

## The Mech 4951

Chapter 4951 Poisoned Chalice

Gloriana most definitely dropped a bomb during the celebratory banquet!

The addition of another powerful ace mech meant that the upcoming expeditions would become even more secure!

Although the Golden Skull Alliance still wouldn't be able to match the combat strength of the temporary coalition organized by the Gemini Family back then, it was more than enough to guarantee everyone's security under ordinary circumstances!

The likelihood of earning a huge profit increased by another margin while the risks became less severe.

Even if the other alliance partners had to allocate a greater share of the loot to the previously unimpressive Glory Seekers, they readily accepted this change because an extra ace mech could save a lot of lives when encountering a setback.

"Those Hexers are awful people. They're the least likable people in this alliance."

"Who cares how much they hate men. They can keep their stupid ideology to themselves. I only care about whether they will cover my back in a fight. The Glory Seekers might be crazy, but they have always been reliable on the battlefield."

"What sort of ace mech do you think the Hexers will send to us? I hope we can get a ranged machine like the Mars. We can't let those alien battleships attack us from a distance with impunity."

As the news spread through the dining hall and beyond, the entire Golden Skull Alliance became excited because of the news!

The most ecstatic people of all were the Glory Seekers themselves!

For many years, the absence of strong or capable leaders such as Patriarch Ves Larkinson, Patriarch Reginald Cross and Master Benedict Cortez had caused the Glory Seekers to become increasingly less important in the alliance.

Hexers such as Marshal Ariadne Wodin and Venerable Brutus Wodin lacked the prestige and accomplishments to lift up the status of the Glory Seekers.

If not for the fact that the Glory Seekers possessed the ability to employ battle formations in combat, it was doubtful that they would still be taken seriously by the Larkinsons and the Crossers!

Due to these developments, the balance of power continued to tilt away from the special troop regardless of the active support provided by the Hex Federation.

This trend became even worse after the recent entry of the Adelaide Third Fleet and the Boojay Family!

"Hah! Our Glory Seekers aren't as pathetic as before!"

"Unlike the other alliance partners, our group enjoys the backing of an entire colonial state that is comparable to Davute. We can receive a lot more support if not for the fact the Fridaymen are keeping an eye on the Hex Federation."

"The Superior Mother has blessed our expedition!"

The surprise addition of a Hexer Saint instantly reversed the downward trend of the Glory Seekers. Every member of this group instantly felt reinvigorated. Whoever the Hex Federation sent, fighting in the presence of a Hexer Saint massively boosted their confidence!

Several hours went by as the party became more festive and boisterous throughout the evening.

Ves and his little family did not stay for long. They boarded their shuttle and returned to their Royal Mansion in the Cat Nest.

Once Ves and his wife put their tired but giggling kids to bed, they retreated to one of their living rooms in order to talk in further detail about the latest development.

Gloriana had not talked much about the offer of the Hex Federation during the celebratory banquet. It was not a suitable venue to talk in-depth about matters directly related to the security of the Golden Skull Alliance.

The married couple hadn't bothered to change out of their evening wear. Ves still wore his ceremonial Larkinson-themed tuxedo while his wife looked elegant in her black dress.

They both sat down on different couches while cats hopped onto their laps.

"Meow meow~"

Lucky playfully rolled onto Gloriana's body and begged for pets. The woman obliged and idly scratched the gem cat's sensitive ears.

"Before you ask, this isn't my idea." Gloriana started. "My mother came up with it first. She is so smart. It is not that the Hexers did not value you before, but that it was difficult to extend so much trust to a Journeyman, even if you are the Superior Mother's son. Your early breakthrough to Senior has managed to convince even the most skeptical and prudent Hexer leaders to invest in you. Does that not sound fantastic?! Our Glory Seekers have become our greatest protectors during our upcoming travels! Forget about Patriarch Reginald Cross and his uncontrollable warlust. Our Hexer ace pilots will never leave us to fend for ourselves!"

Ves still hadn't overcome his shock at the news. He leaned back as Gloriana continued to unleash a stream of words from her mouth.

"Miaow? Miaow..."

Fortunately, Clixie held to ground his emotions by resting on his lap and allowing him to pet her luxuriously soft fur.

The cat began to purr like an engine, causing Ves to relax as if he was being hypnotized.

No matter what the Hexers were up to this time, Ves had no reasons to fear them at this time.

"I haven't paid close attention to the Hex Federation as of late, but I know damn well that every ace pilot is a strategic weapon to the colonial state. The absence of just one of them will have massive consequences to the security of the Hexer people. Why are the Hexers willing to go this far to help our alliance?"

His wife continued to smile at her husband. "Because of you, my dear."

"Be serious. I don't believe the Hexers or at least their highest leaders have lost so much rationality that they are willing to make a losing transaction."

"Who says they will lose out by sending us an ace mech?" Gloriana replied. "According to my mother, the matriarchal dynasties have agreed to lend one of their ace pilots and ace mechs to the Glory Seekers on a temporary basis. The exact duration will depend on several factors, but it should typically be around a year. In order to ensure that the Hexer ace pilots and ace mechs can quickly join our expeditionary fleet or return to the Hex Federation, they shall be carried by the state's fastest and most modern superdrive-equipped combat carriers."

That sounded incredibly convenient. The fastest superdrives could complete a single transition up to a hundred times faster than an ordinary FTL drive!

While Ves did not think a second-rate colonial state such as the Hex Federation could harness such Gloriana grinned at him. "You are almost right! As expected of my husband! The contract that the Hex Federation wants to sign with you will essentially spell out a transaction. To put in plain words, an exaggerated speed, it should be no problem for a superdrive starship to complete a journey in weeks instead of months!

The only major concern was ambushes, but it was impossible for them to succeed. A superdrive starship was too fast and could quickly reach any obscure star system.

Even if it was possible to pull off an ambush, the ace mech stationed on the vessel could easily demolish any obstacles in the way!

As such, the risks for this exchange were not as great as Ves initially thought.

The mention of a rotation caused Ves to become suspicious, though. Why would the matriarchal dynasties bother to rotate their most important trump cards?

His powerful mind rapidly considered many different suggestions before he stumbled upon a possible answer.

He almost stood up! "Wait. Are the Hexers expecting me to upgrade their ace mechs with whatever I can slap onto their powerful frames?"

Gloriana grinned at him. "You are almost right! As expected of my husband! The contract that the Hex Federation wants to sign with you will essentially spell out a transaction. To put in plain words, each matriarchal dynasty is willing to lend an ace pilot and ace mech to the Glory Seekers in turn. The implication is that these loaned aces will protect us and support our initiatives. If that is not enough, the matriarchal dynasties also grant us full access and permission to examine and modify their ace mechs! As long as we can prove that our alterations will improve the combat effectiveness of these powerful machines, we can do anything we want!"

"What!?"

"Miaow!"

Ves couldn't calm down at this point!

Every ace mech represented a concentration of a state's best design work. Only the most proven and capable Master Mech Designers were allowed to implement their most powerful design solutions

that demanded the most expensive materials in order to develop mechs that could decide the fortunes of their entire state.

Each of them contained so much brilliance that Ves could harvest a lot of lessons and inspirations from examining their frames!

The benefits of modifying the ace mechs were even greater. Ves could apply all kinds of different design applications and see how well they amplified the performance of these top machines!

This not only allowed him to accrue valuable experience in working with some of the most high-end mechs that he could get in touch with, but also boost the top-end combat power of the expeditionary fleet by a significant margin!

His eyes widened yet again. Thinking about how he could employ certain solutions to quickly increase the combat power of ace mechs quickly caused him to recognize what the Hexers truly sought!

"I see now! Those matriarchal dynasties aren't lending out their ace mechs to us for free. They want us to turn them into living mechs so that I can empower them with blessed weapons! Once these powerful Hexer ace mechs that no doubt incorporate a lot of transphasic tech are able to channel the power of the Phase King, they can practically beat up any Fridayman ace mech!"

The amplification provided by blessed weapons couldn't be overstated. Powerful ace mechs such as the Thunderer Mark II and the Embodiment of Love became several times deadlier after their formidable ranged armaments gained the capacity to punch through much tougher defenses than before!

Applying this powerful design solution to a single ace mech could already made a substantial difference in the long-running conflict between the Fridaymen and the Hexers.

If this arrangement continued to persist for a decade, then so many Hexer ace mechs would gain such a massive edge over their Fridayman counterparts that the entire Magair Middle Zone might get upended!

"Do you know what will happen if I agree to this deal?! Sure, our fleet will benefit from a lot more high-end protection than before, but the Hex Federation will eventually build up a lot of blessed and empowered ace mechs that those stupid women will not be able to resist the urge to launch a full assault on the Friday Colonies! Billions of people will suffer! Lots of ace mechs will fall due to our actions! The Hexers will put their entire future on the line because they have no fallback option at this point."

Gloriana's grin grew wider as her husband kept speaking. None of this sounded distressing to her ears!

"Exactly! It may be difficult for the Hexers to destroy the Friday Coalition back in the old galaxy, but the Hex Army should easily be able to overrun the Friday Colonies. Just as the Fridaymen once used the disparity between expert mechs to their advantage, the Hexers shall use the disparity between ace mechs to eliminate the enemy's greatest protectors. The remaining Fridayman soldiers will despair as they will have nothing left to keep our superior Hexer ace mechs in check! It is because of this dream that all of the Hexer matriarchal dynasties have agreed to this special arrangement. The Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty have agreed my mother's proposal first, so its ace mech shall have the honor of becoming our first exchange pilot."

"..."

Ves didn't know how to respond. The deal sounded like a fantastic win-win cooperation at first. His expeditionary fleet gained a powerful thug while the Hex Federation slowly built up a huge advantage in high-end combat power.

However, once the Hexers dramatically made use of the advantages bestowed by Ves, he would no doubt attract a huge amount of attention, and not all of it would be good!

If Ves could massively amplify the combat power of the ace mechs of the Hex Federation, then what about the Colonial Federation of Davute? What about all of the first-class colonial states that seek to become empires of their own in the new frontier? What about all of the powerful mechers that Ves could not resist?

The amount of attention and trouble he would incur far exceeded the benefit of having a powerful ace mech at his disposal!

This proposal sounded like a poisoned chalice!

Chapter 4952 Dosage

"This is not a good idea, Gloriana! I admit that your mother came up with a clever-sounding scheme, but the problem is that she isn't paying attention to the huge amount of undesirable attention that I will attract. It is all well-and-good for the Hexers to take revenge on the Fridaymen by taking away their colonial state, but what about me? The benefits offered to me pale in comparison to all of the trouble it will bring to my door. This deal of yours is a poisoned chalice!"

Gloriana already expected Ves to express a lot of fear and reluctance.

As his wife, she already developed an extensive model of his logic and decision-making process.

If not for the uncomfortable fact that he occasionally violated his own logic and made extremely irrational decisions that no one could understand, she would have been able to trap him in a web of her own making by this time!

Still, part of the reason why she developed such a strong attraction to him in the first place was his habit of out-of-the-box thinking. The marvelous and crazy ideas he came up with from time to time truly had the potential to revolutionize the mech industry several times over!

In any case, she could not allow her husband to keep all of his useful innovations to himself and his clan. It was an enormous waste for him to hoard his goods for so long!

"Meow!"

Gloriana's expression turned serious as she stood up. The gem cat in her lap climbed up until he embraced her shoulder in order to remain in a comfortable position.

"The contents of a holy chalice is powerful even if it is tainted with poison."

Ves frowned as he looked up at his approaching wife. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"You are no longer a Journeyman Mech Designer, Ves. You have been promoted to a Senior, and a highly promising one at that. This represents a huge change in status. In the absence of Masters, it is customary for Seniors to take charge and assume responsibility. I have long grown frustrated at your

restraint. You have invented so many fantastic means, but you constantly hide them away because you are afraid of 'trouble'."

