

The Mech 4931

Chapter 4931 Stubborn Choice

Master Benedict Cortez clearly noticed the difference.

Ves entered the room with confusion and uncertainty on his face. His demeanor was subdued and his mood was struggling under the burden of his own choices.

Now, he looked as if he had discovered the light at the end of the tunnel. His passion had lifted his indecision. His resolution helped him regain his confidence and he looked as if he had settled on a solid plan for his future development.

"If I may ask, what have you decided upon, Ves?" Benedict curiously asked. "Which of your two expert mech designs have you chosen to submit to your 'friend', and which research direction have you chosen as your major?"

Ves briefly contemplated whether it was wise for him to share this information to Benedict, but he eventually figured that Benedict had earned his trust.

It was not good to withhold so much about himself all of the time. Without taking the initiative to obtain a second opinion from the likes of Master Benedict, who knew how long it would take for Ves to end his procrastination!

"My design philosophy is Mutual Growth." Ves declared. "Out of the two expert mechs that I have brought up, it is undeniable that the Dullahan Project embodies this concept much more closely than the Ghost Project. The latter is not completely unrelated, but its focus on external sources of power means that the relationship between the mech pilot and his mech becomes more complex. I consider the Geist System as an expansion of the unique power system that I am working on. It is nice if I can develop it further, but it doesn't seem appropriate for me to use it as the centerpiece of my future research initiatives."

"Hm, that concurs with my opinion. Can you think of reasons why you would want to choose this as your major instead? Don't get me wrong, Ves. I am not suggesting that you have made the wrong choice, but I want you to be certain that you have properly considered all of the alternatives."

Ves frowned and fell in thought. "Hmmm. Good question. If I want to use the Ghost Project as a representation of my future research direction, then I would only want to do so if I want to radically redefine what it means to pilot a mech. No longer will mech pilots interface with their lifeless machines in order to leverage the power of material technology alone. Each mech will not only turn into a potent life form, but will also serve as the hub or channel that can allow other powerful and useful life forms to play different roles."

"That sounds as if you want to turn your mechs into existences akin to insect hives." Benedict observed.

"Good analogy. I guess the Ghost Project already falls within this category. That is exactly right. The power of a single mech cannot match that of a living mech that is augmented by a design spirit as well as numerous subordinate spirits. While my expert stealth mech is only able to make the Geist System work by exploiting the power of true resonance, I believe that I can successfully invent a solution that can substitute true resonance with a more accessible power source such as

plain electrical energy. Every mech, no matter how humble, can enter into battle with a hive of ghosts under its command."

As he explained this vision, his imagination already went wild. He conjured up grand battles where mechs from both sides not only clashed together, but also brought forth swarms of intangible ghosts or fiends that tore into each other!

The benefits of being able to throw an army of ghosts at an enemy were much greater if human forces fought against aliens.

There was no way the indigenous alien races could withstand the tide of ghosts with their insufficient tech base!

Master Benedict did not entirely approve of this unusual idea, however. "What you have proposed is radical, that is for certain. I do not believe that many of our colleagues in the industry are willing to welcome your ideas. There is a limit to how much change mech pilots and mech designers are able to accept."

"It doesn't matter." Ves sneered. "Competition always prevails. As long as my design solutions result in mechs that become a lot stronger without raising the costs too much, then my work will sweep the market. Consumers aren't stupid. If one of my products can outfight two mechs designed by my competitors, they will choose the more cost-effective solution all of the time."

Benedict shook his head. "Let's leave this hypothetical aside. You have already indicated a preference for a different major, so let us talk about that instead. What does the Dullahan Project represent?"

"The Dullahan Project is an evolution of my efforts to enable mutual growth." Ves straightforwardly replied. "At this point, I have invested a lot of effort into leveraging the man-machine connection produced by neural interfaces to increase the relationship between mech and mech pilot. While I have also worked on making mechs alive and more powerful in a metaphysical manner, the goal of doing this has always been to further the growth of the mech pilot. A stronger mech can do a better job at facilitating the growth of a mech pilot. I think the relationship between Venerable Jannzi and her Shield of Samar is an excellent example of the mutual growth that I have been trying to realize with my efforts."

Ves had managed to make a lot of mech pilots stronger through his work. Even without the benefits brought by design spirits, his living mechs already provided a huge amount of benefits to their pilots.

"You have already done a good job at utilizing the man-machine connection, Ves. I do not think that you have reached the limit of what you can do with the existing means at your disposal. What I find strange is that instead of sticking to what has already worked to an extent, you spontaneously took a detour and developed a strange new obsession for blood and biomech systems. Only a mech designer as 'creative' as you can devise a design solution where you forcibly turn a classical mech into a cyborg mech for the sole purpose of introducing a seemingly redundant blood circulation system inside the frame. You have yet to test whether this Blood Pact of yours even exists. Are you certain you want to use it as the basis of your major when you have never tested it once in reality?"

Master Benedict Cortez was not wrong for expressing his doubts and skepticism.

Ves hadn't strictly followed the scientific method when he devised the Empowered Blood Sharing System. He combined the theories of several different disciplines in order to come up with a radical new design application that rested on a lot of untested assumptions.

Was it safe?

Was it viable?

Was it cost-effective?

Was it acceptable to his customers?

Was it acceptable to the MTA?

He was plagued by all of these questions and more. If there was anything wrong, then his ability to base his future success on the EBSS or a derivative of this idea came under doubt.

Still, Ves was not the sort of mech designer who let common science and conventional wisdom stop him from pursuing his dreams!

Ves smirked at the older mech designer. "I appreciate your well-meaning advice, but I am certain about my choices. My current implementation of living mechs is already sufficient for the masses. As you said, there is still room for improvement in this area. I can treat this as one of my minors, but I don't intend to treat it as my primary focus anymore."

"Can you elaborate, Ves? I think you are making a dangerous decision here. You are still fairly young, so there is plenty of time for you to reevaluate your choices. Once you advance to Senior and invest several previous decades of your lifespan into a research subject that is much less viable, practical and cost-effective than you assumed, you might come to regret your impulsive choice."

Master Benedict conveyed well-meaning advice. He truly did not want Ves to ruin his future by betting on a design application that was much more restrictive and less applicable than his other innovations.

Ves stuck to his decision, though. He did not have any intention of backing out at this point.

"I don't care what other people think about the viability and desirability of the Blood Pact concept I came up with." He said. "I just know it will work. I also know that its potential is much greater than what I have been doing before. It doesn't really matter if the vast majority of mech pilots doesn't want to bind their life to a single mech for the rest of their lives. I believe I can provide massive benefits to the few extreme mech pilots that truly treat their chosen mechs as their lifelong battle partners. I think I have a good chance of helping mech pilots and their living mechs attain unsurpassed might."

Everything had a price.

It became more difficult for Ves to engender any further mutual growth. The power of blood held much promise, so much so that he was willing to use it as a powerful new medium to stimulate additional growth in both the mech pilot and mech!

All of the baggage that came with this such as binding a mech pilot to a single mech and forcing them to merge their blood circulation were acceptable trade offs in his opinion.

In any case, as long as he continued to develop the Empowered Blood Sharing System, he might be able to mitigate its downsides.

His initial iterations of this radical new biotechnological system would definitely be rough and marked by glitches, but that would not be the case for his subsequent works.

Besides, this was where the Superpublish could play a massive role at this point. By leaping ahead of the development cycle, Ves could get off on a much better start than normal. This would not only prevent a lot of accidents, but also help with persuading other mech pilots to try out this powerful new growth system!

Ves and Master Benedict continued to discuss the merits and difficulties of this profound choice.

Though the Master Mech Designer strongly disagreed with choosing the EBSS as the basis of a major, he did not seek to stop Ves from pursuing his dreams.

"Whether you succeed or fail, I hope you won't regret this decision, Ves. You have made a huge bet today. I do not know whether your work can live up to the promises that you have made, but I will be rooting for you. You have already made a lot of contributions in fostering the mutual growth between mechs and mech pilots. I hope you will not falter before you are able to realize your design philosophy. The mech industry needs your contributions."

"Thank you for your kind words. I do not intend to fail either." Ves smiled at the older man.

"When will your 'friend' make a pass at the Dullahan Project?"

"It shouldn't take much longer. We still need a week or two to complete our current rounds of optimizations. After that, it will take a few days for my 'friend' to improve it with the help of his own expertise."

"That is fast." Benedict commented.

"Don't worry. You will not be disappointed by the results. Just wait."

Ves ultimately left the Cross Production Complex with renewed purpose. He had already considered a lot of different arguments, but he believed that the Dullahan Project was a much better representation of what he set out to do as a mech designer.

"Blood is my future..."

If anyone just heard what he said, they might have mistaken him as a vampire or a mass-murdering lunatic!

Though Ves believed in his heart that his intentions were pure, others might not hold the same opinion. It remained to be seen whether he could ever popularize his radical new design application.

Chapter 4932 Viability Test

Time passed quickly after Ves had made up his mind.

While Ves and his fellow mech designers worked hard to finalize the Dullahan Project and the Ghost Project, the rest of the Larkinsons did not stay idle either.

The time to resume the Trailblazer Expedition had drawn closer. The clan had already prepared extensively for this important moment. Not only did the Larkinsons put a lot of effort into repairing and upgrading their starships, they also collected a lot of information and stockpiled a lot of useful supplies.

Almost every arm of the clan contributed to this major effort. It was no secret that the expeditionary fleet was bound to leave the Krakatoa Middle Zone and cross over into the rougher and more dangerous Torald Middle Zone.

Given all of the stories that came out of this deeper frontier zone, there was no such thing as too much preparation!

One of the most optimistic pieces of news that Ves received as of late concerned his Spirit of Bentheim.

After roughly half a year of extensive disassembly, refurbishing and refitting work, the original factory ship of the Larkinson Clan had finally completed her transformation!

So much of her hull had been strengthened and improved that she had fully regained the capital of leading the expeditionary fleet!

It actually took longer than expected for the MTA shipyard to complete the extensive refit process.

The people in charge of the project never provided a clear reason to Ves, but he suspected that it had to do with the abnormal spiritual properties of the ship. The MTA probably studied the hull of the Spirit of Bentheim from top to bottom in an attempt to figure out all of her secrets!

Ves already expected this to happen. He had nothing to hide. The Spirit of Bentheim was not a mech so he wasn't able to add too many amazing goodies to her hull.

The mechers had already notified the Larkinson Clan that they just had to conduct thorough inspections and conduct short trials to verify that the upgraded factory ship performed up to expectation.

The MTA cared a lot about quality. None of their products ever failed to drop below their exacting demands.

Once the Association made sure that the Spirit of Bentheim passed their requirements, the ship would immediately be sent to the Davute System.

Ves hoped that he would be able to complete everything he set out to do in Davute.

At this point, Ves had reached the moment where he was ready to Superpublish a mech design.

He carefully considered his decision one last time.

"Do you think I am doing what is right or do you think I have gone crazy, Lucky?"

"Meow." The cat nonchalantly responded as he floated in the air while licking his paws.

Ves shrugged. "Maybe you're right. The line between innovation and insanity is not as solid as people think. It is especially blurred when it comes to me. None of my inventions are normal from the perspective of other mech designers."

He felt a little bit better about himself. There were moments where he briefly entertained second thoughts about committing to the Empowered Blood Sharing System. It truly had too many restrictions to make it practical enough for widespread usage.

Still, Ves already came up with a few promising ideas on how to reduce its downsides and increase its practicality. Nothing was impossible as long as he was brilliant enough to come up with a creative new solution.

For example, the Dullahan Project already pointed out a way for mech pilots to be able to continue their careers once they have lost their bonded mechs.

