make it do all kinds of different stuff."

"I can't resonate with equipment without interfacing with an expert mech, did you forget that already, Ves? I am not a swordmaster like Ketis who can resonate with any sword I hold in my hands."

"I'm not that stupid. I know what you can and cannot do. What you have just described is valid as long as we are talking about true resonance. My upcoming Rainbow Shield doesn't contain any resonating exotics. Instead, the Unending alloy that I plan to integrate inside its structure will serve as prime materials that can enable you to generate prime resonance."

The female expert pilot looked lost at this point. It had been a long time since she last did anything related to prime resonance. She also didn't know what she was supposed to do with it outside of piloting a mech.

Ves sighed. "Look, let me give you a little show. Watch carefully and expand your senses."

He concentrated his mind and leveraged his considerably powerful Spirituality to connect with the Unending alloy blocks that he had integrated in the man-sized prototype tower shield.

Its shimmering chromatic surface grew a little brighter as various different forms of spiritual energy began to activate!

Jannzi could feel slight effects from the shield that reminded her of the glows of many different design spirits. From the Solemn Guardian to Titania, the experimental product contained the energies taken from numerous entities!

While the light show was entertaining, the expert pilot didn't see the point in this. How was making the shield light up in different colors supposed to increase her defenses?

"I know what you are thinking." Ves said as he stopped trying to mess around with the shield. "It looks as if this is a complete waste of time, but it isn't. The reason why I can't do anything special with it is because I am a mech designer. I theorize that Object 431 can produce a completely different effect when it is held and used by an expert pilot and you in particular."

"I am an expert pilot, not a shieldmaster or whatever."

"Prime resonance doesn't necessarily require the medium of a neural interface in order to work. Trust me. I invented this phenomenon, so I am pretty confident about this. Just give it a try."

He passed 'Object 431' over to the Larkinson expert pilot. Jannzi continued to remain skeptical as she looped her arm through the straps that Ves had added onto the rear facing.

The shield was not small, and it was made out of solid alloys. It was difficult for Jannzi to lift it up, let alone carry it around all day.

"I can lighten the burden if it is too much for you." Ves proposed as she saw that Jannzi was struggling to handle the tower shield. "I can make a few antigrav modules and attach it onto your shield to reduce its effective weight."

"Please do so. I am afraid that the only other way I can carry it around is to wear a suit of powered combat armor."

"You can do that as well if you want."

Jannzi grew impatient. "Let's leave that for later. Can you tell me what I need to do in order to make effective use of this shield?"

"Do you remember the lightshow I created earlier? Let's start with that. Try to connect to the energies that the different design spirits have donated."

It took less time and effort for Jannzi to be able to replicate what Ves had done. Though her spiritual perception and sensitivity was nowhere close to him, she could still fall back to her piloting experience to pull off a similar feat.

"Now what?"

"Leverage your willpower. Don't do so blindly. Try to channel it to produce a specific result. For example, visualize your mind grasping a clump of energy so that you can shape it into a flat surface. Then try to infuse it with your willpower and think really hard about wanting to protect your shield, yourself, and the clansmen behind you from damage. The choice of energies that you draw upon is extremely important. I suggest that you start with performing this visualization trick with the spiritual energy that you are most familiar with. You should have the greatest compatibility with the energy donated by Qilanxo."

She tried to do what he instructed. It was not too difficult for her to follow the steps he described. She became surprised that she was able to do all of this without piloting a mech, but he was being accurate when he claimed that prime resonance operated by a different set of rules.

Though the energy bestowed by Qilanxo felt a little flat and hollow to her force of will, her deep familiarity with the former exobeast enabled her to manipulate it without too much hindrance.

Soon enough, a near-transparent energy shield appeared above the tower shield's surface. It became more difficult to maintain it the more she spread it out into a flat surface.

"What now?" She asked as she began to strain from the mental exertion.

"Stay still." Ves instructed before he promptly picked up a kinetic pistol from his work table and fired a single round onto the newly projected energy shield!

What surprised the both of them was that the thin and seemingly weak energy shield actually bounced away the physical projectile without striking the actual surface of Object 431!

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?"

"Hahahaha! I did it! It works!"

"You didn't know it would work?!"

"I was confident in my theories, hahaha!"

"That's not good enough!"

Chapter 4892 Unconventional Defense

"How?"

"How what?"

"How does this work?!"

Venerable Jannzi never thought that holding a strangely colored tower shield would produce such a result. She was still shocked at how the thin energy barrier was able to block a shot from a pistol.

"Didn't you just listen to me earlier?" Ves responded after he stopped laughing like a demented scientist. "You took a bunch of energy from Object 431 and infused it with your willpower. That has allowed you to create a pseudo-spatial barrier that can roughly reproduce the spatial barriers that are characteristic to Qilanxo."

"This is impossible!" Jannzi exclaimed! "Isn't this supposed to be a power that only belongs to Qilanxo? I can tell that this energy came from her, but when I did what you suggested, I did not feel her presence from beginning to end. How am I able to make a spatial barrier like her when I did not resonate with her when I held this shield? In fact, how am I able to do without the amplification of an expert mech?!"

Ves smirked as he calmly put the gun back to its safety mode and unloaded it before putting it down on the worktable.

"You don't even know what you are capable of. How many years has it been since you became a demigod? While I don't really like this term because it has obvious religious connotations, I have to admit that the people who associated it with expert pilots are not on the wrong track. Forget about mechs for the time being. This is a power that is intrinsic to demigods. Your force of will is the prototypical form of a Saint Kingdom, which means it can induce the powers of the latter on a limited scale. While you can't do anything special with it outside of your mech, I have theorized that prime resonance can help you harness it in an effective manner. Do you understand what I am talking about?"

Jannzi still looked flabbergasted. "I'm a soldier, not a scientist!"

That caused Ves to grow annoyed. "I can't be bothered to think up a simple analogy that can help you understand what happened. Just take my word for it that you can do this as long as you concentrate your mind. Your willpower is strong, Jannzi. The differences between you and Ketis are not as great as you think. Willpower is a metaphysical force that can strengthen, reinforce and empower anything it comes in touch with. I theorize that you have already been able to do this, but normally the effects aren't strong enough for you to bother with this. My experimental shield basically lowers the threshold and provides you with a ready-made structure to apply your strength in this manner."

Jannzi still couldn't follow his explanation. "This sounds similar to what Joshua can do with his Everchanger. Isn't his expert mech based around borrowing the power of different design spirits to pull off different 'prime abilities'? I thought that this was his exclusive power."

Ves shook his head. "You are partially correct, but didn't you manage to develop a prime ability as well when you piloted the Shield of Samar?"

"I did, but that was when I was working together with Sammie and Qilanxo." She replied. "This is different. I am on my own this time."

"That is not a problem, Jannzi. You depend too much on the help of your battle partners that you never truly realized how strong you have become. You're a mid-tier expert pilot by now, right?"

Jannzi nodded. "I think I am, though I haven't measured it for many months."

"You have already grown a lot stronger since you initially broke through all of those years ago. Your willpower has become dozens of times stronger, and that is a massive difference even if it is not that exaggerated on the battlefield. What I am trying to tell you is that your willpower has already become strong enough to distort reality. You just need a little help and direction, and that is what tools like Object 431 are supposed to provide."

She began to understand what he was trying to convey to her. The expert pilot looked at the heavy shield she strapped on her arm with greater respect than before.

"Does that mean I can become a 'shieldmaster' like you have described?"

"Theoretically, yes, but in practice you operate in a different manner from a swordmaster." Ves replied. "A real swordmaster can generate true resonance with a sword. This is a powerful force that operates by different rules. You cannot do anything comparable with your new shield. Its principles are based on prime resonance, and the requirements of generating it is to combine willpower with spiritual energy."

Venerable Jannzi began to frown. "If expert pilots like myself can form these strange resonance barriers, then why has no one else done this before?"

"Prime resonance is an exclusive invention of mine. There are many requirements to make it happen. You not only need to get your hands on prime materials which are extremely scarce, but you also need to fill them up with spiritual energy, which few people can harness."

"And that allows you to create shields that can strengthen their ability to resist damage without using any normal power sources?"

"Only with a defensive expert pilot such as you." Ves responded with a smile. "An offensive expert pilot such as Venerable Stark won't be able to do what you can do, but she can probably generate stronger attacks if I arm her with a special luminar crystal gun. The tool needs to fit the user. Do you think I would have spent my time on creating a product as large and troublesome as a tower shield if you weren't a defensive expert pilot?"

"I... see..."

"Let me continue with my explanation. What I have done this time is create a shield that contains different 'reagents' that can produce different effects when you act upon it with your willpower. Since you are a protector by heart, the results that you can produce with the help of Object 431 will always come in the form of a protective barrier. The reason why it exists is that I think you can do even more with it than you have already shown."

"In what way?" Jannzi asked.

Ves waved his hand at her new shield. "Try and do what you did before, but with spiritual energy from a different source than Qilanxo. You should be familiar with the Illustrious One. Try and find his energy from the 'prime batteries' that I have integrated into Object 431. It will be a lot harder for you to grasp because you never had any intersection with the Illustrious One's power in the past, but this is where your willpower plays a role. Use your strength to put this energy under your control. You are not cooperating with any living mechs or design spirits this time, so don't worry about anyone's feelings. You need to impose your will on your equipment."

Though his words were ridiculous to her, Venerable Jannzi seriously tried to follow his instructions.

It was much harder for her to produce a result this time. She had never directly worked with the Illustrious One and did not possess enough familiarity or compatibility with his spiritual energy.

Without the guidance of the design spirit, Jannzi had to figure out how to harness his energy by herself from scratch. This was both difficult and frustrating.

"I can't do it." She said as she became frustrated by her failed attempts. "It is as if I am trying to pick up a glass of water when my hand is coated with oil. I can vaguely feel the Illustrious One's energy, but I can't really 'grab' it like I did with Qilanxo's energy."

Ves did not look particularly surprised when he heard that. "Don't worry too much, Jannzi. There is a learning curve to harnessing every form of energy. This is why I created Object 431 instead of waiting until I completed the Dullahan Project. The Rainbow Shield that I have envisioned for your next expert mech will carry a full-sized version of this scaled down prototype. Once you begin to pilot your new expert pilot, you will still be unable to handle its new tower shield correctly because you don't know how to harness energy of different attributes. In order to test out the concept of the Rainbow Shield and give you time to practice and develop new techniques with it, I need you to figure out ways to make use of Object 431."

The woman listened to Ves but tried to concentrate her efforts into harnessing the Illustrious One's energy. She refused to let this hindrance get in her way!

Her stubbornness eventually enabled her to grasp a part of the energy donated by the Illustrious One. While her 'grip' wasn't as solid as she wished, she was reluctantly able to form a dim and shaky energy barrier over Object 431's surface!

"Is this... what you wanted to see?"