"Hey! There are good reasons why I withhold a lot of my innovations! The MTA shares my concerns and has strongly reminded me not to spill anything before our society is ready to accept the changes."

This was a valid excuse, but it wasn't good enough for Gloriana. The woman shook her head in disappointment.

"I am aware that you cannot bring out a number of your most powerful inventions, but that still leaves you with plenty of attractive solutions that you can easily leverage to your advantage. The time for us to maintain a low profile and hide in the shadows has passed. If we want to ensure the best future for our children and smoothly promote to first-raters, we must accumulate the wealth, resources and connections to support our rise. We cannot do that fast enough if we continue to scour the deep frontier like scavengers digging into alien tombs."

required her to convince her husband to upgrade the Hexer ace mechs to the best of his ability!

Ves looked gobsmacked at his wife. This situation seemed incredibly absurd to him. Normally, he was the one who advocated bold decisions while his wife always preferred a safer course of action.

It was highly unusual for his wife to embrace risk to such an enormous degree!

It did not take a lot of thinking for Ves to figure out why she changed her stance.

Gloriana wanted to support her mother along with the rest of the Hex Federation. Doing that required her to convince her husband to upgrade the Hexer ace mechs to the best of his ability!

However, there was more to it than that. She wanted Ves to act boldly for other reasons as well!

Her aura became more aggressive as she channeled her ambition.

"Our circumstances have changed, Ves. We are not as weak as before. Soon, our expeditionary fleet will depart from Davute while carrying tens of thousands of mechs and three powerful ace mechs. No one will have the courage or ability to do anything to us, especially if we employ proper scouts and remain on the move. Aside from that, your friends over at the MTA are already protecting you in ways that you cannot defend against. Since you have repeatedly proven your value to the Survivalists and the Transhumanists, it is in their best interest to allow you to take advantage of your own work."

Ves frowned at her assertion. "I may be a tier 6 galactic citizen and I may have the backing of a few people from the Association, but that does not make me invincible. If I can have the support of an MTA faction, then so can others. What if someone else comes along who is a personal friend of a god pilot or something? It is far too dangerous to put my backing to the test!"

He had a rich experience of getting backstabbed by his friends and 'backers' at the most inconvenient of times. He never put all of his faith in the Mech Trade Association.

He was willing to take advantage of the generosity of the mechers, but he had no illusions about the fact that they were just using him and his work for their own ends. The only one among them that

he could really trust was Jovy Armalon, but he was just a tiny figure in an enormous bureaucratic machine.

His wife persisted in her arguments.

"Let us leave that aside and talk about the fact that the cat is already out of the bag."

"Meow?"

"Miaow?"

"What cat? I have a lot of cats, you know. Our clan is filled with them, you know."

Gloriana snorted. "I am talking about the trick with the Phase King. Do you need to remember how many weapons you have blessed with the power of the Phase King after Operation Lighthouse? The ace mechs and expert mechs that benefited from your work have not remained quiet. Anyone who conducts a careful examination will easily be able to find out the driving reason why all of those powerful high-end weapons produce the silhouette of the Phase King before they overcome the toughest defenses."

He understood what she meant. He had upgraded the weapons of ace mechs such as the Thunderer Mark II, the Embodiment of Love and the Embodiment of Sacrifice.

Though he managed to secure a lot of phasewater and other valuable concessions through this trade deal, he also spread around an incredibly useful upgrade that was bound to make a lot of people curious!

This was what Gloriana meant by her previous remark.

Ves sighed in regret. "I should have controlled my greed. Upgrading the firepower of the Thunderer Mark II was excusable at the time because we wouldn't have been able to punch through the defenses of the orven battleship at the time. Upgrading the weapons of all of those other ace mechs was stupid for the most part. Still, I think it also helped to persuade the Adelaides and the Boojays into joining our alliance."

That did not completely make up for his mistake. Ves had been careless and not in his right mind when he made this highly consequential decision.

His wife continued to pat Lucky's back as she looked down on her remorseful husband. "You cannot reverse the choices that you have made in the past. What you can do is exploit the consequences of your earlier actions in the best possible manner. Since you have already 'sold' this powerful service before, you can do so again. The six matriarchal dynasties of the Hex Federation shall be your next client."

"I am not sure I am willing to accept their business..."

"Don't be a coward, Ves. Empowering their ace mechs comes with many rewards. Aside from the benefits that I have already mentioned, you will also earn the gratitude of an entire colonial state, one that will assuredly dominate the Magair Middle Zone with the help of the blessings that you can provide! Do you understand what this means? The Hex Federation shall become another powerful backer for us! As long as you make yourself indispensable to the Hexers, the Hexers shall protect you and revere you even more! Be smart about this. If you are afraid of attracting trouble, then use

the power of the Hex Federation to increase your deterrence. As long as you are clever about it, you can harvest ample profit from this transaction."

That actually sounded reasonable, which isn't what he expected from his wife.

He had the feeling that it wasn't necessarily Gloriana but her mother Constance who had come up with these clever-sounding arguments.

Ves still remained reluctant to embrace this proposal. "This is a dangerous game, Gloriana. The Red Ocean is obsessed with power and the means to obtain it. If I become known as a highly effective provider of power, we will have to watch our backs ten times as much as before."

"Every problem can be solved, Ves. We are mech designers. We exist to solve problems. Your work is too useful and too brilliant to remain confined within our circle. Don't you want to spread your work and convince the mech community to embrace living mechs on a wider scale? This is the perfect opportunity for you to boost their acceptance by a significant margin! If more and more ace pilots benefit from your work, their positive experiences will inspire countless average mech pilots into embracing your products!"

Mech pilots revered high-ranking mech pilots. Venerables and Saints were practically idols to them. The products they used often sparked demand for similar goods!

In any case, ace pilots never made use of bad or awful mechs. If lots of Saints enthusiastically endorse and make use of Ves' works, then that would undoubtedly add a lot of credibility to all of his other products!

Ves struggled to make up his mind. "I understand how this can work, but the risks are too great. We will have to fend off dangers that come from many different directions. Once we employ this strategy, we will have to work extra hard to find a lot more powerful backers and supporters, because we sure as hell can't fend off every greedy bastard by ourselves."

Gloriana started to smirk. She knew that she had come close to succeeding in her goal. She just needed to give him another push.

"A poisoned chalice can be life-threatening, but only to the weak. Paracelsus once said that all things are poison and nothing is without poison. An ordinary mech designer cannot withstand the dosage because they are too weak and incapable. You are different. You have built up many powerful mechs and trump cards. You are among the youngest Senior Mech Designers of the Red Ocean. You are an associate of the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction. You are the Supreme Son of the Hex Federation. You are the effective leader of an alliance made up of several powerful pioneering organizations. With all of these advantages, do you still think that a mere poisoned chalice can put you down?"

Well, when she put it that way, it did sound a little pathetic for Ves to cower in front of this massive opportunity.

"I will consider it." He replied with a noncommittal answer. "I cannot make a unilateral decision about this issue. This proposal affects our entire clan and many other people as well. I need to consult the opinions of all of my advisors before I can make an informed decision."

His wife figured out that this was the best answer that she could get at this time. "Very well, but do not wait too long. The Vrakens are already taking action. It will not take as much time as you think



for one of their ace mechs to enter the Krakatoa Middle Zone and reach Davute. Remember who you are. You are a Larkinson, Ves."

#### Chapter 4953 High-Level Backers

The proposal that Gloriana shared to Ves that night kept him restless the next day.

The glow and satisfaction he gained from fulfilling his wish to become a Senior became overshadowed by the cloud cast by the Hexers.

A part of Ves agreed with the logic presented by his wife, but another part of him understood that this was an extremely dangerous game.

He had too many concerns. His survival, the safety of his children, and the wellbeing of his clan weighed heavily on his mind. Every decision produced a lot of consequences, many of which might end up biting him back.

As Ves was still going through all of the changes that arose after his successful promotion, he took a bit of time to share his concerns with his advisors.

Naturally, Ves first turned to the woman who knew the Hexers the best. He met with Calabast in an underground office and shared Gloriana's proposal to his spymaster.

"Squeak." Arnold sniffed Ves' leg before huffing and rolling his chubby body.

Calabast meanwhile fell into thought as she took in the story. She had already stayed up all night in order to look up a lot of intelligence and conduct an analysis.

"Your suspicions about the motives of the Hex Federation are correct." She began. "The Hexers are dissatisfied with the stalemate that exists between the Friday Colonies and their own state. So long as their archenemies are still present in the Red Ocean, the Hexers can never rest easy. They have incurred enormous trauma from losing the Komodo War and they do not want to repeat this disaster again."

"The Hexers have been careful all of this time." Ves spoke. "Why turn around all of a sudden?"

"This is why the Hexers are eager to take advantage of a miracle solution to resolve their greatest threat. If you can truly amplify the performance of every Hexer ace mech that you can get your hands on, then the Hexers will definitely gain an enormous advantage on the battlefield. The only concern is whether the other colonial states will allow the Hexers to conquer the Friday Colonies."

Ves looked skeptical. "It is the height of foolishness to bet on a single miracle solution. While my work hasn't been countered yet, that doesn't mean it is impossible to do so. The Fridaymen have probably allocated a lot of manpower and resources into finding a viable means to neutralize my design applications. If they happen to succeed, the greatest reliance of the Hex Army will become invalid at once. This will result in a huge disaster for the Hexers."

"You are right about that, but think about this from the perspective of the Hexers who have fled the Komodo Star Sector. The Fridaymen had to pay a huge price to win the Komodo War. Most of their mechs and assets are currently tied up in reconstructing all of the damage produced by the war and integrating all of the conquered star systems. This is a process that will take many decades, but sooner or later the Fridaymen will be able to free up enough manpower and resources to build up the Friday Colonies."

Ves understood the implications of these words.

"Are you saying that the Hexers want to start a war while the Fridaymen are largely preoccupied with their affairs in the Komodo Star Sector?"

"Exactly." Calabast smiled. "It is a race against time. If the Hex Federation cannot launch a decisive war within one or two decades, the Friday Coalition will eventually be able to channel so much support to its colonies in the new frontier that the odds will grow even more unfavorable. If I am not mistaken, the Hexers place a high amount of importance on rotating their ace mechs. They will keep each top machine with our fleet long enough for you to upgrade them to the best of your ability before it will be rotated with another one. So long as you can upgrade all of their ace mech within a decade, the Hex Federation will definitely be able to start this war with confidence!"

Much of this had to do with the Battle of Pima Prime. The heavy blow inflicted by the Hex Army and the Golden Skull Alliance still left the Gauge Dynasty's crown jewel in ruins.

The Gaugers hadn't even come close to recovering from the loss of an ace pilot along with a majority of the infrastructure on the port system.

While the Gauge Dynasty was certainly powerful enough to return Pima Prime to its peak within 5 years, it was impossible for the Gaugers to pay such a huge price when there were lots of other lucrative territorial acquisitions closer to home!

This meant that as long as the Hexers struck before the Gauge Dynasty fully rebuilt its colonial holdings in the Red Ocean, they would definitely encounter less opposition than if they delayed their offensive!

"Gloriana told me that the Vrakens will send their ace pilot and ace mech first." Ves said. "I guess that they are the first to jump on this idea. Do you have anything to say about this? It does take a lot of trust to give me access to one of their most important trump cards. I thought that the Vrakens were all secularists who don't buy into the hexism crap."

"You are making a generalization, Ves, but you are largely correct. However, Matriarch Alisia Vraken who has likely issued her verdict on this matter is a woman who always tries to make objective decisions. It is apparent that she saw enough promise in you and your work that she did not hesitate any further and went fully onboard with this idea. When it comes to taking advantage of opportunities, the Vrakens will never be slow."

Ves chuckled for a moment. He believed in Calabast because she had acted the exact same way when she decided to defect to the Larkinson Clan!

