

The Mech 4941

Chapter 4941 Blood Pact

Ves grinned as he witnessed the successful formation of a Blood Pact.

This was far from a simple bond.

The blood circulating through the bodies of Jannzi and the Carmine System could not exert their full functionality until the Blood Pact formally took shape.

Now that the living mech and mech pilot connected each other on a level that surpassed anything produced by a neural interface, the Dullahan Project truly began to activate its full potential!

As the expert mech continued to produce a strong outwards reaction, both Jannzi and her newly born battle partner continued to experience a massive amount of changes!

"Ahhh!"

Despite Qilanxo's best efforts to moderate the bond between the mech and mech pilot, the Blood Pact turned out to be far too strong!

Its strength and cohesion had quickly become so astounding that the bond between Jannzi and the Dullahan Project became indescribable.

The Blood Pact produced many effects!

One of them was to blur the lines between the two to an unprecedented degree.

Jannzi had never come in touch with a mech to this degree in her life. The neural interface and the Carmine System connected her mind, body and will to her new battle partner without as many barriers in the way as before.

This enabled her to form a much deeper sense of substitution with her expert mech despite piloting it for the first time.

Not only did she suspect that she could pilot the Dullahan Project as if the new machine was truly her body, she could also borrow the living mech's awareness and strengths in a more effortless manner!

Resonating with the Dullahan Project became a lot easier than before. The shared blood circulating throughout their bodies closed the distance to such a substantial degree that Jannzi's effective resonance strength multiplied to an unheard of degree!

Back in the shielded control room, all of the mech designers barely managed to recover from the shock of witnessing the expert mech establish its much-promised Blood Pact.

Gloriana had a powerful hunch and quickly directed her eyes towards the resonance meter!

"What?! That is impossible!"

"What is wrong, Gloriana?"

"Look at the resonance meter! If the sensors are not malfunctioning, then Venerable Jannzi's resonance strength has currently reached 33.25 laveres!

33.25 laveres!

That represented an enormous leap in power compared to Jannzi's last record when she piloted the Shield of Samar!

Compared to her previous stable levels that hovered somewhere around the early 20s, it was as if Jannzi had obtained a decade's worth of gains in advance!

The dramatic jump in resonance strength effectively meant that Venerable Jannzi was able to exert true resonance with her expert mech that was several times stronger than before!

The significance of this dramatic change was too great. What Gloriana and the others keenly realized that this was just the initial reaction.

What would happen once Venerable Jannzi fully familiarized herself with her new expert mech and began to work together over a span of several years?

It was conceivable that the Blood Pact would stimulate her so much that her growth rate would definitely skyrocket!

If other pilots at this level needed 20 years in order to become a high-tier expert pilot, then Venerable Jannzi might only have to spend 10 years to reach the same height!

This was an enormous advantage, and this was only just the beginning!

It did not take a lot of imagination to guess that the Blood Pact could produce massive benefits once Venerable Jannzi was ready to undergo her second apotheosis.

If advancing to the rank of ace pilot was an insurmountable challenge to the vast majority of expert pilots, then Jannzi may be able to overcome this hurdle as easily as entering another room.

This was because she no longer strictly needed to rely on her own efforts.

Now that she was able to enter into a deeper fusion with the Dullahan Project, her powerful new living mech was able to provide much more substantial help than before!

Gloriana did not dare to imagine how much the Blood Pact could make a difference in Venerable Jannzi's future turning point, but Ves was not as shy!

His grin grew wide as his initial inspection of the Blood Pact gave him an impression of its possibilities!

"This is it! This is what I have sought to establish. The fruit was right! The power of blood did not disappoint me! A new generation of mechs shall arise with the help of this crucial invention!"

Even if the initial results were not representative to his subsequent applications of the Carmine System, Ves had no doubt that the completed Dullahan Project accurately embodied his future direction as a mech designer!

With the success of this experimental design project, Ves gained full confidence in his ability to explore all of the new possibilities introduced by the Carmine System.

Even if ordinary mechs could only gain a fraction of the might produced by the Dullahan Project in its current form, it was already worthwhile to spread blood mechs to the masses!

Ves did not doubt that many eager and ambitious mech pilots would take the plunge and form life-long Blood Pacts with the living mechs of their choosing!

"The price is a bit heavy, though."

Power never came for free. Ves always had this truth in mind when he designed the Dullahan Project, and now he was able to witness through his own senses how extensively the Blood Pact bonded the two partners together in life and perhaps in death.

From a spiritual perspective, Venerable Jannzi had formed a strong and permanent bond with the Dullahan project. It became most active when they shared their blood with each other, but even without this excellent medium, they would still remain tied together no matter the distance!

Cutting this bond would definitely produce deep and mostly permanent trauma to the both of them.

If Jannzi was barely able to recover after the Shield of Samar's effective destruction, then she would never be able to pilot any mech again after the fall of her latest machine!

Ofcourse, as long as enough pieces of the Dullahan Project were left intact, then it was not impossible to salvage the damaged bond and pull Jannzi out of the danger zone.

Ves could consider these added complications in the future. Right now, he needed to witness all of the other changes produced by the formation of the Blood Pact.

As Venerable Jannzi gradually managed to wrangle the much more powerful true resonance produced between herself and her new battle partner, the expert mech no longer became as unbearable as before.

It formed a stable resonance shield that exuded a combination of different powers and influences.

From Qilanxo to the recently formed Blood Pact, the completed expert mech conveyed a much greater presence than any Larkinson expert mech made by the Design Department in the past.

Neither the Amaranto, the Everchanger nor the Minerva could come close in this regard!

The Dullahan Project truly demonstrated with its own strength and appearance that the Larkinson Clan had made huge advances in its design capabilities.

How much this enormous increase in strength could be attributed to the existence of the Carmine System and the Blood Pact was not entirely certain.

There were many other variables in play that undoubtedly helped to empower the Dullahan Project even further.

Nonetheless, Ves had a strong suspicion that once he fabricated the completed version of the Ghost Project, it wouldn't produce nearly as strong of a reaction as now!

A part of Ves even regretted the fact that the Ghost Project did not come with the Carmine System.

There was no way the Geist System could produce comparable effects. It was made for a completely different purpose and could never fuse the Ghost Project with Venerable Zimro Belson to this extent.

"Oh well." He sighed in regret.

Ves already made peace with the fact that forming a Blood Pact was not an acceptable choice to the majority of mech pilots.

Unless Venerable Zimro strongly wished to bind himself to a single living mech for the rest of his life, Ves had no intentions of encouraging him to take the plunge.

Now that the Dullahan Project had reached its final form and entered into a stable but still remarkably powerful state, the dramatic event had come to an end.

While Ves had become so incredibly curious about what the new expert space knight was capable of, he knew better than to start trials right away.

"Jannzi? Can you hear me? Good job. Your expert mech has come to life with your help. If it is possible, please begin the process of disengaging the Carmine System before shutting down the systems of the Dullahan Project. Make sure not to deviate from this order. I cannot guarantee your safety if you lose connection to your expert mech while the Carmine System is still active at the time."

Ves had programmed an extensive set of safety rules in order to prevent this from happening, but a strong enough mech pilot might be able to override them. It would be best if Jannzi built up the right habits from the start in order to minimize the occurrence of accidents.

As Jannzi slowly did as instructed, the Dullahan Project did not exhibit any unexpected behavior.

Despite just coming to life, the living mech obediently cooperated and allowed Venerable Jannzi to steadily remove herself.

This was quite an ordeal as it took time and a number of special procedures to stop the Carmine System from binding the two parties on a physical level.

"Hss."

Jannzi winced as she felt the needles pull out of her flesh. Her piloting suit instantly covered her skin and applied all kinds of treatments in order to heal any wounds.

She felt much more diminished now that the Blood Pact had gone dormant.

Even as the neural interface steadily shut down the man-machine connection, Jannzi could still feel that she had not truly lost her connection to the Dullahan Project.

Once formed, the Blood Pact tied the two together in a covenant that exceeded physical boundaries!

Many thoughts welled in her mind as she could still feel her partner's blood running through her own veins.

At the same time, she could faintly sense that a portion of her lifeblood quietly circulated through the organic systems of the Dullahan Project.

Jannzi could scarcely believe that all of this was possible merely through the exchange of blood.

Once she exited the cockpit and lowered herself to the floor of the workshop, Ves quickly greeted her first.

"How is it, Jannzi? Are you satisfied?"

The female expert pilot smiled. "I... am. It was not what I expected, but... this is even better, short of bringing my old Shield of Samar back to life."

"The Dullahan Project..."

"Is not Sammie, but close enough for me to accept the changes." Jannzi said. "It may sound strange to you, but my expert mech feels like what would happen if Sammie and I had a child."

She was right. That did sound strange.

"If that is the case, then maybe you should choose a new name for your machine." Ves suggested.

"I am still thinking about it. Please give me time to find a fitting name." She said before she turned around to gaze up at the dormant expert mech once more. "I suppose Gloriana will be disappointed today. It's not a masterwork."

Ves did not look bothered by this outcome. "It is what it is. Gloriana's contribution will ensure that your new battle partner will eventually transform into a more impressive form by itself. All of the changes that took place at the end have produced a profound effect on the physical and metaphysical state of the Dullahan Project. It is most definitely not as smooth as I would have liked, but I can see that it will only take a few years for it to become a masterwork mech."

"I will look forward to that day."

"Before you go and take a well-deserved rest, is there anything you want to share that cannot wait?"

Venerable Jannzi hesitated for a second before her expression turned grave. "I am not sure about this, but I think it would be better if I share one of my suspicions to you sooner rather than later."

"Oh? This sounds rather serious."

"We should head somewhere more private. I do not think it is wise to spread what I am about to say to the other mech designers. It mostly has to do with your work."

Given how serious Jannzi treated this matter, Ves not only brought her to an isolation chamber that was especially designed to hinder eavesdropping, but also activated his full jamming suite.

"Alright. You should be able to say what you want without concern of any leaks." Ves confidently said. "Does your message have anything to do with the safety of the Carmine System? Is the Blood Pact exerting much more of a negative impact on your life than expected?"

"It is not that." The female expert pilot shook his head. "I will just share my suspicion with you directly."

Jannzi stepped forward and slowly leaned in until she was able to whisper her words into one of his ears.

"After the Blood Pact took shape, my connection and control over my new expert mech became so strong that I started to form a radical idea. I felt that if I disengaged the neural interface, I wouldn't lose control over the Dullahan Project. I strongly suspected that I could still pilot it to a degree by relying solely on the Blood Pact and the Carmine System that made it possible."

Ves abruptly widened his eyes! He couldn't believe what he just heard! Out of all of the possible benefits that his latest invention was able to realize, he never expected that the Carmine System could act as a substitute to the neural interface!

Jannzi wasn't finished yet. "That isn't all. While it is not relevant to me, I suspect that the Carmine System can play an even larger role for other people. You see, if a neural interface isn't necessary anymore, is it still important for humans to possess the right genetic aptitude in order to become an effective pilot?"

While there was no guarantee that the Carmine System could establish a means of controlling a mech that could come close to the effectiveness of the neural interface, that did not change the notion that Ves' invention could change the entire landscape of the mech community!

"..."

The implications of what he heard were so enormous that an invisible explosion set off inside Ves' mind!

Jannzi stepped back in surprise as she felt an abrupt change from the mech designer in front of her! "What's wrong, Ves?!"

Chapter 4942 Serving the People

A mental and spiritual explosion set off inside Ves' mind as soon as Venerable Jannzi informed him about her suspicions with regards to her newly formed Blood Pact.

Ves hadn't been paying attention to this possibility at all. For all of the work he put into the development of the Carmine System and its associated Blood Pact, he could not foresee the full implications of what he had brought to life.

It couldn't be helped. Everything he worked on was completely new and unprecedented as far as he was concerned. As a successful innovator, he understood that a single person's imagination was ultimately limited.

Yet how could he have missed such an enormous implication?!

