

The Mech 4961

Chapter 4961 The Virtue of Teaching

Master Goldstein had been generous to Ves and answered a good amount of sensitive questions.

However, both of them understood that this could not go on forever. The Mech Trade Association accumulated an unimaginable amount of secrets. There was no need for Ves to learn so much information that had little relevance to his current work.

Ves was only supposed to obtain an introduction to the Kingdom of Mechs and a few related matters. He obtained far more than that today. It would take a long time for him to digest all of the secrets that he learned.

After asking a few more questions, Master Goldstein no longer had the patience to indulge Ves any further.

"You said earlier that Star Designers can step out of the Kingdom of Mechs. Does that mean that they have chosen their own way? Have they become untraceable? Has any of them attempted to create another kingdom, either as a substitute to the original or an attempt to elevate another product category? Has the Common Fleet Alliance ever attempted to create an equivalent 'Kingdom of Warships'? Is the progression path of mech pilots based on older warrior traditions?"

Goldstein raised his palm. "Enough. I am happy that you possess the curiosity of an inquisitive mech designer. Asking questions is always a good sign of your willingness to pursue and embrace new information. However, you do not need to delve too deeply into the affairs of Star Designers. Pay attention to your own work first. As a Senior, your main priority is to work towards realizing your design philosophy. Do not allow yourself to get drawn away from this goal due to a misguided belief that the entire cosmos revolves around you. There is more than enough time for you to undertake greater responsibilities once you have advanced to Master Mech Designer."

The man was right. Though Ves still felt bummed that he couldn't gain any further answers, he accepted this advice.

"Very well. What is next?"

"You have brought up the subject of teaching earlier. Let us discuss that instead. Follow me to my main office."

Master Goldstein and Ves slowly left the ceremonial hall after taking a final glimpse.

Ves still did not understand the full meaning of this space. He hadn't even figured out whether this was a standard feature in every major MTA location or whether Goldstein built it on his own initiative.

In any case, Ves immediately felt as if he had returned to modern society. The hypermodern interior of the Antazella de Osiris put him in a more forward-thinking mood.

A lot of stuff happened in the past. The tumultuous creation of the Kingdom of Mechs produced a massive amount of ripple effects that ended up changing human civilization forever.

However, what did this have to do with Ves? Four centuries had already passed since the start of the Age of Mechs!

All of the people who fought to secure a better future for humanity succeeded for the most part. As a child of the Age of Mechs, Ves had no need to trouble himself over these old affairs.

Instead, he should take advantage of the prosperity built by his predecessors and do whatever it took to enrich the Kingdom of Mechs with his contributions!

After walking through a lot of corridors and halls, the two mech designers eventually reached a large and well-furnished office.

Master Goldstein pursued efficiency and did not add too many distractions to his office. Aside from looking nice and befitting the status of an MTA Master, it lacked a lot of personal touches.

Neither of the two cared about that. A device quickly brewed a pot of tea. Goldstein poured two cups and gestured for Ves to take a sip.

"Whoa. This is actually really nice!" Ves uttered with surprise as he felt a lot more refreshed and energetic than before!

The strange tea not only tasted like the best mint tea in the cosmos, but also cleansed his unstable Spirituality in a manner that he could not understand!

Ves guessed that the function of this tea was to suppress the negative side effects of igniting his design flame.

He hadn't really noticed it before, but his noticeable growth in power and the shock of listening to so many mind blowing revelations had completely thrown him off-balance.

Though Ves was not a mech designer who became paralyzed so easily, he still became a little frayed and nervous due to all of the new concerns swirling in his mind.

He had remained in ignorance for too long. He dedicated over half of his life to mech design, but never in his life did he notice that he became inextricably connected to the Kingdom of Mechs!

He inspected his own mind and Spirituality a dozen times over and did not spot any unidentified spiritual connections.

The only possible explanation was that it was tied to the design seed that erupted into flames recently.

Ves theorized that the interior design of the design seed was far more complicated than he could hope to understand at this stage. There must be an internal component or mechanism that was responsible for maintaining a strong but invisible connection to the Kingdom of Mechs.

He really wanted to get his hands on an intact design seed and slowly crack it open to see what was inside. It was unfortunate that he had already fractured Lady Aisling Curver's design seed into several pieces and used them as spiritual ingredients without examining them first.

"This is good tea." Ves stated the obvious.

Master Goldstein smirked at the younger mech designer. "Do not think about it. You will not be able to find it on any of our Association's exchanges at your current access level. This tea is part of my own private collection. You will get in touch with it once you have entered a higher layer of society. If you wish to procure this tea or similar products on your own, then work hard to realize your

design philosophy and earn the recognition of my peers. As one of the two dominant protectors of human civilization, the Mech Trade Association has access to many treasures. This is but the least of what we have obtained."

"I see."

Ves looked a little bummed when he heard this reply, but he quickly regained his mood.

He just recalled that Master Benedict Cortez had picked up the odd hobby of tea cultivation.

Perhaps the former Skull Architect's purpose for doing so was not just about brewing nicer-tasting teas.

Once they finished their first cups, Master Goldstein addressed the final major topic of this momentous meeting.

"I have already touched upon the subject of teaching earlier. Now that you understand the guiding principle of the Kingdom of Mechs, it is not that difficult to explain the mechanics. First, the kingdom pays attention to how diligently and how much effort you have put into teaching the next generations of mech designers. It has done so since you first became a Novice and initially contacted the Kingdom of Mechs."

"Oh?"

That already assuaged one of his concerns. Ves had been worrying about whether this mystical kingdom credited him for investing his time on teaching Ketis, Maikel and Zanthar. He was glad to hear that he did not waste all of this past effort.

"It would be too exhausting to explain the precise rules and criteria to you, so I will be brief. The Kingdom of Mechs provides greater rewards to teachers whose students have enjoyed greater success in their professional careers. For example, if you have raised 100 students of which 10 manage to advance to Journeyman, you will receive a small benefit. If 5 of them advance to Senior, then you will receive a substantially more noticeable benefit. If 1 happens to be good enough to advance to Master, then the rewards that you will obtain from the Kingdom will be rich."

In other words, the higher the attainments of the students, the more the kingdom fed back to the teacher!

"Mech designers rarely learn their craft from a single teacher." Ves observed. "How does the kingdom handle attribution to multiple teachers?"

"The Kingdom of Mechs will apportion its rewards in proportion to how much the student has benefited from the teachings of every teacher. A Master who has taken in a student as a direct disciple can earn the greatest share of the reward. An ordinary university professor who only taught a single class to a student will only receive a tiny proportion of feedback."

Ves already guessed that this might be the case. "So teachers can essentially earn rewards from the kingdom in at least two different ways. They can invest a lot of attention to a single talent and hope that this fellow becomes incredibly successful and advance to Master one day. They can also teach several large classes of mech design students and hope that their collective accomplishments will add up and provide a large amount of feedback."

Quality or quantity.

The potential rewards of raising a small number of talented mech designers were greater, but the results were highly variable.

Teaching regular classes to hundreds of mech designers was not as fulfilling at first, but the accumulated benefits steadily built up as long as Ves persisted in this job!

Still, no matter what, it took a lot of time for his efforts to bear fruit!

If Goldstein was right that teachers received the greatest rewards from the Kingdom of Mechs when their students realized their design philosophies, then Ves would probably have to wait a century or longer for Ketis, Maikel and Zanthar to become Masters!

"How does the Kingdom of Mechs reward teachers for passing on their knowledge and helping mech designers become successful in their careers?"

"As I have stated before, it is not as direct as you think." Goldstein responded. "Becoming a good teacher does not necessarily turn you into a good mech designer. You must still build up your foundation, conduct successful research and design groundbreaking mechs by relying on your own efforts. What is different is that if you are a highly successful teacher, all of your activities and interactions that are related to the Kingdom of Mechs will yield noticeably better results. I cannot go into the specifics, but it can potentially save you many detours."

Ves did not like that the answer was so vague. It prevented Ves from conducting a proper cost-benefit analysis on how much he should spend his time on teaching a bunch of brats.

"Does it make a difference when a mech designer advanced to Master Mech Designer or Star Designer?"

"Yes. This is also the primary reason why Seniors and Masters undertake this responsibility so seriously despite the fact that it reduces their time to engage in their personal design and research projects. When these mech designers attempt to advance to the next rank, they cannot do without relying heavily on the Kingdom of Mechs. Think about it, Mr. Larkinson. If the kingdom believes you are a positive influence because you have successfully strengthened the continuity of the mech industry, it will treat you with greater appreciation. Any problems you may have become less important whereas any contributions you have made will have greater weight."

This was no different from playing favorites!

Ves' image of a solemn construct that rigidly followed a set of rules had collapsed!

"You make it sound as if... the Kingdom of Mechs is alive."

"This is a part of the original design of the kingdom. The Star Designers that emerged later saw no reason to question the wisdom of the Progenitors of Mechs. As a matter of fact, they all support this policy. No Master or Star Designer can easily emerge from nothing. It takes a large and complete educational complex to produce so many qualified high-ranking mech designers."

So this was why there were so many mech design universities and other related schools in human space.

They mainly existed so that a lot of Seniors and Masters would get into contact with enough students of their own!

Chapter 4962 Poor Teaching Qualifications

Every Senior and higher became obsessed with earning teaching kudos from the Kingdom of Mechs.

This was because it was insanely difficult for mech designers to successfully advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer and Star Designer!

The huge disparity in numbers between Seniors, Masters and Star Designers already made that clear.

If mech designers weren't brilliant or clever enough to produce enough results in their regular work activities, then it was definitely worthwhile to spend more time on teaching classes.

This was because if mech designers became stagnant or got stuck in their current research, investing more time and effort into doing the same did not necessarily yield any further results.

The law of diminishing returns hit really hard in these instances.

It made sense for mech designers to focus on teaching instead. This not only allowed them to get into contact with new perspectives and enriched their theoretical understanding, but also encouraged the Kingdom of Mechs to give them the push they needed to make a breakthrough in their research!

An argument could be made that the Kingdom of Mechs explicitly distorted the mech industry to enforce an unnatural pattern of behavior.

Ves was sure if this mechanism did not exist, much fewer mech designers would be willing to waste their time on raising ignorant brats!

He had no problem with this reward mechanism, though. Many mech designers including himself benefited massively from the open and accessible learning environment. It would have been a lot harder for them to get started if the discipline of mech designer was only reserved for a small group of rich and wealthy elites!

"How much time do mech designers have to spend on teaching them for the benefits to become significant enough?"

Master Goldstein smiled. "There is no single answer to that question. More promising and talented mech designers such as yourself likely do not need to prioritize this too much. Nonetheless, it is always worthwhile for every mech designer to spend at least a few hours of their day on offering guidance to future mech designers. This is because the reward scale is not linear. Even a small but earnest effort will already earn you a healthy amount of recognition from the Kingdom of Mechs. After that, it becomes harder to earn more benefits as you teach more students. You will still gain more advantages, but they will not be as great as before."

This meant that the quantity strategy had its limits. Blindly teaching a lot of students was not necessarily profitable anymore if it took too much time away from core design activities.

"If this is the case, then I suppose it is important for mech designers such as myself to strike the right balance." Ves concluded. "Our research and design projects are part of our fundamentals, so we cannot neglect these core activities. Teaching a little bit already helps, but teaching more

students and taking up a greater share of their curriculums will cause the Kingdom of Mechs to recognize us more."