Her judgment had been correct and her decision paid off in spades. If every Vraken was like Calabast, then it shouldn't be a surprise that the matriarchal dynasty jumped on the opportunity to allow Ves to upgrade its ace mechs.

"Is there anything I need to be careful about once the Vraken reinforcements have arrived?" Ves asked.

"Not particularly." Calabast shook her head. "I will pay close attention to them. Just treat them as other Hexers. They will be adaptable, so do not worry about offending them or violating any taboos."

If there is one area that you must pay attention to, it is that the Vrakens will likely try to insert more of themselves into your clan."

"That's not a problem. I am not opposed to welcoming more qualified personnel so long as they pass Goldie's test."

The Golden Cat had been extremely effective at keeping duplicitous people out of the Larkinson Clan.

The Hexers should know extremely well by now that they could never place one of their own in the Larkinson Clan so long as the intention to serve the Hex Federation remained intact!

Ves shifted the topic. "Let's talk about the possible consequences of accepting this proposal. Do you really think it is a good idea for a Senior like myself to enter into a high-stakes game?"

The spymaster couldn't supply him with a direct answer. "It depends on you. What is your risk appetite? How confident are you in your ability to increase your power? What are you willing to give up in order to cultivate strong relationships with many powerful groups? There are too many variables at play in order to supply you with a simple answer."

"Try, then. I want to hear what you think and feel."

"Since that is the case, I believe that we are up to the challenge." She told him. "If you leverage your most useful innovations correctly, you can turn yourself into an indispensable asset and receive the support and backing from dozens of different groups. These relationships are not that useful in protecting yourself against direct threats by themselves, but you can take advantage of them to obtain a huge amount of benefits that you can quickly convert into a stronger clan and mech army. This is what Gloriana meant by beating the poisoned chalice. So long as you can withstand the toxins, drinking the chalice will quickly allow you to enter the upper echelon of human society in the Red Ocean."

That was an incredibly attractive prospect to Ves. The faster he rose, the more secure he was in his position. He did not want to waste too much time and develop his strength step-by-step because too many accidents could happen in between.

The Red Ocean was anything but stable and a reversal in fortune could happen at any time!

As Ves thought about the consequences of accepting the proposal, he started to think seriously about what he needed to do in order to keep his head intact during this wild ride.

"The key part about this high profile development approach is the necessity of obtaining enough top-level protection." He said. "A second-class clan is far from enough to resist all of the storms. We need to work together with other powerful groups that can cover for our weaknesses. Who do you think we should befriend first? Should we make an offer to Davute?"

"No." Calabast immediately shook her head. "We already have enough entanglements with the Colonial Federation of Davute. This has produced a large amount of tension within its halls of power. Sooner or later, the first-raters will take notice of your work. They will come and knock on your doors. Rather than allow them to take the initiative, we should be more proactive and make the offers first. So long as we can win over enough first-class organizations, we will have enough room for development to quickly rise to this level within a single generation or less."

She had a good point, but that did not mean it was easy. The Golden Skull Alliance already had to struggle a lot to win the favor of the Yorul-Tavik Clan.

"Should we start with the Yorul-Tavik Clan?"

"That is not an easy question to answer. I am thinking more about the need to form a strong relationship with both the Terrans and the Rubarthans. We talked about this before in the past. We only need to ramp up our efforts and target more powerful groups or factions of these first-rate superstates."

Ves felt incredibly uneasy at the thought of entering into any direct transactions with the Terrans and Rubarthans.

"That sounds like playing with fire."

"It is, but it is better than the alternatives." Calabast retorted. "It is not enough to befriend the Terrans or the Rubarthans alone. If we ally with the Terrans, the Rubarthans have a strong incentive to take you out. If we maintain ties with both of them at once, they will restrain themselves so long as the organizations we have partnered with enjoy enough prestige in their respective states."

All of this sounded a little complicated, but Ves possessed enough political acumen to understand the gist of her story.

It still sounded awfully dangerous, though.

"Not everyone is willing to play by the rules." Ves shared his opinion. "A powerful figure is liable to flip the table. We can't defend ourselves against such threats."

Calabast shrugged. "Every game can be won no matter how unlikely the odds may be. We only need to play it well enough. We know work to you, it is up to you whether you want to change our development strategy."

most of the rules, so we can plan our roadmap in advance. I suggest that you give us enough time to draft it up. Once we present our work to you, it is up to you whether you want to change our development strategy."

"Hm, I like the sound of that. Please do that. Make sure to cooperate with Minister Shederin Purnesse and other clever minds."

Ves knew that it was not enough to rope in the Terrans and the Rubarthans. If he truly wanted to guarantee his security in the coming decades, then he needed to obtain much stronger support from the MTA.

Fortunately, he had a good idea on how he could make that happen.

#### Chapter 4954 Rising Clout

Ves could not make an immediate decision on Gloriana's proposal. A radical shift in strategy had enormous implications for his life and the lives of his clansmen.

Instead of making an ill-informed decision, he decided to sit on it and let the situation develop a bit more. He still needed to handle a few affairs such as meeting with the MTA, completing the Ghost Project and preparing for his departure from Davute.

"Just because I'm impulsive doesn't mean I always live my life this way!"

His wife might have tried to use this hasty maneuver to present the illusion that Ves needed to drink the poisoned chalice right away, but he chose to set it aside for later.

There was no obvious reason why he should rush and issue his verdict right away. So what if the Vrakens sent their precious ace pilot to his location on a superdrive carrier?

That ace pilot could sit right outside and wait until Ves was ready to handle her case!

Several days passed by as Ves juggled multiple responsibilities. Aside from meeting with various important figures and signing lucrative new business deals, the time to meet with the MTA had finally arrived.

Under normal circumstances, a mech designer who had just advanced to the rank of Senior Mech Designer had to visit the headquarters of the Mech Trade Association.

The branch headquarters located in the center of Kotor City was not good enough. This was just a location where the MTA primarily dealt with mundane affairs such as certifying mechs, validating commercial mech designs and mediating disputes in the mech community.

What Ves actually needed to do was go on another pilgrimage.

Back when he became a Journeyman Mech Designer, he traveled all the way to the Centerpoint System located in the center of the Komodo Star Sector.

Here in Krakatoa, the MTA already claimed the Yereln System as the headquarters for the entire middle zone.

Although Ves did not mind it if he visited another star system that was completely filled with high technology, he did not want to waste weeks of his time on travel and all kinds of other redundant affairs.

Perhaps ordinary mech designers had to go lower their heads and follow the rules, but Ves was different.

He was a tier 6 galactic citizen and became buddies with the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction. His wife was right that these identities held great value.

Since this was the case, why not try and take advantage of the power bestowed by these connections?

Ves went at it with the mentality of trying it out. He briefly considered whether he should ask for a favor from the Survivalists or the Transhumanists.

On the one hand, the Carmine System and its many implications were directly related to the goals and ideals of the Transhumanist. He was sure that Master Termaneo Dervidian would drool and bring his entire fleet to Davute right away if Ves shared just a hint of what his latest innovation could accomplish!

"However... those Transhumanists can be a bit crazy."

The ordinary members of this faction merely tried to find ways to elevate humanity to a higher state.

The really devoted ones wanted to accomplish this by pursuing all kinds of radical and crazy ideas!

For example, they believed with all of their hearts that the separation between man and machine could eventually be blurred, thereby making it so that a human would become no different from a mech!

Ves could not predict what would happen if he presented the Carmine System to Master Dervidian. This leading mech designer whose head was steeped in transhumanism might go crazy on the spot!

In contrast, the Survivalists were much more reasonable. They only cared about the survival of humanity and did not really care what it took to keep it that way. They were pragmatists in that they accepted any ideology as long as it was useful to them. This caused the atmosphere within the faction to be considerably more grounded.

Perhaps the Survivalists had an extreme edge to them as well, but Ves had yet to experience it in his interactions with them so far. Humanity was at the height of its power, so there was not much reason for this faction to stand up and try to take charge.

In any case, Ves traveled to the Commercial District and dropped communication channels to dispatch a message and a request to Master Vayro Goldstein.

by the MTA Branch Headquarters.

He not only conducted his preliminary registration of his promotion to Senior Mech Designer, but also used the facility's secure communication channels to dispatch a message and a request to Master Vayro Goldstein.

"Hopefully, that guy took me seriously."

He did not know if Master Goldstein believed in his claim. Ves did not dare to spell out the possibility that his new Carmine System potentially allowed norms to pilot mechs.

Ves had no choice but to make a vague claim in order to convince the Master or any other bigshot from the Survivalist Faction to drop by in person.

He soon received an answer on who the Survivalist Faction chose to dispatch to Davute this time when a large portal formed in high orbit of Davute VII!

The Colonial Federation of Davute already received a notification about this arrival, so traffic control had cleared out this entire section of space since early morning.

Now, a smaller MTA starship formed a portal with an enormous radius. Once it stabilized to an extent, the bow of an impressive capital ship slowly appeared!

When Ves called up a live projection of this astonishing event, he immediately recognized the shape of the emerging warship.

His lips curled into a grin. "Master Goldstein believed me after all. That is good."

He felt gratified that a single vague message from him had been enough for Master Goldstein to interrupt his schedule and move to the Davute System straight away.

As the majestic hull of the Antazella de Osiris became fully visible, the residents of Davute all exhibited a wide range of reactions!

While the common folk were completely in the dark as to why a huge and powerful MTA research battlecarrier decided to drop by their humble star system all of a sudden, the upper echelon already learned the truth.

The Antazella de Osiris had come for the sole purpose of handling the Larkinson Patriarch's promotion to Senior!

This surprised a huge amount of people in Davute and beyond!

These folk had already learned that Ves had a good relationship with the mechers, but to be able to pull an important capital ship on short notice meant that his importance may be much greater than was currently known!

A lot of speculation erupted as a consequence. No matter what guesses that people came up with, the one unanimous point was that Ves should not be messed with! Anyone who received this level of treatment from the Mech Trade Association was never simple!

Naturally, the Larkinsons all felt even more honored than before. It was a blessing to work and fight for a leader who earned so much clout from the MTA!

Ves smirked non-stop as he quickly changed his outfit to a more formal and subdued suit.

All of the gossip that erupted all of a sudden was exactly what he wanted to happen!

Even if his upcoming meeting with the Survivalists did not yield as many results as he wanted, he would already be satisfied with his current gains!

"If I choose to embrace the latest proposal and switch to a high profile development strategy, then it will never hurt to strengthen my apparent ties to the MTA."

Ves still wanted more, though. This was why he placed a lot of importance in his upcoming talk.

Once he fixed up his appearance and skimmed through his notes, he was ready to attend the meeting that would directly affect his future course!

"Alright, I am ready. Port me over, please." He said over his comm.

His body started to shimmer and disappear from his office in his Royal Mansion.

Moments later, his body reappeared in a different teleportation chamber than before!

Ves shook off the strange sensations of getting displaced and went through a brief but mandatory security and identity verification check.

Since this was not his first visit to the MTA battlecarrier, Ves did not need to take the scenic tour this time.

A young lieutenant guided him across a maze of hallways and elevators before they reached a large and surprisingly traditional ceremonial hall.

In contrast to the hypermodern ship-based architecture that dominated much of the interior of the capital ship, the ceremonial hall looked as if it was built a few ages prior.

Of course, the MTA made sure it was clean and well-maintained.

Ves took in the vibe of the hall. The archaic suits of armor, the wall that presented an enormous collection of firearms that came from different time periods, the antique paintings that were all masterworks without fail.

The entire place looked incredibly out of place compared to the rest of the Antazella de Osiris. This place was not only steeped in ancient traditions that had no direct relations with mechs, but also contradicted the MTA's attempts at moving humanity beyond the shackles of the past where powerful star nations reigned over humanity.