Ever since he was born, each time he inquired about what it took to pilot a mech, his father and his fellow Larkinson relatives always told him that he shouldn't get his hopes up. Practically every child heard the same answer.

"There is only a 3.5 percent chance you can become a mech pilot." Ryncol Larkinson once told Ves when he was around 6 years old. "You have to win the genetic aptitude lottery in order to become eligible to pilot a real mech."

"But I heard our family was special!" Little Ves complained as he sat on his father's lap. "Aren't we supposed to be natural pilots?"

The father chuckled after hearing his boy's words. "Our relatives like to claim that, but the reality is much less glamorous than you think. The ancestor who started our family was strong. He was really strong. We not only inherited his original genes, but also follow many of his proscriptions several centuries after his passing. I think that has increased the chances that our family can produce mech pilots, but even if it has doubled, that only gives us a 1 in 14 chance to possess the right genetic aptitude. Do you understand what that means?"

"Uhhh..."

"If there are 14 Vesses like yourself, only a single one of you will be lucky enough to become a mech pilot. The other 13 have little choice but to find another job. This is why none of our family

wants little boys like you to think you will definitely get to pilot a mech in your life. Many people are actually ordinary and decent folk who are already happy with doing something normal for a living."

"That sounds boring~" Cheeky little Ves whined.

His father had a different opinion. "Boring is safe. Boring is steady. Boring is a blessing. Becoming a norm is not a curse. It is a relief. Not every potentate is cut out to become a soldier, but those who have the power to pilot a mech are often pushed into this dangerous job regardless of their wishes."

"What about the norms who really want to fight but don't have the right aptitude?" Ves eagerly asked.

Ryncol smiled down at his son. "There is no great expectation for ordinary people to take part in a fight. If you truly want to make a difference, you can always learn the skills to support the mech pilots that do the actual fighting. Many of our family members end up doing that due to their sense of duty. Even if they cannot enter the cockpit themselves, they can still do their part by repairing damaged mechs or serving aboard the carriers that transport the mechs to their destinations. Everyone has their own place in life. Genetic aptitude is one of those things that sets people apart. That's life."

As Ves took in the enormous implications of Jannzi's suspicion about the Blood Pact, he briefly recalled this particular conversation with his father. He thought back on those words because they played a large role in shaping his attitude towards the so-called genetic aptitude lottery.

Life wasn't fair.

The chance that a ten-year old kid would have the right genetic aptitude to pilot a mech was too low.

What was worse was that there were few if any means to influence a child's chances of becoming a potentate.

There were no known training methods that could increase a child's probability of developing the right genetic aptitude.

Nutrition did not seem to matter and a lot of miracle medicines turned out to be complete scams.

Ves couldn't count the number of enthusiastic young children who possessed a lot of talent to become a soldier, but eventually grew into jaded adults due to the simple fact that their brain chemistry just hadn't grown in the exact right manner.

What would happen if genetic aptitude no longer served as the crusher of dreams?

What if every human gained the option to pilot a mech just as proficient as real potentates?

How many other professionals would abandon their successful and impactful careers in other sectors just so that they could revive their buried desires?

The potential consequences of announcing and popularizing a viable means to pilot a mech through an alternative control method were too great for Ves to fully contemplate!

As Ves' incredibly powerful mind continued to wrap around the ideas that sprung into his mind after hearing Jannzi's words, he understood that he may have inadvertently opened one of Pandora's many boxes.

If Jannzi's suspicion turned out to be accurate, then he may have brought an invention to life that could never be unmade!

The Carmine System and the Blood Pact had gained a huge amount of significance!

Ves had already decided to center his major around its many possibilities. He initially thought that the successful formation of the Blood Pact today fully paid off all of the hard work he put into inventing this radical and controversial means of empowerment, but it turned out that he had only scratched the surface of its potential!

A strong part of himself warned him that there was no way it would be that simple!

A huge reason why mech pilots gained the capacity to control large and complicated war machines was because their brains could withstand much greater data throughput!

In other words, their brains had mutated in a way that allowed them to function as highly active organic processors!

A normal human individual did not possess this capacity. Any attempt to forcibly exchange huge amounts of data would quickly cause a normal brain to wear out in a matter of seconds depending on the severity!

However...

What if there was no need to rely on brainpower to control a mech?

One of the basic fundamentals of the Blood Pact was that it was formed on a spiritual level rather than a neural level.

Just like how the Larkinson Network worked according to completely different principles from Master Huron's neural networks, the Blood Pact did not have anything to do with the most basic form of the man-machine connection!

The neural interface induced a heavy load on a mech pilot's brain because it directly channeled data back and forth.

The Carmine System operated through a more mystical means. Aside from requiring that the mech and mech pilot share the same circulation, it did not do anything directly to the latter's brain!

So how could Jannzi's suggestion work?

Through spirituality.

When Ves examined Jannzi from a spiritual perspective, he could clearly see that her force of will had developed a permanent entanglement with the completed Dullahan Project.

Due to Jannzi's extraordinary willpower alongside her strong connection with the successor of the Shield of Samar, this spiritual bond had already grown to become exceptionally strong and firm.

Ves could fully imagine that it possessed the bandwidth to channel the huge amount of data required to pilot a normal mech, though he was less certain whether it was sufficient to pilot a highly complicated quasi-first-class expert mech.

So what if it was not sufficient?

One of the defining traits of his design philosophy and all of its applications was that the starting point was just the beginning!

Each of his works possessed the capacity of growth, and it was not a one-way street either!

If Venerable Jannzi was not yet capable of piloting the Dullahan Project by relying on the Blood Pact alone, then she could always wait until she grew strong enough to make it possible!

This applied to other people as well. Ves already deduced that if he wanted to make this radical new means of controlling a mech viable, he had to ensure that the irregular pilots possessed the spiritual strength necessary to absorb and process large quantities of data.

Although this sounded like an enormous limitation, Ves already knew that he had a potential solution to this new hurdle.

Companion spirits.

What if he combined the strengths of companion spirits with the possibilities of the Blood Pact?

Both innovations happened to complement each other!

Granting companion spirits to normal people not only allowed them to activate their spiritualities and grow their spiritual potential, but eventually allowed them to grow strong enough to perform many complex actions, including the act of controlling a full-sized mech!

In fact, the companion spirit could even serve as a special channel that could make the process of controlling a mech a lot easier!

After all, if Ketis was able to control her swords a lot better by imbuing them with Sharpie, an irregular mech pilot could theoretically merge his companion spirit to a living mech in order to improve the control process!

Embedding a companion spirit to a living mech also unlocked other wonderful possibilities that Ves could scarcely think about!

There was no point in thinking any further. He was going way too far in his speculations when he hadn't even verified a single word of what Jannzi had just said!

He needed to obtain proof before he could properly explore the immense new possibilities opened up by the Blood Pact!

Yet even as his rationality told him that he needed to contain his excitement, his passion told him a completely different story!

As a successful and experienced mech designer and innovator, he knew in his heart that Venerable Jannzi's suspicion was not an idle guess.

It fully conformed with the theoretical framework that Ves had built up in his mind. He was even able to use his existing knowledge on spiritual engineering to derive all kinds of possible outcomes, many of which had a realistic chance of coming true!

Aside from that, his powerful intuition strongly told him that he had become exposed to a discovery of such great significance that he could easily shake the fabric of human civilization if exposed!

While Ves had admittedly developed numerous different innovations that could already change people's lives, this particular train of thought was different from the rest.

He could hardly think of a better way to put his stamp on the Age of Mechs than by giving humanity a viable means to turn every person into a mech pilot!

No matter whether they were space peasants or mechers, each of them could gain the means to control a mech, just like the potentates they always envied!

The Blood Pact had the potential to turn the infamous and much-maligned genetic aptitude lottery redundant!

As Ves thought of the enormous impact he could make on human society, he understood right then and there what his subsequent research direction should be from this point onwards.

Ves still wanted to pursue mutual growth, but rather than focusing on empowering the strongest and most gifted mech pilots such as Venerable Jannzi, he wanted to serve the needs of the weak and underprivileged.

What better way to make his mark as a mech designer than to fulfill the collective wish of 96.5 percent of all humans living in the Milky Way and the Red Ocean?

Ves couldn't imagine how many people he could satisfy by giving them the option of piloting an actual mech!

As a professional service provider, he could not think of a worthier cause!

He believed that not even the likes of the Polymath could make this impossible dream come true!

Many people had long thought that it was impossible to liberate mechs for normal people.

Ves rejected this truth!

His strong belief in the Blood Pact and his determination in liberating humanity from the tyranny of genetic aptitude eventually sparked an irreversible transformation in his essence.

After years of silent accumulation, the design seed that encapsulated his design philosophy started to explode with power!

Ves had finally found the breakthrough opportunity that he had always sought!

Even as Venerable Jannzi looked alarmed and concerned, Ves had entered into a completely different state of mind!

For the second time in a relatively short amount of time, Ves went through another sublimation!

This time, his evolution purely took place on a spiritual level!

Chapter 4943 Ignition

Ves could not describe what he was going through at this moment.

In the middle isolation chamber underneath the surface of Cat Nest, Ves initiated one of the most important breakthroughs of his life.

He did not expect this to happen!

He initially thought he would have triggered his breakthrough immediately after completing the Dullahan Project if he was ready.

Since that did not happen, Ves restrained his disappointment and assumed that he would have a better chance once he fabricated the Ghost Project.

After all, he was just as passionate about this design if not more!

The fact that he broke through after hearing just a single point of feedback from his latest client was out of his expectations!

As such, no one aside from an expert pilot he had a mixed relationship with was able to witness his current transformation.

He would have found it to be ironic that Jannzi of all people triggered his breakthrough if he wasn't already preoccupied at this time!

Ves raised his palm in order to convey to Jannzi to stay calm and not do anything rash.

This was all he could do before his mind became completely immersed in the immense changes that took place within the confines of his powerful mind!

No matter how much he evolved and how many changes he went through, Ves never let go of his identity as a mech designer.

His various incarnations had all become powerful in their own right. Not only that, but their potential was much greater as well. It was quite conceivable to assume that they could eventually transcend into True Gods or comparable existences in the far future!

Yet even if his incarnations were able to attain godhood, Ves knew quite well that they would not become omnipotent.

Gods weren't as impressive as they appeared.

Ves much rather aspired to become a Star Designer, because his ability to create powerful new innovations would become unmatched!

Now that he gained the determination to not only make mech piloting accessible to the common man, but also allow each of them to uplift themselves through mutual growth, Ves understood the truth of what it took to become a Senior Mech Designer.

Journeyman Mech Designers were like teenagers who were just discovering what they could do. They found an initial direction but still needed to figure out how they wanted to apply their capabilities.

Developing design applications was not enough, though. They needed to look beyond their own selfish desires and start to think how they wished to serve the greater community.

What was the point of becoming a mech designer?

While the exact motivations of every professional was different, each of them desired to become a productive member of society!

Seniors needed to hold themselves to a much higher standard than Journeymen.

The latter could get away with focusing on their own selfish needs, but they could go no further if their perspectives remained limited.

Only mech designers who made the resolve to serve a cause that was greater than themselves deserved to attain greater power.

Ves had no idea how or why this rule came to be, but he had clearly become one of its beneficiaries.

As a mech designer who wanted to fulfill one of humanity's greatest demands since the start of the Age of Mechs, it would be a horribly travesty if reality denied his immediate breakthrough!

Fortunately, the worst-case scenario did not happen.

Ves could feel that every part of his mind and his Spirituality underwent a profound transformation.

His mentality expanded to the point where he could feel he could perform a lot more calculations and deductions than before. It was like getting a free upgrade for his cranial implant, but applied to his entire brain.

In other words, his basic ability to design mechs improved by another margin. The only letdown was that the difference was not that great to him due to all of his prior improvements. This particular change was just icing on the cake as far as he was concerned.

What truly mattered was that his design seed finally went through the transformation he had long been waiting for. This solidified spiritual core swelled with so much power after Ves had advanced his design philosophy to this extent that the internal pressure finally forced it to find a release!

