

## The Mech 5021

### Chapter 5021 Healthy Trees

As much as Ves became impressed with all of the progress that the T Institute accomplished in a relatively short amount of time, he did not have a good impression of its director.

Ves periodically met and talked with the third daughter of Matriarch Erexu Aduc. He had always known her to be a studious researcher as well as a woman of faith.

He knew that Gaia favored Pesca Aduc, but he never really minded it in the past because the director was good at her job.

The recent changes caused her to develop a lot more powerful, though. Only a short time had passed before exotic radiation entered the fray, but already Pesca spoke like she had become the messiah of the Mother of Earth!

Ves truly did not like this development. Even though the T Institute's secret research projects had made more progress in the last few days than they had in years, he had a feeling that he was losing control.

It sounded as if many of the breakthroughs that the researchers had made over the past few days could be attributed to Gaia.

As a woman who developed a close connection to the powerful spirit, Pesca Aduc placed more importance in her faith than her responsibilities as the director of a research institution!

All of this talk about a 'holy mission' to establish a version of Earth in this new cosmic region disillusioned Ves even further from Pesca Aduc.

If not for the fact that the only other candidates qualified to run the T Institute were either himself or another member of the Aduc Family, he would have demanded her resignation within the first five minutes!

Ves raised his palm to interrupt Pesca's latest plea.

"I have already told you that our clan and alliance have different priorities. We cannot undertake a burden of this magnitude. Do you even know what you are asking? My clan is not set up to found a colony! If you believe it is a matter of serious importance for red humanity to create a spiritual successor to Old Earth, why don't you approach the Terrans or the Red Two?"

The director shook her head. "They are too powerful to take us and our mission seriously. The Terrans have more reasons to support us than any other red humans, but I am afraid that they will try to claim the Old Lady for themselves and abuse it for their own purposes. Gaia should be able to protect herself and her holy domain, but we do not want to put our sacred tree at risk at all if we can help it. The modern Terrans... have gone adrift."

"You can say that again." Ves rolled his eyes.

Many Terrans took pride in their history and their lineage, but that did not mean they were willing to set aside all of their selfish desires and complicated machinations to serve a random 'goddess'!

The Greater Terran United Confederation had decayed a long time ago.

The rise of the New Rubarth Empire and the Big Two may have forced the Terrans to clean up their act and limit their excesses, but they still retained much of the decadence and selfishness that gave them such a bad name!

Of course, that did not stop Ves from looking forward to teaching them at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology.

There were still plenty of decent people among the Terrans. They were insanely wealthy and had access to a lot of fantastic tech.

"As for the Big Two or should I say Red Two, their ideologies are too hostile towards Gala and our cause. They will never let Gala become the guiding deity of red humanity. The mechers want the masses to worship their own gods while the fleeters reject faith in its entirety." Director Aduc said with enough clarity in her tone.

"So you are leaning on me and my clan to help you fulfill your holy mission?"

"Yes. Gala has not forgotten about you, patriarch. You have already accomplished much, but can do so much more. You bear the power of creation. You have brought her to life."

"Oh, so now Gala remembers me. How convenient." Ves rolled his eyes. "While I am grateful that you and your researchers managed to make these trees work, this is part of an existing arrangement between our clan and your Aduc Family. The contract that we have signed says nothing about your patron."

"We can make another arrangement if that is what you desire. Gaia has spent her time in the past on consolidating her existence and harmonizing with Old Earth. Now that we have all moved to the Virgo Cluster, she shall be able to come into her power in a matter of years rather than decades! The Mother of Life can be the greatest protector of our race as long as we find a new Earth for her to enshrine this role."

Ves crossed his arms. "As I have said, all of that sounds nice, but my clan already has enough on our plate. I am cooperating with the Red MTA on several different projects that are also of great importance. We all have our own missions. I am sure your Aduc Family is resourceful enough to figure out a way to complete this holy mission through other channels."

The Aduc Family may have reached a close cooperation with the Larkinsons, but stopped short of Joining the clan entirely.

As long as they remained separate entities, Ves had no obligation to look after the interests of the Aduc Family. These tree worshipping hippies needed to solve their own problems!

The discussion between the two eventually moved on to more relevant topics. Director Pesca no longer mentioned anything about her holy mission and honestly reported the state of all of the research projects.

The woman blessed by Gaia held out her hand.

A fruit that was hanging on a branch above her body spontaneously fell and dropped into her palm!

"Please examine this fruit."

Ves took the pear-shaped fruit in his hand and examined it in multiple ways.

He felt the texture of its skin. He applied pressure to understand its firmness. He swept his spiritual senses towards the center where a blank and rudimentary companion spirit seed had formed!

Although the seed possessed clear flaws and shortcomings compared to the ones he was able to plant inside other people's heads, it was already rather impressive for a single companion spirit tree to produce such an outcome!

However, it took more than growing a proper seed to make this special fruit work.

What was crucial was that the seed possessed the capacity to crawl towards a person's spirituality and successfully take root without causing harm or triggering a rejection reaction!

Ves tossed the fruit in his hand a few times before he resolutely started to take a bite!

"Hmm. Yummy. This tastes better than the fruits specially cultivated for my family."

He quickly bit and digested the fruit without any regard for manners or dangers.

Once the fruit disappeared into his stomach, he could feel the companion spirit seed enter his body and move towards his Spirituality like a piece of metal attracted by an electromagnet.

Of course, once the seed actually made contact with his powerful Spirituality, it instantly broke apart and scattered into the wind!

Although Ves was not able to observe the operation of the fruit in full, he already had a good idea on how well it would work when applied to other people.

"The seed has become a lot friendlier than before." Ves said with satisfaction. "This is better than I expected. How soon will these fruits be ready for mass consumption?"

"That depends. We have made so much progress in this research project that we can begin to make these fruits available for consumption within months. However, there are many differences in quality and potency. The older and larger trees will be able to grow more sophisticated fruits, and leaving them alone for a longer period of time will increase the potency of their seeds. If you want to grant as many companion spirits to your people as possible, we should harvest the fruits as soon as they are ripe. If you want your clansmen to become stronger, then it is best to take your time."

That made sense. Ves was not sure whether he wanted to go for quality or quantity. Both approaches had their merits.

"Test them out on our pakklaton test subjects. That is what they are here for." Ves instructed the director. "Feed a batch of test subjects with basic fruits and feed another batch of aliens with stronger fruits. If the latter group displays noticeably stronger results, then it is better to go for quality. I will put the companion spirit fruits on the Larklison Exchange so that our clansmen can redeem them by relying on their efforts. That should keep demand under control."

"Good idea, patriarch."

Ves was incredibly happy with the progress made with this project because companion spirits had become a lot more valuable in this new environment!

The more people were able to absorb and convert ambient spiritual energy for their own use, the stronger they would become!

A companion spirit provided a huge amount of help in this regard. People did not need to learn any special knowledge or Join an obscure secret society.

They just needed to ingest a single fruit and let their evolving companion spirits do all of the work!

"This is already enough to change everything." Ves smiled in satisfaction.

The trees responsible for growing companion spirit fruits were by far the most Important ones cultivated by the T Institute, but there were many other varieties as well.

The results for these other types of trees were a lot more mixed. Ves and the T Institute had tried a lot of random stuff in order to figure out what worked.

Previously, a lot of trees had been designated as failures, but now that they could supplement their energy levels by absorbing the ambient spiritual energies, they had come into their own!

For example, when Director Pesca Aduc led Ves to another patch of trees that was rooted in metal-enriched soil, she gestured towards the odd fruits hanging on the branches.

"Can you feel how they differ?"

Ves nodded. "I do. They feel like our design spirits."

Another fruit fell onto Pesca's palm. The woman used her fingers to peel the orange-like fruit and remove all of the succulent bits in order to expose a relatively small metal coin.

She handed the coin over to Ves, who picked it up and lifted it in front of his eye.

The coin shared a great resemblance to the tribute coins he conceived in the past.

Different from a lot of past results, the coin had become a lot more special compared to the failed products in the past!

"This... has become a qualified totem of the Golden Cat." He said. "It's a shame its appearance is still a little deformed."

The shape of the coin looked like an oval that had been bent a few times. The head of the Golden Cat that was supposed to make this coin look impressive instead caused it to resemble a Joke article!

Nonetheless, Ves could feel that the coin possessed a relatively small but genuine quantity of Goldie's spiritual energy!

He could do a lot with such a coin. From absorbing it to fuel his own abilities to using them as a spiritual power cell for an independent construct, the possibilities were endless!

That was not all. He couldn't help but notice that the coin was able to store spiritual energy in a similar manner as a P-stone and a piece of Unending alloy.

Had he managed to unlock the secret to producing his own prime materials?

Ves quickly drained the deformed coin of all of its accumulated spiritual energy, which was not all that much to be honest.

Once it became drained, the coin seemed to lose all signs of life. It felt hollow and weak.

Ves held it with both of his fingers and applied a slight amount of force.

The coin instantly snapped.

"Damn. Oh well. At least I have found the right direction."

## Chapter 5022 Alternative Energy Source

The possibility that money trees cultivated by the T Institute could produce a steady and constant supply of prime materials was a welcome surprise!