"Mr. Larkinson." A voice called near a row of statues placed on the other side of the hall. "Step forward."

As Ves proceeded forward, he studied the marble-like statues but did not recognize any of their identities. Perhaps he might be able to do so if he spent more time on studying humanity's long and extensive history, but that was not his job.

Master Goldstein looked as well-dressed as ever. He not only wore a black suit that was decorated with triangular patterns, but also wore a green cape that added a touch of mystique to his appearance.

The top of his head was as bald as ever. The way its smooth surface reflected the light made Ves guess whether it was actually a dome of metal.

The two briefly shook hands once Ves came close enough.

As the two touched hands, Ves could clearly feel that the MTA Master transmitted a pulse of spiritual energy into his body.

Ves tried his best to stay cool and avoid any instinctive attempts to repel the intrusion.

Fortunately, Goldstein only needed to perform a quick and cursory exploration before he ended his little probe.

"Congratulations, Mr. Larkinson. I have just confirmed that you have genuinely advanced to the rank of Senior Mech Designer."

That caused Ves to raise his eyebrow. "Hadn't I already proved that when I registered at the branch headquarters down below?"

"You wouldn't believe how many fools tried to defraud our Association by pretending to break through. Their camouflage methods have become increasingly more inventive, but you and I both know that genuine ability can never be imitated."

Ves nodded. Mech designers who went through similar experiences and endured the same kind of struggles could recognize each other in a heartbeat.

Just his design flame alone was not a spiritual construct that any spiritual engineer could recreate! Its properties were just too special!

"So now that you have confirmed that I am the real deal, what is next?"

Master Goldstein turned back to the row of statues that clearly enjoyed a high status in the ceremonial hall. "We begin by clarifying a matter that you must have been wondering about for a long time."



Ves looked confused. "I have been wondering about a lot of different topics. Which one are you referring to, exactly?"

"Ah, I recall that you are steeped in secrets. The matter that I wish to address this time is related to the origin and nature of mechs."

Now that he thought about it, mechs occupied a weird position in human civilization. It rose out of nothing and quickly turned into "Oh."

The older man's answer immediately caused Ves to straighten his back and become more attentive.

Now that he thought about it, mechs occupied a weird position in human civilization. It rose out of nothing and quickly turned into the tech that defined the current age!

Anyone who possessed a working mind could quickly figure out that nothing about this sounded natural. There had to be a conspiracy of sorts that caused mechs to explode onto the scene.

Though Ves already figured out through other means that mechs partially served as a check against the spiritual shenanigans of the Five Scrolls Compact, he did not think this was the complete story.

#### Chapter 4955 The Progenitors of Mechs

The ceremonial hall was completely quiet as Master Vayro Goldstein prepared to teach history to a brand-new Senior Mech Designer.

Every individual who attained this rank would get to hear a version of this story sooner or later. This was because they had worked mechs long enough to deduce a few secret matters by themselves.

Rather than allow all of these Seniors to develop all kinds of wildly inaccurate misconceptions by themselves, it was better for the MTA to call them in and present its own narrative.

Every mech designer who had attained this rank had entered into the later stage of their professional track. They were often older, wiser and more responsible after living and working for so long.

Although Seniors still weren't as powerful as Master Mech Designers, the difference between the two was that the former were much easier to persuade.

If the MTA waited until mech designers realized their design philosophies, they became so full of themselves that it was ten times harder to correct any biases and misunderstandings!

Ves happened to be an outlier in this regard. His importance to the Survivalists and the Transhumanists already exceeded that of a regular Master while he was just a Journeyman!

Now that he had taken a powerful step forward at a fairly young age, his ability to contribute to humanity had most definitely advanced even further!

It became a lot more critical to ensure that the attitudes and opinions of this talented mech designer remained within acceptable boundaries. This was one of the reasons why Master Vayro Goldstein quickly received permission to travel to the Davute System straight away!

As the MTA Master stared at the unusual mech designer that had presented one surprise after another, the older man wondered if he should share additional truths than he had been authorized to tell today.

"Do you believe that gods exist?" Master Golstein began.

"Huh?"

"This is not a trick question, Mr. Larkinson. You have witnessed many unusual phenomena that cannot be explained through mundane science alone. Do you believe that gods exist that are responsible for many powerful instances that cannot be replicated through man or technology alone?"

This sounded like a serious question, so Ves took the time to compose his answer based on his assumptions.

"I do not believe that gods exist." He replied. "There are many people and aliens who believe in many different gods, but most of them are either figments of imagination or psionically powerful beings who are mistaken for deities. Here in the Red Ocean, all indigenous aliens are convinced that infusing lots of phasewater into their bodies will turn them into gods of a different kind. No matter what, what they pursue are different power acquisition systems that can only make them more powerful at best. Whether to call them gods after they have reached the top is a question of semantics. I refuse to consider them this way because even ascended beings are still fallible."

This extensive answer clearly pleased Master Goldstein. The Survivalist mech designer nodded approvingly as he turned his gaze back to the statues.

"The Mech Trade Association shares the same stance. The cosmos may be far more convoluted than what is known to our scientists, but that does not change the fact that humans such as ourselves must make our own destiny. There are many cases in the past where so-called gods and the belief of them has caused progress to stagnate and humans to become less critical of the truth. This is detrimental to the progress of our civilization, so the fleeters and us have united together to form a new regime where science and rationality prevails."

Though Ves did not entirely approve of the Big Two's hegemony over human civilization in modern times, he supported their common stance on this matter.

"What does this have to do with your earlier question, Master Goldstein?" Ves carefully asked. "Is my answer... wrong?"

The MTA Master smiled and waved his arm at the statues in front of them both. "Who do you think they represent, Mr. Larkinson?"

Ves turned around and studied the statues once again. Their lack of coloring made it difficult to discern too many details. Their outfits looked outdated but not ancient. They wouldn't look too out-of-place from the people who lived during the Age of Conquest.

His eyes minutely widened. Everything he heard so far caused him to form a bold guess about the identities of these seemingly average-looking people the statues portrayed!

"Wait... are you suggesting that they are gods?!"

"We never describe them as gods." Master Goldstein said. "Yet that is what they call themselves. We have a recounting of events where they have repeatedly claimed that they are human gods. Whether their words are accurate enough goes beyond the scope of this meeting. Our consensus is that they are powerful ascended humans. What matters to us more is what they have done as opposed to what they have said."

Ves tried to discern the identities of the men and women portrayed by the statues. Try as he might, he could not feel any scrap of power from these exquisite artworks.

"What do they have to do with mechs?" He asked. "Since you mechers placed them in this prominent position, they probably have strong relations to our work."

"That is so. The thirteen men and women before you not only developed the first mech for Mack Liu, but also birthed the systematic framework that enabled the rise of extraordinary mechs, mech pilots and mech designers. While we refuse to call them gods and worship them in the same manner, we collectively call them the Progenitors of Mechs. We still honor and respect the great contributions and sacrifices that they have made for the good of humankind."

What?!

These bunch of people created mechs as everyone knew it in the first place?!

Ves regarded the thirteen individuals in a completely different light after this revelation!

Now that he thought about it, there was so much weirdness around mechs and much stuff around them that it did not seem as if this came about through gradual technological advancement.

The real story behind mechs was definitely complicated, and Ves doubted that he would be able to hear the full story this time.

However, just a glimpse of the greater truth was enough to change his cognition!

Ves began to wonder if the Progenitors of Mechs were originally high-ranking members of the Five Scrolls Compact when this cult organization was at the height of its power.

That would explain why they called themselves gods. Perhaps they may have founded the Mech Trade Association in secret in order to arm humanity with war weapons that could effectively resist the weird and unconventional weapons of the Compact!

As Ves continued to form all kinds of guesses based on different sources of information, Master Goldstein continued to present the MTA's narrative on this subject.

"Whether they are gods or not, the Progenitors have done more for humanity than any other mech designer that has come ever since. This is because mech designers such as you and I have only been able to grow to such an extent due to their efforts. If they did not set aside their selfishness, we would still be relying on destructive warships to fight all of our wars."

This caused Ves to narrow his eyes. What Master Goldstein had just said ruled out a lot of possible options.

"What did they do, exactly?"

"They invented the first mech." Goldstein stated. "Perhaps a single machine is not that significant by itself, but it is what happened next that is of great significance. Creating the first mech enabled the Progenitors to set a pattern. We do not have a full understanding of what they have done, but based on their claims as well as what has happened, they have apparently conducted a ritual where they fused and concentrated all of their formidable psionic power to... permanently alter the rules that govern reality. They gave up their own lives and god-like powers in order to give us all effort."

Ves looked both impressed and shocked. "That is... not what I an opportunity to resist similarly powerful beings through human effort."

Ves looked both impressed and shocked. "That is... not what I expected to hear. This sounds similar to the process of realizing a design philosophy."

Master Goldstein nodded. "That is not a coincidence. The Progenitors of Mechs have created the framework that enables mech designers to evolve from Novice Mech Designer to Star Designer in the first place. You can even say that the process of realizing a design philosophy is a small-scale derivation of the Creation of Modern Mechs. Every Senior who advances to Master must exert an immense amount of effort to add their greatest contributions to the 'Kingdom of Mechs', as we have taken to calling it. Different people may refer to it in other ways, but we prefer the imagery that this phrase evokes."

"The... Kingdom of Mechs?"

"That is what we call the invisible but ever-present systematic framework of mechs, Mr. Larkinson. Without it, mechs would never be as strong as they are now. The Kingdom of Mechs regulates psionic power so that everything related to mechs works according to the original intentions of the Progenitors of Mechs."

This explained so much. Ves had never heard about this before. He never came into contact with this so-called Kingdom of Mechs directly, but he worked with the consequences of its existence every day!

Ves looked at Master Goldstein with an enlightened expression. "Is this what makes Master Mech Designers so special? The act of realizing their design philosophies is effectively a ritual that causes them to 'donate' their best design applications to the Kingdom of Mechs, thereby allowing their life's work to become universal and common to all humans. This also ensures that if a mech designer ever perishes, the benefit he has brought to the mech community will not be erased."

"That is a clever deduction, Mr. Larkinson. It appears that you have collected enough clues beforehand. The Kingdom of Mechs is one of our industry and profession's most essential pillars. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Mech Trade Association's founding mission is to protect and develop this collective gift to humanity. For hundreds of years, we have performed our duties with great diligence."

That caused Ves to frown. "It sounds like the Kingdom of Mechs requires a lot of care and attention."

"It is much easier to destroy than to create." Goldstein said. "This adage holds true to creations of this nature as well. The Kingdom of Mechs used to be much weaker and more rudimentary in the past. Our Association has worked hard to strengthen it. The method to do so is to make mechs and everything directly related to it more powerful and ubiquitous."

For some odd reason, Ves immediately felt a strong urge to take part in the collective responsibility to protect and further develop the Kingdom of Mechs!

"What does it take to make it stronger?" He asked.

"Produce more mechs. Train and educate more mech pilots and mech designers. Help mech pilots and mech designers advance along the promotion framework prepared by the Progenitors. To mech

designers such as ourselves, there is no greater method to increase its power and utility than to realize our design philosophies. In short, increasing the quantity and quality of everything related to mechs will feed the Kingdom of Mechs and allow it to benefit us all in term. This is a positive feedback loop that has been cycling across many generations."

That sounded similar to his own spiritual products!

From what it sounded like, this Kingdom of Mechs was an extremely advanced living product of spiritual engineering!

If this was the case, then that strengthened his suspicion that the so-called Progenitors of Mechs had strong relations to the Five Scrolls Compact!

As Ves thought about how the Kingdom of Mechs emerged and how that related to mech designers, he formed another question.

"If Master Mech Designers play such an important role in expanding the Kingdom of Mechs, How do Star Designers relate to this, exactly?"