Short of breaking its solid exterior entirely, it instead formed numerous different cracks on its surface.

The growing pressure from within the seed cracked its exterior to the point where numerous different holes had formed!

This was a crucial step in the breakthrough process!

Only by making enough progress in his design philosophy and setting a firm goal to serve a worthy cause did he manage to ignite the flame inside his seed!

Now, the powerful flame releases a surprising amount of energy from the cracks in the exterior of the shell.

Multiple different streams of energy began to spread out and escape from his mind and body.

His design philosophy had begun to impose itself onto reality to a significantly greater extent than before!

Through the ignition of his design seed, the traces of his work, his theories and his ambitions spread across unimaginable distances in space.

His design seed... turned into a design flame.

Perhaps there may be better ways to describe the new state of the encapsulation of his design philosophy. Maybe the Mech Trade Association already developed its own fancy terminology of this particular state.

It didn't matter. All Ves cared about was that his design philosophy completed a qualitative transformation that turned it from a well of possibilities to a fire that could change reality!

As the cracks of his design seed continued to release continuous streams of ignited energy, Ves could feel that there would be no end to them so long as he sincerely endeavored to continue his career as a mech designer.

So long as he engaged in his work, he would never have to worry about running out of the kindling that continued to spread his design philosophy throughout space!

"How... amazing..."

The most crucial part of his breakthrough had settled down. The formation of his design flame proceeded smoothly and without any obvious issue. Ves did not experience any pain or discomfort.

Despite the worrisome appearance of his cracked design seed, nothing about it felt wrong.

In fact, it was the opposite.

Ves felt more whole and complete than ever before!

He had already felt awfully uncomfortable as a highly accomplished Journeyman Mech Designer as of late. He had created too many innovations and affected the lives of more people than practically any other Journeyman at his level.

His qualifications to become a Senior was stronger than any other Journeyman he knew of. It frustrated him quite a bit that he could not make any further progress unless he overcame his bottleneck.

Though he probably would have broken through sooner or later, he was incredibly happy that it ended up being the former!

In the end, he finally found his key to break his bottleneck and smoothly enter an entirely new phase in his career as a mech designer.

As the design flame settled into his mind, Ves took several deep breaths as he fully tried to understand all of the changes and improvements it introduced.

He could instinctively feel that the changes were far from simple. More had taken place than was obvious on the surface.

In general, he was able to deduce that the strength and activity of his design flame not only allowed his design philosophy to affect reality across much vaster distances, but that it also strengthened his ability to change the rules in close proximity!

Ves immediately made use of his strengthened cognition to deduce what this meant.

His ability to imprint mech designs with his design philosophy became noticeably stronger!

Although his capacity to do so still did not come close to that of an actual Master Mech Designer, it became undeniable that he would be able to exceed his fellow Journeymen in the Design Department in this aspect!

This was good news as his unique design applications became stronger and produced a higher impact due to the ignition of his design flame.

His living mechs could start off stronger and grow even faster than before. His design spirits could connect to his works at a deeper level.

Above all else, Ves saw a possibility to use his strengthened design philosophy as a bridge to close the gap between the material realm and the imaginary realm even more!

direction and knew exactly what he needed to do to realize his design philosophy.

Perhaps other mech designers might think that Ves had gone absolutely mad for tackling an If this was truly the case, then he would no longer have to rely so much on exceptional means such as expert pilots and the Geist System to turn metaphysical power into a force that could break mechs and sunder starships!

Of course, Ves did not expect to be able to realize all of this right away. His design flame shouldn't be that amazing as of yet. He might have to strengthen it further or wait until he advanced to Master Mech Designer or Star Designer to exert his power to this extent.

He was already happy with what he gained. He no longer felt any confusion about his future direction and knew exactly what he needed to do to realize his design philosophy.

Perhaps other mech designers might think that Ves had gone absolutely mad for tackling an ambition of this magnitude, but he was different!

His eyes burned with the fires of his design flame as he formulated an initial roadmap to his ultimate goal.

So long as he had a viable plan in mind, he possessed full confidence in his ability to overcome all of the challenges one by one until he fulfilled the final requirement!

It might take decades. It might even take a century or two. It all depended on his research ability, his problem-solving skills, his creativity, his inspiration and plain old luck.

Aside from that, he could always affect his chances of advancing to Master by adjusting his own goal posts.

He already knew that this was possible through his prior talks with other Master Mech Designers, but now that he had taken an important step forward, he could instinctively feel what it took to break the shell of his design seed.

If he wanted to break this design seed and transform his relatively weak flame into a blazingly hot star, then he had to turn the impossible into the possible!

He could choose from a wide variety of goals as long as they were significant enough and relevant to his design philosophy.

An easier goal would allow him to ignite his flame into a weaker sun, while a stronger one would probably result in a much stronger sun.

Ves did not know whether Master Mech Designers who chose the former could make up for their deficiency.

He also didn't know how strong his 'design sun' would become if he fulfilled an ambition as great as enabling every other individual in human civilization to effectively pilot a mech!

Perhaps his flame would transform into such a powerful design sun that it could light up the entire cosmos!

He shook his head.

This was all too far away from him. He probably needed to have a good talk with the MTA in order to obtain the answers to all of his new questions.

For now, he was more than happy to celebrate his long-awaited breakthrough!

The Larkinson Clan had taken another step towards dominance now that its patriarch became a Senior Mech Designer.

The speed in which he accomplished this breakthrough was sure to increase his value to other parties!

Advancing to Senior Mech Designer when he was around 40 years old was a definite sign of talent and excellence!

All of the bigshots who appreciated his potential and chose to make an early investment in him would definitely feel that their decision had paid off! It would become a lot easier for him to have a greater say in his interactions with the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction of the MTA!

His expression froze when he thought about the enormous storm he might unleash if he conveyed his latest discovery to the Association.

If he told the mechers that he could develop a solution that would enable any human to pilot a mech, how would they react?

If even mech designers could overcome the limitations of their genetic aptitude and gain the ability to control mechs of their own creation, how grateful would they be to Ves for making it all possible?

If he introduced an innovation that broke the monopoly that mech pilots held over their own profession, how many of these favored sons and daughters would feel devalued by this enormous change? What if these elitist mech pilots felt that Ves infringed on their rights by depriving them of their sole advantage?

The huge interests centered around mech piloting were so vast and powerful that a simple Senior Mech Designer could never withstand a storm of this magnitude!

His attitude immediately sharpened.

Before he was ready to announce this game-changing innovation to the public, he needed to be discreet and prevent his work from burning down the entirety of human civilization!

Chapter 4944 Surprise Announcement

It took around twenty minutes for Ves to complete his breakthrough, consolidate his newly ignited design flame and form a preliminary roadmap to realizing his design philosophy.

When he eventually opened his eyes, they conveyed a version of Ves that had grown up, both as a human and as a mech designer.

Venerable Jannzi had eventually figured out what had taken place. She had conscientiously taken a few steps back in order to give Ves the room to complete his breakthrough in total peace.

Now that Ves regained his awareness, the expert pilot could immediately tell the difference.

If the old Ves came across as an impetuous kid that brimmed with curiosity and lacked self-control, the new Ves immediately conveyed the impression that he had settled down because he had undertaken a serious responsibility.

Anyone who knew Ves in person would immediately be able to tell the difference!

"You have become a Senior Mech Designer if I am not mistaken."

Ves simply nodded. "That is correct. It's quite a surprise, Jannzi. Thank you for being the catalyst to my breakthrough to Senior. It's quite funny if you think about it. Around a decade ago, I managed to grasp the opportunity to advance to Journeyman Mech Designer after I designed the original Aurora Titan and fabricated the earliest version of the Shield of Samar for you. Times were much different back then. So much has changed since then, but one remarkable constant is that I owe my breakthrough to you once again."

The woman responded with a confused smile. "This is probably a coincidence. I just happen to be at the right place at the right time twice in a row. I don't even know what it takes to help you break through once again. I heard that it is extremely difficult for Seniors to go any further."

"Well, you never know. Maybe in the future you will be able to help me advance to Master Mech Designer." Ves shrugged and joked.

"Anyway, congratulations for your breakthrough, Ves. I hope that you will use your greater ability in designing mechs for the good of our clan. I might not agree with all of your policies, but I am in full support of your efforts to strengthen our fellow Larkinsons by designing more powerful mechs for them. We need every advantage that we can get in this dangerous dwarf galaxy."

"Aye. I already have many ideas in mind on how to give our clan a greater edge." Ves grinned. "The successful conclusion of the Dullahan Project has proved a lot of theories and given birth to many new ones. It has also become a lot easier for me to realize my more expansive design applications now that I have gained the strength of a Senior."

They talked a bit more about how his sudden breakthrough affected the trajectory of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves soon brought up his great concern.

"About the suspicion that you have just shared with me, can you please keep it to yourself for the time being? I don't think I need to tell you how much trouble we'll attract if it becomes known that my latest innovation can turn regular people into actual mech pilots."

Venerable Jannzi might not be as smart as a mech designer, but she was certainly not stupid!

"I understand, Ves. I will try not to spill this secret to others. Just be aware that if I can think about it, so can other mech pilots who are able to make use of your Carmine System."

"I will choose my next candidates carefully." Ves promised. "I will have to divulge this amazing possibility to the MTA eventually. The damn mechers will find out on their own if I don't take the initiative to share it myself, and by then I won't be able to gain as many concessions as before. It's a good thing that I have a couple of solid friends and backers within the Association."

The possibility to turn any human into a mech pilot without paying too much of a price had massive implications to both the Survivalists and the Transhumanists!

The Survivalists would probably embrace the benefits of expanding the manpower pool of potential mech pilots on a massive scale.

Gifted soldiers who possessed all of the right skills to become excellent mech pilots no longer had to win the genetic aptitude lottery in order to maximize their potential.

If a war between humans and aliens ever deteriorated to the point where most mech pilots had tragically fallen, the much greater population of norms could serve as a huge pool of reserves to draw upon!

As for the Transhumanists, human ascension became more accessible to the masses than ever. The possibilities that Ves brought to the table opened up an easier and less convoluted way for humans of all stripes to grow stronger.

One of the most remarkable consequences of realizing his latest ambition was that apotheosis no longer became exclusive to potentates! Norms could transform their willpower and surpass the extraordinary threshold with the help of mechs as well as long as Ves successfully completed his research!

Yet before Ves could realize all of these dramatic outcomes, it was incredibly important for him and Jannzi to keep this sensitive matter under wraps.

Once he concluded his eventful meeting with Jannzi, he stepped out of the isolation chamber and returned to his fellow collaborators.

Gloriana and the others had spent their time on cleaning up the workshop. An army bots moved all sorts of disqualified parts and loose materials out of the way. The newly completed Dullahan Project also went through a quick inspection to verify that it was stable and not about to explode or anything.

Each of them paused in their work the moment that Ves entered the workshop once again.

They were all highly familiar with Ves. Not only did they spend years collaborating with him on numerous different design projects, they also connected directly to his mind through the design network on numerous occasions.

It took only a single glance at a distance to realize that Ves returned as a different man.

Gloriana, who knew her husband the best, already had a strong feeling that something drastic took place when he talked to Jannzi in private.

She even started to suspect that Ves was up to mischief with his cousin!

Yet now that Ves came back, she understood that the reality was much different from what she guessed.

"Ves... you..." She uttered with increasing shock and realization. Her voice quivered as she spoke her next words. "D-D-Did you... manage to... become stronger?"

The truth was clear to everyone. Her question was completely redundant and she knew it. She only wanted to obtain a firm answer in the faint hope that she had misjudged the situation yet again.

Unfortunately for the young mother, her husband did not give her the answer she sought!

"It's true. I have just completed my breakthrough. From today onwards, I shall become known as a Senior Mech Designer!"

A few seconds passed by in silence before the other mech designers reacted to this announcement!

"Congratulations, Ves!" Ketis grinned. "I always knew you could do it! Out of all of us, the only one who could become a Senior first had to be you. I look forward to all of the interesting mechs you will design in the future."