Ves had long dreamt of building up a large supply of materials that could absorb and release spiritual energy.

The quantity of prime materials in his possession directly determined how many prime mechs he would be able to build!

He had already asked where his mother got all of her Unending alloy from back in the Nyxian Gap. She straightforwardly revealed that she salvaged them from alien ruins and cultist hideouts.

As for the production method?

"I am not a metal worker, my son." Cynthia spoke as she scratched Veronica's ears. "How would I possibly know such a thing?"

The cyborg cat looked disappointed. "Forget about this alloy then. Do you know how to produce other materials with similar properties? It doesn't have to be strong or fancy. I just want a material that can stably hold a lot of energy."

"I do not specialize in this discipline, but I do happen to know a few methods. None of them are suitable for you. They can grant you what you want, but you will pay an even greater price."

"What are you talking about, mother?"

"Life is one of the most valuable resources in nature. Would you be willing to sacrifice the lives of hundreds of people to produce a material that matches your needs?"

"Uhhh... that shouldn't be the only way to produce a prime material." Veronica skeptically said.

"You are correct, but this is the most suitable approach for my nature and my element. I am not as gifted in creation as you, my son. This is why I continue to encourage you to develop your own methods. My way is not suitable for you. At most, I can teach you a few general theories that may help you avoid many detours."

Veronica lifted her paw to scratch her own head. "I would welcome that, mother, but I don't understand. You call yourself an 'immortal goddess'. Shouldn't you be an all-powerful energy-based life form that has mastered a lot of forbidden and exclusive knowledge!? You probably have an entire library's worth of knowledge in your head!"

Cynthia smiled and continued to stroke the cat's back. "I have indeed amassed a great amount of skills and information, but I have sworn oaths to never reveal much of what I have learned. Even I cannot break these promises. While that does not stop me from teaching you my own theories and discoveries, they are not completely suited to your own nature."

The two talked a bit further about this matter. It turned out that all of her advanced knowledge was under lock and key. Cynthia could only share the more foundational theories as well as her own exclusive techniques.

"I need to learn the basics the most." Veronica immediately said. "I don't really need anything else. I just want to strengthen my foundation so that I can come up with additional solutions in my spiritual engineering projects."

The resurrected woman briefly weighed this decision. "You have made so much progress since you started out as a mech designer. I am not afraid that you will go astray anymore. The Five Scrolls Compact also does not pose as much of a threat to you anymore. I shall see what I can do. I will need to prepare for the lessons. You live in a different environment now, so it is of great importance that you learn to make good use of the resources that have become available to everyone. As my son, I expect you to take the lead in this new age."

"Hehe, I don't think you will be disappointed-"

Anyway, back in the Red Ocean, Ves left the T Institute with a sense of satisfaction.

Though Gaia's interference was not entirely welcome, he had to admit that her help was indispensable.

As Ves boarded his shuttle and returned to the Spirit of Bentheim, he decided to present them to the upcoming conference organized by the Survivalist Faction.

Despite the transition to a new era, the Survivalists still intended to gather together in order to share their findings and discuss their future direction.

In an age where some of their greatest fears had come true, it had become more important than ever for the Survivalists to unite and work towards a cohesive future!

It was a pity that Ves failed to obtain much information from his contacts from the Red MTA. People such as Master Termaneo Dervidian, Master Vayro Goldstein and Jovy Armalon had fallen out of contact or had received strict orders to not share any information to outsiders.

The undercurrents surrounding the Red MTA were surging. Ves and many other gossipers on the galactic net guessed that a lot of upheaval had broken out within the Association!

·c0m It would probably take a long time for the different factions and leaders to sort out their differences and unite around a new consensus.

Ves predicted that the Red MTA would announce a lot of changes at that time.

He was already certain about one change. The Survivalist Faction definitely gained a lot of prominence! Their ideology and preparations were much more suited to the new age!

With the increased prominence of the Survivalists, it was not an exaggeration to say that the outcome of the conference would have an outsized impact on the future development of red humanity!

"This is a great opportunity for me to demonstrate what I can contribute to our society." Ves grinned.

From the Carmine System to his companion spirit trees, Ves intended to make sure to amplify his influence within this faction!

He recognized that he would be taking a lot of risks by exposing so many potentially groundbreaking capabilities, but the time for caution and steady development had passed.

Messier 87 opened up countless new possibilities, but the only ones who could take advantage of them were those who acted quickly enough to take advantage of the changing times.

If Ves did not rise up and offer his services, then other people with unusual abilities would step in and rob his chances!

As much as he liked to believe that he was the only effective spiritual engineer in the Red Ocean, it was way too arrogant for him to assume that he enjoyed a monopoly in this field.

The introduction of exotic radiation empowered too many individuals. From the Aducs to the Star Designers, many of them gained the capacity to develop all kinds of wondrous E energy-fueled applications!

Ves suddenly felt a greater sense of urgency. He did not want to lose the small advantages he built up back during the Age of Mechs.

He needed to complete the Dawn Star Project as soon as possible!

He not only needed to do this because he wanted to save his grandfather's life, but also because he wanted to prove the value of the Carmine System!

Even if it would take a long time for Ves to develop it to the point where any ordinary person could pilot a mech, the mechers would definitely appreciate a solution that could help injured and disabled mech pilots get back in the saddle!

Once he returned to his flagship, Ves immediately prepared for his fabrication run.

Despite working on it by himself this time, the mech design was so simple that it probably shouldn't take more than a day to assemble the entire machine.

Ves purely wanted to stabilize his grandfather's condition and reverse his deterioration.

He could think about making his mech stronger and more combat effective later.

He already moved the necessary raw materials into place. The Carmine System was the final piece of the puzzle and the heart of his next mech.

Before he commenced his fabrication run, he conducted one more compatibility test just to ensure that the Carmine System remained compatible with his grandfather.

The current state of Benjamin Larkinson did not appear to change all of that much in the new age.

Ves had already observed how E energy radiation nurtured every clansman around him. Every expert pilot thrived under the new conditions, but Benjamin behaved as if he was still stuck in the past!

Neither his body nor his broken will interacted with the ambient spiritual energy in any way.

This strange phenomena gave Ves the illusion that even the universe had turned its back on Benjamin after he 'broke' his vows!

"Damn, this is too ruthless!"

Fortunately, his grandfather had a good grandson.

The compatibility test revealed no problems. The strange happenings as of late had not changed the variables.

"Don't worry. I will finish your new mech soon enough." Ves patted his hand on his grandfather's feeble arm. "Soon, you will be back in your prime and gain the ability to defend our family once again!"

It was too bad that Benjamin was still asleep at the moment. He had already come so close to death that his waking hours had diminished substantially as of late!

Ves left his grandfather in the care of his accompanying doctors and went back to the center of his workshop.

Although this was a rush job on his part, he still wanted to do the best possible job!

He closed his eyes and Blinky for action.

He decided to modify his original plan.

Ves no longer restrained his glow. He instead sought to strengthen it and amplify it as much as possible by burning his own spiritual energy!

This instantly bathed his workshop with his presence and his domain!

His recently invented Living Workshop ability not only imparted special properties to the raw materials, but also 'blessed' the production equipment so that they became more effective at producing living mechs than normal.

Though the consumption of spiritual energy was horrible, Ves decided to test a new approach!

Instead of knocking on the Superior Mother's door and begging her for a donation of spiritual energy, Blinky instead sucked in as much of the ambient spiritual energy in the environment as possible and directly converted it into the power of life!

"Mrow!"

An invisible vortex seemed to form around the Star Cat as he continually drained more and more E energy radiation that had begun to fill the surrounding environment!

Ves closely observed the condition of his cat and started to grin.

"It's working!"

Although the concentration of ambient spiritual energy was still a bit on the low end, Blinky was still able to absorb enough spiritual energy per second to end his dependence on other design spirits!

Ves slightly toned down his glow as he found that he would drain himself too quickly if he continued to outpace Blinky's efforts.

Once the intake and outflow of spiritual energy reached a balance, Ves started to dive into his work straight away!

His work proceeded extremely smoothly. Compared to fabricating quasi-first-class transphasic expert mechs such as the Bastion or the Phobos, fabricating the Dawn Star Project was like a walk in the park!

Ves deliberately designed the second-class offensive knight mech to be simple but relatively solid.

There was no need to add too many finicky and sophisticated parts.



There was no need to add any transphasic armor plating.

There was no need to put together any high-tech mech systems.

The Dawn Star Project not returned Ves to the basics, but also reminded him of the times where he worked on his mechs by himself.

While Ves enjoyed his collaborations with other mech designers, he never really fully had the opportunity to implement his whole vision and produce a mech that was completely representative of his design style and his design philosophy!

An entire day smoothly went by as Ves smoothly fabricated the parts and put them all together without taking any breaks.

By the time he put the last part into place, the living mech had already begun to exude a strong identity while also radiating the glow of the Golden Cat!

"Wow. It actually turned out a bit better than I thought!"

Although the simplistic and fairly crude design of the Dawn Star Project made it unworthy to become a masterwork, Ves had nonetheless pushed its quality to a point where he was proud of his craftsmanship nonetheless!

Aside from that, the Dawn Star Project also showed the potential of turning into a third order living mech.