So long as they retained possession of a substantial enough quantity of their former mechs, the mech pilots would be able to regain their ability to fight!

He could explore that in the future once he advanced to Senior or higher. Right now, he needed to pull the trigger and pull the trigger.

"Hm, maybe it is better if I leave the Ghost Project alone. It's my latest passion project and I am more confident that it will work out the way I intended. Whatever flaws and imperfections it may have in its current design won't spoil its significance."

Ves had a good feeling about the current iteration of the Ghost Project. He also had a high degree of ownership towards it. He had contributed more to this expert mech design project than any other collaborator.

From developing the basis of the Geist System to implementing and customizing the Seferath AQ-3M transphasic active stealth system, Ves alone had been responsible for designing the Ghost Project's most defining elements!

On the other hand, the Dullahan Project had been much more of a team effort. Sara Voiken had been responsible for designing most of the expert knight mech's crucial defensive systems. Gloriana took care of the internals while Ketis designed a new mech sword that was tailored for Venerable Jannzi. Master Benedict integrated the resonating materials and also worked on the energy transmission systems to make the powerful new machine more enduring.

Ves on the other hand spent much of his time on designing miscellaneous parts along with trying to design a working implementation of the Empowered Blood Sharing System from scratch. His sense of ownership towards the Dullahan Project was high primarily because it was his brainchild and because its spiritual design was such a core part of its identity.

"It doesn't really matter too much if my sense of ownership gets reduced." Ves concluded.

He no longer hesitated any further and activated the Superpublish command.

It did not take a lot of time for the Mech Designer System to process the design of Jannzi's future expert mech.

No matter how sophisticated it had grown, nothing about the Dullahan Project was inscrutable to the fragment of the Metal Scroll!

Once Ves obtained the Superpublished version of the completed mech design, his eyes widened as he beheld all of the changes.

Everything had undergone subtle changes. The most obvious elements such as the Battle Skirt System, the Rainbow Shield, the transphasic armor system and the transphasic flight system all received substantial upgrades and optimizations.

Some of the design solutions that caught his eyes were so brilliant and inventive that they could even shock the developers of cutting-edge technology!

After all, Ves had already invested a huge amount of money and resources into obtaining the best quasi-first-class parts and systems that he could stuff into the expert knight mech.

To see how far the System had gone in order to elevate the performance of the highly advanced Dullahan Project by 10 percent was a humbling experience.

It reminded Ves once again that he still had a lot to do before he reached the pinnacle of mech design.

He was sure that his fellow collaborators would share the same sentiment.

Gloriana would probably be able to get a lot closer to advancing to Senior once she was able to study the refinements to her god body method.

Master Benedict Cortez would be able to skip 10 to 20 years worth of research and development once he mastered the comprehensive improvements made to his Endex System.

"As for me..."

His gains were no less profound. Not only did the System smooth out the rough edges of the reincarnation of the Shield of Samar, but it also turned his initial rudimentary implementation of the EBSS into a work of art!

"Okay, maybe I am exaggerating a bit, but just look at it! Don't you think it's beautiful, Lucky?"

"Meow." Lucky flipped his tail in a clear sign of disinterest.

"You don't understand what this means! This is proof that the EBSS has enough added value that it deserves to remain in the design!"

The Blood Pact was viable! If the opposite was true, the System would have removed it from the Dullahan Project because keeping it was a waste of capacity.

Ves grew more and more eager as he compared the 'optimized' version of the EBSS to his original work. The more he studied the changes, the more he became amazed at all of the ingenious design solutions!

"I truly hadn't thought about this approach!"

"Arggh! I am so stupid for overlooking this possibility!"

"Damn, if this flaw remained unnoticed, there is a chance that Jannzi might have gotten injured!"

As much as Ves wanted to spend an entire month documenting all of the changes before figuring out why they improved on his work, he needed to share the bounty to the others.

"Hm, I should wait a few days before presenting this upgraded design. I can't make it seem as if it only takes an instant to apply all of these comprehensive improvements."

Ves found it difficult to stick to his old routine while carrying such an enormous weight on his shoulders. He knew that his wife and the others had built up a lot of anticipation towards what he was holding back.

Still, Ves stuck to his decision and waited for three whole days before he called the design team of the Dullahan Project together.

Once he projected the improved design and gave everyone access to the detailed design files, the other mech designers reacted just as he expected.

"THIS IS AMAZING!" Gloriana exclaimed! "The quality of our expert mech design has undergone a transformation!"

"I did not expect that I could make my sword sharper through this method." Ketis grew intense as she obsessed over the sword paired with the Dullahan Project.

Ves smiled as he listened to all of the positive reactions from the gang. "Feel free to study the new design. This is a gift to you all. Don't take too long, though. I want to move on and fabricate this expert mech sooner rather than later. I think that 3 or 4 days should be enough for you to understand the improved design to the point where you can fabricate it without issue."

None of the gathered mech designers were mediocre. They were all brilliant and capable as long as they worked within their areas of expertise.

"It would help if you give us more time before we start, Ves." Gloriana responded with a frown.

"You can obsess over the alterations later, Gloriana. We have all waited long enough to fabricate a new expert mech for Jannzi. It is time. No more delays."

Master Benedict looked up from the detailed schematic of the upgraded Endex System that he had originally incorporated in the Dullahan Project.

"I agree. There is nothing we can add to the Dullahan Project at this point as it has already exceeded our capacity to improve. In comparison, the Ghost Project has already become outdated due to this development. I have observed a few new solutions in the Endex System that I can use to improve my implementation of the Original Energy Bridge System in our expert stealth mech design. I believe that you should have a reason to revisit the Ghost Project, Gloriana."

"You are correct!" Gloriana's eyes lit up yet again! "The god body method in the Dullahan Project is much more refined than what I have implemented in the design of the Ghost Project. I need at least a week if not more to bring it back up to date based on all of the lessons I can learn."

"Don't get distracted, honey. Let us focus on our upcoming fabrication run first. Once we make the Dullahan Project, we will probably harvest extra insights that will help us revise the Ghost Project."

This was one of the benefits of Superpublishing a mech. The lessons that mech designers could learn from one could also be applied to their subsequent works!

This could be treated as a substitute to Superpublishing the Ghost Project. Even if Ves decided against using up his precious voucher on this expert mech design, he could still obtain at least a portion of the total benefits!

Everyone quickly agreed on a new plan and timetable before they eagerly split up. They needed to decipher all of the improvements as quickly as possible!

Chapter 4933 Julius & Noah

"Happy birthday, Marvaine!"

"You're one step closer to growing into a big boy!"

"Nyaaaaaa~"

"Meuw meuw!"

"Meow meow meow!"

"Here is your present!"

During the days where Ves and his fellow mech designers frantically analyzed the Superpublished design of the Dullahan Project, a single event briefly caused them to pause their efforts.

Marvaine celebrated his fourth birthday!

The lucky boy was surrounded by both Larkinsons and cats. A nearby dinner table struggled to hold an entire pile of presents.

Gloriana had taken charge of the birthday party from beginning to end. Much of the ground floor of the Royal Mansion as well as its extensive back garden had been transformed into a festive playground themed around dragons.

All of the children had changed into different dragon-themed outfits. The birthday boy himself wore a cute little outfit that made him look as if he turned into a humanoid golden dragon.

With the help of his companion spirit Denny and the Golden Cat, Marvaine literally turned into the golden boy of the Larkinson Clan on this special day!

Of course, the other brats also enjoyed the custom party.

"Mraw! I am a dragon! Hear me roar!" Andraste shouted as she hopped around with her red dragon-themed outfit.

Aurelia initially thought she was too old and mature to play around like this, but she quickly succumbed once her father forced her to wear a metallic silvery dragon costume.

With Mana helping to activate a special effect, Aurelia managed to turn herself into a dragon queen of sorts.

The firstborn daughter of Ves and Gloriana did not need to do anything else to gather a following of admiring young dragons!

The children laughed and giggled as they took part in several organized activities. From using a toy prop that allowed them to pretend they were breathing dragon fire to letting loose an army of plushy bots for them to defeat, the kids completely let go of all of the pressure and expectations set by their parents and their school teachers!

Many prominent members of the Larkinson Clan and its allies had been invited to the Royal Mansion as well.

Marvaine's birthday party was not only an excellent opportunity for their own brats to get closer to the heirs of the Larkinson Clan, but also served as a convenient gathering to socialize with each other on a more direct basis.

Venerable Brutus Larkinson smiled as he stood next to his younger sister. Both of them stared lovingly at their children as they played with each other without concern.

His own two children were among the swarm of pretend dragons. Both of them possessed noticeably different demeanors.

Ever since he married Commander Sendra Larkinson, he and his wife initially agreed to raise their son Wexel as a Larkinson and their daughter Terina as a Hexer.

In practice, the differences weren't so clear cut. The two children spent most of their time among the Larkinsons in practice. It was just that Terina paid more visits to the Glory Seekers than usual in order to make sure she retained a connection to her other heritage.

It didn't matter too much to Brutus. He had left the Hexadric Hegemony for many years just like Gloriana. The Glory Seekers had already started to diverge from their old Hexer ways due to their continued separation from their 'motherland'.

If it wasn't for the fact that the Wodin Dynasty still supported and controlled the Glory Seekers in various ways, it would not have been unthinkable for them to merge into the Larkinson Clan by this time!

"They grow up so fast." Gloriana gently sighed.

"Thank you again for convincing your husband to bestow my children and I with companion spirits."

"Hm. It is only right for Ves to share his bounty. He has been sitting on this invention for such a long time that it is criminal for him to withhold it from family such as you and your children."

"I am sure that he had his reasons."

Gloriana rolled her eyes.

It had been a few months since Ves quietly gathered a bunch of prominent friends and family members from the Larkinson Clan and the Glory Seekers.

The Larkinson Patriarch took time off his schedule in order to grant each of them their own individual companion spirits.

Right now, many expert pilots, military officers and children received their own companion spirits!

Of course, Ves did not put too much effort into customizing and strengthening these companion spirits. Their initial capabilities were heavily correlated to the strength of their origins.

To expert pilots such as Brutus and Venerable Joshua, their companion spirits started off on a much stronger footing than any other spirits of their kind!

Brutus for example gained a black-and-white tuxedo cat that he decided to call Julius.

The extraordinary willpower infused in Julius allowed the cat to pick up simple objects such as pens or buttons.

This was just the start.

The companion spirit had almost certainly grown stronger since then. Julius also gained greater mastery of the intrinsic ability that he derived from his origin, though Brutus still struggled to effectively make use of it when piloting his expert mech.

In any case, many other expert pilots received similar boosts that directly affected their growth pattern and combat power!

This caused them all to look forward to the impending expedition once more. They could only truly test out their gains in a serious battle against real opponents. They did not dare to go all-out in practice sessions.

"Muw muw."

Julius briefly appeared from Brutus' head.

Alexandria subsequently appeared from Gloriana's head and started to nuzzle her 'older brother'.

Sights like these became increasingly more common as companion spirits rapidly proliferated among the Larkinson Clan and the Glory Seekers!

Ves initially thought about ordering the recipients of companion spirits to keep them out of sight entirely, but figured that there was little point in hiding them. The existence of companion spirits was no secret to the MTA.

Since there was nothing shameful or overly taboo about companion spirits, Ves simply allowed everyone to air their companion spirits whenever they wanted. He only cautioned them to be careful about presenting them in front of strangers as the general public might not be able to accept their existence so easily.