Sara Voiken looked genuinely impressed. "I accepted your invitation to join your clan because I judged that following you is one of the best decisions that I could have made. What you managed to accomplish vindicates my choice. I couldn't imagine that you would actually break through to Senior after working as a Journeyman for just a decade or so. I think a lot more mech designers will try to replicate your success and go on expeditions."

Master Benedict Cortez smiled as if nothing was above his expectations. "It was about time, Ves. You have entered a whole new world now that you have moved beyond your Journeyman phase. There is a lot for you to go through now that you have pushed your design philosophy to this extent. While you need to schedule a meeting with the Mech Trade Association, I think it is best if I fill you in on what you need to pay attention to now that you have started your struggle to become a Master."

Ves nodded to Benedict. Out of all of the people gathered in the workshop, only the former Skull Architect had lived through this arduous journey. There was no better friend around who could give better advice.

It took a while longer for the mech designers to finish their congratulatory comments.

It also took a few hard minutes for Gloriana to accept the crushing fact that she had lost the race to Senior.

Though his wife looked as if Ves had trampled on her favorite handbag, he was sure that she would regain her vigor soon enough.

She would probably regain her self-esteem by promising that he might have won this battle, but that she still had a chance of winning the war by realizing her design philosophy first!

Once Gloriana, Ketis and Sara settled down and started to share the good news to the rest of the clan, Ves and Benedict moved aside in order to talk about more serious matters.

"There is a lot you need to know, but don't be in a hurry to meet with a representative of the MTA." Benedict told the newly advanced Senior. "The mechers are highly informative and will definitely be generous about what they are willing to share to a mech designer of proven talent such as you. However, keep in mind that they will only tell their side of the story. Don't contradict their stories, but make sure to maintain a sober perspective."

Ves nodded. "I figure that this would be the case."

"Now that you have become a Senior, it is also time for you to pass on your knowledge and start your formal teaching career. I will leave it up to the MTA to explain the full details, but I imagine once the public learns that a mech designer as young as you has managed to advance to Senior, you will become inundated with countless offers from different mech design universities. Do not make any hasty decisions no matter what they promise. The students you are able to teach will have an enormous influence on your future career and your chances of realizing your design philosophy."

Ves did not know that it was that serious, though he already had suspicions about why every Senior Mech Designer played along with the requirement to become a professor.

"I already intended to wait for a while. My upgraded flagship is on her way back to Davute. Once she arrives, I will gain access to a complete Hyper Chamber. I think that should open up a lot of fancy doors."

Benedict looked pleasantly surprised. "Oh, that is excellent news for you. Try your best to teach at a first-class mech design university if possible. It doesn't matter if you are relegated to teaching basic or elective classes. If that is not attainable, then you should settle for nothing less than teaching classes at the most prestigious second-class mech design universities in human space. I can provide you with a credible reference in order to help you obtain the posting that you deserve."

Ves did not refuse this benefit. "Thank you, Benedict. It will definitely help. Is there anything else that I should know?"

"Aside from teaching general classes, it is a good idea to start mentoring mech designers and mech design students that you see a lot of promise in. I am aware that you have already done so in the past, but this should not be an incidental hobby to you. It is a duty as well as an investment that will pay off handsomely in the future. The mechers will explain to you why this is the case, but for now you should start with forming a list of candidates right away while we are still in the Davute System. If you are not satisfied with people in your clan, you can always choose from one of the many promising kids in the surrounding neighborhood."

"I will take your suggestion into consideration."

Chapter 4945 Big News!

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Big news spread throughout the upper circles of Davute!

"The Larkinson Clan has announced that its patriarch has just advanced to the rank of Senior Mech Designer!"

"How is that possible?! Isn't he supposed to be a third-class bumpkin?! How in the cosmos is he able to become a Senior faster than all of the professors at the Davute University of Technology?!"

"Hah! I knew he was a genius. He didn't break the Polymath's record, but he's not that much worse either. Don't underestimate the potential of a mech designer who earned seven masterwork certificates in the Journeyman stage!"

"This is good news. The stronger he becomes, the more he can assist our colonial federation in our impending war against the Karlachs."

"How likely do you think he will attain Master?"

"Damn, the Living Mech Corporation is already hard to deal with due to their living mechs, and that is when its principal designer is just a Journeyman. Now that he has become a senior, the Larkinsons are bound to win over a greater share of the mech market than before!"

"He's improving too quickly! Not even our worst contingency plans have accounted for this exaggerated promotion speed. What if he becomes a Master before his centennial birthday?"

As the most prominent and high-profile mech designer of the younger generation in the Krakatoa Middle Zone, the announcement of his unexpectedly quick advancement turned into a major topic of discussion!

Initially, the storm spread throughout the political circles of Davute. The Larkinson Clan and its patriarch had abundantly established its prestige in the newly-founded colonial state, so any major change among the Larkinsons could potentially impact a lot of Davutans.

However, Ves and his fellow Larkinsons had also become heroes and household names throughout Davute, so an event that normally did not attract much attention suddenly blew up and turned into prime gossip material!

The young colonial state had never witnessed such an absurdity. Although Journeymen promoting to Senior was not a common event, it was not worth highlighting outside of the mech community.

Normally, only the friends, colleagues, competitors, business partners and customers of the mech designer reacted to such an occurrence as it directly affected their lives.

The fact that the news of Ves' advancement not only elicited a huge reaction from every corner in Davute, but also produced ripple effects in Karlach and far beyond was a sign that his influence had spread far and wide!

As a citizen of Davute, Tristan Wesseling received the news pretty early. The Larkinsons had not deigned to hide this massive development, and instead publicized it through all of their channels!

Tristan had a habit of closely following any news related to the Larkinson Clan, but even he found it difficult to accept the claim.

"Ves became a Senior? This soon?"

This was almost incomprehensible to Tristan. As a direct disciple of Master Katzenberg, he learned what it took to make this transition.

However, knowing was one thing. Pulling it off was another.

A mech designer not only had to study a lot, but combine what he learned with successful research to invent original new design applications.

Most talented and particularly clever mech designers could pull this off as long as they were capable of stepping out the prior work of their predecessors.

What Journeymen truly struggled with was the need to make a profound mental shift. Just saying a bunch of high-minded words was not enough. Mech designers needed to draw from the context of their environment and find an overarching reason to justify the need to pursue a greater goal.

Just as how expert pilots used their conviction to compel themselves to push beyond their limits, Journeymen needed to light a fire that was hot enough to burn down the barriers that restricted their rise!

If that was not enough, mech designers also had to make a major impact on people's lives through their work!

It was not enough to become a celebrity or abuse their authority. They needed to touch people's lives by relying solely on the spread of their works.

This could be done in two different ways.

A Journeyman could arm lots of people and groups with mass-market models that inevitably proliferated on a wider scale.

A Journeyman could also take the elite route and focus on servicing a smaller group of elites whose activities affected a lot of people.

A lot of younger mech designers struggled to satisfy this condition. Most weren't qualified to become the lead designers of major mech design projects. They could only play an assisting or contributing role.

Doing this enabled them to produce at least some impact on people's lives, but the credit they received was much less, which inevitably delayed their advancement.

What was special about Ves was that he had to worry the least about this particular requirement!

As for a more normal mech designer such as Tristan, this was one of the most difficult hurdles that he could overcome at this stage in his career.

It didn't help that he had left the familiar Friday Coalition and all of his connections over there behind in order to start anew in the Colonial Federation of Davute.

This was also why many mech designers did not wish to emigrate from their old and familiar states even if they received better opportunities elsewhere.

If they did not have the confidence to expand their business in a new environment, they were better off sticking to their old haunts!

For a moment, Tristan questioned whether he had made the right decision to leave the Friday Coalition behind.

Master Katzenberg could have opened a lot of doors for him, but here in Davute he was pretty much on his own. It would take many years for him to catch up to Ves' current stage.

"I'm roughly just as old as Ves, but when it comes to this, I am way too far behind." Tristan sighed in regret.

The friend he made back in the Komodo Star Sector was already taking off like a rocket.

Tristan knew that his friend had practically started from nothing, but managed to build a clan that became so powerful that it was already capable of forcing the colonial government to compromise!

A mech designer who was able to do all of that was unlikely to fare any worse in his main vocation. Tristan could only admit that Ves existed on a different orbit than himself.

The announcement did not depress him for long, though.

Every mech designer was different. Some progressed faster than others, but that did not mean the slower ones were worthless.

As a student of Master Katzenberg, Tristan possessed enough confidence in his ability to develop his own valuable design solutions.

He also did not think that he would remain muddle-headed for too long. It might take a few decades, but sooner or later Tristan would lose the mentality of a Journeyman and begin to think like a Senior.

That would be the point where he would make his breakthrough.

"Once I become a Master, I will be able to talk with you on a more equal footing, Ves." Tristan spoke as determination burned in his eyes.

He already started to adjust his plans for his design studio and his own career. He decided to drop a few peripheral business activities and start investing more in his original mech designs.

Even if the current market environment was stupendously competitive, Tristan knew that he couldn't stay timid anymore. He needed to take more risks, apply for further loans and set up a mech factory.

There was no better time to invest in mech production as the upcoming war would definitely cause the demand for mechs to skyrocket!

Even if the major players such as the Living Mech Corporation and much larger companies captured the lion's share of the market, a smaller player like Wesseling Design Services should still be able to squeeze between the cracks.

Elsewhere, the Government District located in the center of Kotor City had undergone substantial changes since the tumultuous founding ceremony.

In the span of half a year, the central plaza had turned from a prestigious parade ground into an enclosed military fortification.

Thousands of military mechs were permanently stationed here. At least one active ace mech was also present at all times because a Saint Kingdom was needed to maintain total control over the passage leading in and out of the recently discovered pocket space.

The government had made substantial progress in exploring the abandoned alien prison. It had even begun to convert the facility into a strategic base and research facility.

Skyline Palace still hovered high in the sky, but it had moved its resting position so that it no longer loomed right on top of the newly built military fortification.

Each time President Yenames Clive approached the window in his grand office and looked down on the site of the former central plaza, he became reminded by the key individuals who secured this enormous gain for Davute.

"So Ves Larkinson has advanced to Senior." The leader of the colonial federation spoke.

"The news has not been confirmed, but our intelligence analysts believe that it is fully credible." His chief of staff dutifully spoke. "It comes straight from the official channels of the Larkinson Clan, and the Larkinsons have no reason to spread a falsehood that can be disproved with contemptuous ease. Our intelligence sources have already confirmed that Ves Larkinson and his collaborators have just completed their most important expert mech design project to date. That has likely been the catalyst that triggered the breakthrough."

Yenames looked as if he couldn't decide whether to celebrate or brood over this development.

"Ves Larkinson has already shown both promise and results while he was just a Journeyman. Now that he has become a Senior, he will become even more effective as a mech designer, but that will likely make him twice or thrice as insufferable."

The Larkinson Clan already had an outsized impact on his colonial federation. It could not be treated as a regular political faction at all. President Yenames Clive keenly understood that he had lost even more leverage now that Ves Larkinson had demonstrated his talent and ability in such a dramatic fashion.

"Winning the war comes first, sir." Reina Kernsk gently reminded the troubled federal president. "The promotion of Patriarch Ves Larkinson will improve our military outlook. It is much more reassuring to our troops and stakeholders if our commissioned mechs are chiefly designed by a Senior rather than a Journeyman. The probability that the Larkinson Patriarch will meet all of the demanding requirements we have set for our military mechs is much greater."

Yenames tentatively nodded. He recognized the unique design abilities of Ves in the past, and his early promotion to Senior only raised his expectations of what he was able to whip up in the following years.

Almost a decade in the past, Ves Larkinson had famously empowered the Hex Army with his unique and surprisingly effective Hexer mech designs. He did so while he was still two ranks away from the Fridayman Masters he competed against at the time!