The MTA Master nodded. "You have a good understanding of this already. What I also have to add is that the environment has a large influence on your 'yield'. The majority of third-class mech design students have a low ceiling. They may become household names in their states, but it is unlikely for them to radiate their work any further. Second-class mech designers are much more rewarding overall. They can design stronger mechs that have greater significance and they can more easily advance to the higher ranks."

Ves recalled Master Benedict mentioning that it was always better to teach at any first-class mech design university than the most renowned second-class mech design university.

Was it because of this? Was it easier for first-class mech designers to realize their design philosophies and attain great success in their careers?

"What about first-class mech designers, Master?"

"The study environment of first-raters is different. Many schools impose high entry requirements. Combined with their extensive augmentations, the average quality of a group of first-class mech design students is much higher. With their strong foundations and stronger state or family support, first-class mech designers are more likely to advance, though the absolute yield still remains fairly low."

From what Ves could understand through his prior studies, first-class mech designers were able to reach the Journeyman and Senior ranks with greater ease due to their superior study and work circumstances.

It was the jump to Master that truly challenged them. First-class mech designers had become too accustomed to relying on their augmentations, family support and the conveniences granted by high technology that they lacked too much practice in conducting original research.

It was not easy for them to rely purely on themselves to blaze a new trail in an untouched or underutilized branch of technology!

That said, first-class mech designers weren't all that shabby. Their superior environments and individual circumstances made a huge difference. Their work was also a lot more directly related to raising the upper ceiling of mechs, so even minor first-class innovations yielded greater rewards from the Kingdom of Mechs!

Ves slowly nodded. "I have a clearer understanding of the importance of the quality of students. I guess I need to find the best possible mech design universities that are open to hiring a mech designer like myself. What do you think about my prospects?"

It was a certainty that Master Vayro Goldstein studied everything that the MTA knew about Ves. Someone as clever as an MTA Master must have already put a lot of thought on this subject.

The bald Master looked ready to share his own thoughts. "You are not a conventional teaching candidate to say the least. Educational institutions generally seek teachers who have proven to possess a certain degree of stability. In addition, you are too young. You may have accrued more

accomplishments and designed more excellent mechs than your peers, but your proven qualities do not necessarily match the requirements that schools seek in their teaching staff."

That did not sound good, but Ves already expected to hear this kind of answer. He knew quite well that he did not exactly fit the mold of a good and reliable teacher.

"I already tutored three students. They are all doing well. I have high expectations for Ketis Larkinson, Maikel Larkinson and Zanthar Larkinson."

"We are aware of that. You have set them on the right path, but you have done so through individual tutoring in person, which is different from teaching large classes at formal mech design universities, especially if you are doing so from remote. You will have to prove that you possess a different set of skills that are more relevant to this mode of teaching, but your relatively young age and lack of experience will prevent school administrations from taking you more seriously."

Although all of this sounded bad, Ves refused to believe he had no way of overcoming this hurdle!

"Alright." He said. "I do not fit the mold of a traditional professor. However, I have advantages that few if any other teachers possess. I am an adventurous mech designer who has gone through multiple expeditions. I have collected seven masterwork certificates during my Journeyman years. I am a tier 6 galactic citizen. I am a senior contributor of restricted technology. Do I need to go on, Master?"

"I believe that there are second-class mech design universities that are more than open to the idea of allowing you to teach specialized and elective courses. For example, you can teach students the basic principles of how to design or work with living mechs. You can teach them how to organize their own expeditions in the frontier. If you have proven your teaching skills and earned more trust from the school, then you may have an opportunity to teach more foundational courses such as physics, electromagnetism and mech assembly. I believe you will do particularly well in the latter."

All of that sounded pretty nice actually, but the only problem that Ves had with this answer was that Goldstein only assumed that Ves would be able to get a teaching position at a second-class mech design university.

"What will it take for me to get a teaching position at a first-class mech design university?"

The MTA Master dropped his smile. "You have a greedy appetite, Mr. Larkinson. I am not discouraging you, but I must warn you that you must be ready for disappointment. Frankly speaking, the fact that you are not a first-class mech designer will already cause most first-class institutions to disqualify you outright. It will tarnish their reputation and 'lower their standards' if they dare to hire you. This is your first obstacle."

"You said most, but not all. There should still be first-class schools that are open-minded enough to look at second-raters such as myself, right?"

"Yes, but these very same institutions demand the very best of what second-class society can offer. There are many mech designers who are much older, more experienced, more accomplished and more intelligent than you. You may be able to exceed them in other capacities, but not in the criteria that first-class schools value the most. Your insistence on becoming a remote teacher as opposed to a mech designer who is willing to teach at a physical campus removes even more options."

"Damnit." Ves quietly cursed. "Well, I can't blame these elitist schools. The amount of second-class mech designers who apply for teaching jobs must be overwhelming. It is really hard for me to stand out from the competition."

"My advice to you is to be more modest and work towards increasing your teaching qualifications step-by-step. There is no problem with teaching at a respectable second-class institution. As long as you spend two or three decades teaching classes while earning high appraisals from your students, you will slowly increase your eligibility to teach more important classes. This will enable you to apply for more prestigious schools. Combined with your increasing accomplishments in your mech design work, you should become eligible to teach at a first-class mech design university within a century."

That was too slow! Perhaps a Master who could live for at least half a millennium did not think so, but Ves was way too impatient to start from the bottom.

He wanted to get in touch with first-class mech designers right away! If he had any chance of skipping the awful grind and parachuting himself into a first-class school, then he needed to fight for this opportunity with all of his effort!

"I may have... a piece of information for you that may change your evaluation of my chances of obtaining a teaching position at a first-class mech design university."

"Hmmm? You seem serious. Very well, then. Please make your case."

Ves shiftily looked around the large and mostly empty office. "Is this... a secure place to talk? I recently made a huge advancement in my work that has massive implications. I dare not say it is true, but one of the implications has such a massive effect on the mech community and our society as a whole that it will definitely make a lot of people crazy. I really do not want this to get leaked."

To his credit, Master Goldstein did not show any doubt towards Ves. The man simply took action and activated a command that caused the entire office to change.

Additional energy screens and physical walls emerged around them and enveloped the two mech designers in an isolating bubble.

The air became charged with different interfering energies. A lot of electronics and advanced tech suddenly became inert.

"Ah!"

Ves could feel that the changed environment induced a lot of pressure on his cranial implant!

It would have shut down already if his bioimplant hadn't undergone a sublimation that caused it to evolve away from its original parameters!

Although Ves managed to keep his cranial implant active despite the unfriendly circumstances, he had no choice but to endure a persistent ache in his head.

Fortunately, Ves had withstood worse in the past. He could easily tolerate a small headache as long as it did not go on for days.

"This space is secure now. I personally designed and built these security measures by myself. If you trust in my ability, you can trust that anything we say here will remain confidential."

That was good enough. Only Star Designers could build anything better.

Ves felt a lot more reassured with the extensive security measures. He took a deep breath and presented the information that was certain to have a lot of meaning to the MTA!

"It is like this. If you have been paying attention to me, then you should know that I recently completed my Dullahan Project. This expert space knight has a special feature called the Carmine System. In the process of its first activation, its pilot made a massive discovery..."

Chapter 4963 Confidentiality Concerns

Shortly after Venerable Jannzi shared her shocking insight and speculation about the Carmine System and the Blood Pact, Ves never thought about keeping it a secret from the Mech Trade Association.

The MTA was one of the well-deserved overlords of human civilization. It possessed a wealth of human and alien technology and could muster the resources of an entire civilization. Dozens of Star Designers directly renounced their allegiances to their former states and devoted themselves to furthering the Association's technological supremacy.

While Ves was confident in his ability to hide his greatest secrets, he did not have the confidence to keep the mechers at bay entirely.

He may be able to hide his thoughts and his less physical creations, but he could never obscure anything solid and concrete like the Carmine System.

Now that he had set a firm goal in mind for his distant promotion, it was inevitable for him to restart the Blood Knight Project.

Not only would he begin to experiment with forming Blood Pacts with different candidates, it would be comically easy for the mechers to notice that a norm with F-grade genetic aptitude suddenly began to pilot a mech!

It didn't matter if Ves took all sorts of precautions and conducted the experiments in a highly secure environment. No measure was foolproof, and the larger the commotion, the harder it became to prevent any leaks.

Rather than engage in a futile effort to hide this secret on his own, he might as well submit his explosive idea to the MTA right away.

This course of action would maximize his gains as the mechers always liked it when mech designers shared the fruits of their labor to the Association.

The only uncertainty that Ves towards turning to the MTA was whether he would be limited or forbidden from furthering his research on the Carmine System.

After all, this brand-new mech biosystem not only possessed a lot of unknowns, but had a higher chance of endangering mech pilots!

Though Ves did not explicitly mention it, a mech designer and researcher as intelligent as an MTA Master would definitely know that the development of the Carmine System had definitely been fast and loose!

Ves would have gotten fired, sanctioned or even imprisoned a long time ago if he attempted to pull off such an insane experiment in a formal research facility!

Fortunately, Ves had the final say in the Larkinson Clan, so he could set his own rules.

That did not change the fact that the MTA would likely take issue if it knew how much he endangered his own test subjects.

Anyone who put a high priority on safety and complying with regulations would definitely work to stop Ves from conducting any further reckless experiments.

He had little choice in the matter. He just hoped that Master Goldstein would be lenient and overlook these problematic issues.

Once Ves completed his brief but extremely subversive ideas, he nervously waited for the verdict.

The bald Master did not act with haste. He had fallen completely silent and put his formidable intellect into processing what he heard.

From judging the accuracy of Ves' statements to visualizing the enormous consequences of reducing the importance of genetic aptitude to the mech community and human society as a whole, Master Goldstein did not dismiss anything he heard!

Ves sat awkwardly behind Goldstein's large desk and tried his best not to groan in pain.

The strong interference fields employed by the MTA Master continued its attempts to neutralize any technological components including organic cranial implants.

Ves had thought that he had managed to upgrade and evolve his original Archimedes Rubal bioimplant far beyond its original specifications, but it turned out that it had a lot to go before it truly became impervious to interference!

He began to distract himself by coming up with possible solutions on how to protect his integrated bioimplant further. It was difficult to come up with any solid solutions as his expertise in biotechnology was still too shallow.

In the interest of upgrading his augmentations and furthering the development of the Carmine System, Ves really needed to increase his knowledge related to biotechnology and biomech design.

It would be best if he could do so with ease by ingesting the right enlightenment fruit, but that depended on whether he could get lucky with the Tree of Possibilities. Its selection of fruits was completely random and their short descriptions hardly helped to clarify their exact benefits.

Ves previously held off on eating a lot of enlightenment fruits because he did not want to pollute his mind with enormous reserves of irrelevant junk.

He also feared that he would reach a limit where he could no longer store any further knowledge in his mind.

He no longer held as many concerns as before. His recent sublimation along with his advancement to Senior upgraded his cognition to such a massive extent that he became convinced that he could easily handle a much greater infusion of knowledge!

As Ves started to think about how many enlightenment fruits he should eat when he got back, Master Goldstein finally completed his analysis and deductions.

The change was obvious as the man shed much of his easy attitude and adopted a much more severe demeanor!