Vayro Goldstein threw a knowing look at Ves. He already anticipated this question and had been waiting to issue his reply.

"Star Designers... have 'jumped' out of the Kingdom of Mechs, to put it in simple terms. They have ascended to the point where they have escaped the framework and are no longer confined by its artificial rules and constraints. They... have become comparable existences to the Progenitors of Mechs themselves. They are the closest individuals to gods that exist in our industry."

"!!!"

Chapter 4956 The Kingdom Of Mechs

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The revelations made by Master Vayro Goldstein continually shocked Ves!

So improbable and fantastical answers resolved many of the questions and uncertainties that accumulated in his mind over the years!

What he had just heard from the MTA Master forced him to reconstruct his entire perspective and conception of mechs. The nature of his work had become a lot more comprehensive now that he had gained the context that had always been missing.

The Kingdom of Mechs was the most crucial and central missing link to his conceptual model of mechs.

It was the origin of the extraordinary and spiritual nature of mechs, mech pilots and mech designers.

Its existence was so powerful to humanity that it had single-handedly defined the current age of human history.

It was the primary reason why the Mech Trade Association came into existence and rose up to become one of the dominant organizations of human civilization!

Everything could be traced back to the existence of this super-powerful 'kingdom'!

As Ves processed all of these massive revelations, he generated more and more questions in his mind.

"You look confused." The Master that inducted the newly promoted Senior to this enormous secret said. "Feel free to ask your questions. I may not be able to answer all of them as you are not yet authorized to learn about secrets above a certain classification level."

That was natural. Ves was 'just' a Senior Mech Designer, after all. He would probably have to become a Star Designer before he could finally learn the full story.

"Tell me more about the nature of the Kingdom of Mechs." Ves said. "Is it an extraordinarily powerful physical location that exists in reality? Is it an intangible site that exists in a higher dimension? Is it a place where people like us can step foot in, or is it more of an abstract concept that does not have a concrete form? Why settle on this specific name and not anything else such as the Totem of Mechs or the Garden of Mechs?"

Master Goldstein chuckled. "Not many mech designers pay attention to this aspect of the Kingdom of Mechs. Let me go through your questions one by one. First, the Kingdom of Mechs is not a physical location. It is also not a more mystical location that exists in a dimension that is too high for us to normally reach. Mech designers such as ourselves cannot literally occupy and traverse it as if we live in an actual state, but we are constantly connected to it in a manner that I am not allowed to disclose. This connection works both ways. We contribute to it, and we draw power from it in turn. This is similar to a citizen's relationship with a state, so we felt it was apt to call it a kingdom."

"I see."

"The word kingdom has greater significance than that. You see, every feudal state is characterized by a strict stratification of noble titles. Just as a human kingdom is divided between commoners, barons, counts and so on, the Kingdom of Mechs provides different treatment to low-ranking mech designers and high-ranking mech designers. A similar scheme applies to mech pilots as well."

That sounded logical. Ordinary mech designers and mech pilots did not deserve to hold so much influence over such an important existence!

"What difference does it make to attain a higher rank in this kingdom?" Ves curiously asked.

"The answer can be long and different. Entire branches of secret studies have been devoted to this topic. Suffice to say, you can equate a higher rank to holding greater shares in a company. Anyone can buy a couple of shares of a publicly traded company, but that does not mean much. A miniscule amount of shares will not grant a person any significant voting power, and they will not earn much dividend either. It is only when they acquire more shares that their status will gradually change."

This was a simple analogy, and one that Ves could easily understand.

"I get it. The smaller shareholders are largely inconsequential. They are barely tied to the Kingdom of Mechs. It is only when mech designers advance to Journeyman and Senior that their relationships to it becomes more meaningful. The higher their ranks, the more they contributed to the company. At the same time, they also earn progressive more dividends due to their efforts."

Master Goldstein liked it when people comprehended his lessons. It saved a lot of time.

"If we continue with this analogy, then advancing to Master is similar to acquiring enough shares that you gain the power to materially influence the running of the company. For example, you can push the company to produce more household bots instead of industrial machines. They can primarily induce these changes upon the moment they realize their design philosophies. The first contribution is the most important. The greater your introductory gift, the more the Kingdom of Mechs will reward you in turn. This is of great importance to making further progress, so you must never take this matter lightly."

That explained why more talented and promising mech designers received so much attention from the mech industry!

"So mech designers who do not contribute that much when advancing to Master don't obtain as much help from the Kingdom of Mechs?"

"Simply put, yes."

"Is there a way to make up for this deficiency?"

"That is complicated. It is better to do well at the start than try to play catchup. If you have the ambition to become a Star Designer, then you must never slacken off. That is all I can say for the time being, Mr. Larkinson."

Ves wondered how this affected the future careers of different mech designers of his own clan. Would a number of them eventually hit a wall where it was difficult for them to make further progress due to the choices they made in the past?

One thing was for sure, though. Ves would definitely fall into the category of powerful Masters who made massive contributions to the Kingdom of Mechs upon his rise! His design philosophy and many applications were just too impactful!

"What are Star Designers, then?"

"Star Designers enjoy administrative authority over the Kingdom of Mechs." Goldstein immediately replied. "They are its greatest contributors and beneficiaries. While they can technically leap out of its confines and expand their works beyond the category of mechs, they are too attached to mechs to leave it entirely. Star Designers continue to keep one foot in the kingdom. This grants them the power to decide on how the Kingdom of Mechs should change or develop. Their voting power is proportional to the value of their contributions."

Administrative power!

If this was the case, then the Star Designers were comparable to the dukes or the royal ministers of a feudal state!

Ves grew curious whether anyone actually sat on the throne of this so-called kingdom.

"Is there... a literal king that holds the highest authority over the Kingdom of Mechs?"

Master Goldstein shook his head. "There is no such individual in the Kingdom of Mechs. No one wears a crown that bestows ultimate authority. Do not think too much about this. Kingdom has more of a figurative than a literal meaning in this context. If anyone deserves to be called in this manner, it is the thirteen Progenitors of Mechs who founded it. Their power, hopes, ideals and love towards humanity is the foundation of the kingdom."

Ves felt relieved by this answer. The importance of the Kingdom of Mechs was so great that it would probably be a disaster if a single person could impose radical changes to its functioning!

"Can aliens access the mechs?"

"No." Goldstein replied with certainty. "The kingdom was made for humans for the express purpose of helping humankind. It does not adhere to a strict definition of humans, so it is not solely restricted to baseline humans. Deviations as radical as heavy gravity variant humans and highly developed designer babies can still access it so long as they consider themselves to be human and a member of the human race for the most part."

"So the mentality of the individual matters more than his physiological properties, is that right?"

"That is how the Kingdom of Mechs is currently configured. The rules do not allow aliens to gain access to it. Half-alien hybrids may access it as long as they fully identify with our race. Humans that have been captured and raised by aliens can only barely gain access and have no hopes of advancing deeper so long as they are undermining our race."

It sounded like the Star Designers implemented a thorough set of usage and access rules. This was the benefit of having a lot of incredibly smart people in charge of this mysterious kingdom.

If all of this was true, then that explained why aliens had never made any strides in imitating mechs.

The basic technological principles of mechs were not that complicated. Any technologically advanced race could reproduce a simple mech through original research or reverse engineering.

Yet even if they accomplished this, Ves had never heard of any Saints or Master Mech Designers among the aliens.

If the Kingdom of Mechs remained closed to aliens, then that effectively meant that humanity's enemies could never catch up in this area!

Master Goldstein grinned as he deduced what Ves was thinking about. "The Kingdom of Mechs is one of the greatest cornerstones to our survival. Do not forget how humanity rose in the ages of the past. When humans started to travel the stars, they discovered that their technological progress is too far behind compared to the surrounding aliens. They rapidly managed to overcome this disparity by obtaining powerful pieces of alien tech and reverse engineering them all so that they can reduce the gap. If this can happen for our race, it can happen to alien races as well."

Ves was reminded of the rumors about massive technology leaks in the ongoing war against the indigenous races of the Red Ocean.

Even if the cosmopolitans and other human traitors passed on their own tech to the natives of the dwarf galaxy, they couldn't do anything about mechs, at least in theory!



"Understood. I take it that the aliens of the Milky Way and the Red Ocean really hate our kingdom, right?"

"That is partially correct. We believe the indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean will largely remain ignorant about it for many decades, but our old enemies in the Milky Way are well aware of our current advantages. It is the latter that we must guard against. They have tried to infiltrate, sabotage or undermine the Kingdom of Mechs for several centuries. One of your responsibilities as an increasingly more capable mech designer is to guard against such attempts. At the very least, you must not do anything to facilitate these harmful activities."

"I would never help the aliens gain access to the Kingdom of Mechs!" Ves seriously vowed. "I will defend the interests of the human race to the best of my ability!"

He figured that this was a great way to ingratiate himself to a core member of the Survivalist Faction.

"Good man." Goldstein smiled in satisfaction. "That is what every human must do. It is a pity that not all of us have retained the same consciousness. Too many people have become pampered by the safety and the prosperity of our current age. We have hoped that the opening of the Red Ocean will remind more humans of the ever-present threat that aliens pose to our civilization, but the results have been less than stellar."

As an avid mech designer, Ves already developed a strong attachment to the Kingdom of Mechs.

This was strange as he only heard its descriptions from a single source. He had yet to obtain hard proof that it actually existed or that it worked the way that Master Goldstein claimed.

Nonetheless, the more he thought about it, the more he felt that it was true.

A Senior Mech Designer like himself had already become thoroughly intertwined with the Kingdom of Mechs!

Chapter 4957 The Secret Of Apotheosis

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It turned out that the Mech Trade Association was a lot more meaningful to humanity than Ves thought.

He previously thought it was a cabal of former cultist rebels who successfully overthrew the Five Scrolls Compact and became the new overlords of human civilization!

Once they gained a taste of power, they eagerly took advantage of being on the right side of history and transformed the MTA into a perpetual blood-sucking octopus that continually harvested other people's wealth!

Though Ves did not invalidate this negative perception of the MTA all of a sudden, the latest revelations put the powerful organizations in a much more favorable context.

Of course, he was well aware that he was getting a one-sided retelling of history.

If he filled up a number of gaps with the secret history centered around the Five Scrolls Compact, he gained a better understanding of the true purpose of the Kingdom of Mechs.

This insanely powerful evolvable spiritual construct could not have been made without having access to the greatest powers and heritage of the Five Scrolls Compact.

The thirteen Progenitors of Mechs had to be high-ranked members of the Compact, and ones who all turned their coats no less!

Ves also bet that they all belonged to the lineage of the Metal Scroll. He even guessed that at least one of them may have been the so-called Holy Son or Daughter while the others may have been that person's trusted entourage.

If this speculation was accurate, then they must have certainly played key roles in the grand conspiracy that led to the destruction of the Great Temple!

His eyes minutely widened as a huge implication came to mind.

What if the creation of the Kingdom of Mechs held direct relations to the fracturing of the Metal Scroll?

What if the Progenitors of Mechs took advantage of the power of this once-mighty Sacred Scroll to create an enormous reality-warping construct that matched or exceeded it in power?!

As his imagination began to run wild, Ves had the feeling that he had touched upon the essence of the secret history that led to the turning of a brand-new age!

The downfall of the Great Temple and the rise of the Kingdom of Mechs must have been the defining event that birthed the Age of Mechs!

This mystical kingdom made an enormous difference to human civilization upon its emergence.

This was because it warped reality to a degree that was more powerful than any god!

For perhaps the first time in human history, relatively average people throughout the galaxy who had no relations to the Five Scrolls Compact at all gained the ability to harness extraordinary power!

Mech designers and mech pilots no longer had to read obscure magical books or undergo a life-threatening blood sacrifice ritual or anything.

They just needed to study a lot of science or train to become a highly specialized vehicle operator in order to transcend their own humanity!