"Since you're about to finish your current batch of expert mech designs, when will you be able to upgrade my Star Dancer Mark II?" Brutus asked his sister. "I appreciate the minor upgrades that you have applied to it over the years, but from what you have told me about the power of quasi-first-class expert mechs that you are working on these days, I feel awfully underpowered. Julius alone cannot close the performance gap. Once our fleet enters the Torald Middle Zone and engages in battle against all manner of alien opponents, the Star Dancer Mark II won't be able to keep up anymore."

Gloriana briefly furrowed her brows. "Your Star Dancer Mark II isn't the only expert mech that needs an upgrade. Ves has already told me that he wants to work on modernizing the Larkinson Clan's older expert mechs. That will all take a lot of time and effort, though once my husband helps me pay for my replacement cranial implant, I should be able to fulfill your wish much sooner than before. We won't be short on materials. I am sure about that. You will be in for a treat as my husband and I have recently made a lot of gains. Once we complete our current batch of mech designs, I am sure that we will be in a better position to upgrade your machine."

"Don't forget about the needs of our other Glory Seeker expert pilots." Brutus reminded her. "Our Handmaidens of Death are good at offense. Their ability to lead battle formations make them especially useful in battles against large alien fleets. They are only constrained by their limited ability to resist warship-grade attacks."

"You are correct. I will be sure to remind Ves when I next speak to him. He can't keep treating the Glory Seekers as his neglected cousin. You are his family as well!"

As the two Wodins continued to chat with each other, Ves was speaking to another prominent member of the Larkinson Clan.

"Rwoar!"

A surprisingly large spiritual feline unleashed a roar that was powerful enough to shake the bones of nearby people.

Many people recognized the glowing white lion as the companion spirit of General Ark Larkinson.

Ves struggled with the decision whether he should grant this boon to his uncle.

On the one hand, Ark was his father's brother. The two had been close back when they were humble citizens of the Bright Republic. Ark was also the Larkinson Clan's only high-tier expert pilot.

He was the most likely among the Larkinsons to advance to the rank of ace pilot within this generation. No one else came close.

On the other hand, General Ark clearly did not support the expeditions and the policy of maintaining a certain degree of separation from states.

He was too much of an old-school Larkinson to let go of the traditional goals of climbing up the military ladder and earning enough merits in war to earn the right to rule over entire planets.

Ark had become a thorny existence to Ves. The man's effective takeover of the Davute Branch had caused it to follow a completely different development strategy than before.

Ves would be lying if he claimed that he still trusted Ark.

Yet... the Larkinson Clan needed the gifted command-oriented expert pilot in the end.

The Cross Clan had Patriarch Reginald Cross.

The Adelaide Third Fleet had Saint Marissa Lewandowski.

The Boojay Family had Saint Kalasandra Boojay.

The Larkinson Clan still did not have an ace pilot as its protector. This made it increasingly more awkward for the Larkinsons to maintain their bargaining power and expand their power base in the coming years.

The clan needed its own ace pilot sooner rather than later, and there was no one else Ves could turn to except for his 'dearest uncle'.

It did not matter too much if Ark continued to be stubborn about committing to Davute. Just the fact that the Larkinson Clan gained its own ace pilot was enough to deter a lot of troublemakers from messing with the Larkinsons regardless of where they traveled!

After all, few people wanted to provoke an angry ace pilot into descending onto their positions and wiping everything from existence in retaliation!

Once Ves made the decision, he went all-out to the point of adding a few extra spiritual ingredients to augment his uncle's capabilities a bit further.

Of all of the companion spirits that Ves had bestowed onto people in the past few months, none of them gained as much as his uncle Ark.

It made sense. Ark Larkinson was a high-tier expert pilot that had reached the standard of an ace pilot candidate for a number of years.

His resonance strength was much higher than that of Venerable Irene Mox when she received Emma!

The additional ingredients that Ves blended into Ark's companion spirit only played a supplementary role at best.

The ferocious white lion had already become good at leveraging Ark's intrinsic advantages!

"Noah has grown a lot faster than I thought." Ves remarked as he evaluated the spiritual lion's roar. "How far can his roar reach when you pilot your expert mech?"

"Not far enough." General Ark shook his head in disappointment. "I would like his empowered roar to encompass an entire battlefield in space if possible. My Travon Exine can only help so much no matter how much true resonance I exert. I suspect that if you design a new expert mech that is specifically designed to cooperate with Noah, my companion spirit can affect the hearts of hundreds of thousands of soldiers at once."

Ves studied Noah a bit. What Ark just mentioned didn't sound so outlandish considering the circumstances.

"Don't worry. You won't have to wait too long before I am ready to address your greatest need. I just need a bit of time to wrap up my current projects and handle a few different affairs that spring up after that. Once I am ready, I will deliver what you need within a year and most likely sooner. The only complication is that you'll need to come to the Torald Middle Zone in order to fetch your precious expert mech."

"Mhmm. That should not be a major issue as long as the war hasn't already started. Davute and Karlach are still ramping up at this stage."

Chapter 4934 Carmine

Marvaine's birthday party came and went without disrupting everyone's schedule too much.

Ves, Gloriana and a few other lucky mech designers quickly returned to examining the Superpublished design of the Dullahan Project from top to bottom.

Their frighteningly high intelligence and comprehension capabilities enabled them to quickly refamiliarize themselves with their work to a shallow degree.

The mech designers involved in the Dullahan Project were able to come up with superficial explanations for the vast majority of improvements and modifications.

This was far from fully understanding the design choices made by the System. That would probably take much longer, but Ves and the others could do that after they fabricated their first new expert mech.

The main priority at this time was to fulfill Venerable Jannzi's greatest wish and deliver a powerful new expert mech to her. She had been relegated to the sidelines long enough. It was time for her to

regain her ability to fight and resume her role of protecting her fellow Larkinsons to the best of her abilities!

Ves was eager to complete this fabrication run. He had spent enough time and effort on the Dullahan Project. He eagerly wanted to finish his current responsibility and embark on other new and exciting projects.

That did not mean that he had lost his appreciation of the Dullahan Project. Its improved design held a lot of promise. Ves particularly became enthralled by its optimized Empowered Blood Sharing System.

The Superpublish function not only corrected a lot of potentially dangerous flaws, but also increased its integration into the frame of the expert space knight in many subtle ways.

Though the Dullahan Project retained all of the traits of a classical mech, the introduction of blood circulation to its internal systems technically turned it into a cyborg mech.

Ves did not know to what extent the Dullahan Project would exhibit the properties of a cyborg mech. He already held an expectation that it would become more alive to a degree.

It might even be possible for the Dullahan Project to evolve its life state and evolve into the fourth order living mech that only existed in theory up to this point!

Ves shook his head. "I shouldn't get my hopes up. Fourth order living mechs are equivalent to ace pilots in terms of spirituality. The gap is too great."

Though Ves held high expectations towards the Superpublished Dullahan Project, the actual combat power of the defensive expert mech was not that mind blowing.

Sure, its defenses received an enormous upgrade, but it was still a melee expert mech that could only make its presence felt within a limited range.

Ves was fine with that. A defensive expert mech could still be a lifesaver in the situations that mattered.

Once Venerable Jannzi grew stronger, her ability to affect the battlefield would become even more exaggerated!

He would have to wait until she advanced to ace pilot before that happened, and that would take a while to say the least.

One of his most important concerns for the fabrication run was whether they could produce another masterwork mech.

Gloriana cared the most about this, but that did not mean that Ves was totally indifferent to the state of her expert mech.

The last major iteration of the Shield of Samar managed to become a masterwork. That provided Venerable Jannzi with a lot of benefits. Her resonance strength grew the fastest among her peers in the Larkinson Clan, with only Venerable Davia Stark rivaling her in growth speed.

Though the design of the Dullahan Project called for recycling much of the parts and materials that comprised the relatively intact head of the Shield of Samar, this was not an upgrade project in the strictest sense of the word.

Ves truly approached this expert mech design project as a spiritual successor more than anything else. The Dullahan Project did not start as a blank slate, but it did not inherit much of the properties of its predecessor either.

From the vast reduction of Unending alloy comprising its frame to the notable increase in mobility, the Dullahan Project performed like a substantially different expert mech in many of the ways that mattered.

"It's almost time."

He and his wife had set up everything a long time ago. The AP-VEX superfab had been fully recalibrated and all of the raw materials required to fabricate the mech were waiting to be used.

Different from the fabrication runs of the past, Ves had to make more extensive preparations than usual.

One of the more annoying aspects about biomechs was that it took a lot of time to grow their organic parts. This downside partially extended to cyborg mech as their organic parts could only be grown, not produced.

While it was possible for the most advanced and specialized materializers to essentially 'print' a complete organic mech from start to finish, this was far beyond the means of the Larkinson Clan.

The custom version of the Empowered Blood Sharing System that Ves had designed for the Dullahan Project stood out in various ways.

Compared to a more generic version of this cybernetic system, the organic tissue of the EBSS integrated in the Dullahan Project was based on Jannzi's DNA.

In other words, the Dullahan Project would essentially carry a part of Jannzi's cloned flesh!

While it sounded creepy, Ves knew that this would help a lot with making Jannzi meld with her new expert mech. The shared DNA and root would minimize the probability of triggering a biological or spiritual rejection response.

Of course, in order to grow enough organic tissue to form the EBSS during the fabrication, Ves had to start with cultivating the flesh and certain key organs a few months prior.

If he wanted to hurry up, he could instruct the Larkinson Biotech Institute to accelerate the growth process and have everything done in a couple of weeks, but that would severely affect the quality and longevity of the end product.

As Ves entered an underground laboratory in the company of Ranya Wodin-Larkinson, he paused and looked up at a large network of rosy red flesh.

"How... beautiful." He spoke.

The director of the Larkinson Biotech Institute did not share the opinion. She regarded the large web of flesh with considerable wariness.

"I cannot imagine how this mech-sized circulatory system is supposed to strengthen a mech." She honestly said. "I may not be as well-versed in engineering as you, but I am sure that running blood through a machine made out of metal doesn't magically make it better."

Ves smirked and chuckled. "Oh come now, Ranya. You have worked for me for a decade or so. You should know that my products are never as simple as they appear on the surface. This circulatory system is a herald of the future. Once I implant it into my upcoming expert mech, you and everyone else will get to learn that blood is the key that unlocks the gate to greater power."

"That 'gate' you are alluding to might lead you straight into hell. Are you sure you identified the right entrance?"

"I am sure." Ves declared with certainty. The Superpublish function didn't lie. "Anyway, how has this circulatory system fared as of late? Are there any anomalies or accidents that I should know about?"

"Nothing has changed since we transmitted our latest report, sir. The only abnormality is that the biotech researchers assigned to monitor its growth and condition have felt... ill at ease."

Ves turned to the woman. "This again? I already explained to you that it is a component of an upcoming living mech. It is natural for it to gain a rudimentary sense of life."

This was an important reason why Ves wanted to grow the circulatory system in advance. He did not just want it to become organically sound, but he also wanted to imbue it with greater spirituality.

It was just that its current transitory state produced a number of uncomfortable side effects. None of this should be a problem as long as Ves made use of it soon.

Once Ranya finished her update, Ves stepped forward and accessed the control panel. He began to change a few settings and activated a few tools.

It surprised Ranya a lot that a mech designer demonstrated a decent degree of familiarity with the biotechnological instruments of this laboratory.

Though Ves had already explained that he had begun to 'dabble' in biomech design, Ranya still couldn't understand how quickly he picked up an entirely new and comprehensive discipline!

Ves did not care about her doubts and skepticism. He skillfully manipulated the controls to alter and fine-tune the circulatory system in many different ways.

Some changes amounted to nothing but trimming a few excess bits of flesh.

Other changes were more drastic. For example, Ves formulated a special virus that soon spread throughout the entire nutrient solution tank.