He just needed to finalize the mech by helping it form a Blood Pact with his grandfather.

"It's time."

## Chapter 5023 Experimenting on the Elderly

The time had come to see whether his Carmine System lived up to his expectations.

His theories did not give Ves the certainty that pairing the Dawn Star Project with his grandfather would save the latter's life.

He truly did not know what would result from this experimental outcome.

Such a procedure would never be able to pass the review of any proper scientific panel. Ves not only broke enough ethical boundaries to turn him into a pariah, but also rushed this project so that he could get everything done in little over a week!

It was not as if Ves didn't want to do better.

He would have preferred to take his time and conduct proper studies on his Carmine System. He should have completed his Blood Knight Project a long time ago and tested the effects of the Blood Pact on many different pilots to confirm that it was safe and that it operated within parameters.

Even after he thoroughly verified the soundness of his Carmine System, he still should have invested months if not an entire year on a mech that was meant to save his grandfather from the abyss!

With that much time, effort and passion, it should have been possible for Ves to turn the mech in front of him into a masterwork.

This could have made a major difference! Any masterwork mech gained extraordinary traits that Just made them better at their Jobs.

Still, Ves did not feel too dissatisfied with the lack of refinement. He possessed sufficient belief that his Dawn Star Project already possessed the essential conditions to bring his grandfather back from the dead.

The root of the problem was that Benjamin Parkinson could no longer perform his vows because he lost his ability to neutrally interface with a mech.

So long as Ves restored Benjamin's ability to control a mech just enough to restore a measure of his combat effectiveness, he would once again turn into a mech pilot that possessed the qualifications to do battle!

This should be enough!

Ves had no control of what would happen after that.

It may be that his grandfather's deterioration might stop, but that his vitality had drained so much that he would pass on anyway!

It may also be that once his grandfather regained his identity as a mech pilot, his willpower would reform and infuse him with the vitality that he had lost!

Ves turned his head and observed the surrounding air with his spiritual senses.

He still maintained the Blessed Workshop after all of this time despite the strain it put him under. In the face of his work and the importance of saving his grandfather's life, the aches induced by overloading his glow did not seem that important!

The only issue he was concerned about was that he was draining the surrounding ambient spiritual energy at a constant rate in order to power his current state.

It might not be necessary to maintain the Blessed Workshop anymore, but he felt it may still be helpful powering up his latest mech.

He decided to maintain his current state as he could always tone it down if Benjamin needed to absorb exotic radiation in order to restore his strength.

Ves checked his final preparations. He had no idea what was about to happen, so he brought several different items in case they could aid in the restoration process.

"I hope I won't need them, because I truly don't know how they will affect my grandfather."

He had accumulated a lot of weird and special ingredients over the years. He could also draw spiritual fragments from his design spirits in a pinch.

He was not lacking for ingredients.

His real problem was that he did not possess the expertise to decide on the correct response to unexpected situations.

If an accident occurred, Ves would only have one or maybe two chances to figure out the right remedy!

If he chose poorly, then he would not only squander his resources, but also ruin his only attempt at saving his grandfather's life!

The pressure began to pile on his shoulders. Ves had little choice but to rely on his judgment and his instincts to make the correct bet.

He glanced towards the treatment bed where his grandfather remained asleep.

"There is not much time left. Who knows how many times my grandpa can still wake up. He's at the end of his rope."

Just before he was about to make his move, a brief interruption took place.

"Nyaaaa!"

The Golden Cat jumped out of the Larkinson Mandate carried by Nitaa and flew right in front of Ves' face!

Her glow along with her strong concerns forced Ves to respond to her concerns!

"Nya nya nyaaaaa!"

"I ley, I know it's dangerous, but I have no choice!"

"Nyaaa nyaaa! Nya!"

"What do you want me to do? Let my grandfather die without attempting any effective treatment? Tills may be his only shot at giving him back his life!"

"Nyaaa! Nyaaa!"

"That's not relevant! So what is he said no? He's not in his right mind! He is depressed and mentally impaired. He is no longer fit to make his own decisions. He can object to my actions all he wants, but he should wait until I've brought him back to life!"

"NYAAA! NYAAAA!"

"We need him, Goldie! He's family! I am not doing anything evil. People's natural lifespan makes no difference these days. My grandfather roughly belongs to the same generation as Raymond Blillngsley-Larklnson, but the latter can easily live for over two centuries after he received a single round of life-prolonging treatment."

It took a little more persuasion before Goldie reluctantly retracted her objections.

The Golden Cat was the personification of the values, the will, the desire and the aspirations of the Larkinson Clan.

Her doubts were a reflection of how this procedure might concern the clansmen.

Her acquiescence was an indication that the Larkinson Clan cared enough about Benjamin's continuation to ignore any problematic elements.

Goldie did not return to the Larkinson Mandate, but instead perched herself onto Ves' shoulders. She clearly expressed the intention to monitor the procedure and take measures if necessary.

Ves reached out and stroked her manifested back a few times.

He could easily see how Goldie's manifestation had become a lot more solid and powerful than before. The ambient spiritual energy helped with reducing the difficulties of maintaining a presence in the material realm.

"Let's begin."

"Nya."

He had his grandfather moved to the cockpit of the Dawn Star Project while he still remained unconscious.

This should normally be an awkward process, but Ves already took this into account when he designed his custom mech.

The cockpit was larger than normal and offered a lot of room. Ves even removed the piloting chair so that he could fit in the high-tech treatment bed that helped to preserve his grandfather's remaining health.

After he locked everything into place, Ves hesitated for a moment before he issued the order to form a physical blood connection.

Several tubes extended from the floor. Flexible needles that extended from their ends gently poked through Benjamin's aged and wrinkled skin.

Ves remained in the cockpit long enough to confirm with his own eyes that the connecting tubes properly connected to his grandfather's blood veins.

Benjamin's aged and feeble physique could not withstand powerful shocks.

His body was practically the opposite to that of Venerable Jannzi, who could tolerate a lot more powerful treatments due to her excellent fitness and her extraordinary qualities!

"Nya."

"I know, Goldie."

Ves took one last look at his grandfather.

It would have been more ideal if Benjamin Larkinson was awake and conscious, but there was no way to make that happen.

The doctors had already injected mild stimulants into his grandfather's body. If that wasn't enough to rouse the old Larkinson from his sleep, then nothing else would work. Anything stronger might end up killing him outright!

Ves withdrew from the cockpit and retreated to a control panel. He already set everything up. His hand hovered over the projected button that would start the critical pairing process.

"Are you ready, Goldie?"

"Nyaaa."

"Let's go!"

Ves pressed the button, which triggered a lengthy set of programmed instructions!

The custom offensive knight mech that shared a lot of resemblance to the original Ember Star slowly came to life.

Its systems were not that powerful or sophisticated, so they did not take that long to boot up for the first time.

Still, Ves felt as if the seconds passed like hours. Each time the projected control panel lit an item in green, he felt a little more relieved.

The ordinary parts and systems of the Dawn Star Project functioned properly. Ves did not have to worry that they would malfunction and pose any danger to his grandfather.

What Ves worried about the most was whether the Carmine System could form a Blood Pact with a 'pilot' that was not conscious.

Theoretically, it was impossible for a mech pilot to interface with a mech while asleep.

The very act of piloting mechs was a mental process. The brain of the pilot needed to actively receive, process and transmit data back to the machine. If the pilot was comatose for whatever reason, the mech lost its most essential controlling influence, which would automatically turn it into a machine without direction. It had no choice but to shut down or go on standby!

The story was different for the Dawn Star Project. It was a living mech that was just about to reach the third order of life. This meant that it would gain enough autonomy and control over itself to remain active for some time!

The Carmine System also worked a lot differently from a neural interface. It was supposed to forge a bond between the spiritual foundation of a mech and the spirituality or willpower of a mech pilot.

This was a bond that transcended mortal limitations. Ves suspected that not even a lack of consciousness could stop the Blood Pact from functioning properly!

As more and more systems lit up in green, the time had finally come for the Dawn Star Project to fulfill its primary purpose.

He activated the fateful command.

"It's happening!"

"Nyaa!"

Freshly cultivated human blood began to pour into Benjamin's old body. Each blood cell seemed to carry a strong degree of vitality that was directly derived from the strong and vigorous cyborg mech!

At the same time, Benjamin's original blood poured out of other tubes. Even though there shouldn't be many physical differences, the vitality contained within these fluids had obviously been exhausted!

A powerful series of heartbeats began to echo from the Dawn Star Project.

Blood continued to circulate between the tired Larkinson and the newly created custom mech.

Benjamin's body seemed to inflate a bit as more and more fresh blood circulated in his body and cleared out all of his aged and exhausted blood!

At the same time, the Dawn Star Project received more and more biological material from an old and retired expert pilot.

Despite Benjamin's present condition, his blood was still enriched with age, affection and pride!

These were the elements that the Dawn Star Project lacked the most. As the machine continued to rouse to life, it eagerly absorbed and imprinted on the elements of its destined partner!

Ves widened his eyes and strengthened his Blessed Workshop as he could see and feel the new mech attempting to forge a closer connection with its pilot!

Through the mutual exchange of blood, the mech and pilot were close to forming a pact!