Each person who worked directly with mechs in either capacity could remain completely ignorant of spiritual engineering while still having hope of evolving into god-like beings one day!

The revolution the Kingdom of Mechs unleashed upon human civilization completely changed the rules!

What primordial humans?

What exclusive bloodlines?

What rare talent?

What exclusive access to secret knowledge?

The creation of the Kingdom of Mechs and as well as the Mech Trade Association completely changed the game!

This was especially the case when the Mech Trade Association openly entered human society and engaged with much more people than the Compact could ever brainwash!

The new kids on the block completely defeated the ancient and highly outdated organization like the Five Scrolls Compact!

Perhaps mechs, mech pilots and mech designers weren't so powerful at first, but the Kingdom of Mechs ensured that they could grow much faster than their adversaries!

After all, the conditions to train a powerful spiritual sorcerer was too harsh.

In comparison, the Kingdom of Mechs granted any individual in the vastness of human space the chance to rise up and become insanely powerful champions or makers as long as they possessed at least a modicum of spiritual potential!

This was why the Age of Mechs had become an unstoppable trend.

The story was no different from an old market leader getting beaten by a new competitor that sold better products and employed better business strategies!

The former may have been more powerful once, but it had grown too stale and inflexible due to the weight of traditions and an absence of forward-thinking leadership.

Four centuries after its birth, the emergence of uncountable mechs, mech pilots and mech designers had caused the Kingdom of Mechs to grow powerful beyond imagination!

With around a hundred god pilots and Star Designers taking care of this collective treasure of humanity, it sounded extremely unlikely that the Five Scrolls Compact could tear it down.

Although the Compact had undoubtedly licked its wounds and restored its strength over the years, how could its cultists ever exceed the quantity of powerhouses produced with the help of the Kingdom of Mechs?

It was impossible for humanity's former overlords to topple the MTA in a direct confrontation!

Ves began to wonder whether he had any special connections to the Kingdom of Mechs.

If the Metal Scroll truly played an indispensable part in its creation, then perhaps Ves and maybe the Polymath may be able to gain extra privileges!

It would partially explain why the both of them had managed to enjoy so many successes in their mech design careers.

He inwardly shook his head. He did not feel this was the case. Although his design seed had provided a lot of convenience and help in his past works, he still felt that much of his mech designs

had come about through his own efforts. His design philosophy, his imagination and his appetite for risk contributed a lot more to his work.

Did it even matter to the Kingdom of Mechs that Ves was a Holy Son of sorts?

Perhaps he would not be able to tell the difference until he reached a later stage of his career.

At that point, he would gain greater access to the Kingdom of Mechs.

Did the Progenitors of Mechs create a secret chamber in the Kingdom of Mechs that granted special privileges to people like Ves?

Would he be able to gain administrative authority over the kingdom in advance?

Anything was possible!

Ves tried his best to keep his increasingly more unstable reactions under control. Though he had already exhibited shock and surprise several times over during this incredibly enlightening meeting, he did not want to give a mech designer as clever as Master Goldstein any reason to suspect more!

He could think about these kinds of implications later. This was not the time and place for him to fantasize about the Compact.

"I have a question, Master." Ves spoke up as he regained a bit of his composure. "You have been quite clear on how the Kingdom of Mechs ties to mech designers. How do mech pilots fit in this picture, exactly?"

The bald Master shifted his gaze away from the thirteen statues and looked across the rest of the ceremonial hall.

"Mech pilots enjoy a different sort of relationship with the Kingdom of Mechs. I am ordinarily not allowed to tell this to you, but given your extensive work in developing new methods to increase the rate of pilot breakthroughs, these secrets may be relevant to your work. It is not unacceptable to share confidential information related to mech pilots to you in advance."

There were clear benefits to building up an excellent relationship with the MTA. It was times like these where all of his efforts and sacrifices made a crucial difference.

Ves could already tell that Master Goldstein would have never shared this much about the Kingdom of Mechs if he was just an average mech designer!

"Mech pilots are a necessary component to the ecosystem of mechs." Goldstein spoke. "The Transhumanist Faction have more extensive information and assumptions around them, but to us they are a means to keep our own creations under human control. Their relationship to the Kingdom of Mechs is quite special and changes as they reach different ranks."

"Oh? How does this relationship evolve?"

"In general terms, a mech pilot can advance to expert candidate with little assistance as not much changes at first. It is the transition to expert pilot as well as ace pilot where the Kingdom of Mechs plays a major role in enabling and guiding the transformation process."

Ves widened his eyes in realization!

"Apotheosis!"

Master Goldstein smiled and nodded. "Exactly. Apotheosis is poorly understood by the general public because it is directly related to the Kingdom of Mechs. When a mech pilot undergoes apotheosis, a part of themselves establishes a direct connection to a powerful mechanism of the kingdom. Once 'apotheosis' begins, the Kingdom of Mechs immediately takes charge and controls the highly dangerous promotion process so that an individual can smoothly become an expert pilot or ace pilot."

Ves looked shocked! He never imagined that so much took place in the background whenever a mech pilot advanced in the field. He never observed any clues that this so-called Kingdom of Mechs secretly controlled the transformations of so many pilots!

"Why does artificial apotheosis exist?" He asked. "What purpose does it serve?"

"The Transhumanist Faction has conducted extensive studies on this topic. They can share many more insights with you as long as they are willing to reveal their secrets." Goldstein steadily replied. "I can only give you a short summary. From what we know, if mech pilots try to advance by relying on themselves, their success rate drops to 15 percent."

"What?! What happens to the 85 percent that fall outside of this category?"

"There are only two potential outcomes. The first possibility is that they lose all of their willpower and psionic power and die on the spot. The second possibility is that they have botched their transformation and end up corrupted. I will not elaborate any further on this as this is a forbidden topic."

That... sounded horrible. If the Kingdom of Mechs didn't give mech pilots a hand, then not as many mech pilots would remain eager to cross the moat and advance to the next rank!

"Is this why it is so insanely difficult for mech pilots to attain their breakthrough opportunities?" Ves tentatively asked. "The Kingdom of Mechs deliberately sets a high threshold because mech pilots would otherwise fail if they try to advance with insufficient qualifications."

Goldstein nodded. "That is an accurate deduction. There are many variables to this framework, and it is not my place to explain them all to you. Just know that the Kingdom of Mechs does not exist to hold mech pilots back, but to facilitate their rise. The Star Designers who collectively administer the kingdom have tweaked its operation over the centuries to improve upon the rules set by the Progenitors of Mechs."

"I see."

"The mech community would be a darker place without the regulating influence of the Kingdom of Mechs." The older man spoke. "It not only aids in breakthroughs, but also filters mech pilots to ensure that only positive additions to human society will gain the opportunity to evolve. We do not wish to empower criminals, anarchists and traitors. The damage that they can do to our civilization is incalculable."

So this was the secret of apotheosis!

The magnitude of this news alone could change the lives of countless people and mech pilots in particular!

It was no coincidence that mech pilots had to be noble, honorable and committed to a worthy cause!

This was because apotheosis was not a natural phenomenon at all. It was a completely artificial process that operated according to a long list of rules set by the Progenitors of Mechs as well as the Star Designers that came afterwards!

Ves' eyes suddenly turned sharp.

"Wait a moment. You said earlier that the Star Designers can essentially control how the Kingdom of Mechs works, is that correct?"

"That is approximately the case, Mr. Larkinson."

"Then what about god pilots? Don't they get to have a say in how their own profession is shaped?"

"That is impossible." Master Goldstein shook his head. "The reason why god pilots cannot exert any direct influence on the Kingdom of Mechs is that they have permanently severed their ties to it. They cannot return to the kingdom because doing so will damage it and threaten its continued existence. As such, god pilots are exiled from it by necessity."

That sounded completely unfair!

Chapter 4958 Punishment & Contribution

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"Are you surprised by this? Do not be. Remember what you know about this class of ultimate soldiers and warriors. Each god pilot must become strong enough to stand on their own, or else they will not possess the resolve that is required for them to become god pilots in the first place."

This was simple enough to understand. God pilots must possess complete confidence in their own strength and ability to overcome all of their challenges on their own. Aside from leveraging the strength of their mechs, they must strengthen their willpower to the point where they could solely rely on its reality-warping effects to defeat the toughest opponents!

Any reliance on outside help made it a lot harder for god pilots to complete this necessary mental evolution.

In that sense, Patriarch Reginald Cross actually adopted the right approach in advance. His purity and insistence on relying more on himself would help increase his chances of advancing in the far future.

Ves furrowed his brows. "I understand. If mech pilots eventually have to cut off their ties to the Kingdom of Mechs, what do they do once they become god pilots?"

"They assume a different responsibility." Master Goldstein answered with a smile. "If Star Designers can be equated to the administrators of the Kingdom of Mechs, god pilots are its

strongest protectors and guardians. They are the soldiers who voluntarily deploy across its borders and deter any external enemy from harming their greatest benefactor. You have to remember that god pilots have all developed an enormous sense of gratitude towards the kingdom. Each of them are principled enough to repay it, and there is no greater means to do so than guarding it from the enemies of humankind."

This clarified a lot. It explained why the filtering mechanism paid so much importance to the integrity and the promises made by mech pilots. Only those who developed an honest personality could be trusted to serve the Kingdom of Mechs even if they evolved to a point where they no longer needed it anymore!

Besides, god pilots were still human in certain ways. They had families, friends and subjects who still needed to rely on the Kingdom of Mechs in many different ways. Volunteering to defend it was a win-win arrangement for both sides.

The overall setup became clear after this. The Kingdom of Mechs continued to prosper long after its creation due to the active efforts of two different groups of people.

The Star Designers served as the kingdom's civilian officials. They were incredibly smart and had personally contributed to its growth. These clever people were highly analytical and could form highly effective plans to ensure that it continued to run smoothly. They guaranteed that the Kingdom of Mechs remained internally healthy and stable.

God pilots served as the kingdom's military officials. Ves had no idea whether the evolving spiritual construct possessed self-defensive capabilities of its own, but there was no denying that god pilots were the most individually powerful combatants in many capacities! They could not only repel attackers, but also take the fight to the enemy and eliminate threats far away!

The Progenitors of Mechs truly put a lot of thought behind their kingdom. If they did not pay so much attention to the attitudes of the Star Designers and god pilots, the Kingdom of Mechs would probably get messed up due to excessive infighting, extreme differences of opinion and interference from malicious parties!

Master Goldstein emphasized this aspect. "The Kingdom of Mechs is a gift to humanity. We must never squander it or tarnish it. The more powerful you become, the more you are obliged to protect it and build it up. Many prior generations of humans have worked hard to make it stronger so that future generations of our race can benefit even more from our collective contributions."

The Master reminded Ves several times on the importance of duty and responsibility. Everyone who worked with mechs benefited from the Kingdom of Mechs, so they always had to give back.

"If this is the case, then does that mean that people who are more committed to contributing to the Kingdom of Mechs can gain more help in advancing up the ranks?"

"That is partially true, Mr. Larkinson. Do not think that becoming a fully altruistic mech designer or mech pilot will trigger the Kingdom of Mechs into elevating you by force. It will never grant people power that they cannot handle and do not deserve. If mech designers want to advance, then they must work hard, design excellent mechs and research highly effective design applications. Mech pilots on the other hand must train their skills, accrue more combat experience and temper their

willpower into an unbreakable force. These are the basic requirements for both professions to advance."

In other words, the Kingdom of Mechs only plays an assisting role. Humanity needed to rely on its own strength and effort for the most part.

If the Kingdom of Mechs did more and actively held the hands of mech pilots and mech designers, then it would be no different from worshipping a god.

What would be the point for humans to actively become stronger? They would all become increasingly weaker and useless as they became increasingly more dependent on the Kingdom of Mechs to do all of the hard work!