The bioengineered virus soon infected all of the altered humanoid tissue and began to 'patch' the DNA to a newer version!

All of these changes were necessary in order to update the original version of the EBSS to the much safer Superpublished version of this same cybernetic system!

Ves stepped back in satisfaction once he completed his update. All he needed to do was give the circulatory system a bit of time to adjust to its new normal.

"Have you ever thought about renaming the Empowered Blood Sharing System to a more convenient and marketable alternative?" Ranya asked.

"In fact, I have been thinking about doing this as well." Ves replied as he called up the sensor graphs and monitored the current condition of the organic system. "I did not put much thought into naming it back then. If I want to popularize it among our clansmen and beyond, I should associate it with a catchier and more encouraging label. Do you have any suggestions?"

"I do have a handful of suggestions. What about Symbiont or Symbiont System? Your EBSS is clearly meant to establish a greater degree of symbiosis between the mech and mech pilot. It would be good if you can emphasize this relationship."

That was actually a good suggestion. Ves seriously considered the word Symbiont before he reluctantly shook his head.

"It's good, but it is also a bit generic. I am sure that some mech designer or developer already created a product with a similar name. If I am not careful enough, I will get sued due to infringing on another inventor's trademark."

Ranya shrugged. "That was my best suggestion. What about Carmine? It is a tasteful reference to the blood that your unusual system relies upon. If you are afraid of stepping on another company's trademark, you can always add an extra word. You can call it the Twin Carmine System for example."

Ves looked intrigued. He liked this suggestion a lot better than the last one, although he wasn't sure about adding the word 'twin' to the name.

"Twin does not really represent what I am trying to accomplish. I want to reduce the barriers between the mech and mech pilot as much as possible, but I don't want them to become too identical to each other. Their pairing is strong because they both possess their own strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of bringing them together is to produce a lot of power through synergy. The Blood Pact that they can form with each other is meant to elevate this synergistic relationship by making it permanent through the medium of blood."

"If that is the case, maybe you should call it the Permanent Carmine System."

"...That sounds worse." Ves grimaced. "Let's settle for calling it the Carmine System, then. It doesn't need any further descriptors or modifiers unless I am at serious risk of getting sued."

"I don't think you need to worry about that, sir. You're a Tier 6 galactic citizen. I think that will help you avoid a lot of trivial problems."

"I hope you are right, Ranya. By the way, how is your companion spirit seed doing?"

"I can feel it is still growing, sir."

"I see."

Chapter 4935 Starting At Level 0

Not everyone possessed spiritual potential.

The occurrence of spiritual activation in the vast majority of people was far too low.

Since companion spirits were born from the spiritualities of humans, their initial states were proportionate to the strength of their principals.

It went without saying that normal people had no possibility of gaining powerful spiritualities right away.

They were much weaker than his three children when they were still growing in their mother's wombs.

In order to give them the possibility of growing their own companion spirits, Ves had to turn himself into a spiritual surgeon again and perform a few exceedingly delicate operations.

He had always theorized that he could do this in the past, but he never had much confidence that he could pull it off without causing his patient's head to explode.

Much of that changed due to his fairly recent gains. His sublimation and his increased understanding of spiritual manipulation opened up many new possibilities that were previously unattainable.

Nowadays, as long as Blinky took his time and worked extremely carefully, he was able to implant a tiny companion spirit seed inside the miniscule spirits of ordinary individuals.

After Ves had finally gotten around to rewarding Melkor for his loyal service by turning him into his first subject, he succeeded in transforming his cousin's life, if only to a small extent!

Melkor's spiritual potential had never been developed in any meaningful way despite exposing himself to a lot of living mechs over the years.

This heavily limited the initial strength of the companion spirit that Ves could make for Melkor.

"It's like adding a plant to a garden." Ves explained to a nervous-looking Melkor as the legion commander lay on an operating table. "Many houses feature gardens of varying sizes. The back garden of my Royal Mansion can accommodate a large and towering tree without problem. A tiny room aboard a starship can only fit a single flower in a humble plant pot. Do you understand the difference?"

Melkor tentatively nodded. "I believe so. The expert pilots who have been showing off their powerful new companion spirits are all blessed with humongous gardens. Mine on the other hand is closer to a plant pot that you can place in the corner of a desk."

"Just so. The reason why I am explaining this to you is to stop you from holding any unrealistic expectations about receiving an immediate power-up. If this is a game, then a powerful expert pilot such as Uncle Ark is able to obtain a companion spirit that immediately starts out at level 70 or something. Your companion on the other hand has no choice but to begin at the lowest possible starting point at level 0."

Melkor made an ugly face. "Level 0? Why not level 1? You can at least put more effort into softening the blow, Ves."

The mech designer shrugged his shoulders. "I can't help it. The truth cannot be denied. You are so weak and pathetic that I can only start you off with the weakest boon."

Though this was the first time he performed this procedure on an individual this weak, Blinky skillfully completed the operation without any serious complications.

Melkor eventually managed to get away from it with an awful headache and the sensation that a seed had been planted in his head.

"Ugh..." The man pressed against his visor. "You weren't kidding about the pain, Ves. Is there any way I can relieve this with medicine?"

"I'm afraid not. Only sleep can help you escape the pain. Your spirit has undergone a huge change, which is why you feel as if the insides of your head are splitting apart. Only time can heal these wounds. I suggest you take it easy and delegate more tasks to your subordinates."

"So how long will it take for this 'seed' to bloom into a fancy companion spirit like your cat?"

Ves threw up his shoulders. "I really don't know. As I have said, this is the first time I did this to a weaker human like you. A level 0 companion spirit seed has to start from scratch and slowly grow as you go about your life. You can theoretically speed up its development by living a more active life and participating in battles. I estimate that it will take at least several years for your seed to metamorphose into a kitten or something."

"That hardly sounds impressive."

"Well, it's not as if your companion spirit can leap from level 0 to level 10 all of a sudden. At level 1, your companion spirit will become as strong as the ones my children had when they had just been born. You need to nurture your young spirit over many years. You can't really speed it up outside of unusual circumstances. Just think of it as raising an extra child."

"Will my companion spirit always remain behind the others?" The Avatar Commander asked.

"Nothing is absolute, Melkor. If you do anything amazing in the future, then I am sure your companion spirit will jump in strength. Undergoing apotheosis is a surefire way to power up your buddy. Levels do not denote your ceiling. Every companion spirit possesses limitless potential. Just because yours starts at level 0 doesn't mean that it always has to stay behind Noah all of the time. If Uncle Ark somehow stagnates in his career, you can exceed him as long as you are able to sustain your own growth."

"There is zero chance of that ever happening."

Ves chuckled. "Never say never. There is always a chance, though honestly speaking Ark is so much better than you in every way that he has to suffer a huge accident in order to give you a chance to overtake him. Outside of that, don't bother comparing yourself to him. You should grow at your own pace. Maybe it will take a century for your companion spirit to maybe grow as strong as Noah in his current state."

It was not pleasant to hear that Melkor would have to wait many years for his companion spirit to become strong enough to serve a meaningful purpose.

After all, Ves had Blinky while the Larkinson expert pilots received all kinds of powerful new companion spirits.

Their Uncle Ark obtained the most outrageous power boost of them all! His Noah could unleash a roar that was so powerful that it could boost the morale of his Warborn mech pilots while shaking the hearts of any enemies in his way!

Alas, Melkor could do nothing about this vast power gap. He spent enough time in the Larkinson Clan to know that there was a vast gulf in talent and endowments between himself and other people. He had long recognized his own mediocrity and did not really yearn to excel anymore. He only wished to stabilize his position and perform his existing duties in a competent manner.

The Larkinson Clan's recruiting standards had reached a ridiculously high standard these days. Any second-rater that entered the fold could think much faster and memorize a lot more knowledge than him. They were transhuman monsters in their own right and easily took over the positions held by many old-timers who were originally humble citizens of ordinary third-rate states.

To be honest, Melkor felt that his time might be up as well in the near future. Even if he was able to catch up by converting all of the Larkinson merits he earned over the years into more advanced augmentations, he was already old enough for his foundation to be set.

As Ves continued to instruct Melkor on what he needed to pay attention to now that he had become a companion spirit carrier, he emphasized how much of a privilege he received.

"Don't think that it is easy or common for me to provide this service to you." Ves told Melkor. "I am only granting a bunch of companion spirits at this time in order to reward all of the people who stuck with me in my time of need. After this, I don't intend to extend this service so casually anymore. Other clansmen will have to pay a large amount of Larkinson merits in order to convince me to take action in person. I am a busy mech designer, so I can't be bothered with doing this every day."

Melkor nodded in understanding. Ves was the patriarch and the head designer of the Larkinson Clan. It was beneath him to toil like this day in and day out. Designing newer and better mechs was much more important than bestowing ordinary clansmen a fancy new cat.

"Is there a way you can delegate or automate this process?"

"In fact, the T Institute has already made a few advancements in this area." Ves grinned. "I can't tell you when our mass production solution is done, but I will make sure all of our clansmen will enjoy the fruits of our labor first."

"I hope that day will come soon."

Once Ves succeeded in his initial attempt with Melkor, he planted a bunch of companion spirit seeds into the heads of other clansmen that lacked spiritual potential.

Even though Blinky quickly managed to accrue a lot of experience by performing the same operation on repeat, the process still remained finicky and dangerous.

Neither Ves nor Blinky could afford to get distracted, or else they might cause so much damage to a person's tiny spirit that it would become irreparably damaged!

Ves couldn't wait until the T Institute finally managed to cultivate viable companion spirit trees!

By that time, Ves could skip the cumbersome operation and simply give a person a special fruit.

The Larkinson Clan did not change in any noticeable way after leaders such as Minister Shederin Purnesse and loyal subordinates such as Gavin Neumann received their own companion spirit seeds.

Their new gifts were completely dormant and inert as they had yet to take on an active and animated form.

As such, once the recipients got over their awful headaches, they soon went back to work and performed their duties as normal.

If there was any difference, then their opinion and gratitude towards Ves had grown a bit stronger.

In any case, Ves had long thrown off these concerns as he busied himself with his mech designs.

After spending almost a week on refamiliarizing themselves with the Superpublished design of the Dullahan Project, the time had finally come to begin the much-anticipated fabrication run.

Every mech designer involved in the project gathered in the most important workshop of the Genesis Lab.

Not only that, Venerable Jannzi Larkinson and her immediate family had come as well.

Her boring-looking husband Adenau Purnesse-Larkinson along with her boisterous son Mercer Larkinson briefly accompanied her to wish her luck.

Once Jannzi settled her husband and son, she turned around and approached Ves.

"I hope you can deliver on your promises and give me an expert mech that bears a strong relation to my old Sammie." She told the mech designer. "I won't be able to accept any other expert mech no matter how much elaborate tech you put into it. To me, the identity and the personality of my partner machine is much more important than its specs. I would rather go back to piloting a standard third-class mech if that is the only way I can reconnect with my lost friend."

Ves smiled at his current client. "I think you will be pleasantly surprised by the time we are done. We have all worked so hard on the Dullahan Project. There is no way we will allow ourselves to screw up when we are close to the finish line."

He did not mind her tone nor her doubts. The more Jannzi acted this way, the more Ves became optimistic about his recently renamed Carmine System.

The Blood Pact that he envisioned in his imagination was not a static concept. It was a malleable relationship that could grow incredibly strong so long as the conditions were right.

Ves could think of no other mech pilot that was more suitable to inaugurate the Carmine System than Jannzi!

Chapter 4936 Double Superfabs

The importance of this fabrication run was too great.

As a quasi-first-class expert space knight, the Dullahan Project held great meaning to the mech designers who worked on it. It also had an outsized impact on the Larkinson Clan as a whole.