It looked as if Master Goldstein had entered into a war mentality!

"Before I say anything further, I would like to thank you for mentioning your ideas and suspicions to me. You have fully justified my decision to take a detour to the Davute System. While you have yet to present any solid data or proof about your assertions, you are known to us as a credible mech designer who has already produced concrete results. I will not question your judgment nor your qualifications on this matter and assume that you can turn your ideas into reality."

The older mech designer extended an enormous amount of trust to Ves. This was a major leap of faith, but as Goldstein already stated, the Survivalists believed in the credibility of their gutsy associate.

This would never happen if Ves was a stranger! The mechers would probably laugh at his wild and outlandish claims if he dared to claim he could make genetic aptitude obsolete!

"If we assume that you can realize this ambition of yours, then we must first control its dissemination. Who is aware of the Carmine System and its greatest implications?"

"Well, as I have stated earlier, Venerable Jannzi Larkinson shared this explosive information with me in the first place." Ves responded. "You can trust her to maintain her confidentiality. I intend to conduct a lot of experiments and studies on Jannzi and her new expert mech. Their Blood Pact will probably be the strongest and most developed of them all. I can gain crucial insights into its evolution if I keep monitoring this strengthening bond. I cannot do all of this without involving Jannzi as a long-term test subject and research collaborator."

The MTA Master nodded in understanding. "It is not difficult to gain the compliance of expert pilots, especially when they are the direct beneficiaries of your research. I shall arrange for her to be brought in so that we can brief her in person and compel her to sign a non-disclosure agreement. Who else?"

Ves frowned for a moment. "My collaborators know about the Carmine System, but not its implications or its specific workings. They have no understanding of biotechnology and showed little interest in my work. Still, I work with them on a daily basis, so they may pick up a few crucial details over time."

"That is problematic..." Goldstein frowned. "Continue. Are there any other people who can possibly know what your Carmine System can possibly produce?"

"That is it, I think. The Dullahan Project is our most powerful and technologically advanced expert mech to date. My collaborators and I took care not to involve any third parties or other personnel. Our technology consultants only assisted with the development of the transphasic armor system and did not get in touch with any materials related to the Carmine System. The greatest risk factor is Master Benedict Cortez as he is not my subordinate. He is the smartest and most experienced mech designer out of our design team, and possesses a good understanding of my work. It is not impossible for him to independently make this deduction."

The good news that Ves and the Design Department no longer became dependent on Master Benedict's assistance.

As much as Ves appreciated and benefited from the former Skull Architect's competence in mech design, depending on him to design the Larkinson Clan's trump cards was a security nightmare!

Now that Ves advanced to Senior and learned the ritual to attune the resonating exotics of an expert mech design, he could say goodbye to the days where he helplessly involved Master Benedict in all kinds of crazy and innovative high-end mech designs!

It was a pity that it was too late to prevent him from learning the core details of the Ghost Project and the Dullahan Project.

"We shall take care of Master Cortez as well." Goldstein said with ease as if this was but a trivial issue. "It is good to hear that there are no other individuals who can threaten the confidentiality of this research project."

"What about your Association?" Ves asked.

"I dare not divulge or transmit anything you have said to any of my peers. Not yet, at least." Goldstein responded. "I cannot handle a case of this magnitude alone. I may hold a position of authority on. I will have to share your work with half-a-dozen other colleagues. Rest assured that you can trust in their integrity. They within the Mech Trade Association, but the implications of your research are too disruptive for a single person to issue judgment on. I will have to share your work with half-a-dozen other colleagues. Rest assured that you can trust in their integrity. They would not have been able to attain their high ranks by betraying the trust of others."

Ves nodded in understanding. Now that he had learned of the existence of the Kingdom of Mechs and how mech designers depended heavily on it, he knew that there were real consequences to acting without integrity!

He was really glad that he had always been honest in his work as a mech designer. He always stuck to his own principles.

"Is it really necessary to involve so many powerful people?" Ves asked.

"It is, unless your claims are wildly overblown." Goldstein retorted. "Even if that is the case, that still does not change my decision. Even the slightest possibility of developing a new method to open up the piloting profession to normal humans merits our full consideration. It will take time to convene a secret panel that can handle this affair. I dare not transmit any information regarding your work over any of our communication channels. The risks are too great. Our faction has organized a conference in less than half a year. That presents us with a good opportunity to meet together and candidly discuss your work."

Ves had thought of that as well. A lot of powerful and clever people gathered together, but he was sure that Goldstein and his buddies had the means to create a fully secure environment.

"Am I allowed to conduct more research and experiment with the Carmine System in the following months?" Ves tentatively asked. "It would be a lot more convenient if I can present at least a small amount of concrete data to back up my ideas."

Goldstein looked troubled. "That is true, but there is a possibility that sensitive information will leak as a result."

"I apologize for saying this, Master, but I have staked my design philosophy and the future of my career on this research. I cannot suspend my work on a project as important as this. You can choose to delay its public exposure, but I do not want my work to be hindered."

These were big words, and Ves may have been too presumptuous in issuing his demands, but he didn't care at the moment. The Carmine System had become a core component of his design philosophy. It would be a huge setback if the MTA prohibited him from conducting any further research and development on this massive project!

Chapter 4964 Alternative Interfacing Technologies

Though Ves did not sound friendly just now, Master Goldstein fully understood the younger mech designer's fears.

The MTA Master was a mech designer as well. He had found himself in similar situations in the past.

The older man waved his arm. "You do not need to be concerned. Progress is unstoppable. We will not instruct you to suspend your research in this project. We are merely concerned about your ability to maintain its confidentiality while you engage with it. The best solution that I can offer is to invite you to work aboard the Antazella de Osiris or another secure MTA facility."

Ves immediately shook his head. "That is unacceptable to me. I am not a mecher and I have no interest in separating myself from my clan. Besides that, much of the reason why I have made such rapid progress and came up with so many useful inventions is because I went on so many expeditions. I do not want to change my lifestyle just to comply with your security demands."

The key to maximizing a mech designer's productivity was to ensure he worked under the right conditions.

Every mech designer had different needs and requirements. Ves had always tried his best to present an image of a highly passionate mech designer that easily got excited after he harvested a lot of loot and insights from his expeditions.

He did not even have to pretend all that much!

Since the Mech Trade Association clearly collected a lot of information about him, the mechers should know that it was best not to disrupt the current status quo!

Master Goldstein remained silent for a minute until he finally came up with a solution that both sides could accept.

"You can stay with your clan and fleet. The conditions over there are not as ideal, but we can improve upon that by implementing additional measures. Your clan will soon welcome back an upgraded factory ship, correct? It is not that difficult for us to implement secret upgrades that can allow you to conduct your secret research with greater confidence."

The MTA Master immediately activated a projection that went up despite all of the interference in his office.

The wobbly projection showed a detailed three-dimensional schematic of the upgraded Spirit of Bentheim.

The design of the quasi-first-class factory ship began to shift. The primary workshop and design lab that Ves treated as his mancave received a lot of additions, many of which were hidden beneath the surface.

"Please limit your work to this compartment as much as possible. We will upgrade its security measures so that it almost meets our standards."

This was a massive upgrade, and an expensive one as well!

Fortunately for Ves, it did not sound as if Master Goldstein would charge him anything for these major changes.

An adjacent chamber that had recently become available due to lengthening the hull by 500 meters also received a lot of upgrades.

"This shall be your most secure internal testing chamber. If you ever have a need to test the operations of your new mechs, please use this compartment. To prevent any possible accidents or damage to your ship, it will come with an array of strong energy shields powered by their own integrated power generators."

Ves' eyes lit up after he heard this! He bet that these were first-class shield generators that were just as strong as the ones employed by the warships of the MTA!

If this was the case, then this chamber may be the most secure and impenetrable location of the Spirit of Bentheim!

Even if the rest of the ship got destroyed one day, it was highly likely that this testing chamber would be able to sustain itself for a long time!

A smaller compartment also underwent drastic changes.

"It is best to add a secret dormitory to your ship where you can comfortably house any test pilots for an extended period of time. This compartment will also be isolated so that no signals can pass through."

Ves hadn't thought about that, but it made a decent amount of sense. He just wondered who he was supposed to use as his test pilots. Would he have to draw them from his clan or would the MTA supply a batch of them like last time?

The projected schematic continued to undergo further changes, though not as drastic as before. Every section of the hull received a few minor changes here and there. Ves could not figure out what changed as he did not recognize any of the new ship components.

It took five more minutes for the Master Mech Designer to complete his revisions to Ves had no idea how long it would take to transform the Spirit of Bentheim yet again, 12:44

but he was sure it wouldn't take as long as before!

the current design.

Ves had no idea how long it would take to transform the Spirit of Bentheim yet again, but he was sure it wouldn't take as long as before!

"That should be sufficient for the time being." Master Goldstein said with satisfaction. "Please conduct your confidential research inside the designated compartments. I shall assign a trusted security officer to your ship to ensure that the security measures will remain functional and up to date."

"Okay..."

Ves did not like the sound of that, but it was clear that Master Goldstein would not take no for an answer. This was not a big deal as Ves did not intend to hide his work on the Carmine System from the Survivalist Faction.

"We shall implement more thorough security arrangements after we have convened a panel and informed other trusted mech designers of our faction. My colleagues will agree to leverage their own resources if you have successfully convinced them of the viability of your research."

That meant that Ves had to make sure to make an excellent case for himself at the upcoming conference!

"I will be ready."

The projection of the factory ship disappeared. It looked as if upgrading a quasi-first-class capital ship was as easy as drinking water to a high-ranked member of the Mech Trade Association!

The older man leaned forward. "Now that we have addressed the security issue, we can hold a more substantive discussion on what you have presented. Never forget that you must always pay attention to confidentiality first. If you are not absolutely certain that you are in a secure environment, then whatever you have in mind can wait."

"Understood." Ves seriously nodded.

He thought that he had already been paranoid enough, but Vayro Goldstein sounded even more concerned!

This was a good sign. It showed that the MTA Master believed in the Carmine System so much that he was willing to pull out all the stops.

"Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that our Association has developed a method that can enable non-potentates to pilot mechs?"

That was a rather unexpected question. Ves did not expect Goldstein to start on this angle.

"I am sure that you guys have mastered more than enough technology to come up with not just one but several solutions. I recently learned about Divine Hussain Albedo's special service."

"The Chosen Human's ability to impart genetic aptitude to a human by force does not fall within the scope of this subject." Goldstein retorted. "The goal is to circumvent the limitations of genetic aptitude. Since the start of the Age of Mechs, an innumerable number of people have tried to overcome the absolute requirements of the neural interface by developing alternative means to effectively control mechs. Several of our research groups have pooled their efforts over the centuries and have managed to produce limited but ultimately insufficient results. Alternative interfacing technologies have proven to be an enormous black hole to many of our best researchers."

Ves felt pleased by what he heard. The value of his most promising design application became a lot higher so long as there was no viable competition!

It also showed that what he brought to the table was definitely new to the MTA! No one else had explored this research direction before, which meant that the mechers had little choice but to treat Ves seriously!

"Can you give me a description of these alternative solutions?" Ves asked. "I would like to know how much my work overlaps with the efforts of other researchers and whether I can benefit from existing research."