Ves grinned. "I knew you could do it, Jannzi. You are a demigod, and you have just taken your first proper step in leveraging your own strength by yourself. Let's see how effective your new barrier is, shall we? Since the Illustrious One is based on light, it is only fitting to make use of an energy weapon."

He turned back to his work bench and picked up a luminar crystal pistol that he had prepared in advance.

Before he could repeat his previous test, Jannzi lost her focus and caused the prime resonance barrier to disappear!

"Stop! Don't shoot me, Ves! This isn't safe, you know! That barrier I just made felt so weak that a flashlight could have broken it. I don't want to end up in the infirmary because you were too impatient to conduct a proper test!"

Ves looked disappointed but put down his energy firearm. "Fine. I suppose we can postpone this test for a few weeks in order to give you time to familiarize yourself with your new experimental shield."

"I don't want you to test the defenses of these dubious barriers."

"Don't underestimate your power, Jannzi. That barrier just now did not look that strong, but it should be much more effective against energy attacks than you think."

Venerable Jannzi narrowed her eyes in thought. "Is that one of the reasons why you came up with this Rainbow Shield of yours?"

"Partially." Ves smirked. "You haven't even tried to form a prime resonance barrier by drawing upon the energies from multiple sources. That is an even more advanced application of this concept. You're probably not ready for it, so for now you should try to do what you have done until you have thoroughly familiarized yourself with the energies of multiple design spirits."

That sounded like an enormous headache to Jannzi.

"Why should I spend so much time and effort on this, Ves? Can't you just develop a normal physical shield for expert mech?"

"I could, but then you would be missing out. Look, one of the rationales for the Rainbow Shield is that it should theoretically allow you to withstand the attacks of many different varieties of expert mechs and other enemy types. There are so many different dangers out there that one form of defense might not work as effectively as another form of defense. By giving you the capacity to leverage different energies to form custom prime resonance barriers according to the situation should allow you to defend all manner of unconventional threats. This has to do with the nature and the effects of different attributes."

"You're afraid." She accused him. "You did not put all of this effort into creating a tool that can help my expert mech block ordinary attacks. You're afraid of fighting against these unknown threats and their powers. You need me to shield you from the attacks from these exotic enemies. Am I correct?"

He did not bother to deny her accusation. "Not all of our enemies are normal."

Chapter 4893 Highly Productive

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"Remember to practice with Object 431 every day." Ves said as Jannzi's visit to the workshop came to an end. "Don't just blindly repeat the same moves. Try to be more creative about it. The shield

contains over a dozen different prime batteries, each of which are filled with different varieties of spiritual energy. It is like a musical instrument that you can play in order to produce a nice-sounding melody. Don't waste too much time on repetitively hitting the same notes, but try to vary and combine them into chords."

It took a long time for Jannzi to accept her new 'homework'. The shield that Ves had made for her might look silly and useless, but Ves claimed that using it would help her become more effective once she finally obtained her new expert mech.

"You're asking for much, Ves." She said with a tired breath. "It will take years if not a decade for me to master the use of this strange new shield."

Ves grinned at that. "Good. That will mean that the Rainbow Shield has nearly endless potential. You can slowly spend your time on drawing it out through relentless practice. What you will be doing goes beyond producing different defensive barriers. You are also exercising your willpower like a muscle. The more you do this, the stronger it will grow. I have a theory that proactively utilizing your extraordinary capabilities like this will help you expand your resonance strength and bring you a step closer to advancing to ace pilot."

Venerable Jannzi briefly felt excited at the thought, but she quickly calmed herself down. Ves had no proof to back up his assertions. She had never heard anything about this before. From what she learned, the most reliable methods for expert pilots to progress was to fight a lot of battles and work on their mentality.

Still, she was willing to give his approach a try since she already agreed to exercise with Object 431. It should at least allow her to make use of the actual Rainbow Shield in a useful capacity once she finally received her reborn expert mech.

"How long will it take for you to complete the Dullahan Project?"

"You will get it before our flagship returns from the MTA's shipyard." Ves promised to her. "It is one of the most advanced and complicated expert mech design projects I have worked on, but that is not detrimental to me. The more complicated it becomes, the deeper its pool of strength. Your new expert mech will not be as weak and limited as the old one. With all of the expensive materials, advanced technologies and unique features stuffed into your machine, I believe it shouldn't be a problem for you to comfortably defeat a high-tier expert mech that is comparable to the Skorpion Kommando. It may even be possible to defeat two of them under the right circumstances."

Venerable Jannzi's eyes grew sharp at the mention of that hated machine.

"Are you being serious?"

"We are living in the early years of the Phasewater Generation, you know." Ves smirked. "Progress is always quick in the first decade of the introduction of a radical new technological paradigm. Transphasic armor systems, transphasic weapon systems and minidrives are constantly improving by leaps and bounds with each passing year. We can do much more with phasewater than when we created the last iteration of your Shield of Samar. Aside from that, don't underestimate the expensive materials that I am willing to invest in your machine. First-class alloys are no joke."

Venerable Jannzi couldn't help but imagine what it would be like to pilot an expert mech that Ves just described.

Somehow, the absurd claim that the product of the Dullahan Project might be able to defeat two expert mechs at the level of the Skorpion Kommando or the Shockshell did not sound as impossible as before.

Jannzi might not be well versed in the technical side of mechs, but even she knew that this was an irrational notion.

Yet the trueblood Larkinson couldn't help but believe in Ves' claims. This was his charm, she supposed. The damn bastard could always find a way to attract people with his dreams.

"I have waited long enough for you to finish your work. I will kill you if you don't give me my expert mech by the time your ship comes back." Jannzi growled.

Ves didn't take her threat seriously. He simply turned around and went back to conducting his next work assignment.

"You can go now. Don't forget to do your homework every day. I think I will pay you a visit in a few weeks and test your abilities with a few weapons."

Once she left his workshop, Ves thought back on the prime resonance barriers that Jannzi managed to project in a short amount of time.

While the barriers were rather weak and pathetic, this would not stay this way forever.

Venerable Jannzi had only recently passed the threshold of a mid-tier expert pilot at this time.

Once she became a high-tier expert pilot at the level of Venerable Davia Stark, she could probably produce a prime resonance barrier that was five times, ten times or even twenty times stronger!

At that point, Jannzi would no longer express any doubts towards the Rainbow Shield and its working principles.

"That is not the limit."

What if Jannzi ascended to a Saint one day? Her ability to harness her willpower would undergo a massive improvement!

Not only would she gain an enormous boost of power, but she could finally exert real control over her strength. This was what made Saint Kingdoms so special.

Theoretically, Jannzi should already be able to form an extremely strong true resonance barrier, but only if her expert mech possessed the right resonating materials.

Resonating exotics and alloys could produce fantastic effects when matched with compatible high-ranking pilots, but they also imposed harsh limits on the mechs in question.

Different resonating exotics often interfered with each other when they were placed in close proximity. Some combinations produced an amplifying effect, but in most cases the opposite occurred.

This was where prime resonance could play a useful role. Prime materials weren't subjected to the same interference effect, so Ves could develop a shield that contained many different prime batteries.

"Besides, who says that prime resonance can't be combined with true resonance?"

Ves already knew from previous instances that both forms of resonance could be combined to produce a stacking or amplification effect!

This could make a huge difference in battle!

If Venerable Jannzi ever fought against an equal or a stronger opponent on the battlefield, she would not fall behind as long as she properly leveraged her expert mech's prime resonance capabilities.

Ves was nearly completely certain that there was no possibility that his forces would ever fight against opponents that harnessed the power of prime resonance. This was his exclusive invention and trade secret. No one should have the ability to reproduce all of the conditions that made it possible.

"That won't last forever, though." He frowned.

Perhaps the MTA might not think much about this obscure design application, but once it became strong enough, that would definitely change. The mechers would definitely want to make it more reproducible before turning it into a general technique that could be passed on to other mech designers.

Fortunately, it would take a long time before the MTA took this step.

"Well, let's get back to work."

Ves went back to his old routine. The preliminary success of his Rainbow Shield concept had elevated his mood and stoked his passion. Just as he predicted, he made a lot more progress on the Dullahan Project than before.

Even Gloriana who occasionally dropped by in order to contribute in her own way took note of his remarkably high productivity!

Mrow~

Blinky floated in the air while cuddling next to another companion spirit.

Maow...

Alexandria lazily yawned as the red spiritual cat pressed closer against her purple companion.

"I didn't think that an odd tower shield would make you so effective." She commented. "What is happening to you, Ves? I don't believe that a single invention can spur you on to this extent."

He chuckled. "Hehehe. I've seen and learned too much as of late. My accumulation has grown too much. I have become so filled with ideas that I want to realize them as soon as possible. Working faster will get me closer to exploring those fantastic new research directions. The fact that I am able to implement a few of them in our current project makes me work even faster."

His wife looked at him with envy. She understood the circumstances that he described. Every mech designer wanted to experience the same state of mind!

Unfortunately, her research was much more plodding and methodical. Her work approach was also a lot tighter and more disciplined than that of her husband. That meant that she was much less likely to enter into a productive frenzy.

She looked back at the projection of the expert mech design in progress.

The Dullahan Project had undergone numerous revisions to its configuration after they returned to work after the conclusion of the founding festival.

One of the benefits of the Larkinson Clan's greater cooperation with the Colonial Federation of Davute was that the latter granted access to more high-end technologies.

President Yenames Clive and his administration still wanted to get on the good side of Ves and his clan. This meant that it was not unacceptable to treat the Larkinsons as insiders and give them access to some of the good stuff that the Clive Consortium and other important parties normally kept to themselves.

Ves took advantage of this generosity to upgrade the technical specifications of all of the ongoing expert mech design projects.

Gloriana was pleased with the boost in expected performance. The only downside was that they needed to spend more time to undo their previous work and start over, but Ves had become so productive that all of these changes hadn't produced any meaningful delays!

"Ves?"

"Yes, honey?"

"If you want us to complete our expert mech design projects faster, you should make a decision about the proposal that I last made. I can work just as quickly as you if you cover the 60 million MTA merits that I need to replace my old cranial implant with a first-class version."

Ves groaned. "Not this again."

"I am not wrong, Ves!"

"Let's wait until we have completed our current batch of expert mech design projects." Ves patiently replied. "We are already doing well enough under the current circumstances. I seriously doubt that you will be able to recover quickly from the complicated replacement operation. What if the recovery period stretches on for months? There is no way the rest of us can complete our latest expert mechs without your input. We need your god body application and your optimization ability to turn them into the best works of our clan. You don't want to miss out on three excellent attempts to add more masterwork certificates to your name, right?"

That caused Gloriana to frown. She wanted her cranial implant as soon as possible, but she didn't want to disrupt her current plans either!

"...Fine. I will wait. You better be ready to subsidize the acquisition of my next cranial implant. I am tired of falling behind."

She was glad that Ves no longer quibbled over the need to replace her old implant with a superior model. That was a definite improvement in her opinion.