In the present time, Ves Larkinson had made so much progress that his mech designs had become much stronger and more effective than before. With his helpful advancement to Senior, he was only a single step behind the Karlach Master Mech Designers that he would have to defeat this time!

"Perhaps you make a good point, Reina." Yenames Clive admitted. "We will not be able to exert too much direct influence on him much longer, but we can still make do with the side branch of his clan. Inform our military staff to raise the priority on the Larkinson Clan. Order more products from the LMC. Raise the access level of General Ark Larkinson. Do whatever it takes to build more goodwill among the Larkinsons that remain behind."

Reina Kernsk's expression turned pensive. "We can do that, but if we are not careful enough, we may end up raising a powerful lion within our territory. Our power and authority over Davute will dilute even further as a result."

Yenames shrugged. "As you have already said, winning the war comes first. I do not mind it if I have to make more concessions as long as the lion fights on our behalf."

"If you say so, sir."

Chapter 4946 A Negotiation Between Two Women

The Friday Colonies was an established colonial state in the Magair Middle Zone.

Since humanity colonized Magair a bit sooner than Davute, many of its colonies and colonial states had already built up a lot more military and civilian infrastructure.

Normally speaking, the Friday Colonies and the Hex Federation should have gone to war already. The Fridaymen and Hexers already had centuries of bad blood between them and the previous war had turned their animosity into utter hatred.

Yet despite their obvious hostilities, neither side declared war on each other.

The two sides had very different reasons to refrain from taking action. The Friday Coalition had become more divided than before, and also invested much of its manpower and resources into digesting its enormous gains in the Komodo Star Sector.

The Hexers who lost the Komodo War had largely been successful in their efforts to evacuate their core strength to the Hex Federation. However, this also meant that their people had run out of escape routes.

The matriarchs who still remained in power may be arrogant, but they weren't stupid. They extensively studied the reasons why they lost the previous Komodo War and largely chalked it up to operating on mistaken assumptions.

The ugly truth of the matter was that the Hexers overestimated their own military capabilities while doing the opposite to the Fridaymen.

Despite their notorious internal division, the Fridaymen nonetheless managed to pull together and utilize all of their advantages to turn the tide in the Komodo War.

The Hexers could not repeat their mistakes and allow their archenemies to pull off the same success formula yet again.

This was why the Hexers who had all been forced to start new lives in the Red Ocean restrained their aggression and continued to accumulate their power.

The council of matriarchs that had always effectively ruled over the Hexer people had not been shy about pushing drastic reforms to Hexer society.

It would have been much harder to push through so many disruptive changes in the old Hexadric Hegemony, but now that the Hexers not only suffered a traumatic setback, but also moved to an entirely new state and environment, the matriarchs recognized that they had a single chance to make everything right!

Many reforms that were previously unthinkable in the old galaxy eventually took effect without too much resistance in the Hex Federation.

For example, the difference in status between boys and women became a lot less pronounced.

Hexers should no longer seek to press boys down.

Hexers should instead put more effort into lifting them up.

Instead of treating grown boys as threats to society that could explode at any moment, the women of the Hex Federation must put more effort into teaching them so that their inherent violent tendencies could be channeled in more productive pursuits.

The Superior Mother served as the great guide to the new ideologies that had been promulgated by the council of matriarchs and the Temple of Hexism.

Now that it became known that the famous son of the Supreme herself had advanced to the rank of Senior Mech Designer at a prodigious age, many Hexers reacted with great enthusiasm!

"What a good boy!"

"As expected of the Superior Mother! Only the best mother could have raised such an impressive boy!"

"The Supreme Son is the model of a good boy. I have tried so hard to become as good as him, but I am much too far behind."

"With his advancement, the next editions of the Valkyrie Redeemer and the Maiden of Adversity are bound to become stronger!"

"Boys such as us can never lead the Hex Federation like women, but we can still do our part by excelling in auxiliary duties such as handling administration or servicing the mechs piloted by the superior gender. Learn from the example of the Supreme Son!"

"Mech design is one of the few activities where boys are fully allowed to express themselves, and Ves Larkinson has given us a lesson on how it should be done. Study him carefully! Examine his relationship with the women around him! His mother and his wife are the secret to his success! If you want to have any hope of matching his accomplishments, then I suggest to worship the Superior Mother as your second mother and beg a woman as magnificent as Madame Gloriana Wodin to take you as her spouse!"

Foreigners who weren't too familiar with the Hexer people reacted with complete surprise. They never imagined that billions of billions of proud and insular Hexers would pay so much attention to the emergence of a Senior Mech Designer that wasn't even a citizen of the Hex Federation!

Only the Fridaymen understood their old archenemies the best. They expressed no surprise at how big of a deal it was for Ves Larkinson to take another step towards becoming a Master Mech Designer.

The New Scimitar System proclaimed a holiday. Many Hexers who lived in the core territory of the rising Wodin Dynasty spontaneously burst out in celebration in honor of their greatest benefactor!

The success of Ves Larkinson directly affected the fortunes of the Wodin Dynasty.

The Wodins had long assumed the role of unofficially representing the Supreme Son's interests in the Hex Federation.

It didn't matter if Ves never really thought about the Hex Federation these days. His wife regularly passed on 'instructions' and 'proclamations' which the Wodin Dynasty spread through official channels in order to affect the policies of the colonial state.

Due to the Wodin Dynasty's undeniable family relationship with the Superior Mother and the Supreme Son, it had risen to become the fastest growing power in the Hex Federation!

To be honest, the Wodins already met many of the qualifications to become a leading matriarchal dynasty of the Hexer people.

The only reasons why their forward had been blocked was because they lacked enough assets and because it was unacceptable for a seventh matriarchal dynasty to arise.

It was therefore extremely unlikely for the Wodin Dynasty to become one of the top rulers of the Hex Federation. The only way it could go much further was to grow its economic might and wait until one of the six existing matriarchal dynasties fell.

Still, even if the Wodin Dynasty fell far short of the matriarchal dynasties in terms of territory, assets and military power, it compensated for it by having an outsized cultural influence on the Hexer people!

Any public statements made by the Wodins weighed as heavily as the announcements made by the council of matriarchs as far as most Hexers were concerned!

This granted the Wodin Dynasty a lot of leverage in the halls of power of the Hex Federation.

Right now, the mother-in-law of Ves Larkinson tried to take advantage of this in order to secure a crucial concession.

"Matriarch Alisia Vraken, let us put aside the pleasantries and speak plainly." Prime Minister Constance Wodin spoke to the projection in her office in the Crescent Palace. "Our Glory Seekers is the only concrete connection that ties the Hex Federation to the Larkinson Clan. My son-in-law may be the greatest good boy that our state has ever seen, but he has set his sights far beyond our trivial affairs. He is a mech designer who is destined to become a part of the top community of mech designers of our entire civilization."

The projection of the old but wizened female leader of the powerful Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty began to look impatient.

"What are you trying to convey, Prime Minister Constance? From what I understand, you and your fellow Wodins are being left behind by your precious 'Supreme Son'."

Constance did not deny this truth. "The boy has a short attention span. Combined with his wild ambitions, his attachment to our people and state grows weaker over time. While our dynasty has put much effort into strengthening the Glory Seekers within his alliance, the material assistance that you and the other matriarchal dynasties have provided is not enough."

"We have already explained to you that we cannot recklessly transfer too many of our mechs and ships to your Glory Seekers." Matriarch Alisia Vraken responded. "The Friday Colonies are watching us like a hawk. The more defenders we divert from our colonial state, the more we become vulnerable to Fridayman aggression."

"We cannot limit our thinking to this level, matriarch." Constance retorted. "My son-in-law has become a Senior Mech Designer now. My daughter has informed me that he can design much stronger mechs for us if he is willing to do so. As Ves Larkinson has proven himself to be a boy who treats his friends fairly, we must make a grand gesture in order to make him feel indebted to our Hex Federation."

"I do not like the sound of this. Grand gestures are costly. Tell me what you have in mind."

Constance Wodin slightly paused before she chose to bite the bullet.

"I want you to plead to the rest of your council to reassign a Hexer ace pilot to the Glory Seekers."

"Absolutely not! This is completely out of the question, Wodin! Each of our Saints are tasked with protecting our most vital star systems from Fridaymen aggression! No matriarchal dynasty will agree to donate one of their own ace pilots in order to please a single boy, even if he has obtained the title of the Supreme Son. Our Vraken Matriarch Dynasty will never approve of this, and so will the other ones."

Constance sighed. She already expected this response.

"Please think carefully, Matriarch Alisia. Sending an ace pilot is a gesture that my son-in-law cannot possibly ignore. This is the only effective method that we can employ to restore the relevance of the Glory Seekers and prevent them from sliding into irrelevance. By reinforcing the Golden Skull Alliance to this degree, we can persuade my son-in-law to repay our generosity with another Hexer mech design or three. Think about how much his work can strengthen our Hex Army even further. The temporary sacrifice of a single ace pilot can strengthen the combat effectiveness of millions of mech pilots. This is a beneficial trade."

The matriarch of the Vrakens looked pensive. She agreed with Constance Wodin's logic, but that did not mean she was willing to pay the price!

Seeing that Alisia Vraken no longer rejected the proposal as strongly as before, Constance decided to pull out a trump card.

"Matriarch Alisia, I strongly suggest you take advantage of this opportunity for the good of the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty. My daughter has shared many interesting stories about my son-in-law's work. What you know about him and his mechs is only the tip of the iceberg. His close relationship with not one, but two MTA factions is not a coincidence, and neither is his elevation to a tier 6 galactic citizen."

"His potential is known to all of us, but that does not necessarily translate into immediate results."

"Respectfully, you are wrong, matriarch. His ingenuity along with the Superior Mother's blessing has allowed him to master not just one but several methods to grow and empower both mechs and mech pilots. His methods are also effective for ace pilots and ace mechs. If you do not believe me, then let me show you a collection of footage of a number of expert mechs that he has agreed to modify in exchange for certain concessions."

Once Matriarch Alisia Vraken received the footage, she began to examine it carefully.

The recordings displayed the battle performance of numerous different ace mechs before and after Operation Lighthouse. From the amazing firepower of the Thunderer Mark II to the extraordinary lethality of the ace mechs of the Gemini Saints, it was clear that these top machines massively outperformed other machines of this category!

The Vraken Matriarch finally became sharper. Someone as old as her possessed an extensive understanding of ace mechs. The information conveyed by the footage along with the accompanying documents made it abundantly clear that the only reason why these powerful machines became much more powerful was because Ves had upgraded them in person!

What was even more shocking was that Ves had a lot more secret methods at his disposal!

Matriarch Alisia Vraken's opinion on the value of the Supreme Son shifted dramatically.

"Let us see what we can do. Your Glory Seekers cannot be allowed to fall behind." One of the six powerful rulers of the Hex Federation readily declared. "It may be challenging to persuade the other five matriarchal dynasties to weaken their defenses, but the Vrakens are more than willing to take responsibility."

Constance Wodin smirked.

Chapter 4947 Old Master

The old galaxy.

No human referred to the Milky Way Galaxy like this in the past. Humanity never actually used this stuffy name of its home galaxy that often either because there was no need to make the distinction.

In the past, ancient humans only referred to the only sun as 'the sun' and the only moon as 'the moon' before they traversed the stars. They were forced to use more unique designations in order to distinguish between stars and moons.

In the same way, humans took a long time to refer to the Milky Way Galaxy as 'the galaxy' before they expanded their reach yet again.

The opening of the Red Ocean and the spread of humanity to an entirely different galaxy, if only a miniature-sized one, caused many humans to develop the need for greater differentiation!

Since calling the Milky Way Galaxy by this clunky name all of the time became tiresome, humans had taken to referring to it as the old galaxy for convenience.

It was not an inaccurate name. The old galaxy was humanity's old haunt. Much of its stars had already been explored to death. The aliens who resided in the Milky Way in the past and present had been figured out as well.

Compared to the exciting and fast-moving environment of the new frontier, the old galaxy practically looked like an oasis of peace and stagnation!