"C'mon, grandfather. I know that deep down, you have always been unreconciled about your early retirement. You could have done so much more. This is your chance. Accept the offer. Make the pact. This is your only chance to protect your family once more!"

"Nyaaaaaa!"

Just when it seemed that his grandfather's broken will remained unmoved by the offer, the Golden Cat channeled her own influence on the mech!

The glow of the Dawn Star Project grew stronger!

A strong sense of family and kinship into the machine.

This stirred Benjamin's unconscious mind just enough for him to reach out to the mech!

The Blood Pact... had been formed!

"Yes!" Ves celebrated!

A transformation was about to take place. Ves quickly reined in his jubilation and restored his focus.

What happened next was the most crucial step in the process. Forming the Blood Pact was not enough. What truly mattered was restoring his grandfather's health!

## Chapter 5024 Motivation to Live

Ves had become fascinated by the power of blood when he initially conceived of the Carmine System.

Blood was both a carrier of life and a medium of power.

By absorbing the occult knowledge contained within an enlightenment fruit, Ves had learned many powerful properties and nuances of blood.

Ves knew so much about the more mystical aspects of blood that he could probably do a good job of impersonating a member of the so-called Blood Cult!

Of course, Ves did not bother to waste his time on reproducing the archaic and outdated methods of this forbidden organization.

The knowledge he learned from System mainly served to provide him with the building blocks he needed to come up with his own innovations!

This was why Ves had great confidence in the Carmine System. Perhaps it might look like an abomination to other people, but he considered it to be a brilliant fusion of different concepts.

To Ves, the Carmine System was one of his most beautiful inventions, and one that embodied his design philosophy to an almost perfect degree!

The fleshy organic components of this large mass web of artificial human tissue contained a multitude of life and potential.

By connecting the Carmine System to Benjamin's body, Ves hoped that his grandfather would somehow be able to borrow the abundant strength and vitality of the Dawn Star Project!

So far, Ves saw no sign of that happening, but this was just the beginning. There was still time for his grandfather to draw strength from his new mech.

Although Ves did not have a complete understanding of the mechanisms of his own invention, he still possessed a decent idea of how the Carmine System affected the mech pilot.

The Carmine System was the element that enabled mechs and mech pilots to forge a closer connection to each other than was possible with the neural interface.

By forming both a spiritual and physical bond through the medium of blood, Venerable Jannzi had been growing stronger in a remarkable fashion in the past few weeks!

Each time she went through another routine health inspection, her physical body became a little more solid and stronger than before.

While it was not unusual for expert pilots to grow even fitter and healthier due to the influence of their willpower, the degree of Jannzi's physical improvement far surpassed that of other Larkinson expert pilots!

Even the introduction of exotic radiation did not change this fundamental equation!

Ves theorized that Jannzi's strong bond with the Bastion enabled her to inherit a small fraction of her expert mech's power!

At the same time, the Bastion slowly absorbed and integrated Jannzi's exceptional willpower, thereby slowly perfecting its own shortcomings.

His brief observations of Venerable Jannzi and the Bastion confirmed his assumption that the Blood Pact was mutually beneficial to both sides. Neither of the parties suffered or lost anything serious aside from their independence.

"C'mon. Please work. You can do it, grandpa."

Ves and Goldie both kept observing the Dawn Star Project as it slowly attempted to leverage its tentative new Blood Pact with its pilot.

However, nothing seemed to happen.

Although blood continued to circulate between the Dawn Star Project and Benjamin's body, the Blood Pact remained inert.

The machine was not the problem. The living mech had gained a lot more life and activity after it successfully formed a bond with Benjamin Larkinson. It followed its programming and its own desires and worked hard to strengthen the Blood Pact by pushing for a mutual exchange.

Yet despite the new custom mech's earnest efforts, the pilot remained unresponsive!

Benjamin had done nothing after Goldie nudged him to accept the Blood Pact!

"Nyaa nyaa nyaa."

Goldie grew frustrated as she tried to encourage the unconscious man to interact with the Blood Pact. It shouldn't take too much effort to deepen his connection with his new mech, but the lack of any strong movements prevented the new bond from developing any further!

Ves grew frustrated with the lack of activity. His grandfather was getting nowhere like this! The Blood Pact needed to be actively used by both sides in order to unlock its potential!

It was like opening a communication channel between two different parties, only for one end to remain completely silent and unresponsive!

·c0m This was not the result that Ves desired.

His control panel produced several alarming noises.

"Damnit! My grandfather's body can't withstand the stress of this activity!"

His body's condition was already hovering at its limits. Though the new blood circulating through his body forcefully injected it with vitality, the current state of the Blood Pact prevented his grandfather from properly drawing strength from the Dawn Star Project!

Instead, it produced an adverse effect as the powerful foreign blood of the new mech seemed to push Benjamin's feeble body beyond its coping ability.

If this continued on without any changes, his grandfather might die due to subjecting it to an excessive amount of stress!

Ves worked to adjust the parameters, but nothing helped. The problem was not that Benjamin was physically incapable of interfacing with the Dawn Star Project.

The true cause of the lack of activity was that his grandfather did not show the initiative to engage with the Blood Pact!

Ves understood why this was the case.

His grandfather was too lacking in motivation!

Every mech pilot possessed a strong fighting Intent. They relied upon it to push through any pain or discomfort.

The stronger their desire to fight, the more successful they became in their careers!

Expert pilots were exceptional because their fighting intent pushed their willpower beyond any mortal limitations.

It should normally be impossible for expert pilots to experience any fatalism!

No matter how poor the odds had become, they never backed down and never admitted defeat when duty called them to fight to the end!

Ves had only seen two expert pilots completely lose their fighting intent.

Venerable Davla Stark was originally a broken woman, but with the help of Venerable Brutus, she regained her fire and forged herself anew!



Benjamin Larkinson had not gone through a similar journey. He had grown so old and spent so much time as a 'cripple' that he no longer saw himself as an expert pilot and a soldier in any fashion!

He simply embraced the identity as a retired and disabled Larkinson and grandfather. There was not a bone within him left that possessed any serious desire to pilot a mech once again.

"That's not quite true."

If Benjamin Larkinson truly had no desire to pick up his original profession and perform his duty once again, then why had the initial form of the Blood Pact taken shape?

Its existence proved that despite all of his words, there was still a part of the old Larkinson that still aspired to be a pilot and a protector!

"There Just isn't enough of it, though."

This left Ves at an uncomfortable impasse. The data readings that reported Benjamin's health were producing increasingly more alarming signs.

Even if Ves suspended the attempt and pulled his grandfather out of the cockpit, it was doubtful that the old man would live past this day!

For better or worse, Ves needed to step in and ignite his grandfather's fighting intent somehow.

How could he properly stimulate his grandpa without killing him outright?

He shifted his gaze to a nearby work table where he prepared several different items and ingredients.

He had a feeling that none of them would help with what he was trying to accomplish.

For example, what was the point of injecting his grandfather with a lot of universal life-attributed spiritual energy?

All Ves would do was waste an entire vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum!

As for other ingredients such as Venerable Relia Foster's remnant willpower, they were not compatible with his grandfather and had little chance of doing anything productive.

"Nya nya nyaaa!" Goldie expressed increasing alarm.

There was nothing she could do at this time.

Benjamin's physical condition continued to deteriorate the longer he remained connected to an active Carmine System.

Ves needed to make his move right away, or else his grandfather would pass the point of no return!

Dozens of different options flitted through his mind before he recalled that he had recently gathered a powerful spiritual ingredient.

Though it didn't seem special when he harvested at the time, right now he believed that it held unmatched power that exceeded anything else that he had in his possession!

A pained expression appeared on his face.

He originally had plans for these special ingredients. He could produce all kinds of powerful spiritual constructs with the help of this spiritual fragment! He had little doubt that he and his clan would experience another major leap in strength if he was about to process his spiritual treasure!

Yet... was this gain worth the cost of losing his chance to preserve his grandfather?

Now that Ves had to choose between a potential source of power and an uncertain possibility of bringing Benjamin back from the dead, he had to make the right choice.

He closed his eyes and thought about what he cared the most.

"I like power, but... I like family as well."

There were times where he prioritized one over the other, so Ves did not have an obvious answer to this dilemma.

"Nyaaa..."

The Golden Cat was different. She understood his difficulties, and offered her support by rubbing her manifested body against his cheek.

"Maybe you are right. No matter whether I succeed or fail, I will never forgive myself for forgoing this chance to save my grandfather."

Ves strengthened his resolve. He no longer thought about the massive opportunity cost of his chosen course of action.

He left the control panel and floated forward and up until he reached the chest of the struggling Dawn Star Project.

He held out a hand and concentrated his mind in order to communicate with the Mech Designer System.

A moment later, he withdrew a special and extremely valuable spiritual fragment from the Vault of Eternity!

The System Space had completely Isolated the fragment from the Destroyer of Worlds, making it so that the fragment remained completely inert and unchanged ever since Ves returned to the present time.

This was no longer the case!

The consciousness of an overpowering companion spirit traversed an enormous distance and instantly made contact with the spirituality that it had lost over two centuries in the past!