She had already managed to get the Glory Seekers to agree to spend 60 million MTA merits to cover the rest of the cost of her future first-class implant, but maybe she could ask for more.

If she was able to persuade the Glory Seekers to invest 120 million MTA merits, then she could shop around for an even better cranial implant!

A product that was worth 180 million MTA merits would definitely boost her progress even more!
She might even be able to surpass Ves with such an excellent augmentation!

Chapter 4894 Paramilitary Mech Division

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Two weeks went by after Ves came up with the Rainbow Shield concept and handed over Object 431 to Venerable Jannzi to practice with. He and his wife spent a lot of time on bringing the Dullahan Project and the Ghost Project closer to completion.

Everything proceeded smoothly. If not for the need to accompany their children after they were done with their daily tutoring sessions, the married couple could have made even more progress on their mech design projects!

As Davute continued to settle down and transform into a proper state after the conclusion of the founding festival, an important event took place on a certain day that forced Ves and many Larkinsons to break from their routine.

This was why they all boarded their shuttles and moved to a medium-sized town located a moderate distance away from Kotor City.

The town was based around a large military base. The entire economy was centered around servicing and accommodating the military units that would be stationed in this location in the future.

This was the site where the mech division that General Ark Larkinson led would formally be established.

It would not be the permanent home of his mech division. The Colonial Federation of Davute had become a rather expansive star territory, but its main problem was that an excessive amount of military units were concentrated in the Davute System.

The port system already enjoyed a sufficient amount of protection. What the newly founded colonial state needed the most was to increase its presence and military control over the vast tracts of space in the surrounding regions and provinces.

Many corners of Davute were not that well developed. The colonies there were years behind as lack of population and investment severely inhibited their growth.

The colonial government hoped that stationing more mech units over there and setting up regular patrols would vastly increase the security level of the region. Trade, immigration, industry and investment would subsequently flow into these underserved regions.

In addition to that, Davute also needed to establish more strongholds throughout the provinces. This was vital to create a robust military infrastructure in preparation for the upcoming war.

One way or another, General Ark Larkinson and his new mech division would become embroiled in the bloody and relentless competition between Davute and Karlach.

Ves had no desire at all to get caught up in a petty war between two greedy colonial states. All of the fighting and killing was completely pointless in his opinion.

Still, not everything was bad. War was great for mech designers. As long as their products were good enough, they would get sold in large numbers as many different groups desperately sought to strengthen their troops in order to tilt the numbers in their favor.

Although the Living Mech Corporation did not really sell any real military-grade mechs at this time, its machines were still incredibly attractive to the large number of paramilitary units that had signed on to fight for Davute.

Technically speaking, General Ark's new mech division was classified as a paramilitary unit. Much of its ownership and control were in the hands of outsiders. Its rules and regulations only partially followed the federal military's code.

This wasn't meant to stay this way. If not for the fact that a war was brewing in the short term, Davute would rather take its time to raise proper military mech divisions and maintain tight control over them from beginning to end.

Ves wasn't sure whether Ark's mech division slowly transitioned from the External Group to the Internal Group of the Federal Military of Davute.

There were huge differences between the two. The former maintained a small distance from the colonial state while the latter was completely integrated into its military apparatus!

He shrugged. This was not really his business. It would be up to the Davute Branch to decide how extensively it wanted to cooperate with the state.

The founding ceremony for Ark's new mech division was not too grand. It was 'just' a paramilitary mech division for a time being. The Federal Military already attracted a lot of outside parties and promised to give them a piece of the pie so long as they made military contributions.

Within a section of the large base, hundreds of mechs had gathered into neat columns.

The majority of them consisted of familiar living mechs such as the Ferocious Piranha and the Crystal Lord.

Curiously enough, the new mech division did not include any mechs that were exclusive to the Larkinson Clan or any group. The conspicuous absence of the Bright Warrior and the Transcendent Punisher caused General Ark's new unit to look awfully unbalanced.

Over ten-thousand servicemen had also arrived. Each of them formed into ranks and stood in front of a large podium.

Many of the soldiers consisted of eager mech pilots, but there were also plenty of other professionals among them. General Ark and his staff had already put a lot of effort into recruiting

mech officers, mech technicians, starship spacers, construction engineers, medical personnel and more.

When Ves swept his gaze across these people, he could immediately recognize where they hailed from based on their connections to different kinship networks.

Roughly a third of the personnel consisted of Larkinsons. Another third originated from the Cross Clan. The remainder had likely been recruited from outside sources.

The proportions looked so even that Ves was convinced that this was a deliberate arrangement.

"Wow. There is so much already." Andraste spoke as their group continued to move forward. "Does all of this belong to Uncle Ark?"

"Not exactly." Ves explained. "Much of this belongs to the state. General Ark and his people have the right to shape the mech division according to their ideas, but they can only do so with the authority bestowed by the higher ups of the government. It's complicated."

Since the colonial government funded and provided much of the infrastructure for the mech division, it did not want General Ark to turn everything into his own private army.

It was remarkable how much personnel General Ark had gathered under his banner. From the start, his mech division had become more attractive than the alternatives due to a combination of factors.

The popularity of the Larkinson Clan, the hero worship of Patriarch Reginald Cross, the confidence in General Ark's leadership ability, the extensive use of living mechs and other reasons all made it so that this had become one of the the hottest mech divisions that Davute had founded as of late!

Once Ves and his immediate family arrived at the front, they were seated in positions of honor along with other important people.

The founding ceremony soon commenced. With the local star hanging over everyone's heads, a large number of soldiers wearing their newly-issued uniforms witnessed the arrival of the champions of their mech division!

The Travon Exine. The Riot. The C-Man. The Blade Chaser Mark II.

Four different Larkinson expert mechs descended from the skies like angels descending from heaven!

The soldiers all cheered at the arrival of these strong and impressive expert mechs!

"Aren't they supposed to be ours?" Marvaine asked.

"Nominally, that is the case." Ves replied. "These mechs still belong to our clan, son. We are just loaning them to the Federal Military of Davute. Once our expert pilots have completed their service, they will take their expert mechs back to our clan."

Of course, this was all theoretical. Whether these expert pilots and expert mechs would resign from the Federal Military once the war against Karlach had ended was unclear.

Even if the expert pilots left the military, they could choose to go back to the main fleet or settle down in the Davute Branch.

Ves did not really care too much about this. The Larkinson Clan already had a lot of expert pilots. New ones would emerge on a regular basis, so the Larkinson Army never had to worry about running out of powerful champions.

All of the Larkinson expert pilots that chose to serve in the Federal Military of Davute or stay in the Davute Branch might not be at his disposal, but they were still clansmen in the ways that mattered. They could protect and promote the interests of the Larkinson Clan in their own ways.

As the four Larkinson expert mechs all touched down behind a large podium, another mech descended from the skies!

A strong presence approached the large gathering! Everyone began to raise their fists and shout a single name!

"Mars!"

"Mars!"

"Mars!"

The powerful masterwork ace mech dropped towards the ground at high speed, only to arrest its momentum and land with utmost precision in between the expert mechs!

Patriarch Reginald Cross had arrived!

The appearance of Reginald and his ace mech briefly caused Ves to look upset.

"Damn glory hound. I could really use the firepower of the Mars in my expeditions." He muttered.

"We can still manage without the ace hybrid mech." General Verle reassured the clan patriarch.

"The Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family are close to joining the Golden Skull Alliance, so their ace mechs will soon strengthen our expeditionary fleet. Both groups are entitled to hefty shares of any profit we make in the frontier, but this is a worthwhile tradeoff as far as we are concerned."

Two ace mechs sounded good, but three ace mechs were even better! Ves would much rather keep the Mars as well because of its strong ranged damage output.

Unfortunately, Reginald was too damn hard to control. The man was too much of a war addict to pass up the opportunity to throw himself into the thick of an upcoming conflict!

Soon enough, the expert pilots all exited the cockpits and descended to the podium. Reginald remained within his ace mech in order to ensure everyone's safety.

As Ves was able to see the familiar faces of his expert pilots again, he noted that they had changed their uniforms into ones that looked similar to the uniforms worn by other servicemen.

The colors of the mech divisions consisted of red and light blue. Their selection was not random as they were strongly associated with the Larkinson Clan and the Cross Clan respectively.

The emblem of the mech division looked rather interesting. It consisted of a planet that was engulfed in flames. The imagery was surprisingly aggressive and not what he expected.

From the moment General Ark Larkinson stepped forward and stood in front of his staff and officers, much of the crowd quieted down.

"Soldiers of Davute. I salute you all today, for you have answered the call. No matter where you come from or how much you have struggled in order to reach this planet, know that our colonial state has become your new home now. Davute has opened its doors and welcomed you all inside. It is only right to defend it from the aggressors that seek to tear it down."

General Ark continued to address his soldiers through his words. He made sure not to overreach and try to usurp the control of the colonial government, which caused his words to become more subdued.

Nonetheless, the soldiers all had a lot of faith in General Ark's leadership ability. The troops all clung his words as if they had a magnetic quality.

"Each of us have a trait in common." Ark continued his speech. "From the beginning, I have established a rule that limits our recruitments to battle-tested soldiers and veterans. There are no rookies among us because we do not need them. Our mech division shall pursue the elite route and take on the most challenging missions as a consequence. Our service is not for the faint of heart, but I believe that each of you will become the greatest possible soldiers in our state! It is for that reason that I have chosen a name for us all that befits our brotherhood."

The Mars leveraged its Saint Kingdom and subjected everyone to Patriarch Reginald's strong yearning for combat!

At the same time, fireworks blasted into the air while a large projection came to life that displayed the symbol and the name of the new mech regiment.

"From this day onward, we shall operate as the 77th Warborn Mech Division!"

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"Warborn!"

"Warborn!"

"Warborn!"

From the moment that General Ark Larkinson announced the name of their new mech division, the troops under his command embraced it with great enthusiasm!

The large proportion of Larkinsons and Crossers within the ranks practically ensured that the culture of the newly established mech division would have a strong enthusiasm for combat.

Their extensive experiences in the battles of the Golden Skull Alliance had forged them into brave fighters who did not back down in the face of a tough challenge!

Once the short ceremony came to an end, the party had begun. While the rank-and-file began to partake in drinks and bond with each other, the guests and the most important members of the Warborn Mech Division began to mingle with each other.

"Warborn, huh?" Ves said as he met up with his uncle. "What an interesting name. Did Patriarch Reginald Cross insist upon it or something? It doesn't seem like a name that you would choose."

General Ark Larkinson smiled back as he faced his brother's son. "Then what name do you think I should bestow upon my troops, Ves?"

"Maybe one that is associated with honor or defense. You used to be known as an honorable protector of the Bright Republic back when we were still living in our home state."