"You would normally not be authorized to learn about them, but given your current research direction, it may be helpful for you to be more aware of our existing efforts. This is anything but a complete listing, but I am reasonably confident that our Association has not developed any better solutions in secret."

Master Goldstein activated a projection that showed an odd human interfacing with a mech in a more direct manner.

Instead of forming the man-machine connection through a less intrusive method, the cockpit directly jacked in a cable through the back of the pilot's skull!

"Heavy digitization is a blunt method to force a norm to interface with a mech." The Master began. "This can be accomplished by converting a large proportion of an organic brain into an electronic equivalent. Genetic aptitude becomes less relevant as it is a function of an organic brain's capacity to exchange and process data."

This was no different from replacing nerves with literal computer processors!

Though Ves could understand the logic of this solution, he could not imagine the consequences of undergoing such an extreme transformation!

"I take it that this has severe consequences to the digitized human." Ves remarked.

"That is correct. The heavily digitized test subject will lose much of his humanity. His thinking process will become rigid and mechanical. The differences between the pilot and the mech will become so small that the two are no longer able to produce strong synergies. An electronic brain is much more vulnerable to hacking and subversion. Any hope of developing strong willpower and psionic power will disappear, making it impossible for such an individual to become an expert pilot. Even if this is not the case, the Kingdom of Mechs actively repels pilots who have become too inhuman."

These downsides sounded so heavy that people were better off relying on other methods to solve this problem! They could easily attain a similar result if they simply converted an empty mech into a battle bot!

"Mechs must serve humanity, not the other way around." Ves repeated this well-known saying. "I don't know much about heavy digitization, but from what you have described, it should definitely be treated as a taboo subject."

"That is indeed the case. We have been forced to scrap many of the human test subjects out of ethical and security concerns."

This could happen to the test subjects of the Carmine System as well. Ves had a feeling that Master Goldstein brought up this example as a cautionary tale.

After all, Ves did not have a clear idea on how sharing the same blood as a mech would change the physique and the mentality of the mech pilot. He was operating completely blind on that front.

"What other alternatives are out there?" Ves asked.

"High automation. Theoretically, a mech that is simple to control can be made even less demanding to pilot by automating many functions that should ordinarily come under the direct control of the mech pilot. There are many ingenious software and hardware solutions that can significantly reduce the data throughput of a mech. This makes it possible for humans with F-grade genetic aptitude to reluctantly 'pilot' a mech."

Ves snorted at this statement. "That sounds like playing a game rather than actually piloting a war machine. It is no different from letting AIs do all of the work. The only difference is that you can give a human the illusion of control."

Again, this alternative solution threw away all of the advantages and principles of mechs. It offered false hope and could not truly turn normal humans into heroic mech pilots.

Goldstein also had a lot of contempt for this fake solution. "It has mostly been reduced to a toy for rich children who wish to indulge in their fantasies. The cost of developing a reasonably viable heavily automated mech is extreme. High-quality tech and materials are required to simulate an authentic experience, but even then its combat effectiveness will only be a fraction of an authentic but inferior mech."

Chapter 4965 Ramifications of New Technology

Master Goldstein proceeded to present a handful of other examples of alternative interfacing technologies.

Many of them sounded just as dubious and wacky as heavy digitization and heavy automation!

One application relied on merging the head of a human test subject with an aquatic alien that was known to possess incredibly powerful cognitive functions.

Another solution was to split up the burden of piloting a mech to six different test subjects.

The Mech Trade Association never became satisfied with these results!

The combat effectiveness of the 'mech' became seriously compromised.

The 'pilots' had to undergo extreme changes that were detrimental to human society.

The amount of money and resources put into these solutions were extremely wasteful to the point where it became uneconomical to employ them on a wider scale!

In short, these were all horrible ideas and had no way in hell of complimenting or replacing the currently established model of mech piloting!

"This is anything but an exhaustive overview of potential solutions." Master Goldstein eventually told Ves. "I do not have full access to all of the confidential research projects within the Mech Trade Association. First-rate states such as the Greater Terran United Confederation and the New Rubarth

Empire are also known to conduct studies in this subject. Granting piloting capabilities to non-potentates has always been a holy grail to our industry."

"Have any of these researchers ever developed a more successful solution than the ones you have mentioned? Is my work on the Carmine System redundant?"

Goldstein shook his head. "You do not need to fear that your hard work and effort will be devalued. It is highly unlikely that anyone has developed an effective means to allow norms to pilot mechs. If there is, then the costs are either excessively high or the piloting experience is severely compromised. Neither of these outcomes are acceptable to the mech community. I will discreetly look into this matter further in order to be certain."

"Okay, but what if a secret Terran or Rubarthan research group managed to succeed beyond your expectations?"

"It is always better to have more options available than we strictly need." Goldstein smiled. "For example, your method is more economical and can easily be disseminated to the masses. Your solution may also offer a much more authentic piloting experience. The technological limitations of your Carmine System may offer much greater room for further development, allowing your work to catch up with an alternative that could not improve any further. You can always trust that our Association will not devalue your work due to changing circumstances."

Ves felt a little better after hearing this. He really did not want all of his work to go to waste.

To be honest, it was unlikely for this to be the case. Not only had many brilliant mech designers crashed and burned in order to chase after this unlikely dream, but the Blood Pact possessed properties that were highly relevant to Ves.

Even if the Carmine System never became popular, Ves could still turn it into a powerful advantage for the Larkinson Clan!

"Okay, I get it." Ves said. "The current outlook of alternative interfacing technologies is bleak. Many clever minds have worked on them for centuries without anything to show for it to the public. I am not sure if my own design application will end up the same."

"The possibility is not small. I am not versed in the particulars of your Carmine System, but I can foresee numerous potential outcomes. For example, the ability to pilot a mech through an alternative connection can only be exercised by an expert pilot. The 'pilots' may suffer severe trauma or outright perish when their mechs suffer a calamity. The pilots must undergo heavy training or augmentation in order to meet the high requirements. The difficulty of designing the mechs and the cost of producing the special mechs may make your work economically unviable."

These were all suboptimal outcomes that might very well come true. While there should always be room for improvement, Ves had no idea how much time and effort it would take to resolve all of the practical issues of his work.

That did not deter him from pursuing this path. Ves did not intend to back down until he had at least made a serious attempt. If his fears were all it took to turn him away from this research subject, then his resolve simply wasn't good enough!

"Suppose I succeed." Ves spoke up again. "Suppose that I have presented a working method to allow normal people to become mech pilots en masse. What will happen next? Will the MTA permit the public to make use of it, or will you guys put restrictions on my new tech?"

Vayro Goldstein's expression became uncomfortable. "You have asked a difficult question, Mr. Larkinson. I must model the responses of many different stakeholders. I must spend more time on making predictions."

The older mech designer did not wish to give any misleading or poorly constructed answers, so he took five whole minutes to make a lot of predictions and deductions.

"Your work is valuable, especially if you can control its negative aspects. Our Association will never seek to destroy your solution or permanently deprive it from everyone. It is impossible to do so anyway. There is an enormous demand for this tech. It cannot be withheld from our society forever. The best we can hope for is to form a plan to best control its usage and dissemination."

Ves asked a question that he had long been wondering about. "Will the MTA even agree to permit the public to utilize my 'carmine mechs' without restriction? Will any norm be allowed to pilot a mech through my alternative control method? I am afraid... the demand will become so high that it will disrupt our entire society."

The limitation of genetic aptitude was both a blessing and a curse. It ensured that only roughly 3.5 percent of the total population had a chance of becoming frontline soldiers.

This left the vast majority of humans with no choice but to fulfill many other important jobs. From factory workers to company managers, a lot of humans were required to contribute to an economy that was large enough to support a lot of warmaking potential!

A flawed or diminished economy severely compromised a state or organization's ability to field lots of mechs. There was no point in letting swarms of norm pilot his new carmine mechs if no one could afford them anymore!

"Your concerns are valid. It is good that you do not solely fixate on technological possibilities. Each action has consequences." Master Goldstein nodded. "Each innovation can change human behavior. Not all forms of technology will lead humanity to a better future. Your Carmine Solution touches upon the lives of so many humans that we must carefully decide on how to integrate it into our greater society. This is where the problem arises. The full Galactic Mech Council as well as all Star Designers and god pilots must debate on the possible options and cast a vote."

Ves already had a feeling that this would be necessary. He still did not like it, though.

"Politics." He spat. "I am sure that there are groups that will do everything possible to hinder my work from spreading."

Goldstein did not look too bothered. "It is not difficult to predict the responses of several different factions within our Association. "The Preserving Order Faction will vehemently block your new tech due to how much it revolutionizes the status quo. The Guidance Faction will hate your attempt to empower norms that previously had no access to military force."

These two factions used to be powerful in the early years of the Age of Mechs, but their stances had become increasingly less popular over time.

They still enjoyed a strong base of support among traditionalists. They were especially strong in the galactic center where a lot of old powers resided.

These were exactly the kind of people who feared a drastic change in human society the most!

"I see. It is pretty hopeless for us to persuade them to open up mech piloting to the greater masses."

"You will also encounter opposition from mech piloting purists who believe that their profession should solely be reserved to humans gifted with good genetic aptitudes." Goldstein continued. "This will be an especially popular stance among the current population of mech pilots. Each of them derive a great amount of superiority and self-esteem from their rare but valuable piloting qualities. It will be difficult to persuade them to surrender their exclusivity on piloting mechs."

This sounded a lot more serious. Existing mech pilots formed a huge and immensely powerful interest group that could make anything happen as long as they united in a single force!

Ves would get into a huge amount of trouble if he became the most hated figure among the soldiers and war heroes of human civilization!

"What about Survivalists such as yourself? Will you insist on controlling my tech as well?"

"I cannot say for certain, but I believe it will do more good than harm to make it available to our society. Currently, humanity is at its strongest point since the end of "That is easier to answer. There may be a part of the Mech Supremacist Faction that will attempt to protect the sanctity and purity of original mech pilots, but a majority the Age of Conquest. The current quantity of mechs and mech pilots that our civilization can muster is more than sufficient for our needs. That may not stay that way. If our race ever becomes embroiled in a war of unsurpassed scale, then it may be necessary to draw upon all fighting resources, even ones that are initially deemed unqualified."

In other words, if humanity ever entered into an extinction war, then it would be much better if a lot of cannon fodder entered the fray!

Ves began to think about the other side of the political debate.

"Who among the mechers will strongly support my tech?"

"That is easier to answer. There may be a part of the Mech Supremacist Faction that will attempt to protect the sanctity and purity of original mech pilots, but a majority will enthusiastically support your work. This faction will celebrate any reason to make mechs more ubiquitous and widespread. Even if your works based on your new tech can barely be classified as mechs, it is still an improvement. This is also a reason for the Warship Abolitionist Faction to put its full support behind your initiative."

"That sounds reassuring. What else?"

"The Unbound Humanity Faction will strongly support the Carmine System as well as it empowers many people. The Transhumanist Faction will be enthusiastic about unlocking another gateway to ascension to the masses. While you should accept their support, you should also be wary of them. Their radical ideals will encourage them to use the possibilities of your solution for their own purposes."

In other words, the Unbounders and the Transhumanists were useful but also crazy.

As someone who possessed a touch of madness himself, Ves did not mind it too much. All he wanted was greater support.

"What about the other factions?"