"What happens if the people who benefited from the Kingdom of Mechs are not so eager to contribute back?" Ves asked another question. "What if they act in a way that is detrimental to its interests?"

Master Goldstein smirked in an ominous manner. "The Kingdom of Mechs has a hidden punishment mechanism. Those who have intentions to damage it, those who leak information about it to unauthorized parties and those who seek to assist its enemies will all receive less help and positive feedback. The greater the severity of their crimes, the more backlash they receive from the kingdom."

"I never knew that this took place!"

Ves shook in fear. He quickly thought back on his complicated history to figure out whether he had done anything that caused him to receive a spanking from the Kingdom of Mechs!

"Do not be too concerned, Mr. Larkinson. The rules governing the punishment mechanisms are not too strict. Many different humans are connected to it. Each of them come from vastly different states and cultures, and each of them possess their own values and principles. The Kingdom of Mechs is inclusive and tolerant by necessity and will not punish minor transgressions. It will only act on serious misdeeds. For example, do not violate its secrecy. The Kingdom of Mechs acts harshly on anyone who exposes its existence to low-ranking mech designers or unrelated people."

This fell in line with the overall policy to reduce the awareness of psionic power and extraordinary manifestations as secret as possible.

The more people who became aware of the Kingdom of Mechs, the more crooked ideas they formed in their minds. It was best not to give crazies any chance to get up to no good.

The punishment mechanism effectively restrained both mech pilots and mech designers.

The consequences to the former were more severe as they could directly impair their growth in strength if they acted against their own integrity.

Ves wasn't sure how it affected mech designers as their work and decisions were much more complicated and ambiguous.

"Is there a way to off-set a punishment or plead for forgiveness?"

Master Goldstein chuckled. "It takes a certain individual to ask such a question. As far as I am aware, there are indeed methods to counteract a punishment. The most straightforward solution is to contribute more. The Kingdom of Mechs only cares whether you are a positive or negative addition.



More brilliant mech designers tend to stumble more in this regard, but as long as their work is of enormous value, the kingdom will forgive everything and bestow great favor on them. Keep this in mind."

Ves had a feeling that Master Goldstein did not mention this particularity to every mech designer.

"Considering that the Kingdom of Mechs is such a sensitive topic to humanity, why do mechers like you take the initiative to reveal it to Seniors such as myself?" Ves asked.

"There are several reasons for that." The MTA Master responded. "Seniors have gone through several layers of screening by the Kingdom of Mechs. Each of them can generally be trusted to protect it and maintain its secrecy. It is also more beneficial to humanity if Seniors understand the necessity of assuming greater responsibility and working for the good of our civilization as a whole. Aside from that, if they wish to realize their design philosophies, they must learn a special ritual that is needed to offer their contributions directly to the Kingdom of Mechs."

"Ah? You can't just do it automatically like before?"

"That is the case. Once you become a Master, you will begin to interact with the Kingdom of Mechs in a more significant fashion. It cannot be hidden from you at that time. The ritual can be regarded as a formal entry fee and an initial investment. The ritual may be... archaic, but it originated from the Progenitors themselves. The Star Designers have never removed it in order to show their respect for the sacrifices made by the founders of the kingdom."

It also made it a lot harder for rogue mech designers who never came into contact with the MTA to get past this hurdle.

Master Goldstein proceeded to spend the next fifteen or so minutes on teaching Ves this ritual.

It was indeed archaic and removed from modernity. It actually had the flavor of the Five Scrolls Compact, which only strengthened his suspicion that the Progenitors of Mechs used to be cultists themselves!

"I have remembered everything that you have taught." Ves solemnly said. "It's a little weird, but I suppose it is fine as long as it works."

"Do remember to not conduct this ritual unless you are absolutely certain about your initial contributions. If you have not exhausted your options as a Senior, then I recommend that you hold off and continue to flesh out your research."

Ves frowned. "If that is the case, why did the Polymath advance to Master when she was around 50 years old? A mech designer as smart as her could have definitely increased her contributions by an enormous degree. Is there any benefit to moving faster?"

"That is a rather advanced topic, Mr. Larkinson. There is a tradeoff. Contributing more will increase your foundation in the Kingdom of Mechs and will help you avoid many detours in your attempts to become a Star Designer. Realizing your design philosophy faster will strengthen humanity much sooner than if you wait for an additional century or two. You will also retain more lifespan that you can work towards advancing to Star Designer."

"I see..."

"To put it in different terms, as long as your current contributions are massive enough, there is no compelling reason to delay your promotion. The Polymath confidently realized her design philosophy sooner because it was already comprehensive enough to put her on a strong footing to become a Star Designer. She is intelligent enough to analyze her options and select the most optimal path that can save as much time as possible. Few mech designers possess this capacity for forethought."

This answer had a lot of relevance to Ves. If he succeeded in his insane ambition to open up the ability to pilot mechs to every human individual, then his contributions were bound to be massive!

As long as he succeeded in that research, he could skip the wait and advance to Master well ahead of other people!

Of course, the premise to all of this was that he could smoothly develop the Carmine System and the Blood Pact further.

Another assumption was that he wouldn't get distracted by his many minors.

When Ves thought about his habit of developing an interest in all kinds of random research topics, he wasn't too sure whether he could advance to Master by the time he became a century old!

Chapter 4959 The Secret Of Resonating Exotics - CONTEST IN COMMENTS

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The momentous revelation session neared its end.

Ves could sense that Master Vayro Goldstein had almost shared every secret that he was meant to convey on this day.

The generous MTA Master even provided a lot of extra information on account of Ves' contributions and favorable relationship with the Survivalist Faction.

The knowledge of the Kingdom of Mechs completely changed his perspective on his entire profession.

Ves needed to spend a lot of time on thinking about the implications of what he learned. His future success and ambitions were directly affected by the variables related to the Kingdom of Mechs!

For example, he needed to behave a lot more honestly in the future in order to build up his favorability with the kingdom.

He also had to put more thought into what sort of innovations he wanted to use as the basis of the ritual needed to realize his design philosophy.

It was a pity that Master Goldstein declined to answer any questions related to the specific rules and criteria related to the realization process.

Senior Mech Designers just needed to employ their own judgment on this matter. They understood their work the best and should not let other people dictate their contributions to the Kingdom of Mechs and the greater mech community.

There was one subject that Master Goldstein needed to convey to a newly-advanced Senior Mech Designer such as Ves.

Both mech designers bowed in front of the statues of the Progenitors of Mechs in order to convey their deepest respect.

Neither of them worshiped these once-powerful human beings as gods, but that did not mean they did not revere the sacrifices that these heroes made in the past.

After that, Master Goldstein brought Ves to another section of the ceremonial hall. They stopped in front of the wall where a large and plentiful collection of antique firearms had been put on display.

"It is time to explain the secret of resonating exotics to you." He spoke. "Unlike typical journeymen, you have worked on many expert mech design projects. You have even led a number of them. Yet in each and every case, you had to rely on a more advanced mech designer to ensure that your expert mechs properly resonate with their expert pilots. This must be a frustrating limitation."

"It is." Ves admitted. "I have often thought that this limitation exists to prevent unqualified mech designers from messing around with high-end mechs."

"Do you still believe that is the case?"

"No more. With all of your revelations, I have a strong suspicion that the Kingdom of Mechs plays a large role in this process."

"You are correct yet again, Mr. Larkinson. It is not a difficult deduction to make. It is true that the Kingdom of Mechs plays an essential role in unlocking the power of resonating exotics to the mech community. Yet before I explain this method to you in detail, I must first explain what exotics are and where they come from. You have worked with them often enough to understand that they are not entirely compliant with the laws of reality."

Ves nodded. "That is true. Do they gain additional powers and properties to the Kingdom of Mechs?"

"No. The answer is not so absurd. The simple truth is that exotic materials are matter that is contaminated by the remnant energies of ancient, long-dead humans and aliens of great power."

"What?!"

Ves had uttered this word a number of times already, but it seemed he would never grow tired of saying it today!

Master Goldstein chuckled at Ves. "I surmised that would be your response. I am not lying to you. According to our extensive research, every exotic material derives its additional traits that cannot be explained through conventional science by the influence exerted by ancient beings. They may be regarded as gods in ancient times, but even gods can die. Once that is the case, what do you think will happen to the enormous reserves of energy that they have accumulated?"

"Their power... disperses into the environment."

"Exactly. The law of the conservation of energy still applies, even in the case of supposed 'gods'. The Progenitors of Mechs channeled all of their own power into the Kingdom of Mechs without any spillage as far as we know, but many other beings of great power were not as selfless or considerate. The history of the cosmos is enormous. Beings that have died centuries or even millions of years ago are still capable of leaving a legacy behind by contaminating random deposits of materials and empowering them in unknown ways."

This... sounded a bit similar to how Lucky produced his gems!

Ves bet that the two processes shared a definite relationship with each other!

The biggest difference was that Lucky generated his gems within a more reasonable timeframe while the transformation of the environment could take place over many eras!

"How fast is this contamination process?"

"Not fast at all. If a powerful mech pilot or mech designer ever perishes, the star system will not suddenly sprout a large quantity of exotics in the following years. The Mech Supremacist Faction has conducted extensive research on this matter so it can tell you more about the more specific rules and patterns. What you need to know is that exotics are not completely 'impersonal'. Because their formation is tied to ancient beings of power, they can help humanity leverage the potential of exotic materials to a greater extent."

Ves widened his eyes. His mind had been churning. Now that he received enough clues, he came up with a strong answer!

"The reason why a small quantity of exotics are able to resonate with high-ranking mech pilots is because they emerged from the energies released by the deaths of ancient humans!"

"That is an accurate answer more or less." Master Goldstein said as he did not exhibit any surprise at hearing the correct explanation. "Resonating exotics are gifts that the ancestors of our race have bestowed to its distant descendants. Each exotic that can enable an expert pilot, ace pilot or god pilot to exert their willpower in much more powerful manifestations is directly related to the humans of our distant past."

That begged the question of what ancient humans were actually like. Since the mech industry discovered and made use of a lot of different varieties of resonating exotics, it was conceivable that the people of those distant eras used to be incredibly powerful!

"Are resonating exotics solely tied to ancient humans?" Ves puzzlingly asked. "People have found enough resonating exotics in the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy. Do they all come from the deaths of ancient humans? What if we can enter a distant galaxy one day where humanity has never stepped foot in? Will we be able to find resonating exotics there as well?"

Master Goldstein crossed his arms. "Not all resonating exotics are related to powerful humans of the past. There is a small proportion of... aliens as well as bizarre existences that possess a friendly attitude to humans and possibly other races. This can lead to an outcome where their dispersed energies contaminate materials and produce exotics that our high-ranking expert pilots can resonate with. In fact, every material can resonate with pilots. The difference is that the effect is not usually

strong enough to rely upon it. Only exotics that resonate with human mech pilots are important to expert mechs."

"I see."

All of it made sense, though Ves clearly received only a fraction of what the MTA knew about this extensive subject.

He was glad to hear that not all resonating exotics had to be related to humans in a fashion. That would make his life a lot harder if he ever traveled far enough one day.

"Okay, I understand how resonating exotics are the way they are." Ves said. "How do I get them to resonate with expert pilots and so on? Do I need to borrow the power of the Kingdom of Mechs to make this happen?"

"As irritating as it sounds, that is indeed the case, Mr. Larkinson. Every Senior Mech Designer has gained just enough access to the Kingdom of Mechs to borrow its power. What I am about to teach you is a small ritual of sorts that can enable you to properly attune an expert mech design. This may sound highly abstruse to you, but this needs to happen at the design stage as opposed to the fabrication stage. Once the design is attuned, any expert mech that is fabricated based on this design will properly resonate with an expert pilot."

That... sounded incredibly convoluted. Ves did not yet understand all of the reasons why it was set up this way, but it was hard for him to argue against the Progenitors of Mechs.