"That was the case in the past, but our circumstances are different nowadays." Ark responded. "The Bright Republic at the time was a state that was regularly besieged by the Vesia Kingdom. The latter had always been the one to violate our borders and invade our territories. Our Mech Corps had no choice but to employ defensive strategies to resist the generational onslaught. We also had to rely heavily on values such as honor and duty to maintain our fighting spirit. Without strengthening our willingness to fight, the Bentheim System would have fallen long ago. Now that I have told you this, do you think that Davute is in the same position?"

Ves briefly paused as he swirled the glass of champagne in his hand. "Hm, I see what you mean. Davute and Karlach are much different. While there are rumors that the latter has raised a stronger military, there should definitely be opportunities for the former to launch offensives and counter offensives."

"Defending a star system is always easier than attacking one." General Ark told the younger Larkinson. "What the Federal Military needs the most are assault and breakthrough units that can overcome the initial defenses of a fortified location and create enough space for follow-up units to establish beachheads in enemy territory. I have chosen for my Warborn to assume this important role."

"That... is quite daring of you. Won't your men suffer a lot of casualties by assuming this dangerous job? The attrition rates will be horrendous. I very much doubt that most clansmen in the Davute Branch are willing to turn themselves into cannon fodder."

Ark shook his head. "As I have mentioned before, the Warborn Mech Division is not for the faint of heart. We only accept qualified volunteers. If there are Larkinsons who want to serve in the military but do not meet our standards, there are many other mech regiments and mech divisions that welcome their talents."

This sounded different from what Ves expected. He did not know that General Ark would be willing to take such extremes and shape his mech division into a bloody fighting unit.

"Why go this far?" Ves seriously asked. "I doubt that you are doing this because your higher ups are forcing your new troops to assume this dangerous role."

"You are correct. My staff and I have discussed long and hard on how we wish to contribute to the war effort. We eventually chose to specialize in assault for multiple reasons. Many of our veterans from the Larkinson Clan and the Cross Clan are already accustomed to launching attacks. We have

fought very little protracted defensive battles. We are not suited to fight battles of attrition, so it is better that we avoid them as much as possible."

Ves firmly nodded. Battles of attrition could drag on for months and leave a huge amount of devastation behind. It took a different mindset for soldiers to take part in grueling campaigns where the ownership of a contested star system could swing back and forth several times.

"What else, Ark?"

"Another important reason is because we are the few soldiers who can do this well." General Ark smiled in a grim fashion. "The Warborn Mech Division is not a militia or a second-line unit. Our mech pilots are better. Our mechs are stronger. Our funding is higher. The Federal Military is willing to provide us with greater funding and infrastructural support. As an ancient myth has once taught, with great power comes great responsibility. Since our Warborn are elites, we are obliged to undertake the missions that only elites can fulfill. We have a clear understanding about this matter with the higher ups of our colonial state."

The upcoming war against Karlach was bound to be a survival test for Davute. The latter could not afford to fool around and squander its resources. It was undeniable that the Federal Military lavished the Warborn with funding, carrier vessels and other forms of support. A lot of other military mech units would become incredibly dissatisfied if General Ark's troops chose to sit in the rear and garrison a safe planet after all of this investment!

"I suppose Patriarch Reginald Cross had a large voice in deciding the combat orientation of the Warborn." Ves said in a mild voice.

General Ark did not deny this guess. "He is... a fervent warrior. His men are much the same. I am gratified that he and his Crossers are in full support of this direction. Together with my grasp of the Larkinsons under my command, I am in full control of the Warborn."

"Is that truly the case?" Ves sounded skeptical. "Your mech division answers to the Federal Military, you know."

"That is true, but its management of the External Group is not as strict as you think. The mech units that fall under this category enjoy varying degrees of autonomy and choice depending on our specific contracts and agreements. There will not be a case where high command will deliberately drive us to our deaths."

Ves smirked. "Davute can't afford to piss off the groups that have joined its side. If the higher ups are stupid enough to do so, then more soldiers will join Karlach instead. I'm sure that the importance of our clan will play a large role in how high command will treat your Warborn."

The intermingling between politics and military affairs was a fact of life. General Ark Larkinson didn't like it, but he was not naive enough to assume he could avoid this phenomenon entirely.

"Even if we have the freedom to reduce our participation in the war, I do not intend to maximize our downtime." The expert pilot and general explained. "The most important reason why I want our Warborn to take this route is because completing assault missions will allow us to earn the most war merits. Davute has formulated many rules with regards to assigning credit for many different war accomplishments. The more war merits we are able to earn, the more territories we can claim for our Davute Branch."

So that was General Ark's game. Ves knew that his uncle wouldn't risk the lives of so many clansmen without a good reason. He bet that the Cross Clan was also eager to gain a lot of territory.

"I can understand why you would want to be more proactive in the upcoming war. The main branch of our clan has embraced this approach a lot earlier than you and your new mech division. What puzzles me is why you are willing to risk the lives of so many of our clansmen and the other people under your command. I don't know how many of the men that have chosen to follow you into combat will survive in the end. Is it truly worth it to sacrifice so many lives just to gain the right to control a few planets and star systems?"

General Ark responded with a stern smile. "We cannot repeat the mistakes made by our ancestors who founded and established our original Larkinson Family. They had the ambition but not the courage to do what was necessary. Our family members had the chance to become a part of the power structure of the Bright Republic, but instead turned into its unwitting tools. Now that we have learned our lesson, I intend to work harder and ensure that we can gain our own territories that we can convert into our permanent strongholds. The Davute Branch may not be important to you, but it means everything to myself and many of our old family members."

Ves couldn't pretend to approve this stance.

"The Colonial Federation of Davute is not any better than the Bright Republic, you know that? The only reason why Davute is treating us better is because we are more useful to the state. This will change as soon as we suffer an enormous setback."

His uncle remained unmoved, however.

"You can say that about any state, Ves. I am not blind or ignorant. I have traveled to enough states to understand that the paradise we seek is a fantasy. The best we can hope for is to earn the right to govern our own planets so that we can do the best we can to build our own homeland. To many people, this is a better alternative than turning ourselves into permanent space nomads."

"At least our fleet is not subject to the whims of others." Ves retorted.

This was an old and familiar argument. Ves and Ark had spoken about this topic plenty of times, so neither of them were willing to rehash it as there was no possibility that they would change their minds.

The fact of the matter was that Ves could never understand and agree with his uncle's unreasonable obsession with serving in the military of an ordinary state. Why wasn't Ark able to recognize that the Larkinson Clan was already transitioning into a state of sorts as well?

It was as if Ark and many of the old-timers among the Larkinsons were completely ignorant of the spaceborn way of life!

Oh well.

The two leaders among the Larkinsons continued to chat with each other.

General Ark soon voiced an important request for his newly established mech division.

"Have you taken a look at our mechs?" He asked. "We have deliberately chosen to embrace your living mechs as much as possible. While we cannot avoid the use of mechs designed and sold by the

Cross Clan and other third parties, we are fully committed to using your works as our mainstay mech models."

"I am glad that you are willing to entrust the lives of your troops to my mechs." Ves responded with a smile.

"There is just one issue, Ves." Ark leaned closer. "Our Warborn Mech Division can obtain your commercial mechs easily enough from the Davute Branch, but that is not comprehensive enough for our needs. I would like to ask you to give us the authorization to procure the mechs that can help us even further. I am talking about the models that have never flowed outside of our clan such as the Transcendent Punisher and the Second Sword. I am aware that I am asking for much, but we need your best works to minimize the casualties among the brave Larkinson soldiers that are fighting for a better future for our fellow clansmen."

That caused Ves to frown. "That is not appropriate, Ark. There are good reasons why those Larkinson-exclusive mech models are restricted to our clan. The more they are spread, the more our enemies can study their properties. That will make it much easier for our forces to suffer defeat in the long run. We already got ambushed by the likes of the Fridaymen in the past. I can't rule out that a similar attack will happen in the future. Our exclusive mech models must not become transparent to all of our adversaries."

Ark was not willing to settle for this answer.

"We need your mechs, Ves. We will suffer many more casualties if we have to resort to lesser mech models. Please do this for our family's sake. Your father would want you to support our family in every way you can. You will be able to save the lives of many Larkinsons as long as you say yes."

"..."

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"No."

"Please reconsider your decision, nephew. The Warborn—"

"—The Warborn is a paramilitary mech division that is fighting on behalf of the Colonial Federation of Davute." Ves retorted after he gulped down his glass of champagne. "If I order you to bring your Warborn to the Magair Middle Zone and raid a planet that is claimed by the Friday Colonies, are you permitted to do as I have asked?"

General Ark shook his head after a brief moment. "You know that I cannot do that. The Warborn may be an irregular military mech division, but that does not mean I can abuse my authority to serve private interests."

This was not a surprising answer to Ves. He huffed in response.

"Then I don't see why I have to share all of my good stuff with you." Ves replied. "I am not opposed to allowing our Davute Branch to make use of our clan-exclusive mechs. This is because I know my works will be used for the betterment of our fellow Larkinsons rather than the Davutans. That is not the case with your Warborn."

There was a strong tone of rejection in his voice. Ves needed little time to settle his mind on this issue. Ark may be his uncle, but that did not mean he could use this family connection as an excuse to break the rules!

His uncle looked pained and hurt at this response.

"Ves... please be more compassionate. I am not asking you to go out of your way and design custom-tailored mechs for our Warborn. You only need to make a single decision to give us access to your best-performing mechs. For example, our light mech regiment will make extensive use of your Ferocious Piranha model, but we both know that this product has excellent synergy with your Stingripper model. I do not know why you are willing to sell the former to the public but keep the latter to yourself."

"There are historic reasons for this particular difference." Ves responded without emotion. "It is not your place to dictate the product strategy of the Living Mech Corporation. That is completely up to me and me alone. I have already stated the reasons why I am unwilling to release our clan-exclusive mechs in your mech division's hands."

"Can't you reconsider?" Ark asked. "Many of your works are already numerous years old. They have been used in numerous battles, some of which are completely public. I believe our enemies have already figured out the details of the Larkinson mech models that have been exposed in these engagements."

"That is not an excuse. It is one thing if the Warborn is a mech force that is wholly owned by our Davute Branch. Since your unit effectively answers to the state, you should look in its direction for what you need. As far as I know, the Masters in the service of the colonial federation has designed plenty of strong military mechs for the Federal Military. There is nothing wrong with using them. They may even offer superior performance compared to my own works."

Both the regular and irregular mech divisions of the Federal Military of Davute should have access to internal channels.

At worst, they could requisition standardized military mechs that offer good performance right from the start.

At best, the mech regiments and mech divisions may be able to place mech design commissions so that they could acquire signature mech models that complimented or defined their mech doctrine!

That wasn't enough for Ark.

"I don't need to borrow too many of your clan-exclusive mech models." He said as he took a step back in this negotiation. "We can significantly increase our chances of winning our future battle as long as we can make use of your Transcendent Punisher. We would also like to utilize the Valkyrie Redeemer and the Second Sword."