Even though it was a small spiritual fragment from a companion spirit that had just been born at the time, its undeniable connection to a powerful god pilot instantly caused it to transform far beyond its initial state!

Ves had no idea what the spiritual fragment was turning into, but he could feel that the infusion of an extremely explosive and evolved form of will was completely its very essence!

"Before it could complete its transformation into a much higher form, Ves threw the evolving fragment towards the chest of the Dawn Star Project!

"Go! Please save my grandfather's life!"

The strengthening fragment passed through the layers of the custom mech and quickly arrived in front of Benjamin's old and weakened body.

It stopped. It refused to get too close to the aged and retired Larkinson.

As the fragment continued to receive an infusion of power from a distant source, it slowly shook before it exploded and morphed into a small but fiery cat!

"MIIIEEW!"

Emma's cry shook the entire workshop and shocked Ves to the point where he almost broke his Blessed Workshop state!

"I know this may be awfully confusing to you, but this is not the time to answer your questions. Please save my grandfather's life!"

The newly cat seemed to peer straight through the cockpit and pin Ves or more precisely Blinky with a judgemental stare!

"Nyaaa!..."

Chapter 5025 An Old Soldier

Ves almost completely froze as he continued to hover in front of the chest of the Dawn Star Project.

The Golden Cat did not make any movements either. She was powerless to help Benjamin Larkinson restore his fighting intent and will to survive.

Both of them could only pin their hopes on Emma, the companion spirit and second personality of Divine Irene Mox!

The new cat clearly did not like being summoned to this strange workshop on a strange ship just to complete an errand that was completely unrelated to her life.

Nonetheless, she was still willing to lend a hand, if only because she had been summoned and could help out an old man.

Emma disregarded the lack of a neural interface and the oddities surrounding the Carmine System and focused solely on the essence of Benjamin Larkinson.

She could instantly tell that he used to be a proud and motivated expert pilot. His fall from grace happened a long time ago and his body deteriorated ever since.

Though the aspect of Emma possessed a lot of powerful capabilities for her size, most of them involved empowering projectiles and amplifying destructive forces!

Destruction was always easier than creation.

The Destroyer of Worlds never really dealt with situations like this in the past. Even she could not put a broken will back together.

That didn't mean that Emma was helpless, though.

She decided on a different approach.

Instead of mending Benjamin's broken will directly, she instead began to commune with the old man's unconscious mind.

Power steadily flowed from the possessed fragment to the sleeping but connected Larkinson.

This power did not infuse Benjamin with any power. He wouldn't be able to absorb any of it as Emma's divine strength belonged exclusive to her and her principal! Anyone else who attempted to absorb this highly evolved form of willpower would instantly blow themselves apart!

Instead of risking a nasty head explosion, Emma made sure to keep tight control over her power. She only exerted herself in order to exchange her own thoughts and memories with the dormant Larkinson.

Emma began to share portions of Divine Irene Mox's legendary career.

Spanning over two impressive centuries, Irene Mox rose up to become an expert pilot, an ace pilot before ultimately making the ultimate breakthrough after passing several life-and-death tests!

She had been born as a second-class citizen of the Quillim Principality, but once she proved her strength and talent in spades, the New Rubarth Empire took her in and invested a huge amount of resources in her development to facilitate her eventual evolution to god pilot.

The battles she fought with the Rubarthans along with the generosity they extended to her caused her to develop a strong affection for her adopted first-rate superstate.

Even after she reached the ultimate rank and attained godhood in a special form, Divine Irene Mox continued to respect her vows and promises to the New Rubarth Empire and served as its protector in the times to come!

There was no way to properly describe and summarize the career of such a powerful and long-lived human legend.

Where there were other god pilots who lived much more eventful lives than Irene Mox, she had definitely experienced more than her fair share of hardships!

The arduous battles, the camaraderie that she built up after fighting alongside many friendly mech pilots, the support she received from the mech designers responsible for designing her powerful machines and other factors had enriched her life and fulfilled her ambitions as a mech pilot!

Though Emma only shared a fraction of Divine Irene Mox's life and career to the ailing Larkinson, no one in the Larkinson Clan had ever experienced anything close to such a long and fulfilling journey!

The life of a god pilot was indescribably glorious to other people, but had an especially strong effect on people who possessed the ability to pilot mechs!

A small flame began to ignite in Benjamin's heart. Though he understood on a fundamental level that he was nothing like the Destroyer of Worlds and had no way of replicating her impressive life trajectory, he couldn't help but envy the life of a much more successful mech pilot.

Even when Benjamin remained functionally unconscious, his heart could not be denied!

As the old Larkinson continued to get immersed in Divine Irene Mox's impressive life experiences, the man no longer felt content to remain envious.

Benjamin may have retired a long time ago, but he still retained a fraction of the pride as an expert pilot.

He did not want to imitate or copy the Destroyer of Worlds.

He wanted to forge his own legend!

His body grew hotter as his mind began to become more active.

"Mieew!"

Emma became encouraged by his progress. Her fiery eyes glowed brighter as she continued her efforts to revive the burred strength of a fellow mech pilot!

For the first time in many decades, Benjamin started to feel young again.

His eyelids shook as his consciousness not only began to rouse to life, but also developed a strong desire to return to the glory days when he was fighting his enemies in the cockpit of his Ember Star!

The more he became exposed to the priceless experiences of a god pilot, the more he thought that he too possessed the potential to serve in a similar capacity!

"Grandfather..." Ves whispered as he could sense a fundamental change taking place inside the cockpit.

"Nyaaaa!" Goldie grew more encouraged to the point where her tail started to swish as fast as a propeller!

Once Benjamin reached a critical point, he fully regained his consciousness and opened his eyes!

No longer did his eyes look placid and gentle.

The stimulation he received from the Carmine System and the powerful Emma had completely ignited a fire in his heart!

It was a fire that he always thought had become extinguished from the moment the doctors informed him that his brain had become incapable of interfacing with any mech.

Yet as he began to regain more and more awareness of his own condition, he could feel through the newly established Blood Pact with the Dawn Star Project that he could actually exert control over the latter!

Even if this new control method was anything but perfect, it still possessed enough similarities to the man-machine connection to convince him that it was possible to resume his mech piloting career.

As soon as elderly Larkinson recognized the new possibilities that he had been given, the fire in his heart grew hotter!

He yearned to attain the same level of strength!

He yearned to attain godhood and obtain the power to completely impose his will on reality!

He yearned to become the ultimate projector of the Larkinson Clan just as Irene Mox had become for the New Rubarth Empire!

Emma retreated at this time. She sensed that her assistance was no longer needed. All she had to do was to remind Benjamin that he possessed the power to fight and overcome insurmountable challenges.

It was up to him to complete the rest of his Journey.

As Emma consciously retreated to give Benjamin room to process his own thoughts, the Dawn Star Project began to grow more active!

Ves and Goldie gained more hope as they noticed that the new mech wasn't taking on its own, but had responded according to the instruction of its pilot!

It looked as if Benjamin still needed to obtain one more piece of proof to confirm that he could pilot a mech once again.

As the arm of the offensive knight mech slowly raised before lowering again, it became undeniably clear that Benjamin's damaged brain no longer hindered him from piloting a mech anymore!

He became fully convinced by the technology invented by his grandson!

Nothing could hinder his revival except for Benjamin himself.

The old Larkinson gradually realized that he regained control over his destiny.

He had two choices before him. The former war hero could either stick to his original decision and surrender to the ravages of time and regret, or he could return to his old profession and restore his long-buried dreams!

As his control over the Dawn Star Project increased, he felt as if he too could perform miracles on the battlefield, just like how Divine Irene Mox had dominated the battlefield across unimaginable distances!

As Benjamin developed the desire to make his mark on the battlefield and protect his grandson and his other descendants, his broken willpower began to piece back together!

A glowing corona started to form around the Dawn Star Project. The mech and mech pilot were beginning to resonate with each other for the first time.

The more Benjamin reforged his willpower, the more extraordinary it became!

Soon, his willpower not only broke past the mortal limit, but continued to grow more condensed.

His restoring strength not only manifested in a growing desire for life, but also caused the Dawn Star Project to exude more and more power!

"Impressive!"

Even though the Dawn Star Project did not contain any resonating exotics, the Blood Pact along with Benjamin's exceptional mental state caused the machine to resonate in a similar fashion to forced resonance!

This phenomenon was usually associated with breakthroughs as newly ascended pilots burst out with a lot of excess power.

Though Benjamin Larkinson had already experienced apotheosis in the past, his incredible restoration generated a lot of strength at once, enabling him to experience the addictive nature of wielding a lot of power!

At this time, Benjamin felt he had the strength to defeat most of the Vesian expert mechs that he once fought against in the past!

The resonance between himself and his new mech grew stronger and stronger until it had reached a limit.

Though Benjamin wanted to summon even more strength, his restoring force of will could only do so much.

Ves quickly called up the readings of the resonance meters.

"45.3 laves!"

That was a lot more than Ves expected from his old and feeble grandfather!

As Benjamin noticed that he had reached his current limit, he no longer forced the matter any further.

Regaining the ability to pilot a mech was already enough!

·c0m Even if he was unable to express the strength of an expert pilot, he would be willing to train every day in order to build up his strength again!