"They will either remain neutral or make decisions based on variables that I am not fully aware of. The Terran Faction, the Rubarthan Faction and the Longevity Faction are unlikely to support one side or the other, but they can always be bribed."

From what it sounded like, anything could happen. Ves could not really predict if the MTA would agree to disseminate his tech once he completed it. This was not an ideal situation, but at least he would have lots of time to conduct his research before he needed to consider these matters.

With clever and powerful backers like Master Vayro Goldstein supervising his confidential research, Ves had no need to worry too much about all of this political maneuvering.

"Do not lose heart, Mr. Larkinson." The MTA Master tried to reassure the younger man. "What you are working on can change an entire epoch. It has the potential to revolutionize our entire society and lower the threshold to piloting mechs. It can enable mech designers such as ourselves to pilot our own products and understand exactly what our customers must endure. It can prolong the Age of Mechs and prevent warships from making a comeback. In short, your Carmine System and its possibilities are of utmost importance to us. I can promise you that as long as you make an excellent case during the upcoming conference, our Survivalist Faction will endeavor to employ all possible means to introduce your work to the public."

That was just what Ves wanted to hear. Obtaining this promise was his main objective for this meeting!

Chapter 4966 Booming Sector

Ves got what he wanted for the most part.

As long as he managed to convince the Survivalist Faction to take his Carmine System seriously, he could continue his research on it without too many concerns about outside factors coming to disturb his progress.

His big brothers and sisters would take care of the trouble!

As much as Ves felt proud and confident about the clan he had built out of his own hands, he knew that he could never challenge the status quo by himself.

His clan and his allies might have become a force to be reckoned with in a regional environment, but his ambition threatened the interests of much more powerful groups of people!

This was why Ves leaned so heavily on the Survivalists. Instead of trying to fight this uphill battle by himself, why not let the professionals do all of the hard work?

Ves should only be responsible for conducting the necessary research and developing a working application!

Once he had completed his goal, he would ideally hand over his end results to his buddies within the Association and let them sort out all of the mess that his creation provoked.

As Ves gained a more thorough understanding of the division of responsibilities between himself and the Survivalists, Master Goldstein finally concluded the discussion on this subject.

"My authority is limited and you have only just begun your research. It is not appropriate to award you with MTA merits for an idea of a design application that has yet to prove its viability. Each transfer of MTA merits is also tracked. Given the enormous implications of your idea, it is best to avoid generating unnecessary attention. You must be patient and prepare to present your proposal at our upcoming conference. You shall not leave empty handed as long as you are able to back up your assertions with at least a small amount of proof."

That was fine. Ves already managed to secure a substantial upgrade to his Spirit of Bentheim out of this talk.

Ves understood that it was unrealistic to make the entire Survivalist Faction move just because he talked a big game.

Master Goldstein may be willing to take a bet on the Carmine System, but that was because he had studied Ves extensively and knew what he was capable of. Not all mechcers could be expected to do their homework.

All of this meant that if Ves wanted to ensure that he would have a smoother ride when he conducted his research on the potential of the Carmine System, he had to impress a group of very important MTA mech designers!

He inwardly gulped. Anyone that Master Goldstein considered as his 'buddies' were almost certainly fellow Master Mech Designers! He might even be able to pull in a Star Designer to preside over the secret meeting!

"Don't forget that the Carmine System can also enhance the piloting experience of existing mech pilots." Ves felt the need to emphasize its value to more skilled and gifted warriors. "It was originally designed to give mech pilots who are deeply attached to their existing mechs an extra edge. According to my theories, bonding the mech and mech pilot with a stronger and more permanent bond will help the latter break through a lot easier."

Master Goldstein nodded. "I understand. It is a good idea to explore as many angles of your new tech as possible. Even if one of them does not appeal to a panel, another one may save you from dismissal."

The potential of blood was almost limitless. Half a year was not enough for him to develop a full solution that was ready for mass adoption, but Ves was sure he could cobble together a few demonstration prototypes that emphasized the different strengths of his Carmine System.

Now that they set a plan for the future, the conversation eventually drifted back to Ves' prior request.

"Now that you understand what I am working on, do you think I have a better chance of obtaining a teaching position at a first-class mech design university?"

"Hmmm..." Master Goldstein did not issue an immediate answer. "Your teaching qualifications are still dubious, but your professional skills and accomplishments are much more impressive. The latter cannot completely outweigh the former, but there is a variable that may tilt the scales in your favor to an extent."

Ves' eyes lit up. Any extra measure could make a crucial difference in his life! He did not want to squander his time on teaching a bunch of second-class brats when he could indoctrinate first-class geniuses instead!

"What do you have in mind, Master?"

"The answer is simple. I shall write a referral letter for you. The form and the specific wording of the letter is not important. It is simply a message that conveys my trust in your competence and abilities. You can treat it as a form of verification that you are as good as you present yourself as. Mech designers such as myself do not issue them lightly, as we put our own credibility and reputation on the line. If we hand a referral letter to the wrong individual, then we will not only damage our standing in the mech industry, but also cause unnecessary harm to the institution that based its decision on my action."

All of this meant that Vayro Goldstein did not easily issue a referral letter. Ves was not sure whether he qualified. The two were familiar with each other, but they were not that close to be honest.

"Will you..."

Fortunately, the older man did not keep Ves in suspense.

"I shall transmit a letter to your account as soon as you have left this ship." Goldstein smiled. "Your existing accomplishments and research results are already sufficient to write this letter for you. There is no need to mention anything with regards to the Carmine System. Be careful about what you say if you are invited to an interview session. A sharp school administrator will not let a single letter of recommendation decide whether to hire you. There are many competent and brilliant mech designers in the mech industry. Many of them are able to obtain letters as well."

Damn. Goldstein was right. Perhaps a referral letter from a Master Mech Designer of the Mech Trade Association carried much greater weight than normal, but Ves did not know whether that was enough!

Wait, if one letter was not enough, what about two? Master Goldstein was hardly the only impressive mech designer that Ves came in touch with! Perhaps the other ones might be willing to write letters as well!

"I can ask other notable mech designers to write letters for me as well." Ves eagerly said. "That should make me more attractive compared to the competition, right?"

"These letters are only icing on the cake, Mr. Larkinson, but more is certainly better. You must take care not to obtain them from individuals that possess insufficient weight in the industry. You should only collect them from other Master Mech Designers. A first-class mech university will not take the recommendations of Seniors seriously."

That was a shame. Ves knew a lot Seniors as well, but his hopes of increasing his pile of recommendations were dashed.

Ves actually met with a good number of Master Mech Designers, but whether they would be willing to write a referral letter for him was another matter. He did not actually know them well enough for them to issue this favor.

"Alright. I understand. I will try my best to collect as many serious referral letters as possible before I start my job search. Can you point me towards specific mech design universities that you think would be a good fit for myself? You should already understand my needs. I am a frequent traveler, so I won't be able to teach any students in person. The Hyper Chamber in my flagship should help with enhancing my remote teaching ability."

The MTA Master had already been thinking about this. "The hiring requirements of first-class mech design universities and similar educational institutions are still too strict. There are no backdoors that can allow an unqualified Senior to sidestep them. The better and more renowned the school, the harsher the criteria."

Ves frowned. "If what you say is true, then I can forget about getting my foot through the door of all of the good schools."

"Every mech designer with teaching aspirations wishes to become a professor at an established university that has built up their reputation and alumni networks over multiple generations. What you need to do is set your sights lower. It just so happens that the opening of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy has not only added many new territories to human space, but also led to the formation of many new universities."

That was right. Just as Davute invested a lot of funding and resources to prop up the Davute University of Technology, many other states and organizations had done likewise!

This applied to third-rate colonial states as well as first-rate colonial states!

"What do I need to pay attention to if I choose to apply to a newly founded mech design university?" Ves carefully asked.

"Not all of them will succeed." The MTA Master responded. "This is a highly competitive sector. Many parties understand that as long as they enter this market and turn their schools into an established name in the region, they can turn their investments into self-perpetuating cash cows that can also function as continually expanding influence networks. The financial and strategic value of successful universities are unimaginably lucrative."

As an entrepreneur, Ves understood what that meant. A lot of players had entered the game, but not all of them would be able to win it in the end.

If Ves became a professor at a crappy school, then he would only be able to add a few years of teaching experience to his record.

The rewards for teaching at a school that managed to survive its most difficult years and establish a footing in the education sector were much higher!

Not only would Ves be able to boast that he taught at a more prestigious institution, but he would also gain access to much higher quality mech design students that possessed much brighter futures!

This option suited him quite nicely now that he thought about it. Getting hired by a first-class heritage institution was impossible due to his low qualifications, but it was still possible to attain a similar outcome by obtaining a job at a school that could eventually become just as impressive!

All of the universities in the old galaxy that had centuries if not millenia worth of heritage may possess a lot of advantages, but the problem was that their structures were already fixed in place!

None of them were flexible enough to quickly adapt to changes such as the opening of the Red Ocean or the introduction of phasewater.

The mech design universities founded in the new frontier should possess much greater advantages in this regard!

Although Ves was a bit disappointed that Master Goldstein did not recommend a specific first-class mech design university to him, this was not that big of a deal.

If Ves wanted to secure a better teaching position, then he needed to fight for it by relying on his own strengths. Those referral letters should only be used to buy him an opportunity to make his case.

After concluding a few more matters, Ves finally ended his long and informative meeting with Master Goldstein.

The teleporter brought him straight back to his office in his Royal Mansion.

It only dawned upon him now that the spatial interdiction measures built across the Cat Nest had been active all this time.

None of these expensive high-tech devices managed to make any difference!

Ves began to scowl. "If the MTA can do it, then so can others. I need to get my hands on better tech."

The problem was that he and his clan obtained all of their spatial interdiction field generators from the very same Association!

Chapter 4967 Collecting Letters

The Antazella de Osiris had no more reason to stick around anymore. The large research battlecarrier opened up a portal and disappeared shortly after Ves had returned to the surface of Davute VII.

Everyone in the Davute System practically sighed in relief. Although many people had a lot of trust in the MTA, that did not mean they were willing to live under a warship's formidable cannons or the invincible first-class multipurpose mechs!

Plenty of people and organizations directed even more attention to the Larkinson Clan than before. If even the mechers thought that Ves' promotion to Senior Mech Designer was a big deal, then it was definitely worthwhile to establish friendly ties with this rising star!

It was a pity that Ves still paid little attention to these opportunists. All he had on his mind at the moment was his quest to get in front of a class of bright and promising first-class mech design students.

Master Vayro Goldstein fulfilled his promise and transmitted a virtual referral letter.

Ves looked quite impressed at the appearance of the letter. The fancy typography, the MTA symbols along with the name of the MTA Master bestowed a lot of value to this document!

It should definitely not be a problem for Ves to secure a decent professorship at a prestigious second-class mech design university that was rooted in the old galaxy!

If he was lucky enough, then he could even get into an institution that was either a subsidiary of a first-class mech design university or held frequent exchanges with one.

Such a connection gave Ves hope that he could transfer to the more impressive school one day!

"This is a good backup option."

Ves was not willing to settle for less until he had exhausted everything better.

"I need more referral letters."

Only Master Mech Designers possessed enough weight, but each of them differed drastically from each other. Their age and experience diverged wildly, and the class of mechs they worked on also affected their prestige.

Even so, even a skinny letter was better than nothing!