Ves widened his eyes. "NO! Absolutely not! Those are the three most sensitive and strategic standard mechs of our clan. The former gives us absolute superiority in ranged firefights. The latter two serve as the basis for our battle formations. There is no way that I am giving your Warborn access to the trump cards of our main fleet. Besides, those mech models can't be piloted by just any random soldier. They are highly specific to their respective mech legions."

"Our Warborn has recruited a respectable number of Ylvainans, Penitent Sisters and Swordmaidens." General Ark regained his footing. "They have signed up to us because they want to temper themselves in frequent mech combat. They aren't abandoning you, Ves. They think they can grow faster and have a better chance at breaking through in a conventional war instead of those odd expeditions of yours. Once the war is over, they will return your fleet stronger than ever."

That was true. Ves had investigated the motivations for the mech pilots who had flocked to General Ark's banner and there were plenty of clansmen who only treated this as a high-risk training camp.

The expeditionary fleet suffered from a persistent shortage in mech capacity. Everyone knew that the Larkinson Clan employed an excess amount of mech pilots. It was not necessarily bad for the clan to send off much of its reservists to the Warborn in order to gain a lot of actual combat experience.

"I don't see how this matters." Ves stoically responded. "These pilots you are referring to may be loyal to our clan, but as long as they have chosen to join the Warborn, they have pledged to serve Davute. I don't know about you, but I am absolutely opposed to allowing your colonial state to take advantage of our Transcendent Punishers and our battle formations! It is already generous enough for me to permit our expert pilots to fight alongside your troops. Don't go too far, Ark!"

The conversation between the two quickly died down. Ark severely underestimated how possessive Ves was towards his most effective mech models. The safety and the security of the expeditionary fleet was at stake.

There was not much reason for Ark to stick around for much longer. He couldn't make any progress with Ves and he still needed to mingle with important guests.

Shortly after Ark's departure, General Verle took the high-tier expert pilot's place.

"He asked you permission to use our mech models, right?"

"Right." Ves responded. "Did you foresee this in advance?"

"I did, and I am not the only one. It is clear that General Ark wants to do his best to imitate our Larkinson Army as closely as possible. We have developed a winning formula, after all. He cannot do so unless his Warborn has access to all of our mech models."

"He thinks highly of us." Ves remarked.

"Can you blame him, sir? Our strength surpasses most if not all of the elite military mech divisions of Davute. The Warborn can earn many more war merits if it has gained the ability to utilize battle formations on command."

Ves snorted. "Karlach will prioritize their total destruction if that happens. It is not necessarily good for the Warborn to perform too well on the battlefield."

"I agree."

As General Verle moved on so that he could chat with other people, a familiar family member soon approached Ves.

"Melinda." Ves calmly greeted his cousin. "I half-expected you to wear the same red-and-blue uniform as the rest of the Warborn. You've become a strong supporter and confidante of Uncle Ark over the years."

Melinda Larkinson had aged and matured a lot since the days when Ves just started out as a mech designer.

Much of her youthful appearance and demeanor had made way for a more serious and matronly posture.

"I am not suited for war." She responded to Ves. "Ark invited me to join his Warborn not as a mech pilot, but as his aide and assistant. I struggled over this decision, but I eventually decided to reject his offer even though I am not opposed to doing my duty."

"Why did you say no, Melinda?"

Her expression turned strained. "I still don't like killing people or seeing my fellow friends and family fall in battle. I am also a mother. I cannot stand the thought of allowing my children to grow up without receiving my affection in the most crucial periods of their youth. I have decided to remain on this planet for that reason."

"That must be difficult. I don't think you have made the wrong decision." Ves sympathetically said. "What will you do instead?"

Melinda smiled again. "I have actually received an offer to serve in the Planetary Guard of Kotor City. I am not certain what rank my superiors will bestow me. I need to do a lot of catching up before I am qualified to work in law enforcement again. I am probably not good enough to pilot a law enforcement mech, but I don't mind if I receive a desk job. It is less stressful and I will be able to spend more time with my kids and the rest of our family."

That did not sound that bad.

"I think this is a good choice, but you may not be able to stay close to your children depending on how the upcoming war progresses. Planetary Guard units may not be suited to fight in the frontlines, but they are excellent at pacifying recently conquered planets. You may find yourself on the other side of the border before you know it." Ves warned.

"I have been told that is a possibility, but... everyone may need to contribute if it comes down to it." She sighed.

The implication was that if Ves provided more support to the Warborn and Davute as a whole, the war would not implicate the Larkinsons as badly as she feared!

Ves completely disregarded this implication. He had already decided how much he wanted to support the Davutans. Nothing had given him a reason to change his mind.

The two cousins spoke a little more. Their personal relationship used to be close before they became a lot more strained due to physical separation as well as differences in philosophy.

However, now that the Larkinson Clan effectively absorbed the Larkinson Family, they had become part of the same family organization once more.

"Is there truly nothing you can do for Ark and his Warborn, Ves? Your mechs can make an enormous difference. Everyone knows that. You can pass us your old mechs that you plan to phase out of your lineup. I am sure that the Warborn will gladly extend their usage."

Ves shook his head yet again. "That will not happen. I have other arrangements for the mechs that our clan plans to phase out. In no way will they ever fall into the hands of third parties, and yes, I consider the Warborn to be among them. If Ark really wants my work, then he should wait for me to complete the mech design commissions for Davute. The Federal Military will receive my latest works that are especially designed to fight in this war and likely make them available to all of its mech units."

That was not really the extent of what Ves could do, but this was his limit.

"Will you at least abide by your promise to design a new expert mech for Ark?"

"That hasn't changed." Ves assured her. "You don't need to worry that I will change my mind on this matter. Ark is still my uncle, you know. There are both personal and professional reasons why I will fulfill this request. It will just take a few months before I am ready to embark on a new expert mech design project."

Melinda looked relieved. "At least try your best with it, okay? Ark feels that he is being limited by his current expert mech for too long."

"I understand. If he can break through to ace pilot with the help of my work, then that will benefit our clan immensely. I have every reason to help with making this happen. I don't even mind if Ark continues to remain a stubborn fool and keeps serving the whims of Davute. Just the status of having an active ace pilot in our clan will help us a lot in future business transactions!"

Chapter 4897 Securing Reliable Help

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The establishment of the Warborn Mech Division represented a closer entanglement between the Golden Skull Alliance and the Colonial Federation of Davute.

The Larkinsons and the Crossers no longer limited their support for the state in the form of industry, commerce or technological exchanges.

If that was all they did, then they could still avoid associations with the Davutans if this proved to be inconvenient.

That was no longer the case anymore.

Ves and his allies had formally crossed a line by offering their troops and mechs to the Federal Military in a time where war loomed closer with each passing day.

The fact that the Larkinsons and the Crossers not only provided tens of thousands of soldiers, but also numerous expert pilots as well as its only ace pilot was a massive commitment!

What President Yenames Clive and the colonial government cared about the most was Patriarch Reginald Cross and the Mars!

The addition of such a powerful and symbolic strategic asset substantially boosted the morale and the actual combat strength of the recently founded colonial federation!

It served as an authentic vote of confidence and dispelled a lot of fear and uncertainty that had spread ever since the Karlachs launched a surprise attack in the Government District.

Even though the tragedy that occurred that day led to many deaths and horrible memories, it only took a single month for all of the pessimistic attitudes to fade.

The federal president, his administration and the backers behind him all worked extremely hard to placate key stakeholders.

Davute became even more attractive of a trade destination than before now that the state granted increased autonomy, greater access and more explicit support to the strong or wealthy pioneering organizations that continued to arrive in the new frontier.

Many different colonies and colonial states sought to bring these powerful talents and groups into their camps.

Though Davute and Karlach both developed their own strategies to build up a stronger network of supporters, they were hardly the only game in the region.

Many more nascent states had emerged that offered their own favorable terms. The larger, stronger and better funded ones offered more attractive terms.

Davute and Karlach actually did not rank among the top of these growing colonial states. They could only settle in the middle of the ranking of second-rate states. Neither of them were able to attract too many pioneering organizations at the caliber of the Golden Skull Alliance.

"How is Davute doing these days?" Ves asked Minister Shederin Purnesse as he paid a visit to the older man's office in the Cat Nest.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had grown a lot busier after the founding of the Colonial Federation of Davute.

The Larkinson Clan might not be the strongest party in the local scene, but it was definitely a player that punched above its weight!

"It is difficult to form an accurate assessment of Davute, Ves." The diplomat said. "The situation is changing quickly. Public data is scarce and we do not have access to the colonial government's metrics. We can only base our analysis on many indicators that are obvious on the surface. Right now I would say that Davute is doing as well as it can hope, but that is not enough to overpower Karlach."

Ves expected as much. The two colonial states were too even in many regards. It was hard for either of them to overpower the other.

"Alright, forget about Davute for the time being. How close are we to welcoming the Adelaides and the Boojays into the Golden Skull Alliance? We need their help in order to hunt down the opponents we need to harvest the MTA merits and first-class materials we need to comprehensively upgrade our combat assets. The sooner we reach quasi-first class standards, the more we can guarantee our safety. We won't become invincible, but the combination of a roving fleet and a mech force that is practically undefeatable in the middle zones of the Red Ocean will buy us a lot of development time."

"I am aware of your layout, sir. My office and I are working as hard as we can to conclude the treaty negotiations as soon as possible, but we cannot work any faster. The Golden Skull Alliance is not as small and casual as before. A vast amount of people have become involved. The two ace pilots of the Adelaides and the Boojays also represent massive bargaining chips. We are essentially providing these two groups with their own kinship networks in order to secure a promise that Saint Marissa Lewandowski and Saint Kalasandra Boojay will accompany and protect our expeditionary fleet. This may sound like a simple exchange, but the details are extremely crucial as we want the ace pilots to affirm these promises in their own words."

Ves nodded. He understood the gravity of the situation. High-ranking mech pilots always abided by their words. The moment they broke a single promise was the moment they threw away all of their chances of advancing any further!

He only needed to remind himself of his grandfather Benjamin to know how much their vows and convictions dictated their lives for good or ill.

"Make sure they won't be able to get away from this demand." He told him. "Kinship networks are immensely valuable, but it doesn't really cost me anything to make them for different groups, so don't worry about whether we have to make great sacrifices. I am more worried about ruffling the feathers of the Big Two and inducing a backlash from the general public."

"I agree." Minister Shederin replied. "The implications of your kinship networks are too massive and will definitely attract attention from the wrong parties. We have exaggerated the value and the difficulty of making your kinship networks to the Adelaides and the Boojays in order to strengthen our negotiating position. It has worked well for us. All we need to do now is to finalize the details and close the deal before our two future partners realize how badly we desire their ace mechs."

After getting fooled and betrayed by numerous stubborn and boneheaded high-ranking mech pilots such as Uncle Ark and Patriarch Reginald, Ves had resolutely changed his handling concerning these powerful champions.

He learned the hard way that he couldn't rely on soft methods to bring these brain-damaged idiots to heel!