Ves, Gloriana and everyone else derived great benefits from gaining access to the Superpublished version of the already sophisticated mech design.

Although each of them possessed enough smarts to quickly refamiliarize themselves with the upgraded mech design, they were far from mastering all of the changes.

By moving away from pure theory, they could hasten their comprehension of all of the nuances of the new mech design by working with their hands.

They could learn all kinds of details that were difficult to parse if they continued to look at the design schematics all of the time!

As such, fabricating the Dullahan Project not only represented an opportunity to add a powerful machine to the Larkinson Army's mech roster, but also served as a unique and valuable learning opportunity to the relevant mech designers!

Once they completed this fabrication run, they would gain a lot more insights and comprehension at once. This would subsequently help them master and internalize all of the improvements to their own design solutions!

This was why every mech designer entered the workshop with much greater enthusiasm than before!

Ves swept his gaze across the workshop. While Gloriana, Ketis and Sara conducting their own pre-work rituals, Master Benedict Cortez carefully inspected a huge machine that was just as big as the AP-VEX Superfab.

In order to save time and increase the efficiency of this fabrication run, the former Skull Architect agreed to transfer over his own superfab!

It went without saying that Master Benedict procured a high-quality first-class superfab through his own efforts.

The amount of MTA merits that the Cross Clan had at its disposal was not small, and it was practically mandatory for a Master Mech Designer of his status to own a complete design lab and workshop of this caliber.

Ves did not possess a great familiarity of the specific model procured by Master Benedict, but it didn't matter as the older mech designer would be the only one to manipulate it in the following days.

"Are you ready to get started?" Ves asked.

Master Benedict nodded. "I am. It shall be interesting to say the least. Out of all of the collaborative projects that I have taken part of, the ones involving you and your fellow Larkinsons are by far the most interesting. The design networks that you and your wife are able to establish are game changers, do you know that?"

"Hmm? Are you interested in gaining this ability for yourself?"

"Can you?"

Ves shook his head. "No. I will be honest to you. I need special raw materials in order to derive powerful effects. Ones that can produce design networks don't come by often to say the least. I only ever obtained a single sample, and it is all used up. Besides, even if I have a spare sample available, I won't be able to bestow it to you. The most I can do is to imbue it into a companion spirit of one of your students or subordinates."

Ever since Ves decided to hand out companion spirits and companion spirit seeds to a wider group of people, he primarily rewarded the Larkinsons and the Glory Seekers.

He did not yet develop enough friendship and affection to offer this invaluable service to the latest two partners of the Golden Skull Alliance.

As for the Crossers, Patriarch Reginald Cross' defection to the 77th Warborn Mech Division caused Ves to become a lot less generous towards them. They needed to earn back his trust or trade a lot of concessions before he was willing to give them a boon.

The only member of the Cross Clan that he was willing to give a companion spirit for free was Master Benedict Cortez. The older mech designer had helped Ves a lot, and years of cooperation and collaborations had caused them to treat each other as genuine friends.

They both came from the Komodo Star Sector and possessed a lot of shared history. They had both been tempered by adversity and managed to rise from it. Their design philosophies complimented each other well and their exchanges often enabled them to gain a new and interesting perspective on familiar subjects.

The gap between age, experience, generation and so on no longer mattered as much to them. Master Benedict was not stingy about admitting that Ves and his fellow Larkinsons had done much to enable his critical breakthrough.

It also helped that they firmly recognized that they were more alike than most people realized. This allowed them to understand each other's desires and ambitions on a deeper level. They trusted each other with certain secrets that they would never share with other friends and colleagues.

After years of getting along like this, it should not be a great surprise for Ves to offer his unique service to Master Benedict.

It was a pity that his attempt of giving his friend a great gift failed!

No matter how hard Blinky tried to 'operate' on Master Benedict's blazingly strong spirituality, the poor companion spirit failed to create any openings with his bites!

Any attempt to follow the steps needed to make a companion spirit failed due to the enormous power difference between Ves and Master Benedict!

After numerous failed attempts, Ves and Benedict explored what happened and eventually came to a depressing conclusion.

"You're too weak, Ves."

It was a dream for a Journeyman, even one as strong as him, to rearrange the spiritualities of Master Mech Designers and other transcendence at this level!

There was a huge difference between Masters and anyone below this rank. Any mech designer who did the impossible and realized their designed philosophies were among the most brilliant and successful individuals of human society!

Their mental strength was already strong and tenacious because of that alone, but after undergoing a profound transformation that completely evolved their spiritualities to the point where they acquired god-like traits, they became strong enough to change an entire galaxy if not more!

"I think it is even more impossible for you to perform the same operation on an ace pilot." Master Benedict Cortez theorized. "The good news is that Saints are already strong enough that they do not

require companion spirits to exert their power in various ways. Reginald is already a beast on the battlefield regardless of whether he can summon an additional part of himself."

"I'm not too sure about that." Ves said, though he declined to elaborate.

He couldn't very well say that one of the reasons why the Destroyer of Worlds had gradually grown to become the most destructive god pilot of humanity was because Emma had kept up with her growth and become formidable in her own right!

Fortunately for Ves, this was just a temporary limitation.

"I should be able to succeed once Blinky and I become a lot stronger."

That would take a long time, though. Ves would probably have to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer himself before he could reduce the power gap to the extent where he could make a move.

Until then, Master Benedict would have to make do without this particular benefit.

It was good that the older mech designer himself did not really mind it if he missed out on the party. He had experienced a lot of ups and downs throughout his career and managed to realize his design philosophy in the end. What more could he ask for? He certainly hadn't degenerated to the point where he had to beg for another handout from a Journeyman in order to remain productive!

"So how is your superfab?" Ves asked as he wanted to make sure that there were no problems on Benedict's end.

"All of its parameters are within acceptable levels." The Master Mech Designer responded. "No issues have occurred during the transportation and installation processes of my superfab. So long as you can ensure that your complex can supply enough energy to this hungry machine, it won't let us down."

"You don't have to worry about that. The Cat Nest has enough reactors on hand, and we can always divert additional power from other activities if necessary."

Once Ves confirmed that nothing was wrong on this end, he waited for a few more minutes before calling over the people who mattered.

The mech designers along with Venerable Jannzi all gathered in front of the Larkinson Patriarch.

Ves had already conjured up a timetable.

"Alright. I am sure you have already memorized your own schedules, so I won't need to go into further detail. The Dullahan Project is a fairly large and massive expert mech. It may not be as heavy as the old Shield of Samar anymore, but the fact that its material composition is primarily made up of transphasic and non-transphasic first-class materials makes it a lot harder to fabricate its parts, especially if we want to attain a high standard of quality."

This expert mech design project was a watershed for the Larkinson Clan and its mech designers.

The Dullahan Project was the first of many quasi-first-class mechs that had been systematically designed!

The Larkinson Clan would soon adopt such mechs on a much wider scale, but the first step was the most important one. The Dullahan Project set the pattern of a new wave and generation of Larkinson mechs.

Much could go wrong in the following days. Ves and the others might have spent a bit of time on practicing with first-class materials in various side projects and smaller rehearsal sessions, they never worked with such a great quantity of high-end materials at once!

The amount of variables that the mech designers had to take into account while processing these materials was great. If they overlooked a single crucial detail, they might botch their current task and waste a decent quantity of expensive materials!

Ves made sure to order enough spare materials to account for this eventuality.

Even if he went overboard and ordered enough raw materials to fabricate the Dullahan Project twice, it was fine. Whatever was left wouldn't go to waste. The Larkinson Clan could simply put them back into storage and use them up in the future whenever the expert mech needed to be repaired.

Once Ves made sure that everyone agreed with the division of work assignments, he clapped one last time.

"If everything goes right, we should be able to complete the Dullahan Project in a week. The Dullahan Project has more in common with the original version of the Mars than any of our previous Larkinson expert mechs, so I don't think we can complete it any sooner despite the fact that we have two impressive superfabs at our disposal. Anyway, just like before, Blinky and Alexandria will rotate their duties during the entire production process."

There were four mech designers with companion spirits among the ones gathered in this workshop. Only two of them were able to form the crucial design networks.

Sharpie helped a lot in combat and in a limited variety of design processes, but she could not help that much outside of helping Ketis forge a more remarkable mech sword for the Dullahan Project.

Sara Voiken recently obtained her own companion spirit, but the new addition wouldn't be able to help that much either.

This caused Ves to frown for a moment. Design networks were far too useful to mech designers. It became a bit cumbersome to rely on Blinky and Alexandria all of the time.

He needed to find a way to reverse engineer design networks and come up with a method to reproduce them on a systematic basis without relying on special ingredients!

After all, it was not as if he could hunt down Master Toqueman Huron's apprentices for the sole purpose of harvesting their design seeds. He had already gone far enough by killing Lady Aisling Curver!

"Any further questions? No? Then let us begin!"

The all-important fabrication run had finally begun!

Chapter 4937 Bolton Armor

The tacit cooperation between all of the mech designers had reached a high degree.

Ves and Gloriana had reached the highest degree of cooperation. No matter how many disagreements they might have over the course of their daily lives, they were still a married couple. They genuinely loved each other.

The two also happened to be more familiar with each other's work and theories than others. They may be completely different mech designers, but regular collaborations had caused them to effectively minor in their spouse's respective specializations.

Ketis was a long-time Larkinson mech designer and also cooperated well with the married couple. Her design philosophy along with the addition of Sharpie's extraordinary willpower allowed her to forge much better swords than anyone else in the Larkinson Clan and arguably beyond!

The only downside was that her narrow specialization did not make her good at other kinds of work. Once she finished her only major assignment, it was better if she took a step back and handled all of the miscellaneous duties.

Sara Voiken had joined the Larkinson Clan fairly late, but managed to convince everyone with her competence. She was a clever mech designer in her own right and had largely been responsible for designing the critical transphasic armor system of the Dullahan Project.

Although Ves played a defining role in setting the extraordinary characteristics of the Dullahan Project, Sara definitely designed the bulk of the mech frame!

The Dullahan Project was a space knight first and foremost, so its foundation was heavily tied to its defensive systems. Sara contributed much more to its design than any other mech designer. There was no way to do a good job of fabricating this expert mech without her personal intervention!

As for Master Benedict Cortez, he was the only non-Larkinson to take part in the process. Though he was likely able to do a better job in many areas than a bunch of Journeymen, he did not insist on depriving them of the crucial experience they needed to fuel their growth.

His responsibilities during the fabrication run were much more restrained and low-key than normal.

Normally, the opposite was the norm!

Just as during the time where he fabricated the original version of the Mars, Benedict firmly took the lead and assigned less important responsibilities to the Journeymen of the Larkinson Clan.

It was quite rare for a Master to acquiesce to a more assisting role during a design project, but this was the norm in the eccentric and abnormal Larkinson Clan where a Journeyman was in charge.

Everyone involved understood their respective responsibilities for the following week. No problems occurred at the start as they split up and handled their initial work assignments.

Even Venerable Jannzi knew her own place during this important period of time.

Different from the other Larkinson expert pilots, she had already participated in a similar process before.

She obediently sat down and relaxed as Alexandria appeared above everyone's heads and tied everyone together in a cohesive design network.

The exchange of thoughts, emotions and ideas started right away. The design network immediately became active as a bunch of excited mech designers as well as a highly impatient expert pilot leveraged the new possibilities in an efficient and familiar manner!

They needed all of the help they could get as they quickly got bogged down by the difficulty of realizing the Dullahan Project into a physical form.

Everything had become more advanced and high-end compared to just a few years ago. From using stronger and more exceptional raw materials to handling much more advanced production machines, none of the Larkinson Journeymen would have been able to complete their work assignments proficiently if they did not work hard to improve themselves in the past few years.