This was the difference between an ordinary man and a demigod.

Now that Benjamin regained his strength as an expert pilot, he also regained the mentality and dignity of a powerful champion!

As Benjamin's aged body slowly lifted up from the high-tech treatment bed, his skin and flesh slowly seemed to nourish under his revived force of will.

Though it was impossible for him to return his physical condition to his prime, he was still able to borrow and digest the vitality contained within the vigorous blood of the Dawn Star Project!

Through these basic measures, Benjamin no longer felt as if he was only a single step away from moving on to the afterlife.

He had firmly chosen to commit to his present life now that he gained a chance to make up for most of his past regrets!

He sent a brief look of gratitude to the extraordinary companion spirit hovering inside the cockpit before he made a decision that would define the rest of his life going forward.

As he managed to reforge his willpower, he gained an opportunity to reorient his life by making a new vow that superceded all of his old ones!

There were many possible reasons why he chose to return to this difficult and dangerous life, but Benjamin was mainly driven by one overpowering motivation.

"I... shall do my utmost... to protect his family for as long as I can possibly manage! Family... is everything to me. For as long as my descendants live, I will watch over them and protect them from any threat! THIS IS MY PROMISE!"

The Dawn Star exploded in red as Venerable Benjamin Larkinson dedicated his life and strength to protecting his bloodline!

An old soldier had found new life!

Chapter 5026 Long Overdue Reunion

Venerable Benjamin Larkinson had risen again.

After spending half of his life as a harmless, disabled man, his willpower and fighting intent had completely revived!

Not only did he gain the chance to pilot a mech once again, but he also regained the might and bravery of an expert pilot!

Though he did not actually regress in age, Ves had the illusion that his grandfather had truly returned to his glory days when he served in the Mech Corps!

Along with Venerable Benjamin's glorious return, his new partner mech received ample benefits as well!

The successful establishment of a Blood Pact completed the Dawn Star Project's formation of a strong sense of self and identity, thereby marking it as a third order living mech.

Not only that, but the pseudo-breakthrough that Venerable Benjamin just experienced also channeled a lot of spiritual feedback to his new bonded mech, causing it to mature and grow stronger to an extent!

All of the previous events had caused their Blood Pact to grow thick and solid.

The two were bound for life!

From this point onwards, Venerable Benjamin Larkinson had no way of piloting another mech!

His permanent commitment to the Dawn Star Project exceeded every other oath or restriction subjected to him. Even if the old Larkinson found a way to completely restore his brain and his nerve cells in the future, his blood bond prohibited him from piloting any other machine!

This was a heavy restriction to most mech pilots, but it was completely trivial for an old man who unwillingly went into retirement!

What happened today was an unprecedented feat.

Although Ves had no idea whether the Mech Trade Association had accomplished anything similar, he seriously doubted that their methods were as practical and affordable as his own solution!

"There are so many disabled mech pilots out there that are desperate to attain a second chance!"

There were more old dogs like Benjamin Larkinson out there. Mech pilots rarely sustained physical injuries over the course of their careers. They either remained in good health or died in an instant after a powerful weapon breached their cockpits.

Nonetheless, there were still edge cases where a defeated pilot managed to survive a battle with injuries.

This meant that a lot of experienced veterans and former expert pilots suffered fates similar to that of Benjamin over time.

Ves did not believe that too many of those retired soldiers emigrated to the Red Ocean. There was little point to doing so unless they wanted to accompany their families.

Nonetheless, there were still old soldiers who had taken up related jobs such as becoming a mech instructor or continuing to serve in the military as a staff officer.



How many of these people would leap at the chance to pilot a mech again?

There were bound to be soldiers and warriors who would give up anything in order to return to their former lives!

The most fantastic part about the Carmine System was that its technical requirements weren't all that high.

It could be scaled down to a cheap third-class system that might not be as damage resistant, but still offered the same essential experience!

It could also be scaled up to a highly luxurious third-class system that was a lot more resistant to damage, thereby reducing the chance of ruining an old mech pilot's return to the battlefield.

Ves predicted that he could extract a lot of concessions from unwillingly retired first-raters!

There were bound to be a lot of rich people among them. They could easily pay millions of MTA credits, barrels full of phasewater and even entire starships just to restore their ability to pilot a first-class multipurpose mech again!

Even though Ves did not possess the qualifications to design a first-class mech himself, he just needed to whip up a basic Carmine mech before delivering it. Other first-class mech designers should easily be able to rework it into a proper combat machine!

"I can't do this." Ves sighed in regret.

This was way too high-profile for him. He could not resist the greed of so many powerful groups.

Besides, he already made an agreement with the Survivalists about maintaining the confidentiality of the Carmine System.

Ves did not think his buddies from this faction would be pleased to know that he had invited the companion spirit of a Rubarthan god pilot to this party!

As Benjamin Larkinson and his new living mech slowly became accustomed to their new states, the powerful cat retreated from the pair and flew straight towards Ves!

"Miew!"

"Uh, hello there pretty kitty. How's it going?"

"Miew miew miew!"

"Uh, I can explain!" Ves innocently raised his hands. "This situation might look a little confusing to you, but Blinky is-"

"MIEW!"

Emma's manifestation lost patience and dove straight into Ves' mind!

"OUCH! What are you doing!?"

The destructive cat surged into Ves like a spiritual armor-piercing projectile, breaking through all of his protective barriers with contemptuous ease!

Once she traveled deep enough, her teeth sank into Blinky scruff and dragged the purple companion spirit straight out of Ves' head!

"Mroooooow! Mrooooooow!"

"MIEW MIEW MIEW!"

It looked as if Emma harbored a lot of grievances towards the Star Cat! The powerful god feline kept her hold on Blinky and continued to beat up her original creator and benefactor with her paws and her head!

Ves groaned and placed his palm on his face.

He refused to witness this shameful sight!

It was not as if Blinky allowed Emma to have her way. He tried to absorb Emma's spirituality, but the strong divine will originating from the Destroyer of Worlds had reinforced her manifestation into an unbreakable form!

Not even the devouring ability inherited from the Unending One was strong enough to shake Emma's metaphysical substance!

"Mroow!"

In desperation, Blinky absorbed as much ambient spiritual energy as possible. Yet even as he used that to reinforce his own counterattacks, Emma remained as solid and unmoving as ever.

The difference in strength was too great!

Even though Blinky was one of the first companion spirits to come into existence, he was born after the Age of Meehs had already persisted for over four centuries.

Emma on the other hand was not only born two centuries earlier, but she had also grown alongside a powerful soldier who eventually transcended to godhood!

Suffice to say, Blinky had no chance of asserting his dominance over the female god cat!

Once Emma relieved all of Divine Irene Mox's grievances towards the cat that had been absent for over two centuries, she mercifully let go of the beat-up Star Cat.

"Mrowww..."

Blinky might not have suffered any serious damage, but Emma had been anything but gentle to him. She had somehow managed to make him ache and suffer across his entire spiritual body!

"Miew miew!"

"Mroww..."

"Miew miew miew!"

"Mrow!..."

"Miew miew miew. Miew!"

The Destroyer of Worlds was no longer as weak, ignorant and naive as she was in the past when Ves descended into her mind.

Her long life experiences, her evolved cognitive functions along with her extensive access to many of the secrets held by the New Rubarth Empire enabled her to put all of the clues together.

The god pilot pieced together a story that closely matched the truth of what Ves had done!

Ves grew more nervous, but not too much.

He already anticipated that this would happen as soon as he pulled out Emma's spiritual fragment from the System Space.

In order to save his grandfather's life and reignite his fire, Ves did not hesitate to expose himself to the Destroyer of Worlds.

He bet that Divine Irene Mox would still remember the gratitude she owed to Blinky and by extension Ves.

Fortunately, his bet paid off. Though Emma put on a resentful act, she could have done much worse.

Once Emma vented her feelings, she began to talk about more relevant matters with Ves.

"Miew miew miew miew."

"If you have been tracking my career, then you shouldn't be surprised that I can do this." Ves responded.

"Miew miew!"

"I can't. I am already cooperating closely with the Survivalists on this. I also maintain an active cooperation with the Transhumanists as well. You need to get through them first if you want to have a piece of the pie."

"Miew miew miew. Miew miew. Miew miew miew."

"Look, it just isn't convenient for us to meet together. Our identities are too far apart and we don't have any existing ties that we can reveal to others. I was planning to wait until I realized my design philosophy before trying to make contact. I don't think the mechers will like it if we do, so we need to do it behind their backs."

"Miew miew."

"Oh, that's convenient. Thank you for that. I was afraid that I may have missed a few bugs."

The two talked a bit more before Emma withdrew her attention from this location. Venerable Irene Mox was far too preoccupied at the moment due to the crises that emerged in the aftermath of the Great Severing.

The orange cat threw a final look at Ves and Blinky before she withdrew from the workshop, causing the energies that remained to recondense into a diminished and half-depleted spiritual fragment.

Ves grabbed a hold of the floating fragment and immediately stuffed it back into his System Space.

He was pleasantly surprised by the fact that he got back half of the original fragment.

Apparently, Emma did not consume as much energy to manifest herself and help Benjamin reforge his force of will.

Ves did not want to utilize the remaining fragment in the same manner again.