Expert pilots and ace pilots obsessed too much over their principles and convictions. Treating them like friends might allow Ves to influence their decisions, but these powerhouses wouldn't hesitate to turn their backs on their buddies if they chose to pursue a greater calling!

Patriarch Reginald was the most obvious case of this phenomenon.

Ves thought he had an understanding with Reginald. They talked often enough about the need to keep their respective clans safe and independent, and that roaming the new frontier was a great way to avoid entangling themselves in troublesome conflicts.

Yet after all of that talk, what did Reginald do? Once the prospect of war between two substantial colonial states arose, the Cross Patriarch completely disregarded the needs and priorities of his own clan and selfishly offered his services to Davute!

What was so egregious about this was that his sole purpose for doing so was to indulge in his own lust for battle!

The rest of his clan such as Master Benedict Cortez and many of his relatives had little choice but to accept his unilateral decision and make the necessary adjustments.

This must not happen again.

After talking a bit more with Minister Shederin, Ves became reassured that the Adelaides and the Boojays wouldn't pull off a similar U-turn in the future.

"The only way the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family can withdraw their ace pilots from the expeditionary fleet is by mutual consent." Shederin explained. "For example, if we ever split up our fleet or stay in a fixed location for numerous years, we can always agree to station these strategic assets elsewhere. It is also not possible for us to retain the services of the ace pilots if their respective pioneering organizations have decided to part with the Golden Skull Alliance."

These were all understandable terms. One of the reasons why the negotiations took so long was because both sides needed to agree on what would happen if one of the alliance partners wanted to leave the Golden Skull Alliance.

The ace pilots and ace mechs could easily be taken away, but what would happen to their kinship networks at that point? Ripping them out would cause massive trauma and loss!

As such, if the Adelaides or the Boojays ever had any reason to leave on short notice, they were practically obliged to provide compensation.

The exact magnitude of this compensation and the details regarding many other variables had to be spelled out in clear and concrete terms. It was better to settle these differences in advance rather than get caught unprepared when a low probability event occurred several years later.

Shederin issued a warning to Ves. "While the Adelaides and the Boojays have not pushed back against our demand with regards to their ace pilots, you need to take into account that neither of them are enthusiastic about staying permanently in our alliance. As far as both groups are concerned, the Golden Skull Alliance is a transit vehicle that they can enter for as long as they want until they have reached their respective destinations."

"I already know that. I don't mind too much if they leave as long as they do so in an orderly process. The Golden Skull Alliance is nice and all, but the main reason why I set it up in the first place is to benefit the Larkinson Clan and make it stronger. If the Adelaides and the Boojays have helped us a lot in the following years and allowed our clan to develop a lot faster than before, then they have already contributed enough as far as I am concerned. We can always seek new partners in order to fill the void left behind by these two groups. We just have to sustain our massive success."

That caused Minister Shederin to look troubled. The older man leaned forward.

"I was meaning to talk to you about this subject, Ves. So far, we are lucky that we have managed to secure victories in the battles we have fought in the past. While we can rely on excellent preparation, superior intelligence gathering and powerful mechs to tilt our battles in our favor, it is inevitable for us to bite off more than we can chew in the coming years. We are not properly prepared for this eventuality. We will lose far more than you realize. Right now, we are able to derive enormous benefits from our myth of invincibility and success."

Ves sighed. "I know that, Shederin. I am well-versed in statistical analysis and probability theory. I know that we are investing too much in our luck. This is exactly one of the reasons why we need the strength of the Adelaides and the Boojays. Greater numbers and more ace mechs will reduce our vulnerability to enemies. I am also counting on another measure to accelerate our success and minimize the accidents that we might suffer over the course of our expeditions."

"Oh? That is new. You have yet to explain this measure of yours."

"It's not a new idea." Ves smirked. "Do you recall how thousands of different pioneering fleets descended upon the border region between Krakatoa and Zelmar, only for ours to succeed in tracking down Lord Pearian Yorul-Tavik and earn the favor of a first-class clan?"

Minister Shederin Purnesse immediately understood what the clan patriarch had in mind.

"Are you suggesting..."

Ves smirked even wider as he mockingly pressed his palms together. "We need to kick our growth and expansion into gear. Aimlessly wandering the deep frontier doesn't sound particularly productive to me. Since we have access to the services of a 'prophet', why not make use of this asset? We can track down all sorts of alien treasures and valuable resources with a bit of metaphysical help!"

This was the measure he needed to turn his Trailblazer Expedition into a true success!

Chapter 4898 Professor Reylon Kavanaugh

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The brisk progress and favorable negotiations with the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family boosted Ves' optimism.

This directly translated into better results during his regular design sessions. Whether he worked alone or in collaboration with his wife, his consistently good mood and enthusiasm at the coming changes constantly urged him to put in his best effort in his work.

Though Ves and the others encountered many thorny problems over the course of the Dullahan Project and the Ghost Project, none of them hindered their progress for long.

The most troublesome problems related to the use and integration of advanced technologies.

For example, the Larkinson mech designers had to look up a lot of information and consult the developers of the Seferath AQ-1L, the advanced active stealth system developed by Optaar Integrated Solutions.

This transphasic quasi-first-class stealth system that was especially developed for high-end mechs was so insanely complex and convoluted that Ves felt as if he was out of his depth at times!

He relied a lot on Senior-level Stealth and Cloaking to carry him forward, but this System-granted Skill became increasingly more inadequate as Ves had to address more specific and technical design problems.

Gloriana couldn't offer much help as she was a complete novice when it came to stealth tech.

"Stealth systems are exclusively handled by state actors." She explained to Ves. "This is confidential expertise that is usually taught to mech designers and equipment developers that have already proven their loyalty and commitment to a state. I truly don't know how you managed to absorb so much theory and scientific principles related to this field, but it is clear that you have not kept up with the times."

Stealth technology was undergoing massive paradigm shifts with the introduction of phasewater. The powerful substance offered more cost-effective means to bridge the gap between maximum stealth and maximum protection.

It had often been the rule that stealth mechs were incredibly fragile in combat. Their exterior layers had to be optimized for concealment, not resisting attacks. It was almost impossible for stealth mechs to do well in both areas. The few exceptions that existed only managed to hit this impossible target by using insanely expensive materials to brute force this outcome.

That was no longer necessary. A dash of phasewater could make stealth-oriented plating ten times as resistant towards damage than before!

Of course, transphasic weapon systems could counteract much of this enhanced protection, but Ves had a good solution in mind.

He wanted to maximize the phasewater concentration of the Ghost System's stealth plating!

This was not a simple request. Although the Larkinson Clan paid Optaar Integrated Solutions to provide customization services, what Ves was asking for was such a big deal that he needed to renegotiate his deal with the Rubarthan development company!

Ves dressed up for the occasion. He wore the most luxurious version of his patriarch uniform and made sure to read up on the details of Optaar Integrated Solutions.

"Meow..." Lucky yawned as he laid on the desk.

"I can't make myself look too shabby. The people in Davute already know how good I am, but the folks over at Optaar still regard me as a talented but overambitious Journeyman Mech Designer."

"Meow meow."

"My masterwork certificates can lend me a bit of credibility, but they aren't as effective as I expected. Too many people can't believe that I deserve to have them. They are under the mistaken impression that I have been freeloading off the work of Master Benedict Cortez."

It was a frustrating ordeal. The MTA had an excellent reputation for record-keeping. It would never falsify its certificates as that would threaten its legitimacy as a trade organization!

"Meow meow." Lucky thumped his tail.

"Hey! At least I am being productive. What have you been doing ever since we returned from that pocket space? All you do is wander around and let yourself be hugged and carried around by different people. It's been a long time since you last needed to use the litter box! Don't you think it is time to solve your constipation problem?"

"MEOW!"

Lucky became so offended by this inquiry that he turned his body around so that he faced away from Ves!

"Look, I don't mind if you take your time on digesting all of your previous gains, but you better produce something really good before I complete my current batch of expert mechs. They all need powerful boosts in order to give our clan a greater edge in combat. I am especially in need of a good stealth-oriented enhancement to maximize the infiltration capabilities of the Ghost Project."

"Meoww..."

Ves continued to badger Lucky with his demands until he finally received a notification. He quit arguing with his pet in order to prepare for this critical call. He stood up and activated a few commands.

A physical projection came online that depicted a tall and handsome man who wore a high-tech lab coat and protective outfit.

Ves and the projected man quickly shook hands with each other.

"Greetings." The Rubarthan scientist and engineer began. "I am Professor Reylon Kavanaugh. You must be the cheeky young mech designer. You may know me as the chief developer of the Seferath series of transphasic active stealth systems. I have a busy schedule, but I have been persuaded to listen to your demands and proposals."

"Thank you for your time, professor." Ves humbly replied. "I would like to talk about the implementation of Seferath AQ-1L in my Ghost Project. Do not misunderstand me, please. I am not dissatisfied with your product. It is highly advanced and I have great confidence that it will perform well in the field. I have already wrangled with it for many weeks and what I have learned so far has continually reinforced my opinion that I have made an excellent choice to work with your company."

Professor Kavanaugh smiled after receiving this flattery. "We aim to please here at Optaar Integrated Solutions. However, you have not explained why you must speak to me in person. If you are satisfied with our work, then I see no reason to change our transaction."

"The circumstances on my end have changed." Ves quickly summarized his point. "In short, my clan is looking to field a stronger expert stealth mech. I can also work with more complex transphasic systems. What I want to ask from Optaar is whether you can increase the phasewater concentration of your Seferath AQ-1L transphasic active stealth system to the maximum possible limit. This way, my Ghost Project will become even more effective in battle. I want to turn it into an

expert stealth mech that can adequately participate in a pitched battle without worrying that it will become defenseless as soon as it loses its resonance shield."

The Rubarthan engineer became upset when he heard this request. "Do you know how disruptive it is to change your requirements in the middle of an active project? Of course you do. You are a mech designer. The Seferath AQ-1L already strikes an excellent balance between stealth, defense, energy consumption and cost."

"Our clan is willing to make additional sacrifices in order to increase the defensive properties of your active stealth system." Ves straightforwardly said. "Can you give me an estimate on how much phasewater we can stuff in your Seferath product before it reaches its limit?"

"That depends on many factors, mech designers." The Rubarthan immediately responded. "The Seferath cannot accommodate too much phasewater due to two main reasons. If your expert stealth mech incorporates other transphasic parts, then you need to pay close attention to the quantity and concentration of phasewater in the design. Too much phasewater in one place will exceed the safety limitations of your expert mech. We can calculate the exact tolerances for you as long as you share your mech design with our company."

Ves quickly shook his head. "That is not acceptable to us. The full details of our Ghost Project must remain confidential. I am sure you understand."

It was outrageous for an external contractor to issue a request to examine the design of an important stealth mech. Ves would have reacted a lot stronger if he wasn't talking to a Rubarthan and needed the cooperation of Optaar Integrated Solutions!