"Amazing." Venerable Jannzi uttered as she began to explore all of the complicated numbers and theories flowing across the design network.

She was a pure soldier and never dabbled in science and engineering. That did not stop her from appreciating how much Ves and the others excelled in their respective jobs.

The emotions and passion that the mech designers freely passed on to each other helped a laywoman like Jannzi follow what everyone else was doing to an extent.

For example, Sara Voiken took her time to ramp up by producing the easier mech components first. She wanted to do her best to warm up so that she could fabricate the large quantity of transphasic armor plating and other parts on the best possible footing!

Sara had worked hard to build up a decent understanding of phasewater theory and transphasic armor plating. Although she had managed to get started in these new and exciting fields, she was still too far away from calling herself a master in them. She simply didn't have enough time to complete the studies she deemed necessary to work on a transphasic armor system this good!

Sara did not refuse this challenge because she made special preparations to succeed during this fabrication run.

For one, Sara played a minor role in the development of the customized Bolton Armor.

Out of all of the high-tech developers that the Larkinson Clan turned to, Ves and Sara chose to get in bed with Melmen Advanced Systems once again.

The Larkinsons already cooperated successfully with Melmen numerous times in the past. The ExTrans Armor System of the Riot and the Godkiller Rifle of the Nullifier couldn't have been made without the cooperation of Professor Neihy Almar and her R&D teams!

While the Colonial Federation of Davute's deliberate attempts to court the Larkinson Clan gave its mech designers greater access to more exclusive development companies, Ves still preferred to work with the people and organizations he trusted so long as they were competent enough.

In fact, one of the deciding factors why Ves entrusted Melmen Advanced Systems with developing the Bolton Armor for the Dullahan Project was because his clan owned 7.75 percent of its stock!

The Black Cats never informed Ves that any confidential information about the ExTrans Armor System and the Godkiller Rifle had been leaked over the past few years. Melmen hadn't let the Larkinson Clan down so far in this regard.

In any case, working closely with Melmen Advanced System to develop the Bolton Armor provided a lot of benefits to Sara Voiken.

Not only was she able to put a lot of new and complicated theories to use under the guidance of a much older and more knowledgeable phasewater pioneer, she also learned many subtle nuances that were specific to the Bolton Armor.

Perhaps Sara's ability to fabricate other transphasic armor systems was seriously deficient, but she should barely gain the qualifications to produce a satisfactory version of the Bolton Armor during the current run!

This was especially the case when she received the help of Professor Almar when mapping out her work assignments for this fabrication run.

Since the Larkinson Clan partially owned Melmen Advanced Systems, it was only natural for the latter to provide a lot more customer service and support than usual!

Of course, the rich amount of phasewater awarded to Melmen for its services also motivated Professor Almar into doing her best.

The Bolton Armor integrated 8.6 kilograms of phasewater!

It could have accommodated an even higher concentration of phasewater, but that would leave no room left for the internals and other crucial components.

A proper defensive mech needed more than a tough outer shell. If its other parts and systems did not receive a similar amount of strengthening, then its defensive layout would resemble that of an egg.

A space knight whose internals were far too soft and fragile to withstand much damage had no business participating in any serious battles!

That said, Sara did not have to concern herself about fabricating all of those other transphasic parts during this fabrication run. She only had to do the best possible job of producing the Bolton Armor.

It was all well-and-good to make a lot of preparations in advance, but once she started to use the advanced AP-VEX Superfab to use up precious phasewater, she started to grow nervous.

Ves noticed Sara's lack of confidence. If this went on for much longer, then who knew how this would affect the outcome of the run.

Fortunately, Ves had enough foresight to prepare for this possible scenario in advance. He could help her out in two different ways.

While Ves might not know as much about armor systems as Sara Voiken, his affinity and understanding of phasewater and its applications vastly exceeded that of the defensive specialist!

It was normally impossible for him to teach her and guide her during a fabrication run, but the design network removed enough barriers to make the transfer of information a lot more seamless.

What was impressive was that Ves could provide extensive guidance to Sara through the design network while still maintaining enough focus to handle his own work assignments!

Similar to Sara, Ves had taken up the duty of fabricating other difficult transphasic mech parts. His understanding of phasewater theory exceeded that of his wife, so it made sense for him to take over this burden.

Besides, his craftsmanship and appreciation for quality had improved so much that his wife reluctantly trusted him to do an acceptable job!

As time went by, Ves showed no signs of flagging. His mental capacity clearly exceeded that of almost everyone else in the design network, and the disparity was quite substantial!

The only mech designer who could outperform Ves in this regard was Master Benedict Cortez.

If he wanted to, the Master Mech Designer could largely take over the design network and completely flood it with a myriad of extremely profound theories.

The older and more powerful mech designer had to put a lot of effort into holding himself back. It would not do the Larkinson mech designers any good by exposing them to his much deeper and more developed design philosophy.

Gloriana became a little dissatisfied as several hours went by without any major changes.

Although she was pleased that no major accidents or mistakes had occurred, she hoped that she or the others would enter into an inspired state.

After all, they were not working to realize a normal design, but a Superpublished one! There was so much novelty in the improved design that she had many reasons to feel passionate about her current work!

In practice, she and everyone else became hindered by the vastly greater difficulties of their work. They had to invest so much time and energy into overcoming a lot of new and unfamiliar practical challenges that they had little spare capacity left to enter into an inspired state.

Gloriana briefly paused in her work and exchanged glances with her husband.

This prompted Ves to quickly complete his current production task before he moved over to Sara.

He held out a familiar-looking glowing hammer.

Since they all swapped their opinions through the design network, Ves needed no further delay to perform the solemn act.

Bonk.

Sara's eyes lit up as she spontaneously connected many different theories together and inadvertently solved a lot of different problems that plagued her in the past!

Her accumulation was so substantial that the false inspired state bestowed by the Hammer of Brilliance had an outsized impact on her mentality!

Her passion began to overflow the design network as she started to fabricate the next batch of transphasic mech parts with much more vigor than before!

Although the quality of her output did not improve by a substantial margin, it became a lot more stable and consistent!

"Now we're talking!"

Her current state would only last a few hours, so Sara and everyone else tried their best to take advantage of this temporary boost to fabricate the trickiest and most technically challenging mech components!

The mech designers worked at a faster pace. It seemed as if nothing would stop them from fabricating the expert mech that they had visualized for many months!

Chapter 4938 Gravity Sword

Unlike a number of fabrication runs that took place in the past, Gloriana had no need to take any extensive breaks.

She was not pregnant at this time, and her children no longer required constant attention from their parents.

Though Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine visited the workshop inside the Genesis Lab at least once every day, they conscientiously maintained their distance.

They all understood how important it was for their father and mother to devote their full concentration on their work.

"They're so cool." Little Marvaine said as his eyes turned into stars. "I want to make a mech alongside papa and mama too one day."

Andraste started to yawn. "It's so boring now that Ketis isn't available to tutor me in person."

"Aunt Jannzi will finally be happy again once she gains her new expert mech." Aurelia said as she paid close attention to the enraptured expert pilot. "It has been too long since our clan last had a strong defense mech at its disposal."

The three young children continued to talk and remain on their best behavior as they watched their parents do all sorts of complicated work.

Once they started to get bored or tired, their nanny soon ushered them away.

"Let's get you back to the Royal Mansion. Your meals are already being prepared. You will enjoy what the chefs have prepared for you tonight." Shannon Maris said as she gently pulled Marvaine from the observation window.

Ves could vaguely sense the presence of his children in the distance each time they entered the Genesis Lab, but he did not pay a visit to the adorable munchkins.

His work was much more important at the moment!

There was only one good chance to fabricate a good expert mech for Venerable Jannzi. Even his wife understood the importance of working as continuously as possible so they could build up a lot of momentum.

In the past few days, Sara Voiken helped propel everyone's moods.

Ever since Ves whacked her head with a special hammer, Sara not only managed to solve a lot of confusion that had been bothering her in the past, but also made notable advances in her understanding of phasewater theory.

On top of that, she also managed to master the improvements to the Superpublished design to a greater degree!

Though she still experienced her fair share of difficulties as she tackled her work assignments, she clearly demonstrated greater fluency in her actions than before!

It was a pity that neither Sara nor the other people she infected with her passion managed to reach a high enough threshold to catch enough fire.

The false inspired state might have provided Sara with an invaluable moment where she became more productive than ever before, but it soon faded after it had run its course.

They all returned to a more sedate mood after that. No one gained any remarkable inspiration that was significant enough to have a major positive influence on the work in progress.

Gloriana felt a little upset about that. She had high hopes for the Dullahan Project and strongly believed that it would lead her to obtain another masterwork certificate.

However, if the current pattern persisted, then the chances of producing a high quality mech was not that great.

The Dullahan Project was ultimately too ambitious for mech designers at their level.

The quasi-first-class expert mech design not only integrated phasewater in as many of its parts as possible, but also incorporated high technologies that were more commonly seen in first-class multipurpose mechs.

No matter how much Ves was confident about his ability to catch up to first-class mech designers, he was still far from reaching their standards.

Fortunately, Master Benedict possessed a much greater proficiency in this area and undertook the responsibility of fabricating the most high-tech parts whenever necessary.

This relieved Ves and the others of the burden of tackling work that they were not exactly qualified to handle.

After five nearly continuous days of working, the mech designers finally fulfilled their fabrication responsibilities.

Ketis completed her work the fastest. Her contribution to the Dullahan Project was by far the least consequential. The Dullahan Project was primarily a defensive mech after all. The only reason she had been brought along was because Ves wanted the expert space knight to become a more competent duelist.

As such, it had become especially important to arm the Dullahan Project with a transphasic sword that could do more than parry melee attacks. Jannzi's primary means of attack needed to be sharp and strong enough to pose a real threat to opposing expert mechs!

Ketis wanted to design a more distinctive sword this time. She not only wanted it to fit Venerable Jannzi's personal fighting style, but also match the characteristics of the Dullahan Project.

Just like the old Shield of Samar, the successor mech made extensive use of GT-535 to bestow the expert space knight with gravity manipulation powers.

By working together with Master Benedict, Ketis was able to design a sword with a modest amount of this artificial resonating alloy in its core.

This should be enough to allow Jannzi to increase the mass of her expert mech's weapon and deliver considerably stronger strikes when needed!

Once Jannzi became more proficient in manipulating the Gravity Sword, she could come up with more advanced tricks that could give her an additional edge against her opponents.

Due to all of these demands, Ketis chose to deviate from her usual style and design the Gravity sword as a single-edged sword.

Ketis was normally a great fan of double-edged swords, particularly larger ones, but it made more sense to take a different route for this design project.

The sharp edge of the Gravity Sword naturally excelled at piercing through armor. It could also cut through certain energy barriers as long as the difference in power was great enough.

This was not possible under normal circumstances. In case the Dullahan Project entered into a confrontation against an opponent protected by a resonance shield or a transphasic energy shield, it was not necessarily a good idea to wear either of them down with a sharp edge.

This was why the Gravity Sword featured a notably wide and heavy blunt edge. It made the cross-section of the sword take on a triangular shape.

The additional mass and thickness added much-needed reinforcement to the sword when used as a bashing implement. It might not be as good at its job as a solid hammer, but it saved the Dullahan Project from carrying a spare weapon.

Perhaps in the future the Design Department might design additional weapons for the Dullahan Project that possessed different characteristics, but the Gravity Sword should be sufficient for the time being.

In any case, Ketis managed to successfully create the Gravity Sword. This was not easy. Not only did she have to work with phasewater, she also had to pay extra attention to properly handling the precise quantity of GT-535 needed to turn the weapon into a powerful resonating tool.