"Is there a method to manually attune a mech design to a mech pilot without relying on the Kingdom of Mechs?"

"That is an astute question. There is. This can be considered as the original method to make mechs resonate. I do not recommend you waste your time on this alternative because it is akin to ascending to the top floor of a tall building by taking the stairs. You can easily reach your destination by taking the elevator that was specifically made to offer this convenience."

Ves did not like what he heard. He felt that mech designers were relying a bit too much on the Kingdom of Mechs to resolve numerous difficulties in their work.

"What does it take to do it manually?"

"You are not strong enough." Goldstein bluntly said. "You should revisit this topic when you have become a Master and consolidated your growth for a number of decades. You must also increase your understanding of multiple different fields related to energy, materials science and more. It is only then that you have the strength and expertise to learn and apply the cumbersome manual process to attune the resonating exotics to a human pilot."

"...Okay. I think I understand why the Kingdom of Mechs allows mech designers to take the elevator."

The threshold of designing expert mechs would become way too high if people like Ves could not outsource this essential task to the Kingdom of Mechs!

This process sounded similar to relying on outside developers and consultants to perform difficult and highly specialized work.

The biggest difference was that this time the work was done by a super-powerful evolving spiritual construct instead of a normal human engineer!

Ves looked enlightened. He finally understood the secret behind high-ranking mechs. He no longer felt upset at the fact that Master Moira Willix and Master Benedict Cortez always avoided him whenever they performed this step themselves in their past collaborations.

It was truly inappropriate to share this secret method to a Journeyman like Ves, no matter how much talent and ability he demonstrated.

He felt fortunate that he managed to get rid of his Journeyman status fairly early in his career. He would never know what he was missing out on if he lingered at this stage for 40 years or more!

It did not take a lot of time for Master Goldstein to teach Ves the ritual to enable a mech design to resonate as long as it met the requirements.

Though Ves still wanted to learn the method of making his high-ranking mechs resonate with their pilots by himself, he accepted Goldstein's warning that it was best for him to wait until he realized his design philosophy and became a much more competent mech designer.

"I have explained almost everything that you are supposed to know and more." The MTA Master eventually spoke. "You should be intelligent enough to understand everything that I have said, but I will allow you to ask a small amount of questions. What do you wish to know? Keep in mind that I will not divulge too much new information because you are not yet permitted to come into contact with greater secrets."

Ves needed to think about this. He had a thousand questions on his mind, but he needed to choose carefully if he wanted to obtain clarification on the most urgent subjects.

#### Chapter 4960 The CFA's Attitudes

The mech industry may appear like a product of all of the latest advances in modern human science, but that was just what the Mech Trade Association used to fool the public.

The hidden depth behind mechs was far more mystical and unfathomable than most people thought!

Even when clear signs of abnormal manifestations of power emerged such as the reality-defying abilities of high-ranking mech pilots, an average person on the street still thought it was just a really clever application of technology!

The cognitive dissonance among people became especially absurd when literal god pilots began to emerge. These gods of war exhibited abilities that not even the largest and most well-equipped CFA battleships could match, yet people were still willing to believe that it was scientific that a single human and a mech could destroy entire planets!

Ves still felt that there were a lot of missing pieces to the story. Why must humanity be so thoroughly protected from the truth? Why was it so important to hide the existence of the Kingdom of Mechs from the public at large? How much inheritance did the MTA manage to retain from the Five Scrolls Compact?

He wanted to ask so many questions, yet he was sure that he would only attract a lot of trouble as a result. His relationship with the MTA was too valuable for him to put at risk just because he wanted to satisfy his curiosity.

No matter what, Ves always had to keep in mind that the MTA ultimately had its own interests at heart. The mechers only treated him nicely because he provided them with a lot of value.

As Ves rearranged his thoughts, he quickly formed a small list of questions that were particularly relevant to his work and his future.

"Can you tell me how biomechs relate to the Kingdom of Mechs?" Ves asked first. "I have recently begun to dabble in biotechnology and biomechs. Due to the particular nature of my design philosophy, I have found that I can augment the performance of my products by incorporating organic parts into them. Will I be able to gain as much benefits from the kingdom if I start to conduct research and design mechs that start to look as if they belong to the biotechnology industry?"

Master Goldstein frowned as he heard this question.

"You have touched upon a controversial topic. Biomechs still fall under the category of mechs, and the kingdom does not make a distinction between the materials and the tech base used to make them. As long as a machine fits a loose definition of a mech, it will fall under the purview of the Kingdom of Mechs, especially when it is developed by a genuine mech designer such as yourself."

Ves looked reassured. It sounded like his Carmine System might have a place in the mech community after all. He just needed to make sure that it was undeniably linked to mechs.

"Are there any technological limits to the Kingdom of Mechs? Is there anything I explicitly need to watch out for, such as weapons of mass destruction, biological viruses and other prohibited weapons?"

Goldstein shook his head. "Human technology and creativity is limitless. The kingdom must always be inclusive to new technological paradigms. It would be counterproductive to close itself off to specific branches of science and allow our enemies to outpace us in technological development. The Kingdom of Mechs is a tool that exists for the good of humanity. It is not an instrument that is meant to enforce the laws of specific states and organizations. The prohibition against weapons of mass destruction is a taboo enforced by many human institutions. Do you understand the difference?"

"I do. I think I understand."

He was sure that Master Goldstein colored his answer from the perspective of the Survivalist Faction. This group of pragmatists who were deeply concerned with the survival of humanity were willing to compromise all sorts of rules as long as it served the greater good!

Master Goldstein's expression turned serious. "In practice, biotechnology is not particularly well-received among the mech pilots and mech designers of our society. Most people have inherited a strong bias against biomechs and organic technology. This bias does not necessarily disappear when mech designers advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer or Star Designer. The Kingdom of Mechs may be created to serve as a neutral and inclusive platform for everything related to mechs, but what do you think might happen if most of the Star Designers who hold the highest administrative authority?"

Ves' face turned ugly. He understood the meaning of Master Goldstein quite well. Just like how the Hexers used their belief in the superiority of women to warp their entire state, the Kingdom of Mechs definitely wouldn't treat biotechnology as favorably as more conventional forms of technology!

"How unfriendly is the Kingdom of Mechs towards biotechnology?"

"It depends." The bald MTA Master responded. "My specialization is centered around support mechs. My work does not intersect with biotechnology. From what I have learned from other sources, the Kingdom of Mechs holds any biotechnological applications to much higher standards, especially in the aspect of safety and stability. If a biomech designer has been less than diligent in guaranteeing the safety of his own products, he will not be able to earn as many rewards from the kingdom as other mech designers. Over the long-term, this pattern will produce an environment that reinforces the existing norms."

In other words, because the earlier generations of mech designers were all strong proponents of classical mechs, the Kingdom of Mechs became strongly geared to this broad product category.

Anything that fell outside of this category would have to fight an uphill battle! Biomech designers needed to put in twice or thrice as much work in order to earn a similar amount of recognition as ordinary mech designers.

This did not sound good at all. Ves had definite plans to turn his Carmine System into a core component of his best works, but if the entire Kingdom of Mechs repelled biotechnology to a significant extent, then he would have to overcome a lot of inherent skepticism and unreasonable suspicions.

Ves accepted this challenge.

The more subversive the idea, the more effort it took to make it acceptable! This was a universal rule and applied to any form of new idea or invention. A design application as radical as the Carmine System would never be embraced by the public and the mech industry at the start. It was just too weird and did not fit in the existing paradigms that most people held dear.

Pioneers such as Ves had to accept the heavy burden of changing everyone's minds about useful but subversive applications of technology.

Besides, it was not as if Ves went all-in on biomechs anyway. He much preferred to blend the unique advantages of biotechnology with the ease of classical technology.

Now that Ves gained a better understanding of how biotechnology was positioned in the Kingdom of Mechs, he asked another question.

"When I spoke to various Seniors and Masters about reaching my current rank, they all told me to pay a lot of importance to the responsibility of teaching mech design-related subjects to a class of students. What is the big deal? Does the Kingdom of Mechs reward mech designers from passing on their skills to the next generations?"

Goldstein did not look surprised when Ves brought up this particular subject. "I intended to address this responsibility to you later. As you must already suspect, teaching is indeed related to the Kingdom of Mechs. In order to avoid the mistakes of the past and encourage the development of



mechs at a wider scale without hoarding an excessive amount of trade secrets, mech designers must be more proactive in passing on their teachings to future professionals. This is one of the strongest reasons why the mech industry has grown so fast and remained so productive since the Age of Mechs began. I will explain this heavy subject to you extensively after I have addressed your other questions."

It appeared that teaching was a much bigger deal than Ves realized.

"Alright." He responded and changed his tack. "Then how does the MTA and the Kingdom of Mechs relate to the CFA? It is clear to me that the fleeters probably don't have anything to do with the kingdom."

"That is correct, Mr. Larkinson. I believe that you have gained a crucial piece of information that explains the ideological differences between the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance. The former works on the assumption that the Kingdom of Mechs is necessary to promote the development of humanity. The latter believes that humanity must not grow dependent on forces that it cannot fully control and that conventional technology is the only power that we can harness."

That was what Ves deduced as well, but this was not enough of an answer.

"Does the CFA oppose the Kingdom of Mechs, or does it want to destroy it as well?"

Master Goldstein gave Ves a rueful smile. "That depends on the individual. Just as with our Association, the Common Fleet Alliance is hardly united. It is split up in multiple fleet-based factions that each espouse different values and ideals. There are moderates among the CFA that are open-minded enough to recognize the value and the necessity of mechs and everything they bring. There are also fleet admirals who believe that the Kingdom of Mechs is a construct similar to a rogue AI that has hijacked our civilization and distorted its development. These belligerent fleeters would not hesitate to destroy our precious kingdom if they think they can succeed."

This meant that Ves probably needed to remain careful about his interactions with the fleeters in the future.

He shouldn't have much intersection with them, but if that might change once he started to provoke more fights against alien forces. Fighting humanity's external enemies had always fallen under the jurisdiction of the CFA.

"Do ordinary people like myself have to be concerned about the CFA's stances towards the Kingdom of Mechs?"

"You are hardly an ordinary person, Mr. Larkinson, but no." Goldstein looked amused. "The primary responsibility of the Mech Trade Association is to protect and ensure the continuation of the Kingdom of Mechs. You are not required to intervene in any fashion. We are not that incompetent."

Of course this was the case. The MTA was all-powerful. If a large number of Star Designers and god pilots could not fend off the CFA's threats towards the Kingdom of Mechs all this time, then Ves might as well hang up his mech designer cape and look for a new job!

"Do you think that the CFA's strategy is viable?" Ves asked.

Perhaps other mech designers would strenuously insist that the fleeters were a bunch of fools who clung to outdated technological paradigms, but a Survivalist like Master Goldstein possessed a more tolerant mindset.

"That is not certain, but I believe that the CFA's approach has its merits." The MTA Master steadily replied. "The warships that the fleeters obsess over are blunt, powerful instruments of war. They can be built en masse with greater convenience, but their excessive resource requirements means that they impose a progressively heavier burden on our society."

"And that is bad?"

"One of the lesser-known disasters of the Age of Conquest is how the economy and the resource distribution of human civilizations were excessively skewed towards warships. Food, housing, medicine, civilian infrastructure and more all suffered due to leaders channeling too much funding and materials to the shipbuilding industry. Part of the reason why the Age of Mechs repulsed warships to such a strong degree was because people wanted to channel those resources back to their own lives. Our race also does not need to chase after the resources controlled by alien civilizations by starting so many aggressive wars."

Humanity enjoyed a long period of relative peace after the end of the Age of Conquest. Ves now understood that much of it was because people no longer needed to plunder so many bulk resources from neighboring alien empires!