Fortunately for Ves, Professor Kavanaugh had a convenient solution at hand.

"Our Seferath line is split up into multiple different products that are targeted towards different client categories. The AQ-1L is already one of our most extravagant products for wealthy and resourceful second-class clients such as your clan. However, we have recently developed the AQ-3M, a limit-pushing variant that is more appropriate for high-tier expert mechs and ace mechs. It requires you to infuse as much as 8 kilograms of phasewater into its stealth plating to make them resilient enough to resist many attacks."

Ves' eyes lit up. The famous Abasis Armor of the Mars integrated as much as 11 kilograms of phasewater. It provided excellent defensive power in exchange that was worth all of the expense.

"Can you tell me more about the AQ-3M and its differences from your older AQ-1L."

"I would be glad to do so, patriarch." Professor Kavanaugh said with a bit more interest.

Any client that was willing to pay much more phasewater in order to obtain a better product was worth his attention!

Optaar Integrated Solutions may be a powerful Rubarthan development company to a second-class rube like Ves, but it was an insignificant player in the Rubarthan market.

Otherwise, Optaar wouldn't have bothered to sell its wares to poorer and stingier second-class clients in the first place!

"While it is true that we have developed the AQ-3M as a direct improvement of our AQ-1L, that does not mean you can plug it in the place in your mech design. You will need to allocate your time to make substantial changes in the design of your expert stealth mech. The alterations are not too difficult or time consuming as you will primarily have to reinforce the internal structure of your work."

This was not a big deal to Ves. "Does the AQ-3M have other requirements?"

"Yes. Its energy consumption is even greater as it is more cumbersome to activate so much more phasewater. However, this is a good change in our eyes. Energy is the currency of reality. The more your expert mech spends its energy, the greater its benefits."

Ves had never heard anyone describe energy in those terms. It was quite clever actually. He might start using this phrase himself in the future!

"Our clan can handle these changes. At most, we will just have to upgrade the existing power reactor with a superior model. Will you provide us access to your AQ-3M and offer whatever assistance I need to integrate it into my expert stealth mech design?"

"We can satisfy your needs as long as we can both agree on a revised business contract." Professor Kavanaugh replied as he spoke on behalf of Optaar Integrated Solutions.

Ves could handle this situation so long as this was the case.

It took days for the Larkinson Clan and Optaar Integrated Solutions to amend their existing contract.

After that, Professor Kavanaugh and his development team were always on call to solve numerous difficult problems that Ves after he adjusted the Ghost Project to adapt to this major change.

Optaar couldn't provide as much help as Ves wished. The Larkinson Clan could not afford to leak too many details about the Ghost Project.

This meant that Ves often had to be circumspect in his thoughts and words whenever he requested the help of Optaar Integrated Solutions.

In numerous cases, Ves couldn't even say anything because the problem strayed way too close to the more sensitive and important aspects of the Ghost Project!

Though Ves found it regretful that the switch to a higher-end version did not effectively increase its stealth capabilities, he found it more than worthwhile to increase his expert stealth mech's defenses."

"The Ghost Project will become a force to be reckoned with in the field by the time this is finally done!"

Chapter 4899 First-Class Resonating Exotics

Despite the restrictions that Ves had to work with, he maintained a pleasant cooperation with Optaar Integrated Solutions.

The company and its engineers were highly professional and did not treat him with too much contempt despite his status as a second-class mech designer.

Of course, it was impossible for Optaar to exhibit awful customer service. The competition in the New Rubarth Empire was too great, and small companies that actively pissed off its customers would quickly get swept away by their rivals!

Professor Reylon Kavanaugh often looked annoyed whenever Ves faced a technical problem that couldn't be solved by ordinary engineers.

Nonetheless, the chief developer of the Seferath series patiently assisted his client for the sake of how much the Larkinson Clan was willing to pay for Optaar's services.

Since the Seferath AQ-3M required up to 8 kilograms of phasewater to make, the development company was entitled to receive just as much phasewater as payment!

There was a huge difference in profitability between the AQ-1L and the AQ-3M. Every development company wished to sell as much of their top-end transphasic products as possible because the profit margins were that much better!

Ves fully understood that he was paying a disproportionate amount of money and resources in the development of the Ghost Project.

Whatever budget he drafted at the start of this expert mech design project had long become irrelevant ever since he treated it as a passion project!

It was times like these where he patted himself on the back for all of his past decisions. If he hadn't gone through all of the effort into building his own clan, starting risky expeditions and designing highly marketable commercial mechs, he wouldn't have been rich enough to completely disregard the expense of this extravagant expert mech design project!

Almost no low-tier expert pilot that had only broken through a relatively short time ago enjoyed such luxurious treatment.

Venerable Zimro Belson was going to be a lucky man for being able to pilot a resilient machine whose performance was comparable to that of a high-tier expert mech!

Although Ves constantly had to exercise his problem-solving skills whenever he worked to integrate the Seferath AQ-3M into the expert mech design, everything else proceeded a lot more smoothly.

Master Benedict Cortez occasionally dropped by in order to handle the selection and integration of the all-important resonating exotics.

Ves hadn't really been involved in this process as he already had his hands full with wrangling the high-tech transphasic active stealth system.

He entrusted this important matter to his wife and Master Benedict. Both of them had done this many times already.

After examining and performing many tests on Venerable Zimro, the two mech designers finally selected a pair of resonating exotics to serve as the key materials for the Ghost Project.

"We spent more time than we thought on trying to find the best combination of resonating exotics for the Ghost Project." Gloriana explained to her husband. "We first identified four different priorities that we would want to enhance for our expert stealth mech."

"What are the priorities?"

"Stealth, defense, assassination and mobility. Each of these properties are worthwhile amplification candidates in our opinion. We have found suitable resonating exotics that relate to each of these areas. Once we have formed a comprehensive list, we explored the combinations of different resonating exotics to determine which ones provide us with the greatest performance boosts and the lowest possible interference. It was not easy for us to figure out the best ratios and combinations. I hope you appreciate our hard work."

Ves leaned over and embraced her in a sideways hug. "Thank you for helping with this matter. You have truly resolved a significant burden with our work. Can you share your results?"

"I can. Master Benedict and I have eventually formulated several excellent combinations, but we think that one of them is the best."

She waved her arm and activated a projection that displayed two different materials. She gestured at the strangely colored metal bar on the right.

"This is Emdar Alloy, a recent product made by a metallurgy company based in the Red Ocean. It is a first-class resonating exotic that can only be made out of several different first-class exotics that can only be sourced in the upper zones. Producing it is also troublesome as it requires the developer of his alloy to start a difficult production process that results in a large proportion of unqualified output. The lesser alloys are sold as second-class products, which are much more reasonably priced. We would have chosen to use one of them if you hadn't completely exploded our design budget."

"You can thank me for that." Ves grinned.

Gloriana lightly swatted his arm. "Since you have reassured me that our clan can fully bear the expenses, I have decided to settle for Emdar Alloy for several important reasons. The main one is that its function is crucial to the effective performance and the survivability of our Ghost Project. Emdar Alloy can significantly reduce the emissions of an expert mech."

That caused Ves to widen his eyes.

While her words did not sound exciting to a layman, Ves fully understood how important Emdar Alloy could be! It was exactly the resonating alloy that the Ghost Project needed in order to supercharge its stealth operations!

The emissions of a mech basically exposed its existence and coordinates to an enemy. The stronger the emissions, the brighter the machine showed up on sensors.

It was extremely difficult to dampen the emissions of a mech. One of the main reasons why stealth mechs were so fragile was because it took an enormous amount of capacity to contain and reduce their emissions!

This problem became even stronger once the stealth mech became more powerful. The more energy they burned up, the more heat theft accumulated!

Active stealth systems such as the Seferath AQ-3M did not just camouflage a mech so that it blended into the surroundings.

They also included heat absorption systems that could contain a massive amount of waste heat. So long as they did not reach their limits, they could keep a stealth mech silent and undetected for hours or even days!

However, it became a lot harder to keep a stealth mech if it became even more powerful.

There was no need for Ves to rethink how immensely powerful the Ghost Project would become. Expert mechs were powerhouses without exception and Ves had made this particular project even more excessive due to his desire to elevate its performance as best he could!

All of that power turned the Ghost Project into a more effective expert mech on the battlefield.

Ves envisioned it working together with other friendly mechs to ambush and assassinate critical enemy assets!

However, obsessing too much over battlefield performance clearly reduced the runtime of its stealth systems. The Ghost Project would undoubtedly generate a massive amount of thermal energy by engaging in all kinds of heavy exertions.

This made the Ghost Project a lot less capable of completing lengthy infiltration missions. Ves did not like this because he was thinking about employing this hidden blade against other parties outside of the battlefield.

Emdar Alloy neatly solved this problem, if only to a limited extent.

"In truth, there are many resonating exotics that can produce similar results, but Emdar Alloy has several advantages aside from its high compatibility with Venerable Zimro Belson." Gloriana continued her explanation. "What I appreciate the most is that its resonance interference is remarkably low. It is much easier for us to find optimal combinations because the effective performance of other resonating exotics does not deteriorate as much."

"That is also nice." Ves sounded impressed.

Lower resonance interference meant that the Ghost Project could not only mount another key material, but also integrate a greater quantity of general resonating exotics before reaching a limit.

"Finally, Emdar Alloy is remarkably easy to resonate with, especially if the expert pilot in question is highly compatible with this material. Venerable Zimro will not have to exert much strain to reduce the emissions of his expert stealth mech to an adequate level. Of course, he can also exert much more effort into minimizing the detection rate of the Ghost Project to the utmost. He will probably resort to this option in battle against hostile expert mechs."

Ves raised his eyebrow at that. "Do you think that Emdar Alloy can help with enabling our Ghost Project to approach a hostile expert mech undetected? You should know how good the intuition of demigods can be. They can detect threats to their lives even when they are asleep!"

"I cannot say anything certain about that, Ves." Gloriana shrugged. "This is the first expert stealth mech that we have worked on, and we do not have access to a lot of documentation. Master Benedict doesn't have much exposure to these types of machines either. He had to leverage his own network of contacts to provide us with the necessary information."

"Oh."

"To satisfy your curiosity, Emdar Alloy does indeed help with improving the Ghost Project's chances to assassinate a target expert mech. It does more than dampen an expert mech's emissions. It also dampens the more noticeable effects of true resonance. This vastly increases the fault tolerance of our work."

All in all, Ves had to admit that Gloriana and Master Benedict had truly made a fantastic choice. The effects of Emdar Alloy satisfied multiple priorities, from improving its assassination chances to extending its active stealth runtime.

The only downside was that it was too damn expensive!

Ves did not dare to look at the price tag for fear that he would reject the purchase of this specialty material.

Fortunately, the Larkinson Clan could exchange Emdar Alloy for a couple of tons of salvaged first-class alloys or a few random pieces of valuable intact alien tech. Ves was even willing to trade away several kilograms of phasewater if that was what it took!