With that thought in mind, Ves activated his comm and called his good friend over at the Cross Clan.

"Hello again, Ves." Master Benedict's projection greeted. "I see that you have concluded a long discussion with the MTA."

"I have. I never knew that our profession has so much depth."

"It is indeed a revelation that can change your entire cognition. Now that the mechers have initiated you to the secrets that a Senior is allowed to learn, I can share a handful of insights to you that may be of use. We will have to hold this talk in a much more secure environment. Take care of what you mention outside of one. The MTA can be lenient in many areas, but this is not a matter that you can take lightly."

"I understand. I wanted to address another topic with you, actually."

"What is it you require?"

"I want you to write a referral letter for me." Ves straightforwardly described his request. "I want to try my luck and apply for a job at a first-class mech design university. The ones in the old galaxy are probably too snobby and elitist to take me under my consideration, but I think I still have a chance at one of the newer schools based in the Red Ocean."

The older mech designer blinked. "If that is the case, then my letter should not make much of a difference. I shall be honest with you. I have not been a Master for too long. My mech designs and design applications are far from impressive compared to that of my peers. I do not have a strong network of contacts that I can vouch for myself. Are you certain that you wish to obtain my recommendation?"

Ves shrugged. "The two of us already have a history of working together. It would be unreasonable if you did not write a letter for me after years of cooperation."

"Very well, then. You shall have it. I hope that this will make a difference in your search."

That was easy. Now that Ves had a second letter in hand, he began to set his sights on the other Masters in his contact list.

He called Master Decimus Horst of ZUTA University next and quickly stated his request.

The heavy artillery mech specialist did not immediately agree. "Your request is slightly unreasonable, Ves. A letter of referral only holds meaning if its writer is sincere about issuing it. I cannot in good faith claim to do so. The two of us have discussed our upcoming collaboration project many times, but we have yet to design an actual heavy artillery mech for the Federal Military of Davute. I would be glad to write the letter you have requested after we have done so, so I suggest you be patient and prove your qualifications."

Ves shook his head. "I apologize, but I am in a hurry. I do not mean for you to violate your principles, but I hope you can be a little more lenient to me this time. How about this? Let me visit your office and present the mech design proposal that I have been working on. I can also show you a number of my existing works in order to give you a better understanding of my competences. Will that be enough to earn your recommendation?"

Master Horst did not look too comfortable about this idea, but as he continued to stare at Ves over the connection, he eventually nodded in acquiescence.

"I shall give you a single chance. If your presentation does not satisfy my criteria, then I will have to ask you to repeat your request after we have completed our collaboration project."

"That is fine!"

Ves spent the rest of his day on preparing for his upcoming presentation. He pretty much treated it as a small practice opportunity for the real deal in the upcoming Survivalist conference.

If he could not sway a mech designer the likes of Master Horst in a 1-on-1 sitting, then he should clearly shore up his presentation skills!

He quickly shuttled over to the campus of ZUTA University the next day and presented his existing work as well as his ideas for his upcoming heavy artillery mech.

He blended the best traits of the Transcendent Punisher with all of the lessons that he had learned from his last Mastery experience.

Master Horst looked decently impressed by the end of the pitch. "If your claims are at least halfway true, then your bold vision of a heavy artillery mech is indeed a product that can complement if not supplant Davute's existing artillery mech roster. Your proposed mech model may change the direction of all of the land battles of the upcoming war."

That was good praise!

Ves did not need to boast too much about his other accomplishments in order to obtain the other mech designer's approval.

"Very well. That is enough, Ves. While I am still unable to vet you according to my standards, you have inspired enough confidence in my mind that I am willing to grant you this favor. Take my letter and do your best to succeed. What you are trying to attain this time is an unimaginable dream to me when I was still your age. Prove your excellence and succeed where I have never tried."

The Master did not reveal any hint of envy or jealousy in his tone, but Ves guessed that the older mech designer definitely harbored these feelings!

It was just that Master Horst had grown old and successful enough in his own right to ignore these unproductive thoughts!

Ves grinned like a shark by the time he departed from ZUTA University's campus.

"That's a third letter in my bag."

He thought about contacting Master Hargard Elroy of the Davute University of Technology next.

Ves did not have any personal relations with the esteemed state-sponsored mech designer, but the renowned specialist in alternative propulsion drive systems presided over the Twin Weapons Tournament.

"Winning first place in this tournament should be enough to convince this guy to write a letter, right?"

He did not sound too certain about this. Winning a serious mech design tournament was indeed an impressive accolade, but it was a bit too flimsy to use as a basis of a referral letter.

"I should try to maximize my advantages."

Ves could try and leverage his other professional accomplishments to impress Master Elroy.

On top of that, Ves could also bring up his substantial contributions to Davute. He and his Larkinson Clan benefited the colonial state so much that this should definitely make a difference to the contracted Master Mech Designer!

However, when Ves scheduled a call and eventually gained an opportunity to present his pitch, Master Elroy remained unmoved!

"You make a good case for yourself, but I will not write a referral letter for a mech designer who I have never personally, taught, supervised or collaborated with. I have indeed witnessed your skills extensively during the tournament, and you have also done much for Davute, but I will not break the rules I have set for myself on this matter."

Master Elroy was a significantly more impressive mech designer than Master Horst.

The former became a leading figure of Davute's leading mech design university.

Elroy was also involved in a number of important projects that were either sponsored or organized by government institutions.

He was also over two centuries old and had built up an impressive catalog of mech designs and design solutions.

Even if he was ultimately just a second-class mech designer, Master Elroy's referral letter was probably worth at least ten times as much as the one issued by Master Horst next door!

It was a pity that the older and prouder Master remained obstinate.

"Thank you for hearing me out. I shall not disturb you any longer."

Ves did not feel too depressed at his failure. Master Elroy was one of his least likely candidates. There were several more names on the list that should give him more consideration.

"Hm, let's try Master Dervidian next."

Ves had not contacted his liaison from the Transhumanist Faction for a while, but that did not mean that the two had devolved into strangers.

As the inventor of the transcendence glow and other relevant design applications, Ves could always count on the support of the Transhumanists!

He just didn't know whether Master Dervidian would be willing to do the same as Master Goldstein.

"Well, it doesn't hurt to try."

Ves did not overthink the issue and used a more secure communication line to connect with the Transhumanist.

Once he explained his request, Master Dervidian nodded.

"If my friend over at the Survivalist Faction has seen fit to grant a letter to you, then you shall have mine as well."

It was that simple?

"Thank... you..."

Ves found it rather ironic that he managed to obtain the most valuable referral letters with surprising ease!

Compared to a relative nobody like Master Benedict Cortez, the word of a leading figure from the Mech Trade Association carried a lot more weight!

"You deserve to rise to a greater stage." Dervidian generously commented. "Your high potential is known to us all, and now that you have managed to become a Senior Mech Designer, this is an excellent time for you to step up and increase your engagement. Coming into contact with first-class mech designers will be highly beneficial to your future development."

Ves certainly felt a lot more pepped up after hearing the MTA Master's praise.

He felt a bit more sorry that he could not tell the Transhumanist anything about the Carmine System and its implications as of yet. He had already decided to leave that up to the Survivalists.

Soon after Ves ended this fruitful call, he grinned with satisfaction as he gazed at the four virtual letters in his possession.

"That makes four!"

Chapter 4968 Catching Up

Since Ves managed to obtain Master Termaneo Dervidian's referral letter with such ease, he thought he might as well complete his collection and contact the remaining MTA Master on his friend list.

His expression turned a bit emotional as he submitted a request to schedule a call with Master Willix.

She was one of the mech designers who pulled him into the orbit of the MTA in the earlier stages of his career.

Despite the huge gap in rank and status between the two, Ves never had the impression that Master Willix looked down on him. The generous mecher taught him, advised him and even bent the rules in his favor.

It made Ves feel as if he was being mothered by her. It was a profoundly odd experience to a man who had grown up without a female parental figure for much of his childhood.

Unfortunately for him, he had fallen out of touch with Master Willix after he departed for the Red Ocean.

They had ended their collaboration on the design of the first six Larkinson expert mechs years ago. On top of that, Master Willix also notified Ves that she was about to spend years on closing herself off in a secret MTA site in order to conduct vital research.

"Is it even possible to form a communication channel to her current location?" He wondered.

His concerns turned out to be overblown as Master Willix eventually became available.

The two mech designers situated on the opposite ends of human space came into contact once again!

The female Master curled her lips in a modest smile. "I did not misjudge you, Mr. Larkinson. The results that you have produced over the years have exceeded my expectations. You are a leader among your generation and a credit to our common profession."

Ves blinked. "Thank you for your praise. I still have a long way to go before I can become worthy of my status as an associate to your faction."

There was a sense of intimacy between the two that was lacking in Ves' interactions with Master Vayro Goldstein.

Master Willix was the first MTA Master that Ves opened up to. She had also collaborated with him on numerous projects, so it shouldn't be too much of a surprise that he felt closer to her than Master Goldstein.

Ves and Willix continued to chat with each other. Neither of them were in a hurry to address business.

"It is regrettable that your Shield of Samar has been destroyed in battle." Moira Willix said. "You have recently completed a replacement expert mech for young Venerable Jannzi Larkinson, correct?"

Ves smiled and nodded. "That is right. My new Dullahan Project shares numerous similarities with its predecessor, though I collaborated with Master Benedict Cortez instead of you this time. Our new expert space knight still relies on GT-535 as its key resonating exotic. This should help Venerable Jannzi control the immediate area around her new machine to a greater extent."

"I am curious to examine how you and your fellow mech designers have managed to integrate my work into your new expert defensive mech." Master Willix looked thoughtful. "I am afraid that it will not be enough without my personal intervention."

"I am aware of that, but Master Benedict brings his own specialties to the table. The Dullahan Project is able to last considerably longer on the battlefield and won't have to worry about raising its energy consumption too much."

"If you need my expertise to inspect your work, you only need to transmit its design. I should have enough time in my schedule to make a single pass."

"That will not be necessary, ma'am."

Even if the MTA already stole the design files of his Dullahan Project, Ves did not want them to spread around any further than necessary.

This was especially important when the Carmine System gained a lot more significance than before!

"Now that I have become a Senior, I have become a bit more aware of the true nature of resonating exotics." Ves eventually said. "I have always wondered what it takes to develop a new resonating alloy. What is it like to develop a product like GT-535?"

The distant Master shook her head. "Developing resonating alloys is not an activity to be taken lightly. You first need to ascertain whether it is necessary for you to spend your time and effort on it. You must first ascertain whether your needs are already met by natural exotics or alloys developed by your peers."

"What is the next step?"

"If your investigation has not revealed anything amiss, then you must choose whether to develop a resonating alloy yourself or outsource much of the work to a qualified specialist. You must have a deep understanding of materials science as well as the fields that are most relevant to the nature of the resonating alloy that you wish to form. This is anything but suitable for a beginner. You must study matter and the properties of exotic materials to an extensive degree. Even then, your chances of developing a viable new resonating alloy that can exceed the alternatives are slim."

That indeed sounded difficult. It looked like that it was unlikely that Ves would be able to develop his own resonating exotics anytime soon.

"Does that mean that most mech designers will have to depend on experts in materials in order to obtain what they need?"