She had already moved on to performing numerous assisting jobs after that. This allowed everyone to move on to the assembly phase of the fabrication run with considerably less delay than normal.

Ves smiled as he looked back on all of the parts that he and his collaborators had made. They had managed to overcome the most difficult hurdles of the fabrication runs. The assembly phase was much less prone to failure as long as everyone worked carefully enough.

"Let's see if I can successfully complete my first cyborg mech." He muttered.

Although he did not consider the Dullahan Project to be a true cyborg mech, it was undeniable that a part of the design called for the integration of biomechanical components!

The addition of the recently renamed Carmine System added a lot of extra complications to the assembly process.

None of his other collaborators possessed any understanding of biotechnology and biomech design, so they understandably exhibited a lot of disgust and skepticism towards the giant web of bloody red flesh.

Just the thought of merging it to what should otherwise become a clean and fully metallic mech offended their sensibilities!

Ves did not care about their reactions. His passion and enthusiasm surged as soon as the assembly phase went underway.

While the other mech designers were concerned with putting together the normal parts, Ves bided his time while he assembled the Rainbow Shield.

Compared to the original design, the Superpublished version of this defensive tool was noticeably more robust and less prone to malfunction. The design of the Unending alloy 'medallions' that made up its spiritual batteries had become a lot more capable of enduring violent kinetic impacts.

Ves already believed that Jannzi would be able to produce a lot of miracles by leveraging the expanded prime resonance possibilities of this tailor-made defensive equipment.

Despite its impressive potential, the Rainbow Shield was not that sophisticated from a technical perspective. Ves was able to assemble it with ease. It did not take much time before he ended up with a relatively large tower shield that featured a highly chromatic and reflective surface.

"That's done."

By this time, Gloriana and Master Benedict had made good progress in assembling the inner frame of the machine.

This was a suitable time to start with integrating the Dullahan Project's organic components.

Ves had never done this before in reality, but when he started to extract the large fleshy parts from their nutrient tanks and placed them into the incomplete frame of the expert mech, he did not show any sign of uncertainty or unfamiliarity.

Combined with the flood of biotechnological knowledge that was spilling over the active design network, Gloriana and the others quickly learned that Ves had not lied when he claimed he had gotten started in biomech design!

They all felt his passion, his understanding and above all else his strong belief in the power of blood!

Previously, none of the other mech designers could bring themselves to agree that adding blood to a mechanical mech increased its performance.

Now, they weren't so sure anymore. Ves appeared so certain about the validity of his weird and creepy theoretical framework that it seemed as if he might be able to cultivate a vampire from scratch!

Ves spent most of his time on making sure that the Carmine System was properly applied to the Dullahan Project as it became more and more complete. No matter how confident he was, this was no time for him to be careless.

One of the more troublesome aspects about cyborg mech was that it was easy to botch the interface between organic and metallic parts. Ves had to be exceedingly careful and precise to form all of the connections correctly from the start.

The Dullahan Project could handle it if those contact points incurred damage later on, but it was of great importance for it to be as whole as possible from the beginning. This would turn into its default state and make it a little easier for maintenance crews to perform repairs in the future.

Piece by piece, the Dullahan Project became more complete.

As it did, it became more alive, but not in a traditional sense.

While the influence of Qilanxo over the expert mech became more and more obvious, neither Jannzi nor anyone else felt as if the living mech possessed a mind of its own!

In this regard, the Dullahan Project actually resembled the second skin template of Gloriana a lot more!

Everyone knew why the Dullahan Project started off as a hollow machine in this regard.

As Sara Voiken and the others carefully assembled the final pieces of heavy armor plating into place, the assembly process finally neared completion!

The mech designers only needed to make one major step.

"The Dullahan shall bear its curse no more." Ves declared. "The knight shall become whole once more as long as it regains its head."

Clamped above the headless frame of the Dullahan Project was the refurbished and modernized head of the old Shield of Samar!

Though its interior and exterior had undergone huge transformations that completely brought it up to standard, it still looked like the head of the original living expert mech that existed once before!

Ves had worked hard to preserve the look and overall impression of the original expert mech. Now, he was ready to use this echo of the past to initiate a long-awaited rebirth process!

He glanced towards Venerable Jannzi, whose expression turned mixed as she beheld the special mech head.

"Do it." She uttered.

With her permission, Ves activated the command that slowly lowered head into the empty neck socket.

Fate seemed to converge inside the workshop as the successor to a once-great living mech was about to reach completion!

Chapter 4939 Head Insertion

Everyone aware of the Dullahan Project's significance had long waited for this moment.

This was the time where the successor of the Shield of Samar would finally take shape!

After so many months of research, development and design work, the Design Department finally completed the first expert mech of a higher standard than the Larkinson Clan had ever handled before.

For the mech designers who worked for almost an entire week with uninterrupted rest, this fabrication run had put each of them to the test.

The work had been rough for Gloriana and Sara. The women had to rely on an expensive cocktail of stimulants and nutrient solutions to stave off sleep and maintain a high degree of concentration throughout the entire process.

The two women were physically able to bear with the increasingly greater strain on their physiologies. Both Gloriana and Sara were originally designer babies whose bodies could temporarily relieve the need for sleep to an extent.

That said, their performance dropped to a noticeable extent at the end of the run. If not for the fact that the assembly stage did not require them to work as intensely as before, the others would have forced them to take a break.

They understood their limitations quite well. The work schedule already accounted for their growing exhaustion. They had gradually moved on to performing lighter and less demanding duties at the end.

Compared to the two former designer babies whose augmentations primarily focused on enhancing their intellect and cognitive functions, Ves and Ketis fared much better throughout the fabrication run.

As a woman augmented for combat rather than more intellectual pursuits, Ketis managed to maintain her peak condition for an extended period of time. Sharpie helped as well as the reality-distorting effects of extraordinary willpower had subtly removed her mortal limitations and enhanced every part of her body in numerous different ways.

Compared to the three women, the two best performers at the end were Ves and Master Benedict Cortez.

There was no need to say too much about the Master Mech Designer. A man of this stature could easily gain access to a higher tier of augmentations.

Even without any artificial enhancements, Master Mech Designers transcended so much that they had reached the later stages in their transformation into energy-based lifeforms!

That meant that their bodies no longer held the same meaning to them as ordinary people.

What few people realized was that Ves had more in common with such mech designers than expected. Though his body received numerous dramatic upgrades before undergoing a profound sublimation, his mind and Spirituality evolved even more!

Ves and his companion spirit had both grown to an impressive height compared to their relative youth. Compared to all of the pressure that Ves endured over the course of his travels, maintaining his full focus while slowly fabricating the most difficult high-ranking mech after the Mars was a breeze.

Their current appearances reflected their endurance.

Sara and Gloriana were struggling to keep their backs straight while standing.

Ketis held her sheathed Bloodsinger in order to draw from its support.

Ves and Master Benedict both remained energetic enough to look excited!

After announcing the formal completion of the Dullahan Project, Ves watched with increasing anticipation as the solid clamps of the workshop's assembly system carefully aligned the mech head and slowly brought it down to the empty neck socket of the rest of the mech frame.

The head slotted into place without any issue. Ves and the others had worked carefully to make sure that the fit should be well within acceptable tolerances.

It would have been an affront to their skills and reputation for them to botch this crucial step!

As the giant head of the expert space knight settled into place, a lot of different automated procedures took place both inside and outside of the mechanical frame.

Bolts screwed into their places. Power lines and data cables connected to each other. Software started to integrate together.

It took a few more minutes before the head truly integrated with the torso and the rest of the machine.

The physical frame of the Dullahan Project finally attained its full physical form. Its current appearance matched precisely with the Superpublished mech design.

The mech designers along with Venerable Jannzi all experienced different emotions after seeing the mech that they had worked on for so many months take shape in reality for the first time.

Everyone fell silent for a minute.

Then another minute passed.

It wasn't until the third minute that an exhausted-looking Gloriana finally broke the silence.

"...That's it? Is this the result that we have attained after investing so much time and effort?"

Ves briefly interrupted his examination of the Dullahan Project to turn to his wife.

"What's wrong, Gloriana?"

"Everything is wrong!" The woman screeched as her anger and frustration momentarily overwhelmed her exhaustion! "You insisted that the Dullahan Project would be special and that we should put as much effort into completing it as possible, but what did we get from all of this? This expert mech has failed to reach its potential! It's not a masterwork mech at all! It isn't even close enough to make up for the difference!"

Ves let out a sigh. "What did you expect, then? This is a quasi-first-class expert mech. It is filled with enough tech and rare components to challenge our mech design skills. Aside from Benedict, none of us are qualified to work on mechs of this caliber under normal circumstances. It is already a good result if the mech can move and fight according to our expectations."

This was not enough for Gloriana! She hoped that they would be able to attain more due to all of the resources invested in this massive project!

"It's all your fault, Ves! If you didn't insist on adding that stupid Empowered Blood Sharing System to the mech design, we would have been able to work on more familiar ground, thereby attaining a more stable result!"

As Gloriana kept nagging, Ves rolled his eyes and tuned out her words. He didn't take her complaints seriously.

After being married to her for roughly a decade, he already figured out that it was in his wife's nature to find a scapegoat to bear all of the blame regardless of whether her suspicions were justified or not. Ves just happened to be her most convenient punching bag.

Instead of wasting his time on validating her bad faith arguments, Ves turned to the person who truly mattered at this junction.

"Jannzi." He called out. "What do you think about your new expert mech? Does it match your expectations?"

The expert pilot who had dreamt of this moment for many months did not look pleased.

Instead, she looked disappointed. As impressive as the Dullahan Project may be on a technical front, to Jannzi it lacked the most crucial essence that she demanded from the Larkinson mech designers!

"It's not Sammie or anything like her." She succinctly voiced the reason for her dissatisfaction. "You promised me that you would find a way to realize a reborn Shield of Samar. Now that you have completed your work, I don't see a trace of her at all. This shiny golden transphasic expert mech might look impressive on the surface, but I don't feel it has any life to speak of. It is an empty shell."

Her words were not inaccurate. The Dullahan Project that stood before them did not possess the liveliness of a living mech. It resembled the Mars a lot more when it was dormant.

While that did not necessarily mean that the Dullahan Project was weak or inferior to true living mechs, it was definitely not what the customer had ordered!

Seeing Jannzi grow upset caused the other mech designers to feel inadequate. Had they made too many mistakes? Should they have waited and studied the Superpublished design a bit more in order to fully understand all of the improvements to their original work? Had they overlooked an important detail during the fabrication process?

Gloriana, Ketis and Sara all thought they had failed.

Strangely enough, only Ves and Master Benedict maintained their composure after all of this time.

The older man turned and directed a pointed stare at Ves.

"Okay, that is enough. Stop fooling around. I know you do not consider the Dullahan Project to be truly complete at this stage. After all, its organic components have yet to be attuned."

Ves started to smirk. "I suppose I can't hide it from you, clever bastard. You're right! The Dullahan Project is not complete! We still have to take two more steps before it can truly take on its final and most complete form."

Gloriana and the other women looked surprised.

"Well? What do we need to do?" His wife impatiently asked.

"You don't need to do anything, dear. You have done your part." Ves told her before turning around to face his cousin. "Jannzi. Remember what the Dullahan Project is all about. The Carmine System that I have added to your expert mech is nothing but a giant bundle of artificially cultivated flesh at the moment. It is no different from a cloned organ in this regard. If we truly want to activate it in order to kickstart your new expert mech, then you must prove your dedication with action. Form the Blood Pact and bind your life to the machine."