"What did you choose as the second key material?" He asked his wife.

His wife pointed at the second projection which depicted a piece of raw ore.

"Denissium Maximum is a natural first-class resonating exotic that can directly amplify the lethality of the Ghost Project's attacks."

His wife clearly disliked the name of this resonating exotic. She looked as if she was about to vomit when she uttered it on her lips!

"So what's so special about Denissium Maximum?" Ves asked with an amused expression.

"I don't want to talk about it too much. Suffice to say, it is an excellent material that can help with launching a single fatal or crippling attack. When an expert pilot resonates with it, the expert mech's weapon will become 'charged' over time, and can only maintain this state for a short amount of time. Once the machine launches an attack, the charged weapon will strike with the force of multiple superimposed attacks. I think you can imagine how much damage this can do. The stronger the expert pilot, the faster he can charge a weapon and the more he can raise the upper limit of its charge."

Ves looked impressed! The name of this resonating exotic might be silly, but its effects were absolutely incredible!

If the Ghost Project could charge up its weapon so that it could unleash an attack that was 5 times, 10 times or 20 times stronger, then it might be able to assassinate an unsuspecting expert mech no matter if there was a resonance shield in the way!

"What's the downside of this material?"

"It is a first-class exotic, so you can already deduce that it is expensive. Its resonance interference is high, so it can only truly be paired with a 'gentle' material such as Emdar Alloy. Furthermore, its resonance load is high, so you shouldn't expect Venerable Zimro to be able to charge the weapon of his expert mech more than a handful of times. This limitation will ease once his resonance strength improves over time, but do not expect any miracles at the start."

Ves smiled. "It is already good if the Ghost Project can successfully assassinate a single enemy expert mech."

Chapter 4900 Scared Of Ghosts

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The Ghost Project came a lot closer to completion once Master Benedict Cortez integrated it with resonating exotics.

The incomplete design truly took on the character of an expert mech at this point!

Although the Larkinson Clan had to pay an exceedingly high price to purchase and ship a batch of extremely valuable first-class exotics from the Zelmar Upper Zone, their effects were far too strong and useful to pass over!

When the mech designers involved in this difficult but increasingly more promising expert stealth mech started to simulate the performance of the Ghost Project in all kinds of combat and infiltration scenarios, they reacted with both glee and fear.

"Hehehe." Ves grinned as he observed a rerun of a simulated mission where the Ghost Project sneaked close to the Palace of Shame before activating its Geist System.

The ghostly fiends that emerged from the hidden expert mech completely turned the periphery of the alien asteroid base as well as many of the alien warships in the vicinity into purgatory!

Even after the aliens learned that they had come under attack by a hidden but nefarious enemy, their warships and starfighters failed to detect the Ghost Project in their midst!

The combination of Venerable Zimro Belson's intuition, the emission dampening effect of Emdar Alloy and the cutting-edge Seferath AQ-3M active stealth system, the inadequate sensor systems of the indigenous alien races had no way of detecting the Ghost Project!

The only measure that could stop the Ghost Project from attacking sensitive areas and the more interior portions of the Palace of Shame was solid transphasic energy shields, but even that was not a guarantee of safety.

This was because the fiends under the Ghost Project's control could theoretically bypass every obstacle, no matter whether they were energy shields or many meters of thick materials!

Although Ves did not have a solid idea how far these fiends empowered by true resonance were able to move away from their source, he did not expect them to be able to move too far away.

The Geist System was both their source of strength and the tether that kept them in control. If the spiritual specters were able to exceed their range limitations, then that meant that they had lost a lot of power but also became completely free and unrestrained!

For now, Ves assumed that ghosts such as Mephisto the Firstborn could only move a few hundred meters away at most.

Still granted the Ghost Project a lot of capacity for destruction, but it was not enough to infiltrate and sabotage large fortifications and capital ships so long as they kept up their energy shields.

Even so, the expert stealth mech in its current form already represented a terror off the battlefield!

"Imagine what it can do to the Friday Colonies." Gloriana gasped as she pulled up a graph that displayed how much damage it could do if it was left unchecked in a star system. "As long as we pair it up with a stealth carrier, the Ghost Project can ruin entire planets over the course of a week, maybe several if there are a lot of settlements. So long as our opponents do not have powerful detection methods, a single expert stealth mech can do anything from assassinating key leaders, sabotaging expert mechs when they are dormant and destroying key infrastructural targets. The Fridaymen's ambitions in the new frontier could be brought to heel with the power of a single expert mech!"

That was an outrageous story and one that Ves did not look keen on realizing.

"Please do not go overboard and exaggerate the Ghost Project's impunity, Gloriana. Our Ghost Project remains highly effective as long as we use it sparingly. The more it is used, the more it exposes its capabilities to our enemies. Its mystery will be gone and our foes will prepare more adequate countermeasures in order to guard against another attack. This upcoming asset of ours is best served as a hidden blade rather than an obvious hammer."

Master Benedict Cortez nodded his head. "I agree with your husband. The deterrence factor is far more useful than its actual implementation. It is enough to expose its existence and give your enemies a hint of what it can do. That is enough to make your rivals and enemies fear your retaliation."

His words rang true to Ves. Just because the Larkinson Clan invested a huge amount of time, money and resources into designing and building a lot of mechs did not mean that they wanted to throw them into battle non-stop!

The Larkinson Clan grew quickly because it was able to accumulate a lot of strength in times of rest and loot a lot of bountiful spoils in times of action!

Ves did not believe that his clan would be able to do nearly as well if it committed heavily to one or the other.

The same dynamic applied to the use of the Ghost Project. If he and his clan had to employ it against others on a non-stop basis, then something had gone terribly wrong!

"Even if I had a reason to take action against the Friday Colonies, I wouldn't be foolish enough to do what you have described." Ves told Gloriana. "Our Ghost Project may theoretically be able to circumvent the vast majority of detection methods, but the Seferath AQ-3M is not infallible, you know. Optaar Integrated Systems has warned me that there are first-class detection systems that can overpower its active stealth measures as long as they are fed with lots of energy. The Fridaymen can also call upon their ace pilots to hunt down our stealth asset."

It would be game over once an ace mech found a trail and managed to sniff out the Ghost Project!

All of the damage amplification bestowed by Denissium Maximum would not help at all at this point!

There were ways to make the Ghost Project even deadlier than now, but there were two reasons why that was not a good choice.

The Ghost Project was already extravagant enough to stretch the definition of a quasi-first-class expert mech.

Once his clan started to apply qualitative improvements such as upgrading its power reactor, then the MTA would forcibly reclassify it as a first-class expert mech.

Ves would no longer be able to use it in the middle zones without getting into a lot of trouble!

Another reason why he and his fellow mech designers could not make any substantial improvements was because Venerable Zimro Belson could not effectively make use of the additions.

As Ves and the others continually applied one improvement after another on the expert mech design, it increased the depth of the Ghost Project to an unreasonable degree.

There was no way that Venerable Zimro would be able to effectively utilize more than 30 percent of its capabilities from the start!

His lack of experience and more importantly his insufficient resonance strength heavily limited how much performance he could leverage out of his excessively strong expert mech.

There were good reasons why low-tier expert pilots were paired with low-tier expert mechs at the start.

It was the most economical approach. It enabled expert pilots to develop their powers and extraordinary techniques step by step without getting overwhelmed or lost.

However, this was way too slow and inefficient for Ves. His clan pursued quality over quantity and couldn't afford to leave the potential of its talents untapped.

Perhaps it may be unfair for the Larkinson Clan to pile up so many expectations and responsibilities on a recently promoted expert pilot, but the Red Ocean was too dangerous to do anything less.

"Are you sure you are not overhyping the threat of the Geist System?" Cormaunt Hempkamp said as he studied the data relating to its estimated performance parameters. "I mean, they are unstoppable and all, but it is not as if they can deploy an entire army of ghosts. According to your estimates, each fiend won't actually be able to deal much damage when they are activated."

"That is correct." Ves nodded. "The Geist System tries to add physical substance to immaterial life forms, but I don't think that the willpower of two different demigods is enough to turn them into powerhouses, at least not at the beginning. Object 335 is a static power source for all intents and purposes, so the only ways to strengthen the Geist System is by cultivating its spiritual fiends or stimulate the growth of Venerable Zimro's resonance strength."

"What about increasing the quantity of these so-called fiends?" Master Benedict asked an important question.

"I think that the power of the Geist System will become dispersed to a degree." Ves frowned and answered. "It is still better to deploy multiple weaker fiends than to concentrate power in a single one of them, but this is all based on theory and assumptions. We will have to fabricate the Ghost Project and test it out in reality to be sure."

The simulation results were highly dubious and could not be relied upon. Ves had run the simulations anyway because he wanted to gain a more visual and concrete impression of what his expert stealth mech could do when let loose.

No matter whether the simulations were close to the truth or wildly inaccurate, Ves saw little reason to become disappointed with his work.

No matter what, even the more pessimistic estimates of the Ghost Project's performance already exceeded his minimum expectations!

"Do you know how much damage a proper first-class version of the Ghost Project can do?" Miles Tovar finally spoke up and shared his concerns. "The first-raters would probably kill to obtain the Geist System. This innovation of yours is too powerful and subversive. So long as the mech industry has yet to develop a proper counter against it, the most powerful first-class stealth mechs that are armed with the Geist System can throw our entire society into disarray."

His fears caused the other mech designers to frown.

Each of them were smart enough to envision this scenario. The only reason why they hadn't raised the topic was because they were too reluctant to turn the breaks on the Ghost Project.

Nonetheless, they all needed to address this topic sooner or later.

Ves looked at everyone in the eyes. "The confidentiality of our Ghost Project should remain high, I think. I have not allowed any of our design teams to touch upon the truly important elements of the Ghost Project. I haven't even mentioned a single word of the Geist System or shown off the design of our expert stealth mech to our external consultants either. This may have slowed down our progress, but the confidentiality of our project should remain secure."

"I don't believe our Ghost Project is as hidden as you think it is." Master Benedict warned.

There was no way to completely stop the snooping of the Mech Trade Association. A mech design as sensitive and innovative as the Ghost Project aroused the interest of the mechers like nothing else!

"We can't do anything about it." Ves simply shrugged. "There is no way for us to keep up the confidentiality of the Ghost Project forever. The best we can hope for is that its secrets will not spread out too much during the time where we need to rely on its capabilities the most. Besides, I highly doubt that anyone can reproduce the Geist System due to its specific requirements. Don't

forget that its core consists of Object 335. I highly doubt that the MTA will permit other groups to decapitate expert pilots en masse only to put their heads on life support before stuffing them inside a lot of expert mechs!"

Even if there were mech designers who were crazy to do that, they still wouldn't be able to reproduce the Geist System. They lacked the ability to create spiritual fiends like Ves.

Without the presence of these unfriendly ghosts, the incomplete Geist System was nothing but a glorified life support box!