"That is correct. High-ranking mech design is a branch of our profession that is constantly obsessed with pushing the limits of our technology. Resonating materials are the most powerful materials that you can add to an expert mech. There may come a time where you wish to empower your clients to the best of your ability, but cannot adequately do so because you lack the right material support. This will not happen to you for the time being, but once you become a Master Mech Designer and wish to elevate your work according to your design philosophy, then you may not have any better options."

In other words, Ves should stop thinking about this and leave it for later. It was still too presumptuous for a mech designer as young as him to think about developing his own resonating alloys!

They continued to catch up with each other by discussing a number of other topics, but Ves eventually had to bring up his request and the main reason why he called Willix for the first time in years.

Surprisingly enough, Master Willix already had an answer ready.

"I have already learned what you have obtained from both Dervidian and Goldstein. I predicted that you would come to me and make a similar request. I shall transmit my referral letter immediately."

Ves received a notification that informed him that he had just received his fifth letter!

"Wow... I do not know what to say, ma'am..."

"I am aware of what you are capable of. Your history and your entanglements may be complicated, but your passion and your love for mech design are real. Combined with your proven results, I see no reason why you are not deserving of my recommendation. I expect much from you now that you have become a Senior. At this stage, it is not only important to make progress in the research that you are most hopeful about, but it is also imperative for you to expand your vision beyond yourself."

Ves was still basking in the joy of obtaining his third MTA Master referral with remarkable ease. It even gave him the illusion that he was actually a mecher all along!

"Can you expand upon the latter, ma'am? Several mech designers have already told me about the importance of passing on my knowledge to the younger generations. Master Goldstein also told me how I can gain from this, but I don't think I have the complete picture."

Master Willix's projection stared deeply at Ves. "You are likely correct. You are still a fairly young mech designer, and you are at a stage where you can make substantial progress in your design and research projects by relying on yourself. It is not too pressing for you to raise your own inheritors and help them mature to the point where they can make progress in research that you are unable to explore due to the choices that you have made."

"You mean..."

"There will come a time where you will encounter an obstacle in your work that you cannot overcome by yourself. This can hinder your progress for several decades, a century or more."

Ves understood her angle. "So you are telling me that having a fresher and younger pair of eyes by my side might help me overcome a bottleneck in my work."

"That is indeed possible. Granted, the amount of time it takes to mentor a mech design student and wait for him to advance to a high enough rank to be of use can take a large amount of time. Nonetheless, it is better to have an additional option available to you when you have worked on your problem for six continuous decades without making any substantial progress. The student that you have educated may have grown into a skilled and knowledgeable Senior Mech Designer at that time. Having a capable assistant and relevant expert by your side will facilitate your work much more effectively than the alternatives."

That explained much of the reasons why so many mech designers wanted to teach a class of first-class mech design students!

Compared to their second-class equivalents, the first-raters were much smarter and had access to much better resources and knowledge reserves!

It was natural for them to gain the qualifications to explore technological angles that second-raters simply weren't qualified to get in touch with. This meant that the same design philosophy could be expressed in much stronger and more varied ways!

Just as how third-class mech designs were heavily limited by technological and budgetary constraints, second-class mech designs suffered from similar issues!

Ves' eyes burned brighter. He deeply needed to get hired by a genuine first-class mech design university!

Once Ves learned a bit more why it was important to teach the best possible students, the call neared its end.

"I must return to my research once again." Moira Willix told Ves. "In order to maximize the probability of succeeding in my research, I will be cut off from outside contact for extended periods of time. I may not be able to talk to you in the next months or years, but you can rely on Master Goldstein to handle any issues that you cannot solve through your own means."

"Oh. How long will you remain in isolation?"

Master Willix closed her eyes. "Several decades at the very least. A century or more if I suffer too many setbacks. Progress does not come quickly even for Master Mech Designers such as myself. It takes a deep love and commitment to mechs in order to make an attempt to leap beyond what is possible and conceivable."

It was quite clear that Willix had strong ambitions to become a Star Designer. Not many Masters actually managed to pull it off, but that did not deter mech designers who advanced to their current ranks step-by-step over the course of their lifetime.

Ves recognized the heart of a pure mech designer in the older woman. It did not matter that she was a rational mech designer. Her suppressed emotions did not affect the sincerity of her work.

Once the call finally came to an end, Ves had already gone through a majority of the names on his list.

He knew a few more Masters, but he wasn't confident at all in his ability to squeeze a letter out of them. It was a bit far-fetched for him to ask this favor.

Still, in the interest of getting accepted in a first-class mech design university, he owed it to himself to make an attempt.

So what if he was shameless?

It was better to ask and receive a rejection than to remain silent!

Ves took a deep breath before he sent a message to the next Master on his list.

Chapter 4969 Gem Research

Ves made the decision.

In the desire to increase his collection of referral letters, he chose to make contact with Master Carmin Olson.

He did not activate his comm and make direct contact with the cheap Master who barely taught him anything before kicking him away due to getting entangled by a single Hexer.

Though he held a lot of resentment towards her in the past, enough time had passed for Ves to mature and get over this incident.

In fact, Ves likely wouldn't have been able to decouple himself from his family and his state in order to pursue his own future without this crucial turning point.

All of the experiences he went through and the lessons he learned from them had molded him into one of the leading independent mech designers of his generation!

Of course, Ves also went through a lot of dangerous and death-defying incidents, but he conveniently downplayed their severity considering that he managed to come out on top in the end.

Given how far he had come, Ves looked back on his brief tenure as Master Olson's nominal disciple with considerable more fondness.

The Fridayman Master Mech Designer provided him with crucial assistance at an early stage of his career. The guidance she provided also helped with setting him on the right path and maintaining the correct mentality as a mech designer.

The only question was whether she was willing to write a referral letter on his behalf. There were many reasons that he could think of for her to refuse this request.

Nonetheless, as long as he had the faintest of chances, he might as well try and hope for the best!

"I need to take a more clever approach."

His chances of succeeding were too slim if he directly contacted Master Olson out of the blue and begged for a referral letter. Ves possessed at least that much awareness.

A better way to open up a dialogue was to make use of an intermediary. Ves paused and ran through the short list of names that could act as a suitable bridge between himself and Master Olson.

He quickly settled on a single name.

His lips curled into a smile. "Last I recall, he should still be around."

He looked up a few pieces of information on the galactic net and quickly obtained what he needed.

Ves immediately prepared to make a short trip.

"Lucky! Where the hell are you?! We're going to visit an old pal!"

He managed to track down his lazy cat. As soon as he entered his second daughter's cute and pastel-colored bedroom, he saw his cat looking distressed as he wore a cat-sized pink princess dress!

"Meow! Meow!"

"Sit still, Lucky! The marriage ceremony isn't finished yet! You still need to kiss Mr. Snuggleberry before you can go!" Andraste insisted as she pushed forth a plushy dinosaur.

"Meeeeeeooooow!"

Ves chuckled at the childish sight. He stepped forward and lifted her daughter into his arms. "Hello there, pumpkin."

"Paaaapaaaaa! I am busy!"

"I saw that. As much as I would like you to play with Lucky, I am going to need him to visit an old friend."

His red-headed daughter's eyes began to sparkle. "You're going out! Can I come!?"

"Sure you can, but it won't be particularly interesting to you. I am merely paying a visit to a design studio. Unless you are interested in looking at boring mech designs, you won't have a lot of fun at that place."

Andraste immediately lost interest. "I am going to visit Kirian so that we can practice our swordplay!"

"Okay, dear. Have fun and don't hit him too hard."

"Hihi!"

Ves rescued Lucky from his current predicament and took him to his shuttle that was already warmed up and ready to depart.

The shuttle along with its escort moved away from the city center and eventually reached a landing zone situated in the outskirts of the capital.

Ves looked up at the modest building that was currently undergoing renovation and expansion.

The construction work did not hinder the building's operation, so Ves stepped straight through the entrance where a receptionist led him to a private lab.

It was not often that guests received the opportunity to visit the lab or workshop of another mech designer. Doing so despite the risks could be considered a sign of trust and friendship.

It could also be a reflection of the vast gulf in power and status between the two sides.

In this case, Ves had no interest in stealing the secrets of a struggling Journeyman Mech Designer.

It would have been a different story if he entered Master Toqueman Huron's laboratory, but despite all of the gems and other quaint curiosities on display, there was nothing in this chamber that merited his interest.

"Look, Lucky. There are lots of shiny gems over there. Are you interested in taking a closer look?"

"Meow!"

"What do you mean, no? Gems are part of your identity!"

"Meow meow meow!"

Ves shrugged and left his cat to fool around while he approached the mech designer awaiting his arrival.

"Ves."

"Tristan. It has been a long time."

"That it is indeed." The man who looked almost just as old as Ves nodded in an almost subservient manner. "It is a great honor for a Senior such as you to visit my humble company. Congratulations for your promotion by the way. You have generated a lot of commotion in Davute."

"It will die down quickly. Becoming a Senior is an important step to any mech designer, but it is only a prelude to advancing to Master."

The two chatted for a short while. They had not exactly remained in contact even though they lived on the same planet for a decent period of time. It couldn't be helped as they lived in two vastly different orbits these days.

Ves continued to look around the lab every once in a while. He paid increasing interest to a number of gems, a few of which vaguely reminded him of Lucky's increasingly rare output.

"How much have you progressed your design philosophy as of late? Have you been working on anything interesting?"

This was an awfully direct question, but Tristan knew that Ves only expressed genuine interest.

"I have been working on miniaturizing the effects of exotics by combining them, purifying them and processing them into small and easy to handle gems." The Journeyman said in a mildly proud tone. "I have not advanced my research far enough yet to start commercializing my work, but it will only be a matter of time before I can start selling them at a considerable profit."

Ves looked more intrigued. It did not sound as if Tristan's gems shared the same principles as Lucky's gems, but perhaps there might be a few commonalities.

"What can these gems do? How are they supposed to compliment the performance of a mech? It is hard to believe that they can make a meaningful difference given their awfully small sizes."

"That is the point." Tristan grinned back. "You can treat these gems as the shrunk forms of a larger quantity of exotic materials. Imagine what it would be like to have the power of a kilogram of phasewater in a gem the size of your fingertip. Such a potent product has many uses in the development of high-tech miniaturized mech components!"

That definitely sounded useful! Ves worked extensively with a lot of different mech parts and systems. He also cooperated with external development companies, so he knew quite well that the fairly restricted size of mechs had always formed a powerful constraint.

In a circumstance where the volume and capacity of mechs could never grow bigger than its current standards, one of the best ways to make them more powerful was to pursue greater miniaturization!

If Tristan truly managed to make a breakthrough in his gem research, then even Ves would become interested in incorporating these gems in a number of his products!

The premise was that those gems were actually worth the hassle.

"How much of the efficacy of the original quantity of exotics can these gems retain?" Ves critically asked.

"That is a complex question that has many different answers. The results differ depending on the type of exotics and the processing method. The retention is not that great at the moment. A typical gem can only retain 0.01 to 2 percent of the efficacy of the original materials. This is still useful in numerous different applications, but I am afraid that it is not cost-effective enough to attract customers."

Ves nodded. "Most mech designers and equipment developers are better off resorting to more expensive exotics that have greater potency."

"That is true, but the availability of the desired exotics may not be able to support the needs of a large mech company. If I can develop a series of gems that can be wholly produced with materials sourced within the borders of the Colonial Federation of Davute, I will be able to ease the logistical pressure of the state by a significant margin. My company will truly take off at that point."