There were much more convenient methods to communicate with the god pilot, and now that they had reestablished their 'friendship', there should be enough opportunities to exchange with each other in the future!

The only issue at the moment was that Divine Irene Mox immediately became involved in a secret operation that was targeted towards the Red Cabal.

As one of the few human god pilots in the Red Ocean, the Destroyer of Worlds had to bear a huge responsibility!

Ves was happy with this as the operations targeted towards the main elements of the indigenous alien races would likely drag on for numerous years. It was unlikely that Irene would receive a break anytime soon!

This suited Ves fine. It granted him enough buffer time to build up his strength and increased his negotiating power.

He temporarily set his affairs with the Destroyer of Worlds aside and turned his attention back to his grandfather.

Though Venerable Benjamin had already begun to grow exhausted by all of his recent life-changing experiences, he couldn't help but test his new capabilities.

His freshly fabricated mech continued to make more and more deliberate movements under his direction.

From lifting the arms to taking a few cautious steps forward with the legs, it became clear that Benjamin truly possessed the capability to control his machine without using a neural interface from beginning to end!

"Jannzi was right." Ves spoke under his breath.

He already had a strong suspicion that this was the case, but he still harbored a small measure of doubt.

No more. Now that he obtained solid proof that the Carmine System could function as a substitute of the neural interface in the case of an expert pilot, Ves experienced a sense of fulfillment that excited his design philosophy!

He had yet to verify the effectiveness of the Carmine System when paired with a standard mech pilot.

However, as long as it worked for an expert pilot, Ves was convinced he could find a way to increase the practicality of the Carmine System and ready it for mass adoption!

"You can stop now, grandfather. I know you're excited to get back into the saddle, but your body is still in a relatively precarious condition. Please power down your machine so that we can check your health. There is no point in restoring your ability to pilot a mech only for you to suffer a heart attack a minute later!"

Chapter 5027 Look Who's Back!

Benjamin Larkinson was back!

To the utter surprise of the Larkinson Clan, the grandfather of the patriarch had made a surprising comeback!

Although most clansmen did not possess much of a familiarity with this figure, the trueblood Larkinsons all knew Benjamin a lot better.

Benjamin was one of the most prominent Larkinsons of the old family!

Not only did he serve with honor in the military before he had been forced to retire, but he continued to serve the Larkinson Family as an elder and a leader.

If that wasn't enough, he produced a number of remarkable direct descendants.

Ark Larkinson was his proudest son. Nothing further needed to be said about Ves.

Many old men wished they accomplished as much as Benjamin!

Nobody expected for this old Larkinson hero to regain his ability to pilot a mech. He had been bedridden for months. People like that did not simply rise up and return to the cockpit all of a sudden!

What was even more odd to the Larkinsons was how Benjamin was able to pilot a mech in the first place.

His brain injured state was a matter of public record. If Benjamin retained the ability to pilot a mech, he wouldn't have hung up his cape and spent all of his days watching over the children and the grandchildren of his fellow Larkinsons!

It was difficult to explain how Benjamin Larkinson suddenly regained his vitality and the ability to pilot a mech.

Ves decided to issue a brief statement about how he made a lot of concessions to the MTA in order to pay for an experimental treatment program for his grandfather.

The story might not hold up to people who possessed a lot of knowledge of the actual situation, but there weren't too many of them to begin with. Ves knew he could count on the trueblood Larkinsons to avoid kicking up a fuss.

After all, these people respected Benjamin Larkinson the most! Each of them had more reasons to be happy about the elder's return to power!

Ves still had to deal with the other aftermath of his successful attempt to restore his grandfather's health.

For example, he had to deal with a rather annoyed MTA security expert that Master Vayro Goldstein assigned to his flagship!

"Your actions and decisions are making it much more difficult to maintain the secrecy of your Carmine System and its implications." Specialist Amanda Colchester neatly explained to Ves in a secure office. "My mission is to assist you with minimizing any leaks and exposure of sensitive information, but I cannot effectively do so if you actively undermine our priorities."

Ves stood his ground on this matter. "I never really agreed with this in the first place, you know. It was Master Goldstein who imposed all of this on me. Look, I get it. I understand the importance of

keeping the full capabilities of the Carmine System under wraps. That does not mean I am going to stop the only possible means for me to save my grandfather's life!"

"Patriarch Larkinson, I am not objecting to the actions that you have taken to restore your grandfather's ability to pilot a mech, but it is not wise for you to reveal this in public, let alone allow him to pilot his new mech in the open! There are proven records about his infirmity. It is highly improbable that any medical treatments have regenerated his brain just enough to interface with a mech once again. Your fellow Larkinsons may not have any reason to question what has happened, but the same cannot be said for outside groups. It will become more and more difficult to hide the true scope of your work over time."

"It doesn't matter." Ves defiantly crossed his arms. "The rules have changed. We have transitioned to a new age where exotic radiation has created many new possibilities. It should be easy to spin a narrative where a happy accident involving E energy radiation has restored the piloting capabilities of an old and disabled man. Exotic radiation can make a lot of amazing stuff happen. The news about Benjamin Larkinson's return to form is just one of the many events that characterize the Age of Dawn."

Amanda Colchester grew frustrated. "I will need to consult with my superiors about this, but I am requesting you to prevent your grandfather and his special mech from deploying in the open for the foreseeable time. Our shipbuilders have constructed a secure barracks and testing compartment in the Spirit of Bentheim for the sole purpose of upholding the secrecy of any research related to your invention."

"I WILL NOT CONFINE MY GRANDFATHER IN A PRISON!" Ves burst out! "His continued life is dependent on his ability to fight and serve as a mech pilot. Locking him up in those secret compartments will only cause him to regress and lose the lifespan that he has just regained. If Master Goldstein doesn't like it, then he can say so himself, but I will not compromise when it comes to the life of my family!"

Ves knew it was not entirely conducive to his relationship with Master Goldstein and the Survivalists to defy them in such an open manner, but he hoped that they would let it slide on account of his value.

After all, red humanity was no longer in a comfortable position. Cut off from the Milky Way and left with only a fraction of human civilization's total military might, the Survivalists must be working frantically to ensure the continuation of their isolated civilization!

Besides, the value and the importance of the Carmine System had changed now that red humanity entered the Age of Dawn.

The effects of exotic radiation became increasingly more obvious over time. Though it undoubtedly produced negative effects, its benefits to mech pilots and mech designers had also become more prominent!

All of these changes were enough to occupy much of the Red MTA's attention!

In any case, Ves did not immediately receive a reprimand from Master Goldstein or any other mecher, so he knew that he had managed to get away with his latest stunt.

Emma had fortunately used her brief presence in the workshop to disable all of the hidden spying methods that the mechers had left behind during the extensive refitting of the Spirit of Bentheim.

Their methods were both clever and advanced, but they had no chance of escaping the notice of one of the most powerful god pilots in the Red Ocean!

Thinking about Emma put Ves into a complex mood.

He was happy that he managed to make contact with Irene again, but he did not want their reunion to happen so soon and in a way that caused him to owe a favor to the god pilot.

Though the Destroyer of Worlds had yet to properly engage with him after their first meeting in 'centuries', Ves knew that she would definitely confront him once she completed her important missions and retreated from enemy lines!

He eventually shrugged. "I'll worry about this later. My grandfather is back!"

Many Larkinsons congratulated Benjamin on his miraculous recovery, though many of them also expressed their doubts about his ability to fight effectively.

"I am alright, my son." Benjamin said as he briefly explained his improved condition to General Ark Larkinson. "Mech piloting is not a physically demanding activity to begin with. Fitness is a bonus but not a requirement to pilot a mech. My concentration, reaction time and ability to process data are much better than that of a normal mech pilot."

Ark remained skeptical. "I cannot understand what Ves has done for you, but it is madness to assume that you can return to your peak condition. You have aged too much. Not only have you fallen out of practice for over half a century, but you do not know anything about advanced second-class mechs. You will require an extensive period of retraining to adapt to our current tech and contemporary combat methods."

"That is fine. These are not insurmountable problems. I can spare enough time and effort to get up to standard again." Benjamin replied. "My grandson has already informed me that it will take around a year for him and his team to rework my Blood Star into a proper high-tier expert mech."

The Blood Star was the final name for the completed Dawn Star Project.

Ves was initially in favor of retaining the code name, but Benjamin felt that it was not a suitable name.

He was no longer the Brighter expert pilot of old. He regained his life and his ability to pilot a mech by relying on the power of blood.

Each time he 'interfaced' with his new mech, Benjamin could not avoid the necessity of merging his own blood circulation with his life-saving machine!

The Blood Pact permanently marked Benjamin's life. It was only fitting to call his living mech the Blood Star.

In any case, Benjamin's restoration continued to the delight of the Larkinsons around him. His previously deteriorating state had given him a much greater appreciation of the pleasures of life, so he became a lot more active than before!

Naturally, he spent a lot more time with his great-grandchildren.

No longer did he have to meet them while he was confined to a bed or a chair overlooking a garden.

He could join Ves and his immediate family at the dinner table. He also volunteered to take over the work of a nanny and keep the children company.