While the old galaxy still hosted plenty of conflicts, it was clear that their intensity no longer reached the heights of the past.

The opening of the Red Ocean served as an escape valve for many states.

A huge number of ambitious, eager and combative people no longer stirred up trouble in the old galaxy, but instead chose to do whatever it took to emigrate to the new frontier in order to obtain much greater room for development!

Did this make the people left behind in the old galaxy inferior? Not necessarily.

The Fridaymen happened to be in a special situation. They had won a massive war for control over the Komodo Star Sector shortly after the Red Ocean became accessible.

Compared to chasing after ephemeral riches in a region of space that was unimaginably distant, most Fridaymen chose to consolidate their gains in the Komodo Star Sector!

Even if it was just a frontier star sector that was far away from any prosperous trade, there was still a lot of value in taking it over in its entirety!

Enough time had passed for the Friday Coalition to overcome the initial difficulties in annexing and starting the enormous reconstruction effort of the former territories of the Hexadric Hegemony.

Key figures of the Friday Coalition such as Master Carmin Olson made heavy commitments in exchange for obtaining a relatively small but extremely lucrative piece of the pie!

The Master Mech Designer who once became known as a genius for realizing her design philosophy before she became a century years old reacted with bemusement after receiving an unexpected piece of news.

"There is no need for you to express so much excitement at this announcement. Ves Larkinson is no longer your friend. He is still our enemy. His work has led to the deaths of many good Fridayman soldiers. You should not expose this attitude to other Fridaymen. They are liable to accuse you for treachery."

Oleg Vorn snorted. Though he had grown up since the last time he met with Ves in person, he still couldn't help but regress whenever this topic arose!

"Alienating was the worst mistake our state could have ever made. Besides, no one ever asked me whether I agreed to this. I respect you a lot for teaching me all of this time, but I am no longer studying under you anymore. I have set off on my own these days. I am my own person and I can treat anyone as my friend as I like!"

"That is a dangerous opinion to hold in this star sector." Carmin Olson warned her graduated disciple.

The younger Journeyman irreverently shrugged his shoulders. "Then I will pack up my bags and move to the Red Ocean like the others who want to get out of this depressing state. I swear the Friday Coalition has never been the same after winning the war. We've become so bogged down by the reconstruction effort that we never really do anything exciting with our mechs anymore."

"We are citizens of the Vermeer Group and the Friday Coalition. We were raised by them. We have a moral obligation to repay them. There are many priceless opportunities to establish your business

and secure a strong footing in a regional mech market in this period of time. If you want to have any hope of catching up to your former brother, then you should stay put and meet the demands of your local customers."

Oleg sighed. This was indeed the best possible choice for him, but that did not mean he liked it. Pretty much every mech designer of his generation faced temptation from the Red Ocean.

"Don't worry, Master. I am not going to abandon what I built in this star sector so easily. Ves has his clan and his mech company. I can't fall too far behind if I want to meet with him again on an equal footing."

Even as he said so, Oleg felt quite uncomfortable about the fact that the young man he once knew had made such an enormous leap in progress.

Just like Tristan, Oleg Vorn had received the core teachings of a Master Mech Designer. This put him at a much higher starting point than other mech designers.

The fact that Ves was able to surpass him in such a clear and undeniable manner despite lacking so much guidance was difficult to stomach!

Fortunately, Oleg still looked at Ves from a favorable angle. He was happy for the other man's success. He easily accepted this outcome after he had a bit of time to adjust his mentality.

Carmin Olson stood up from her seat at her design terminal and moved closer to her disciple.

She placed her hand on his shoulder. "What happened to Mr. Larkinson is... regrettable, but we cannot compromise our own interests in order to satisfy our baser desires. We are both limited by our allegiances. So long as we still call ourselves Fridaymen, we must maintain our distance from him and other enemies of the state."

Though Oleg Vorn was upset at this situation, he was not as willing to distance himself from his home state as Tristan Wesseling.

The Vermeer Group was not in a good shape these days. It was still in the process of rebuilding everything it had lost in the Komodo War. It also experienced a lot of difficulties in digesting the newly conquered territories of the Hexadric Hegemony. Oleg would feel guilty if he abandoned the Vermeers in their time of need.

"Is there any possibility that we can reconcile with Ves?" Oleg asked. "I mean, you managed to obtain shares in his mech company. Even if you had to give up most of it, our state still allows you to hold whatever you have left."

"That is because becoming a minority shareholder of the Living Mech Corporation allows our state to gain access to at least some information on Ves and the Larkinson Clan's activities. Controlling these shares will also give us several means to manipulate the Larkinsons if necessary."

The younger mech designer raised his eyebrow. "So you're not holding those shares because you're incredibly optimistic about his future career and want to wait until you earn a fantastic return on your investment?"

Master Olson shook her head. "That is a low probability event. You should already be aware of that. Do not forget who I am. I have no need to profit from the success of a former apprentice who I have not been able to teach as much as I had hoped."

"Are you proud, though? I bet you are. No matter what people say about Ves, you helped him once. You taught him for a while and set him on the right path. He owes at least a part of his massive success to you. Sure, he may have used his talents against our state, but that is life."

The female Master Mech Designer folded her arms behind her back and looked around. Her rebuilt design lab was better equipped than ever. She had also made a lot of progress in her research projects due to the stimulation of the Komodo War and all of the rewards she earned after the conflict had passed.

"Human society is turbulent." Master Olson told her discipline. "It is because our race is prone to fighting against each other that there is room for mech designers for us to exist. Colleagues who share the same passions and interests as us can become our adversaries solely because they take different sides. This may be the first time you must regard a friend as your enemy, but will not be the last. It is difficult to reverse this transformation, but it is not impossible. I sincerely hope a time will come when we do not have to treat Mr. Larkinson as our opposition anymore."

That sparked Oleg's interest. The clever mech designer derived additional meaning from her words.

"Are you working towards that future?"

"It depends on my research." Olson answered. "Winning the Komodo War has put the Vermeer Group and our state as a whole on a stronger footing than before. Once our people consolidate all of our gains in this star sector, a new era will begin for Fridayman mech designers. I do not know whether I will still take part in such an era."

"Didn't you just tell me earlier that we need to be loyal and help the Vermeer Group and the Friday Coalition?!"

"I did, but that is not a reason for mech designers to permanently remain attached to a state that no longer provides as much assistance to their future growth and research." Olson said. "It is not forbidden for us to hold selfish desires. The people of our profession seek to make progress, and if we cannot find it in our home region, then we must look elsewhere."

The younger man reacted with mild shock. In their many talks about the future, he had never heard Master Olson suggest that she might leave the Friday Coalition and settle elsewhere!

"Are you... thinking about moving to the Red Ocean?"

"Not necessarily, but it is a potential destination." The older woman replied. "I can also find opportunities elsewhere in the old galaxy. My decision will heavily rely on the results of my current research. The greater my results, the greater my value. I hope to earn access to better opportunities in both the old galaxy and the new frontier, but only after I have helped the Vermeer Group rise from its current difficulties."

"I see... What if... the Vermeer Group can't get out of trouble?"

"What are you referring to, Oleg?"

The younger mech designer nervously fiddled with his hands. "I have been hearing more and more rumors about a possible civil war. There is a story going around that suggests that the Gauge Dynasty thinks it is everyone else's fault that the Sundered Phalanx suffered a massive defeat in Pima Prime. Whatever the case, the Gaugers are hopping mad and they are taking it out on everyone else."

Master Olson was not ignorant of this development. She possessed more information channels than most, and she also happened to play a secret role in the Battle of Pima Prime.

"The Gaugers are engaging in theatrics as usual, Oleg. Do not believe in the rumors without applying your logic to the situation as I have taught. The Gauge Dynasty may have become stronger than ever, but it will lose far more than it can gain by fracturing the Friday Coalition. Not only will the dynasty lose its holdings in the Friday Colonies, it will also redivide the Komodo Star Sector and regress it to a condition where a costly and destructive war may erupt once again. None of the coalition partners can bear this cost, especially when outside parties are waiting to take advantage of our continuing depletion of strength."

"Oh. You are right. Do you think that Ves will help and take our side if a civil war ever erupts?"

Olson shook her head. "He is more likely to derive amusement at our misfortune."

Chapter 4948 Change In Status

A single day after the Larkinson Clan announced that their patriarch had advanced to Senior, it held a lavish banquet to celebrate this historic occasion!

It couldn't be helped. So many important people and organizations wanted to talk to Ves all of a sudden for one reason or another.

The Larkinson Clan and its various related subsidiaries became inundated with cooperation agreements and business proposals.

Such a reaction was highly uncommon. This was the first time that a mech designer's promotion to the rank of Senior Mech Designer produced an enormous change in attitude and treatment.

Ves initially thought that all of those people had gone crazy, but after thinking it through, he understood why they acted this way.

It was truly worthwhile for them to establish a closer relationship with Ves, or if that was not possible, the Larkinson Clan as a whole.

There was a difference between possessing the potential to become a bigshot and being a bigshot outright.

There were far too many talented and well-endowed individuals who fell into the former category. Not every flashy and presumptuous punk could withstand the test of time and mature into a leader that could easily affect the lives of trillions of people.

Though Ves had not yet grown to this height, he had already taken a substantial step forward!

A lot of clever analysts had studied his record and examined all of the information available to the public. They even studied any intelligence collected by their respective organizations.

With all of his recent gains, it became clear that even if Ves ultimately failed to reach his potential, he shouldn't be much worse!

Investing in him was no longer considered a high-risk investment!

In an environment that attracted a lot of profit-seeking pioneers, it made a lot of sense to make overtures to the Larkinson Clan.

However, the Larkinsons did not particularly welcome their overtures.

The clan prized loyalty and friendship above all. It did not disdain pure transactional relationships, but it was wary of partners who possessed a lot of green but not a lot of principles.

Ves had a long history of getting betrayed and stabbed in the back by fair-weather friends.

In his eyes, most of the opportunists who wanted to start up a relationship with him because he showed enough value.

If that was the only reason that motivated them, then Ves did not want to have anything to do with them. This was because if his enemies ever offered greater value, his 'friends' and 'allies' would quickly turn their faces in an instant!

It was the buddies who had stuck with him when he was weaker and not that impressive that Ves valued the most.

The Hexers, Glory Seekers, Crossers and certain mechers had all earned his trust to an extent. They had either fought alongside his clan in battle or helped him overcome various other difficulties that he could never resolve on his own.

Even if he had increased his status to the point where he could easily exchange all of his weaker partners for stronger ones, he did not think about it for a second.

Perhaps not all of his buddies were capable of keeping up with his growth rate in the long run, but that was okay. He was not an ungrateful mech designer. He would definitely be able to give them a hand in the future.

At this time, a large number of invited guests converged at a floating restaurant and club in the Austere District.

It cost thousands of MTA credits to rent the prestigious venue for a single evening, but the Larkinsons could easily cover the expense.

Hundreds of Larkinson mechs had taken up guard positions all around the entire floating structure. The local government did not even bother to lodge a protest or do anything to stop the Larkinson Army from violating a whole host of rules and fielding so many private mechs in one of the most expensive and sensitive districts of Kotor City!

In any case, if the government wasn't willing to play ball, then the Larkinson Clan would just host its celebratory banquet elsewhere.

This would definitely turn into an embarrassing scandal for Davute as it would show that the Larkinsons simply did not trust the security arrangements of the colonial federation!

As the guests started to pour into a large reception room, they soon became enthralled by the various sights.

The Larkinsons converted the resplendent room into an exhibition hall that portrayed their patriarch's brilliant accomplishments over the past decade.

From competing in the Young Tigers Exhibition to earning first place in the Twin Weapons Tournament.

From getting drafted in the last Bright-Vesia War to playing a critical role in rescuing the trapped VIPs in the Davute VII Pocket Space.

From journeying into the forbidden Nyxian Gap to completing several successful expeditions into the new frontier.