That sounded quite impressive! Tristan would be doing a small but crucial service to a state that was on the cusp of going to war. Trade and resource extraction would inevitably suffer at that point. Any solution that could help Davute's military production stay afloat a little longer would definitely be appreciated.

It turned out that Tristan wasn't as weak and pathetic as Ves initially thought. The Fridayman Mech Designer may have fallen stagnant for a couple of years due to his participation in the Komodo War, but he was still a student of a notable Master Mech Designer.

Now that Ves had advanced to Senior himself, he possessed a much better understanding of the origins of exotics. This also gave him a much better appreciation of mech designers who specialized in the manipulation of existing exotics and the development of new ones.

He wondered whether Tristan already understood that exotics originally spawned from the released energies of long-dead spiritual entities. It was not quite necessary to know this in order to study exotics on a deeper level, but it could certainly answer quite a few difficult questions!

Ves did not dare to bring up this topic. Not only was this place not entirely secure, Tristan was still a Journeyman and not initiated in the higher-level secrets of their common profession.

The visitor decided to put this issue aside and bring up the point of this reunion.

"You must have already deduced that I came here for a purpose." Ves told the other mech designer. "As you know, I have recently advanced to the rank of Senior, and that comes with many benefits and obligations. One of my duties is to become a teacher and pass on my knowledge. I am currently trying to get hired by a good school, but if I want to have a chance of making this happen, I need to collect enough referral letters from notable individuals in the mech industry."

It did not take long for Tristan to adopt a knowing look. The man did not start from the bottom like Ves. He had been a part of the educational establishment for quite a few years.

"I understand." Tristan said. "You want my assistance in facilitating contact. Are you asking for my help in contacting your old Master?"

"I am. Can you do that for me, Tristan?"

"Uhm, I am not sure that this will work. You are kind of on the Friday Coalition's list of boogeymen. Master Olson would never dare to contact you when not that much time has passed since you and your clan banded together with the Hex Army to raid Pima Prime."

Ves rolled his eyes. Tristan helped make this secret attack happen! Both him and Master Olson played an indispensable part in suppressing the Gauge Dynasty that had been growing increasingly more rampant at the time!

"Just get in touch with Master Olson and wait for her response, okay?"

Chapter 4970 Begging for a Compliment

Tristan may have renounced his Fridayman citizenship and start over in Davute, but that did not mean his relationship with Master Meredith Katzenberg had frozen over.

The relationship between the two was not as estranged as the one between Ves and Master Olson.

As such, Tristan had no qualms about calling his former Master.

Since Master Katzenberg happened to be a good friend of Master Olson, it was best to use the former as a channel to contact the latter.

Master Katzenberg did not look pleased when she heard Ves' request through Tristan's explanation.

Her projection directed its gaze at the Larkinson Patriarch.

"You have recently advanced to Senior, so I do not doubt your intelligence. The Friday Coalition and the Larkinson Clan still maintain a state of hostility between each other. You may not care about what others may think if you try to make contact with a Fridayman and your former Master no less, but Carmin will not be able to shrug off criticism with the same amount of ease. If you have any gratitude or affection for her, I advise you to maintain your distance from her. She has already suffered greatly for accepting you as her apprentice in the first place."

He could indeed imagine that Master Olson went through a tough time due to raising a mech designer who eventually terrorized her own state, but he knew that the situation was a lot murkier than what was apparent on the surface.

The intensifying division within the Friday Coalition along with other factors made it so that Master Olson did not turn into a pariah outright.

In fact, as far as he knew, Master Olson benefited substantially from the Komodo War just like all of the other Fridayman Master Mech Designers.

"Please just contact her and relay my request." Ves politely said to Master Katzenberg. "Please allow Master Olson to make her own decision regarding this matter. The two of us aren't completely cut off from each other, you know. She still owns a 2 percent stake in my incredibly profitable mech company."

"Hm, I suppose that is true. I shall do as you say on account of this relationship."

The projection disappeared, leaving Ves to wait alongside Tristan.

The two mech designers who used to come from the same home state began to chat with each other again.

Lucky meanwhile occupied his time by sniffing around the lab. The cat avoided any gems like the plague. Since there were so many of them in the lab, he eventually decided to phase out of the chamber and explore the building's other rooms.

It took around fifteen minutes for a projection to reappear. The much more elegantly-dressed form of Master Olson had finally come!

The blond woman carried herself with an elegance that spoke of great confidence derived from her own ability and successes.

Her demeanor was much different from the likes of Gloriana or stuffy nobles. Unlike the people who were born to a life of wealth, privilege and power, Master Olson had worked hard to reach her current position!

She had advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer when she was around 100 years old. Ves understood a lot more how significant this was. Perhaps she could have accumulated a bit more in order to get off to a better start, but her decision to realize her design philosophy earlier meant she must definitely have the confidence to make it further!

Master Olson echoed the Polymath to a small extent in his eyes. Whether her confidence was warranted, Ves could not tell. He could only judge that his former teacher and guide was still in a stage of rapid growth.

"Hello again, Master."

"Hello, Ves..."

An awkward silence ensued. Their identities were not simple, and it was already a controversial matter for the both of them to come into direct contact with each other!

An invisible aura spread between the two mech designers who were physically separated from each other by hundreds of thousands of light-years.

The air became more oppressive as it looked as if neither side would stop until one of them lost composure first!

Tristan felt distinctly unwelcome despite the fact that he was standing in his own laboratory. He smiled awkwardly and slowly backed away until he quietly slipped out of the entrance.

He did not want to get involved with whatever was going on between the two! A careless mistake could easily cause him to get dragged in the middle of the long-running conflict between a powerful state and a rapidly growing clan!

Shortly after Tristan made his getaway, Ves eventually loosened his posture and deliberately adopted a casual stance.

"It has been a long time."

"It has." Olson simply responded.

There was little point in starting up a casual chat with Master Olson. Doing so might cause her to lose patience and end this sensitive call before Ves managed to bring up his request!

"The reason why I wanted to contact you is because I recently broke through and assumed greater responsibilities. I am sure you know what it is like. My current issue is that I am trying to apply for a teaching position at an excellent school, but my qualifications are not quite sufficient."

Master Olson raised her eyebrow. "So you wish to obtain a letter of recommendation from my hand?"

Ves nodded. "I do. I have already collected a couple of them, but I think it is indispensable for me to obtain one that is written by my former Master."

"..."

The woman did not reply immediately, but let the silence stretch for almost a minute. She looked as if she was spending her time in thought, but it may be that she was trying to express her displeasure.

"Can you... write a letter for me, Master? It would be helpful if you do. I have greater confidence in my ability to get accepted by a mech design university if I can present your kind words about my competences. I have managed to accomplish a lot ever since I visited Leemar for the first time, you know."

Olson's lips curled into a sardonic smile. "By accomplishments, you mean arming the enemies of the Friday Coalition with mechs that are hard to handle, defeating the fleets and mech forces dispatched by my state and utterly contributing to the sacking of Pima Prime."

"Uh... that's right."

"These are indeed accomplishments that you can be proud of, Ves, but they carry the opposite meaning when you present them to a member of the state that has suffered greatly from your work. What you are doing is the equivalent of a serial killer visiting the family of one of his victims in order to beg for a compliment. How dare you, Ves?"

Though Ves indeed felt rather guilty about making such a presumptuous request, his desire for a letter overpowered his shame and sense of propriety.

"Oh, come on, Master. We may stand on opposite ends of a conflict, but that has little to do with us in person. We are merely the victims of an uncontrollable circumstance. It may be in the best interest of the Friday Coalition for the two of us to remain separated from each other, but does the Vermeer Group think the same?"

Master Olson directed a pointed stare at Ves, but she withheld her reply for the time being.

Both of them knew quite well that Master Olson played a key role in enabling the attack on Pima Prime by offering much of her shares in the LMC as an incentive.

Since Ves and his Larkinsons upheld their end of the secret bargain brokered by Tristan Wesseling, Master Olson promptly transferred a nice chunk of shares back into his hands.

This made him feel a lot more comfortable as less of the profits generated from his work flowed into the hands of outsiders!

Thinking about those shares allowed Ves to present another argument.

"Besides that, you are still an important minority shareholder of the Living Mech Corporation. My Living Mech Corporation." He grinned at her projection. "If you truly wanted to cut off your relationship with me in total, then you shouldn't have kept those shares for so many years. If you truly consider me to be an enemy that you are obliged to obstruct or defeat, then prove that with your actions by divesting yourself of the shares in my mech company."

This was a fairly strong argument as it was based on an unquestionable fact!

Master Olson slowly narrowed her eyes for a bit before she finally opened her mouth again.

"Enough. You are not incorrect for stating that our relationship is multi-faceted. I have heard many words of persuasion from you, but you have yet to provide me with a compelling reason to write a referral letter. You will need to be more direct."

That was an encouraging sign. Master Olson's tone remained adversarial, but she still gave Ves a chance to make his case!

Ves grinned. "You want me to succeed, right? Leaving aside my hostile relationship with your state, the two of us are student and teacher. You have undeniably taught me and facilitated my growth as a mech designer. Even if you did not directly teach me all that much, you opened up a part of your network and allowed me to obtain greater knowledge through channels that have opened up due to my new status as your nominal disciple. I still hold a lot of gratitude for you because of that. Thank you for supporting me in my time of need."

Olson shook her head. "As you have stated yourself, I did not contribute too much to your rapid growth and success."

"You do not need to be modest. As the Master of a highly successful mech designer who advanced to Senior, you must have benefited a lot from my rise, though in ways that are not as obvious to the people who are not a part of our industry. I am trying my best to make further progress, but I need to enter a more powerful academic environment in order to obtain better support. I won't hide it from you. The reason why I urgently need your letter is because I want to apply to work at a first-class mech design university."

This finally provoked a substantial reaction from Master Olson. Both of her eyebrows rose at the same time!

"You... are not eligible to teach at such a high institution."

"Am I really?" Ves chuckled and smirked. "Come now, Master Olson. You know more than most people how impressive of a mech designer that I have become. Don't just take my word for it. I have already secured the endorsement of five Master Mech Designers, three of whom possess much higher identities and qualifications than yourself!"

He activated a projection that briefly showed off his current collection of referral letters. The ones that contained the markings of the Mech Trade Association looked especially dazzling!

Master Olson's eyes flashed. "Did Master Moira Willix agree to write a letter of recommendation for you already?"

"She did."

"Then... I shall do likewise."

"Eh, you agree?"

Master Olson nodded. "The five Masters that you have contacted before are not blind. If they have expressed great confidence in your competence, then I cannot be dishonest and reject an obvious truth. In addition, it is indeed unacceptable for your former Master to withhold support. It may give the impression that I believe that you have been poorly taught, which is not the case."

Though Ves hadn't managed to keep up with the rapid turnaround, he did not want to look a gift horse in the mouth!

"So you will write a letter for me?" He asked in the hopes of obtaining confirmation.

"I... shall. It may not provide you with as much assistance as you have hoped. My word will not mean as much as an MTA Master to a university-employed recruiter."

"It will definitely make a difference, Master. Thank you for setting aside our differences and base your decision on what we have in common."

Master Olson let out a small sigh of exasperation. "Let us conclude this matter quickly."