Venerable Jannzi could sense the seriousness in his tone. She did not think he was joking about this matter.

"What do I need to do, Ves?"

"Change into your piloting suit and prepare to interface with your expert mech." He instructed. "We need to get this done as soon as possible. The longer the Dullahan Project remains in a state of limbo, the greater the chance that an unpredictable event might occur."

"Wait, what? Are you doing this now?! We just stayed up for an entire week! We are not ready to commence our first testing session!" Gloriana vehemently protested.

"It's your choice, Jannzi. I have given you my recommendation. Do not forget what I told you about the Blood Pact. I admit that there may be risks involved as I have never tested the Carmine System in reality, but all I ask of you is to trust my work. Have I ever let you down when it comes to catering your needs as a mech pilot?"

Venerable Jannzi took a few seconds to stare into Ves' eyes. She eventually became satisfied with what she saw.

"I have never questioned your brilliance in mech design. I have trusted your work in the past, and I shall do so again. Give me a moment."

Now that she agreed with this crucial step, Ves pointed her to a changing room that he prepared beforehand.

She emerged a few minutes later while wearing a bright yellow armored piloting suit.

Different from the ones usually assigned to the expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan, this particular suit received heavy modifications. Ves not only embedded it with additional health and treatment-related modules, but also featured several ports that provided direct access to Jannzi's blood vessels.

The expert pilot took a deep breath before she began to ascend into the air. She slowly approached the cockpit that Ves opened by remote.

Once she entered into place, she sat in the piloting seat and gazed at the dormant control panels.

Meanwhile, most of the mech designers had all retreated to a shielded control room.

No one knew what might ensue once Jannzi activated a brand-new expert mech that contained a lot of experimental tech and had never gone through a final inspection.

Not even Ves could fully predict what might happen at this point!

Still, Ves had a lot of faith in his work. He was the only mech designer who stayed in the vicinity of the completed expert mech.

Once Master Benedict and the others activated the sensor systems and formed remote connections to the Dullahan Project's largely dormant systems, Ves gave the fateful command.

"It's time, Jannzi. Please get ready to activate your expert mech. What will happen next may induce a lot of distress, but it is important for you to remain calm and seated in your chair. Under no circumstances should you ever pull out while the Blood Pact is still in the process of being formed. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Then proceed."

Chapter 4940 Heartbeats

As soon as Venerable Jannzi Larkinson pressed the button, the Dullahan Project started to wake to life.

Numerous electronic systems booted up. They activated slower than usual because they needed to perform extensive internal diagnostics to confirm that they were performing normally.

At the same time, several needles and tubes extended from the piloting chair and abruptly poked into Jannzi's body!

In order to make sure that she did not make any dangerous movements, the chair also clamped down on her body so that it remained firmly in place while the crucial blood channels connected to her bloodstream!

What happened was not completely outside of her expectations, but the actual experience was much worse than its description!

In order to ensure that she did not botch this crucial process, Jannzi bit her lip and tried her best to suppress any strong reactions. She clearly understood that she needed to maintain as much control throughout this process as possible.

As soon as the needles poked into place, they first injected different chemicals into her body.

This was not the artificially cultivated blood that played an essential role to the working mechanisms of the Carmine System.

It was highly irresponsible for Jannzi to absorb a lot of foreign blood while losing much of her own. Her physical body needed to be put into the right condition first before it was ready to endure more extreme circumstances.

Jannzi felt warm as her body heated up a bit. Her veins became warmer and her heart started to pump more actively than before.

Her piloting suit efficiently absorbed all of the sweat produced by her more active body.

While all of this took place, the expert mech continued to execute its first startup process. More and more advanced mech systems came online. The powerful reactor integrated in the Dullahan Project started to kick into a higher gear so that it could fulfill the increasing demand for energy.

The expert space knight was beginning to exude more heat!

Soon enough, the neural interface started to establish a connection between Jannzi's mind and the control systems of the Dullahan Project.

This was a crucial step!

In the case of a normal mech, this process allowed the pilot to extend his awareness beyond his physical body and gain access to the functions of a mechanical machine that was countless times more powerful!

Venerable Jannzi experienced the rush of connecting to a powerful new expert mech for the first time, but the experience was not as good as the time when she first interfaced with the Shield of Samar.

However, the formation of the man-machine connection was just one of several steps needed to fully activate the Dullahan Project.

Outside of the cockpit, Ves floated in front of the torso of the massive machine.

He did not hesitate to stray closer in order to better feel the changes that took place inside.

Of course, he also kept watch over the telemetry transmitted by the Dullahan Project. His cranial implant received a direct feed that allowed him to keep track of the precise fluctuations of the booting expert mech.

A sense of power began to surge from the Dullahan Project. The customized neural interface especially designed by the Larkinson Clan's recently hired neural interface specialist was doing its job.

The Dullahan Project faintly began to glow as the man-machine connection enabled Jannzi to resonate with her new machine.

The magnitude of the resonance was not high. Part of this was because Jannzi did not want to produce a strong and dangerous reaction, but another part of it was because she had yet to recognize the new machine as her battle partner!

Ves did not look concerned. He monitored the situation closely and recognized that it was almost time to perform the most crucial steps.

After Jannzi received enough adjustments, half of the channels connected to her body started to pump foreign blood into her bloodstream!

At the same time, the other half of the channels began to siphon her native blood away from her body!

These processes took place simultaneously.

Not only that, the blood did not flow continuously through the transparent channel, but instead pulsed in or out in the cadence of a heartbeat.

No, not a single heartbeat.

There were two heartbeats.

The small and tiny human heart inside Jannzi's body did not have the strength to circulate the enormous quantity of blood flowing through the organic veins of the Carmine System.

In order to make sure that its blood circulated effectively throughout its massive biological components, Ves embedded it with an artificial heart.

This heart, which was largely based on Jannzi's DNA, began to beat in perfect synchronicity with the expert pilot's own key organ.

It was as if the Carmine System's gigantic heart machine was not a foreign component at all, but one that was always meant to circulate blood in Jannzi's physical body!

The neural interface which previously granted Jannzi awareness of the expert mech's mechanical systems now began to connect her to a part of the machine that she had never experienced before!

The sensation of connecting to an organic system was like nothing else she had ever experienced before. Yet as the Carmine System opened itself up to her influence without any rejection or complications, Jannzi instinctively felt as if she was always meant to assume control over its organic parts.

The connection and intimacy she felt towards the Carmine System exceeded that of anything that she had ever experienced in the past!

Not even the Shield of Samar in her former peak condition could match the strong sense of unity produced by the Carmine System!

This weird and novel addition to the Dullahan Project made her feel as if she and it were one and the same!

If not for the fact that the rest of the Dullahan Project was fully mechanical and operated under an entirely different and inhuman set of standards, Jannzi might have been able to embody the entire machine as if it was her own body in truth!

Although the process of connecting her body to the Carmine System turned out to be much less scary and much more pleasant than she anticipated, Venerable Jannzi did not gain the result she wanted.

She did not set out to turn the Dullahan Project into a perfect vessel that she could fully embody. She wanted to reconnect with her long-lost battle partner.

As impatient as she may be, she understood that she needed to wait a bit longer.

The more Jannzi extended her awareness to the new and powerful expert space knight, the more she sensed the void inside the machine.

It was not a physical void. The mech frame was completely filled with matter when examined on a physical level.

No, this was a different kind of void. The more Jannzi interfaced with the Dullahan Project, the more it became obvious that there was a metaphysical void!

She found it extremely strange that this void had been deliberately left unfilled. All of the living mechs designed by Ves were completely opposite.

Each of his works contained the fullness of life. This was especially the case for his most recent mechs!

Outside of the mech, Ves could sense Jannzi's confusion.

He already intended to do something about the void that prevented the Dullahan Project from reaching its most complete form.

He just had to make sure that the expert mech performed well enough and that Venerable Jannzi's body had yet to experience any negative side effects from connecting to the Carmine System.

Seeing that all of the parameters looked fine, Ves confirmed that the mech and mech pilot were ready to endure the next shock.

Ves reached into his pocket and withdrew a large gem that Lucky produced in the past. He had made up a plan on how he intended to use it as soon as it fell into his hands.

[Shield of Sacrifice]

The dying wish of a powerful soul is contained within this gem. Increases the damage resistance of a mech up to 100 percent in proportion to the damage it has incurred.

The incredibly potent boost provided by the gem was not as important as the source of its power.

Through studying the Mars as it turned from a traditional living mech into an empty vessel attuned to Patriarch Reginald Cross, Ves already made a lot of strides into figuring out how these gems produced their reality-defying effects.

Ves had come to accept that the System's silly descriptions of Lucky's gems were not as nonsensical as he once thought.

There was real substance to all of the references of greater existences.

He carefully examined the Shield of Sacrifice gem. It had always remained fairly calm and inert while it was in his possession, but now that had come in close proximity of Jannzi's second expert mech, it began to shine with the power of desire!

"Get ready. It's time for you to enter your final destination."

Ves slowly extended his hand and pressed the gem onto the chest plate of the Dullahan Project.

A small port opened up to suck the gem inside the frame.

Away from his sight, the gem continued to travel a prearranged route before it finally neared the gigantic organic heart of the Carmine System.

Fleshy tentacles extended from the bioengineered organ. They embraced the gem with loving care and pulled it in so that the solid object could sink deep inside the enormous heart!

BADUMP.

Once the organ made a powerful beat, an invisible shockwave spread from the Dullahan Project!

Ves quickly drew back as he sensed a surging will and spirituality from the depths of the expert mech!

BADUMP.

Another powerful beat spread from the expert mech, causing it to become more alive than it had ever been before!

As the blood pumped by the hearts of the mech and mech pilot continued to circulate throughout their bodies, two different life forms started to connect and familiarize with each other.

Tears spilled from Venerable Jannzi's eyes as she began to experience a surge of strong emotions.

After so much waiting, she finally sensed the traces of her familiar battle partner.

"Sammie..."

The gem that Ves added to the machine did not make the Shield of Samar come to life again. Too much had been lost to make that happen.

What actually happened was that the gem filled up the invisible void and prompted the expert mech to form a new and independent personality that was descended from Sammie's dying wish!

BADUMP.

BADUMP.

BADUMP.

As the hearts beat faster and faster, more and more blood circulated throughout their bodies!

This had a profound effect on the woman and her new machine.

Even though the newly born consciousness of the Dullahan Project was only less than a minute old, it already formed a bond with Venerable Jannzi that was far more intimate than anything the Larkinson Clan had ever witnessed!

BADUMP. BADUMP. BADUMP. BADUMP. BADUMP.

Both sides of the relationship experienced such a rush of emotions that their hearts began to beat much faster than was healthy!

It couldn't be helped! The very first Blood Pact formed between a human mech pilot and a living mech was such a powerful rush that they lost their self-control!

However, before Venerable Jannzi could go too far, the design spirit that had remained silent throughout all of this time immediately took action.

A moderating influence entered the fray. Qilanxo's powerful influence descended upon the expert mech. She exerted enough power to lower the frequency of their heartbeats.

Ves quietly sighed in relief as he witnessed what had happened.

"Thanks, Qilanxo."

With the help of the design spirit, Venerable Jannzi and her expert mech continued to merge together until they had fully established their permanent Blood Pact!

A brief lull occurred before the two hearts produced a simultaneous reaction.

BADUMP!

An explosion of power and true resonance erupted from the Dullahan Project!

Gloriana and several other people yelled in surprise as the might released by the expert mech surpassed almost anything they had experienced before!

Outside of ace mechs, the Dullahan Project exuded the most power by far!

A powerful corona marked by the blue of Jannzi's resonance mixed with another corona that glowed red with blood!