The mechs stole the show. Numerous projected dioramas displayed the full catalog of the Larkinson Patriarch. From showcasing his earliest third-class variants to presenting brief snapshots of his most exquisite masterwork expert mechs, the range of his works along with their meteoric rise in combat effectiveness astounded many guests!

Each exhibit made it abundantly clear that Ves was not like any other mech designer. He lived a much more active life and took much more risks than usual.

The greater the risk, the greater the reward!

It was exactly because Ves had a penchant of making reckless decisions that made other groups reluctant to invest in him. It was only now that he managed get past his weakest period that he became a lot more worthwhile to befriend!

Every guest invited to the celebratory banquet reacted in two different ways.

The Glory Seekers, the Crossers, the Aducs, the Murphies and other familiar partners all felt lucky that they had entered into a close relationship with such an impressive rising star.

Compared to the past where the Larkinsons had to expend a lot of effort into forming a cooperation agreement with them, now the situation had reversed!

Third parties had no chance of forming a partnership with the Larkinsons anymore!

The Larkinson Clan only showed a willingness to sign modest business agreements with a select number of groups.

This was just to ensure that the clan would gain easier access to starships, resources, supplies and other mundane goods and services.

The representatives of the companies who were willing to sign much more favorable contracts with the Larkinson Clan did not get to meet with the famous Larkinson Patriarch in person.

There was no compelling reason to bother Ves with such trivial affairs. The Larkinson Clan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant departments had more than enough qualified personnel to manage the new relations.

Unless a group was willing to gift the Larkinson Clan an entire fleet carrier on the spot, there was no chance that any representative would be able to secure a meeting with Ves in person!

Still, as much as Ves wanted to avoid dubious people in this time of celebration, he could not completely say no to everyone.

His responsibility as the leader of the Larkinson Clan obliged him to meet with a number of individuals he would rather avoid.

"Congratulations for attaining the rank of Senior Mech Designer. Please accept this little token on behalf of President Yenames Clive." Reina Kernsk said as she passed on a decorative box to Ves. "I believe I can speak for all Davutans that we look forward to what you will be able to present to our military in the coming months and years."

Ves accepted the gift box as if he was holding a plague locked within a vial. He quickly passed it over to his personal assistant without making it seem as if he wanted to toss it into the trash chute.

"I am almost ready to commence work on fulfilling the first major mech design commission." He told the president's chief of staff. "I have regularly met with Master Decimus Horst over the last couple of months. I learned a lot about the type of mechs that he excels at and brainstormed a lot of interesting ideas. It won't take long before I will finish a mech design proposal that your people can evaluate. If they approve of my mech design concept, I can start our new design project right away. I think it is possible to complete it within a year with the earnest cooperation of an experienced Master and the full support of your state."

Madame Kernsk looked satisfied with this answer. "Speed is important. The sooner you complete your design, the sooner we can retool our mech factories and produce your new mech model in sufficient quantities. If we can transfer enough copies of your new and promising heavy artillery mech to our strategic planets at the border region, we can stop or at the very least delay the offensives that the Karlachs will undoubtedly launch."

Having gone through a Mastery experience that gave him an extensive first-hand experience of how wars were fought on land, Ves gained a much greater understanding of the context and the importance of planetary campaigns.

A strong heavy artillery mech that could outperform the models fielded by the opposition could make a huge difference in any war!

Ves grinned at the representative of President Clive. "Don't worry. I was already a productive mech designer at the Journeyman stage. Now that I am a Senior, I can work even faster. You will get your new heavy artillery mech in time."

Once Reina Kernsk got the promise she wanted, she left with a satisfied expression.

More important guests came up. The Larkinsons had carefully screened and selected them so Ves did not grow too annoyed.

"Congratulations on your promotion, Ves." General Herman Foraine spoke as he came up next. "We have yet to go on any expeditions, but it appears that our decision to join your alliance has already paid off. The Adelaide Mercenary Company is pleased to be your friend and ally."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "Are you speaking on behalf of your Third Fleet or your parent organization as a whole?"

"The latter." General Foraine spoke. "If not for the fact that it is not possible for the other fleets to converge on our location in the short term, I am sure that more of us would have clamored to join your expeditionary fleet."

"I think we already have enough mechs for the time being." Ves gently replied. "With an effective strength of around three mech divisions, our fleet has already become incredibly large and clunky. It might be better for everyone if we think about splitting up. We can cover more locations and harvest more wealth this way. We just need to make sure that our splinter fleets are close enough to each other that any of them can quickly be reinforced if a major threat is on the way."

Herman looked critical. "Dispersing our fleets and mechs comes with considerable risks, Ves. Even if our fleets are located in two different neighboring star systems, it still takes at least a day or two for reinforcements to arrive. This is not a problem if our scouts can detect major threats in advance, but if our enemies manage to launch a sneak attack, it becomes extremely difficult to maintain an effective defense for such an extensive period of time!"

"I am aware of these possibilities, my friend. I am just making a suggestion. We can discuss the details of our upcoming expedition at a later date."

The two leaders talked a bit more about other subjects. Herman even talked about the possibility of procuring a number of Larkinson mechs.

"While we are not looking to break our existing contracts and overhaul our entire mech setup, we are much more open about the possibility of introducing additional living mechs in our mech roster." Herman said. "Are you interested in designing a custom mech for our mercenary company? You can treat it as a formal commission if you would like."

"Hmmm..."

Chapter 4949 Too Reliant

Ves always had an interest in designing a powerful new mech for a specific client. These sort of commissions were fun and interesting because he could tailor his work to a much more defined target audience.

However, it was not a good idea for him to accept General Herman Foraine's commission right away.

"I am going through a lot of changes at the moment, and I am already obliged to design a bunch of other mechs already." Ves told the leader of the Adelaide Third Fleet.

"Oh. I see."

"Besides, I don't think we should act too hastily on this matter. My clan has yet to fight alongside your mercenary fleet outside of the Battle of the Boryan Belt. I already have a decent idea on how your forces fight, but I need to observe your mechs in action further in order to figure out what sort of living mech model can best complement your existing combat approach."

"We always have room for lighter mechs, though I will not say no to heavy firepower either."

Ves recalled that the Adelaides had a preference for mobility warfare. Getting bogged down in battles of attrition was extremely unprofitable, so the Adelaides preferred to outmaneuver their opponents. They also liked to distance themselves from enemies that were too costly to defeat.

The Jemma Sandivar of the Adelaide Third Fleet loosely matched the strategies that the mercenaries favored.

The ace light skirmisher was too fast to get pinned down and possessed plenty of means to isolate and disrupt its chosen prey. All of these advantages ensured that Saint Marissa Lewandowski always held the initiative.

Ves already came up with a few interesting ideas that might give the Adelaides an extra edge on the battlefield, but there was no hurry.

"If you want to dip your toes into living mechs, then I highly recommend you look into our Ferocious Piranha Mark III. It is an effective mech against all sorts of enemies, but is especially useful against aliens who aren't mentally resilient enough to withstand its disorienting glow."

General Foraine was familiar with this mech model. "Our fleet has purchased a dozen Ferocious Piranhas. I cannot deny that they are useful, but we cannot replace all of our existing light skirmishers so easily."

"I understand."

Their talk did not go on for too long as Ves still needed to chat with other important people.

He was tempted to ask whether he could gain permission to study and tinker with the Jedda Sandivar, but he ultimately did not voice this request.

Just because he was able to do so before did not mean it was appropriate for him to drool over the Adelaide Third Fleet's trump card on a regular basis. It would be disrespectful to its existing designers to hijack the work of other mech designers!

Besides, even if the Adelaides were crazy enough to give Ves free rein to the powerful ace light skirmisher, he wasn't qualified to design most of its systems despite his recent promotion.

Ves met and chatted with a number of other people for half an hour before it was time to enter the dining hall.

The opulent restaurant that the Larkinson Clan took over had not undergone too much of a makeover.

Aside from hanging a lot of banners and emblems related to the Larkinson Clan, the luxurious furniture and the warm decor already did a good job at turning this into a special occasion.

A lot of Larkinsons as well as many guests took their seats.

Not many people could sit at the main table where Ves took the seat of honor. Only the most important Larkinsons received this special honor.

"Papa?" Little Marvaine asked as he sat on his elevated child-sized chair.

"Yes, my boy?"

"What is so great about being a Senior?"

Ves reached out and patted his son's neatly combed brown hair. "The answer is a little too complicated for you. To put it in simple terms, a Senior Mech Designer has proved himself to be a better mech designer in general terms. You can count on a Senior to design a better mech than any Journeyman, though there are exceptions. To be honest, I don't know the full answer myself. I still have to talk to the MTA in order to understand it myself."

He already contacted his pals over at the MTA and scheduled a meeting later this week. He had a feeling that the mechers would solve much of his confusion.

"Seniors are qualified to teach classes." Gloriana mentioned one of the most obvious changes.

"Your father's record and accomplishments will easily allow him to take up a teaching position at an impressive virtual school. If the first-raters do not look down on him, it may even be possible for him to teach at your future university!"

"Yay! Papa is the best teacher!" Marvaine squealed and enthusiastically clapped his hands.

Ves chuckled and shook his head. "I do not think that it is possible for you to formally enter any of my classes. It is against the rules of any decent institution. Still, it doesn't matter. Your mother and I will most assuredly teach you everything that we can pass on to you so long as you are ready."

General Ark Larkinson who sat further down the table spoke up at this point.

"I am glad that our clan has gained a powerful Senior, but we cannot pin all of our hopes on you." Uncle Ark said. "While we can still rely on your wife and your colleagues to an extent, we do not have enough talented or promising mech designers among the younger generations. If we want our clan to become comprehensive enough to guarantee its ability to maintain its prosperity throughout the years, it is important to set up as many of our descendants for success as possible."

Ves and Gloriana already understood what he meant. Big family organizations always concerned themselves with maintaining inheritances and securing their long-term stability.

It was critically important that the Larkinson Clan put a lot of effort into developing an unbroken chain of talents and leadership figures.

Though Ves already invested enormously in the development of all of his children, it would take at least thirty to forty years before they grew up sufficiently enough to take over his burdens.

This was too long of an interval. This was why the Larkinson Clan needed to develop more stopgaps that could ensure that the younger clansmen of today could step in if the older generations proved to be insufficient.

Ves looked around until he spotted Maikel and Zanthar Larkinson.

His two former students were still Apprentice Mech Designers, so they did not get to sit at the main table. The two young mech designers still had a lot to go before they became ready to advance to Journeyman.

"I will pay more attention to this." Ves promised to General Ark Larkinson. "I will give any Larkinson a fair opportunity to learn from me, but the premise is that they are smart and compatible enough to accept my teachings. Few mech designers and mech design students are capable of adopting a similar design style as mine."

"Just do the best you can."

Everyone here knew that the Larkinson Clan had become too reliant on Ves. This was the case from the beginning, but slowly eased as many other capable Larkinsons arose.

His early advancement to Senior Mech Designer provided a lot of new benefits to the Larkinson Clan, but also had the downside of reversing the previous trend!

The significance of a young Senior Mech Designer was too great!

All of this meant that the Larkinson Clan would soon return to a circumstance where it could rapidly fall apart if anything happened to Ves.

Although everyone recognized this problem, it was not so easy to find a solution. The only way to mitigate this vulnerability was to raise more powerful pillars for the Larkinson Clan.

The two most likely pillars that could help take over some of Ves' burdens were Gloriana and Ark.

As long as Gloriana caught up to Ves and as long as Ark attained his long-awaited breakthrough, the clan would no longer remain stuck in a unipolar state.

Ves already understood what held his dearest uncle back.

To be honest, he had been waiting to advance to Senior and learn the secret about expert mechs before he intended to design Ark's next battle partner.

When Ves glanced towards his wife, he wasn't sure how long it would take for her to return to parity with him. It would be rather inconvenient if he designed the next batch of expert mechs without a competent collaborator by his side.

He had grown too used to working together with Gloriana. She was truly an ideal design partner in many ways.

It would be a tragedy if he continued to make rapid progress while his wife increasingly fell behind.

Ves was already to help Gloriana pay for her much-desired first-class cranial implant as soon as the Design Department completed its current batch of expert mech designs.

Dinner soon got served. Exquisite looking clockwork bots floated to the tables and delivered the initial dishes.

As the Larkinsons and the guests began to dig in, Ves continued to talk to all of the clansmen who wanted to know how his promotion changed their lives.

"Will you upgrade all of our expert mechs?" Venerable Joshua asked as he sat next to Ketis and his children. "The Everchanger has been clamoring to reach the standard of Jannzi's new machine."

"Please upgrade the Larkinson expert mechs assigned to my Warborn Division first." General Ark quickly requested. "The expert mechs that remain attached to your fleet will not be subjected to as much pressure as my troops. The Larkinson expert pilots who volunteered to take part in the upcoming war will inevitably fight against their Karlach counterparts. Any upgrade can make a difference in these confrontations."

This was true more or less. Given how Ark was eager to earn a lot of war merits, the Warborn were bound to fight a lot of tough battles.

The mechs and expert mechs would subsequently be subjected to a lot of abuse and difficult circumstances.

It wasn't just the intensity of combat that worried everyone, but also the frequency of battles.

Wars between second-rate states often sparked many different battles, each of them centered around different star systems.

There were hardly any circumstances where two warring states decided to take it easy and refrain from launching attacks!

Ves began to frown. "I am not opposed to upgrading the Riot, the C-Man and the other expert mechs under your command, but it will be rather difficult. Just because I have become a Senior doesn't mean I can work on so many projects at once. You will have to wait for me to revise our current expert mechs in batches. Aside from that, it would be highly inconvenient for me to upgrade any existing machine in your Warborn Division when our expeditionary fleet has traveled far away from Davute. I do not intend to compel the fleet to turn around and travel all the way back to the Krakatoa Middle Zone just to solve a single problem."

"Could you not plan out a route that will regularly swing your fleet in the vicinity of our current zone?" Ark suggested. "I am not asking for your fleet to come back immediately after a single call. We can arrange it so that we can still wait until you have completed all of the necessary upgrade projects."

"Hmm... that sounds a lot more reasonable. I think we should talk further after this banquet is over."

Ves did not want to deprive the Warborn of any major upgrades, but he did not want the Davute Branch to shackle his fleet either.

He needed to find a reasonable balance where the main branch of the Larkinson Clan could support its side branches but not to the extent of turning into their slave!

Chapter 4950 How To Progress Quickly

As the banquet progressed, Ves increasingly felt more gratified with the attitudes of his fellow clansmen.

In the last couple of years, he always had the sense that his clan had grown too large for him to control.

It was a bit difficult for many Larkinsons to continue to look up to a Journeyman Mech Designer.

The story was different now that he had become a Senior Mech Designer.

While it was not as good as attaining the rank of Master Mech Designer, people were already accustomed to seeing Seniors in positions of authority.

This was because the majority of Seniors tended to advance to this rank when they were in their sixties or later.

Mech designers who had overcome their youth and climbed their way to this level of success were no longer young and inexperienced. They had all attained the mentality and the qualifications to assume responsibility over important duties.

Even if Ves personally thought that he hadn't gotten rid of his wild and adventurous streak, he was more than happy to take advantage of the common stereotype of Seniors.

From the reactions of his fellow Larkinsons, he already understood that his authority within the clan had restored to its peak. It was trivially easy for him to implement his ideas. People would actively bend over in order to accommodate his request as long as it wasn't too unreasonable.

"Can you tell us more about the mech that ultimately triggered your breakthrough?" Beatrice Hendrix curiously asked. "I already have access to the basic details about the Dullahan Project, but what is the most important factor that caused your design philosophy to make so much progress? You don't have to be too specific about it. I only want to learn from your example so that I can save a few years myself."

Half a year had passed since Ves successfully invited one of his former competitors at the Twin Weapons Tournament.

Just as expected, Beatrice adapted well enough to the Larkinson Clan.

It did not matter whether she fully agreed with the values of the clan or its penchant for risk-taking.

The huge amount of resources the clan had at its disposal was reason enough alone for the talented Journeyman Mech Designer to feel grateful about joining this club every day!

Ves figured that Beatrice Hendrix would soon be ready to get into full gear. He already had a few upcoming mech design projects in mind where she could make full use of her specialization in modular armor systems.

"I cannot say too much about the most promising features of the Dullahan Project." He said as he gestured around the dining hall. This was anything but a suitable venue to explore sensitive and confidential topics. "What I can say is that our latest completed expert mech is of great significance to my work and design philosophy. I took a gamble and implemented experimental new tech that is not proven to be safe. While I am sure that I have broken a lot of ethical rules in the process, the benefits are also obvious. It is only through bold experimentation that I have been able to become a Senior so quickly."

The laymen around the table all nodded as if the entire story made sense, but the mech designers weren't so easily fooled.

Gloriana and the others started to frown.

"Forgive me for saying so, but you are contradicting yourself." Merrill O'Brian spoke up. "Testing untested and highly unsafe design applications is a good way to crash your career. It only takes one deadly accident to force the MTA into censuring you. Mech designers such as us are supposed to serve mech pilots to the best of our ability, and an important part of our duty is to prioritize their safety. How can we make persistent progress when we constantly subject our own clients and customers to unnecessary risks?"

That was indeed a persistent problem with Ves' work. He had few compulsions about holding back and constantly wanted to play around with new ideas. That admittedly caused him to develop a lot of bad habits that he found difficult to shake.

Everyone stared at him in order to hear his answer to this crucial issue. Ves could already tell that his status as a Senior would incur serious damage if he did not provide a satisfactory answer.

"My attitude towards innovation is different from most of you." He began. "It is a bit complicated to explain, but the short version of it is that I recognize that there are already lots of mech designers who are busy with helping mech pilots by developing conventional solutions. I feel no need to follow the crowd because my work won't make that much of a difference anyway."

"You would rather kill yourself than become a generic mech designer." Gloriana said in a familiar tone.

"Just so." Ves grinned. "I have chosen to tread my own path and pioneer an entirely new field of mech design. This has been incredibly rewarding to me so far, but what few people know is that I have to make a lot of difficult decisions on how to proceed. If I slow down and conduct proper studies all of the time, then I would have still been stuck as a Journeyman. Innovation comes at a price, but I have always made sure that the users of my product understand the dangers of benefiting from my latest work. I laid out all of the possible risks and rewards to Venerable Jannzi so that she could make an informed choice. In no way did I ever deceive or coerce her into playing along with my experiments."

"Was it worth it to cooperate with Ves on the Dullahan Project, Jannzi?" Venerable Tusa asked his fellow expert pilot.

"Yes."

Many people reacted with surprise. Everyone knew that Jannzi had a lot of disagreements with Ves. To hear her support his reckless decisions was a bit difficult to accept.

"Are you serious?"

The female expert pilot crossed her arms. "What do you want me to say? I was desperate, okay? My old Shield of Samar has died, but Ves promised to deliver a new expert mech that is at least somewhat related to my old battle partner. He has satisfied this condition and more. I was only able to interface with my brand-new expert mech for a short time, but I can already tell you that my machine has become unbreakable in my hands."

She spoke her words with so much confidence that she painted Ves as a powerful mech designer who could make any dream come true!

Ves smirked. "Do you know that when Jannzi interfaced with the Dulluhan Project for the first time, her resonance strength jumped by more than 50 percent?"

"What?!"

"That's impossible!"

This provoked a huge reaction from numerous people, but especially among the Larkinson expert pilots!

They all understood how difficult it was to grow their resonance strength and reduce the distance to advancing to ace pilot!

The expert pilots had already been aware that Jannzi had just surpassed the threshold to mid-tier expert pilot, which was normally around 20 laveres.

For her to exceed 30 laveres when she hadn't been piloting any expert mechs at all in the past year sounded absurd!

The only reasonable explanation why Jannzi managed to make so much progress was because of her new expert space knight! This was the only variable that made sense!

More than a few Larkinson expert pilots began to stare at Ves as if he was a juicy morsel. It made him feel slightly uncomfortable.

He quickly raised his palm. "Whoa whoa whoa, slow down everyone. Each of you should know about Jannzi's close attachment to the Shield of Samar. Since the Dullahan Project is my attempt at creating a successor mech, this partial 'reunion' evoked a strong emotional reaction."

"That shouldn't be enough of a reason." Joshua said.

"True. The Dullahan Project has other qualities that can explain why Jannzi has made a huge jump in resonance strength. I even think it will continue to accelerate her progress over the coming years."

Naturally, this caused every expert pilot to request the same treatment!

Venerable Rosa Orfan banged her fist against the table. "How soon will you be able to upgrade our own expert mechs with this fantastic new tech?! I can't wait to get stronger!"

"That is not a simple matter, Rosa. The specific solution that Jannzi is benefiting from can be incredibly powerful, but the demands are also high. You may not be willing to pay the price to enjoy a serious boost. I will brief you on this in a more private setting as soon as I am done with testing Jannzi's new expert mech."

The Larkinson expert pilots had no choice but to drop the matter. There were too many foreign guests in the banquet hall and several of them must undoubtedly be able to eavesdrop on the discussion.

As they continued to enjoy the meals, the Larkinsons continued to chat about different topics, though not many of them were particularly important.

Director Ranya Wodin broke that pattern by asking an important question.

"In the past, you said that you were thinking about expanding the Larkinson Army with a biomech-oriented legion. Now that you have become a Senior, do you still have plans to do so, sir?"

Ves firmly nodded. "I haven't changed my mind on this issue, but I am not in a hurry to add such a big and complicated piece to our clan. I fully understand that it is not a simple matter to disrupt our current pattern and add a lot of infrastructure related to biomechs. It would be ideal if we can absorb an existing biomech outfit into our clan. Most of our mech legions came about in the same way. It is always easier to start with an existing foundation than make one from scratch."

Many people nodded in agreement, though not everyone felt easy about fighting alongside icky and disgusting biomechs. They were just too weird for people who had spent decades of their lives working alongside pure metal war machines.

"With the current strength and status of our clan, I believe it will not be particularly difficult to acquire such a unit." General Verle opined.

"That is true, general, but if the only solution to get what I want is to throw a lot of money at the problem, I would have obtained what I wanted a long time ago. What I am truly looking for is a group of strong but more importantly trustworthy biomech pilots. If they cannot be as trustworthy
"Pardon, madame?"

Gloriana's expression turned coy. "Our expeditionary fleet will receive the protection of three ace as the likes of the Swordmaidens or the Penitent Sisters, then I would rather not take the risk of turning

an unstable element into one of the core protectors of our clan. There aren't viable candidates in the Davute region."

Although Davute had grown into an enormous trade hub over the years, it was not a particularly friendly or accommodating site for biomechs and large-scale biotechnology.

There was too little infrastructure to accommodate biomechs. Any pioneering fleet that heavily relied on biomechs would constantly suffer headaches when they needed to replenish their organic supplies and order large batches of replacement biomachines.

If Ves wanted to complete this particular goal, he would have to bring his fleet to another colony or state that embraced biotechnology to a greater degree.

In other words, he had to find the Red Ocean version of the Life Research Association!

Such settlements were rare but not unheard of in the new frontier. The real challenge was to persuade a good enough biomech outfit to join the Larkinson Clan!

"I do not think we have the ships, personnel and room to integrate a large biomech legion in our fleet." General Verle cautiously said. "I think it is best that we focus on profiting from our expeditions for the time being. We are not too short on mechs and we are traveling in the company of many strong allies. With two ace mechs watching over our fleet, we can shrug off most threats in the Torald Middle Zone."

"Three ace mechs." Gloriana spoke up all of a sudden.

"Pardon, madame?"

Gloriana's expression turned coy. "Our expeditionary fleet will receive the protection of three ace mechs. You see, my mother has just informed me that the Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty just agreed to temporarily transfer one of its precious Saints to the Glory Seekers."

The entire table fell silent for a few seconds before Calabast expressed her shock.

"WHAT?!"