"Hihihhi!" Marvaine gurgled as he sat on his great-grandfather's lap. "Did papa truly cry after his pants slipped off his waist?"

"He did. You didn't expect your father to be so clumsy when he was at that age, right?" Benjamin said with a grin.

Ves groaned when he heard this embarrassing story. "Can you stop it please? How am I supposed to maintain their respect when you keep ruining my image?"

"Love is stronger than that. Your children need to know that you are still fallible underneath your guise."

Although Ves found it rather annoying that his grandfather interjected himself so much in his personal life, he still loved him all the same.

In the days after Benjamin restored his willpower, Ves conducted a series of tests and examinations to get a better understanding of how much had changed.

He made a number of notable discoveries.

For one, Benjamin's resonance strength was not static. It continued to grow as he became more comfortable with his new condition.

·c0m Despite the fact that the Blood Star did not integrate any resonating exotics, Benjamin was able to exert a surprising amount of combat power by relying on prime resonance!

Even if the Blood Star did not have the ability to compete against a proper expert mech, it could readily beat any standard mech in battle!

Ves identified three major variables that granted his grandfather the ability to hold his own on the battlefield.

The combination between a third order living mech, M87's exotic radiation, and a functional Blood Pact resulted in fantastic synergies that partially made up for the absence of traditional resonating materials!

Ves grew incredibly fascinated by the results and the possibilities that they implied.

He already had a good understanding of the potential of prime resonance back in the old galaxy.

Prime resonance had the capacity to introduce a lot of new and useful abilities to expert pilots, but it lacked the raw power to compete against true resonance in a direct confrontation!

This relegated prime resonance to an auxiliary feature that was useful but not not essential to his expert mechs.

"The rules have changed!"

The increase in ambient spiritual energy powered up every spiritual phenomena!

While it was true that true resonance manifestations had undoubtedly grown stronger in the new environment, prime resonance was a lot more sensitive towards differences in E energy radiation!



What this meant that as long as his mechs came closer to M87 one day, prime resonance had the potential to surpass true resonance in power!

## Chapter 5028 Increased Alien Incursions

As Ves continued to harvest a lot of interesting data and insights from the operation of the Blood Star, he formed a lot of important conclusions.

For example, he confirmed that his grandfather's ability to control the Blood Star was not quite up to standard.

"I am still learning how to do this myself." Benjamin told him as he wore his piloting suit. He had just completed another testing session. "The Blood Pact is much different from the man-machine connection that mech pilots are familiar with. You need to take a different approach to controlling a machine. I can transfer many of my old piloting skills to this new interfacing method, but I have to learn a lot of new skills from scratch as well. I can do this faster because I have regained my old strength as an expert pilot, but I believe it will be much harder for normal pilots to build up the same proficiencies."

Ves nodded in understanding. "Interesting. Do you think that normal blood-bonded mech pilots will be able to control their machines as effectively as you? Their willpower and mental strength cannot match yours. How much do you rely on these qualities to effectively pilot your Blood Star?"

"I... do not know. I feel that you should not expect much from mech pilots who have yet to grow to my extent. It depends on whether their Blood Pact can develop as extensively as mine. Do not use me as a representative example for other cases. I think that weaker mech pilots will struggle to control a mech through a tenuous bond."

The only way to find out was to design a Carmine mech for ordinary individuals. Ves was far from ready to do so. He had so many different priorities on his hand. The new demand of developing the Blood Star into a proper high-tier expert mech added yet any heavy burden to his busy schedule!

Ves inwardly shook his head and focused his attention on his grandfather's physical condition.

His hair was still gray and his skin did not lose its wrinkles. Though Benjamin's body had filled up a bit as of late, it did not look as if the old man was ready to run a marathon anytime soon!

"How is your health, grandfather? I can sense that your restored willpower along with your regular piloting sessions with the Blood Star has done your body a lot of good, but I do not have a clear idea of how extensively you have pushed back your expiration date. Expert pilots normally aren't able to prolong their lifespans due to various limitations. Your previous physical condition was also exceptionally poor. It should be a miracle that you can stand like this with a straight back!"

Ves still had a lot of concerns about Venerable Benjamin Larkinson's longevity. It should have been impossible for his grandfather to recover to this extent so quickly back in the Milky Way.

Yet now that red humanity lived under the golden dawn of Messier 87, every person received a substantial boost!

Although it was not quite certain whether most humans would benefit from getting exposed to exotic radiation, the story was different to those who were strong in will or spirit!

Benjamin had become a genuine demigod again, and that granted him the capability to absorb E energy radiation and use it to empower him in various different ways!

From strengthening his domain to boosting the transformation of his physical body, Benjamin already started to exhibit the traits of an ace pilot!

What was even better was that this was just the beginning. As long as the old expert pilot continued to acclimate to his new state and received a proper expert mech, his health would continue to improve!

Ves already concluded that his grandfather's continued existence was highly reliant on his resonance strength.

The stronger his force of will, the more he would be able to reverse the effects of aging!

Advancing to ace pilot was the greatest priority at the moment. Ves even considered that it was more important to ensure that his Benjamin advanced to ace pilot first before helping Ark attain his own breakthrough!

After all, Ark was still at the prime of his life. He still had plenty of years of life ahead of him. He might even be able to experience his second apotheosis by relying on the more favorable conditions produced by exotic radiation.

Of course, he and his wife would probably design both of their expert mechs at the same time.

Gloriana had enough time on her hands after she completed the Greenaxe Project and the Bloodripper Project, although...

"If breakthroughs occur at greater rates, then even she will become overwhelmed." Ves frowned.

He needed to expand the Design Department even further if that was the case. It needed a lot more lead designers in order to keep up with the expanding workload!

"Mech designers should be able to break through with greater ease as well."

That gave him hope that many of the assistants who had been working for the Larkinson Clan for a number of years would rise up and form their own design seeds.

Although the overall quality of every new mech designed by the Design Department would obviously drop because of this, it was fine as long as the Larkinson Clan was able to issue an expert mech to every new expert pilot in a timely manner!

"Not every new expert mech has to be as exaggerated as the Bastion or the Phobos." He reminded himself.

He was used to treating his expert pilot like scarce treasures.

It was fine for him to invest a huge amount of resources in the development of every expert mech because he could not afford to lose any of his high-ranking mech pilots.

He might have to rethink this approach in the Age of Dawn. Perhaps it was better to deprioritize expert mech projects unless they were aimed towards people he cared about.

While he would still endeavor to design the strongest possible machine for close friends and relatives such as Venerable Benjamin and General Ark, he felt no need to put in the same effort to a random clansman like Venerable Kolak Glendale.

He let out a sigh. "I kind of understand now why large mech militaries invest so little in the initial expert mechs for their new expert pilots. It is hard to care for them when there is already a lot of existing stock."

This was a good development all-considered. No one said no to additional expert pilots, and the transition that he was thinking about was a sign that the Larkinson Army continued to mature into a proper military organization.

As Ves and many other Larkinsons continued to focus on their respective work, the expeditionary fleet smoothly crossed the border between the Krakatoa Middle Zone and the Torald Middle Zone.

Many people initially did not notice any differences. The security situation on this side of Torald was not any different from the previous middle zone.

The story was different once the expeditionary fleet moved closer to the other side of the middle zone.

The security situation at the coreward side of the Torald Middle Zone had become increasingly more tenuous!

"The indigenous aliens have made the most logical course of action after they initiated the Great Severing," Calabast's projection to Ves. "The Red Cabal and the aliens aligned to this alliance has tried their best to encourage a galaxy-wide uprising against red humanity. They are proactively throwing their forces against the Big Two's warfleets and strongholds. The escalating offensive has kept the Red Two's main forces so busy that a lot of smaller alien warships and fleets can slip through the cracks. These alien raiders have apparently been tasked with wreaking as much destruction to humanity's infrastructure as possible. This basically means that they are mainly trying to destroy human colonies."

As the spymaster reported the state of the ongoing war, Ves studied the projected map closely.

The Black Cats had done an excellent job of collecting a huge amount of information and using that to map out the estimated risks of each region of space.

There were certain regions in Torald that were much more dangerous than other areas!

These places reported the most numerous instances of alien incursions!

"How strong are these raiding forces?"

"Not that strong, to be honest," Cabalast smoothly answered. "Many of the raiding fleets belong to relatively minor races that are functionally vassals to the major races. They straddle the line between second-class and first-class for the most part. Their numbers vary a lot, but their tech level is not that impressive. The greatest variable that determines their combat strength is the amount and tonnage of warships. The more big warships in a fleet, the harder it is to defeat them in battle."

A typical pioneering organization should be able to fend off the riff raff, but would probably suffer exponentially more casualties once a bunch of alien heavy cruisers or an alien battleship joined the fray!

Ves started to grin. "I originally wanted to focus on finding phasewater deposits for this expedition, but this is a golden opportunity to harvest a lot of valuable salvage with ease! As long as we choose

our targets well enough, we should be able to get our hands on a lot of valuable wreckage. Is the Red Two offering any rewards for destroying these raiding fleets?"

"They are." Calabast confirmed. "You cannot earn any Warship Tokens from defeating them unless they are accompanied by a phase whale or a phase lord, but we should still be able to earn enough MTA merits to cover our expenditures. The premise is that we do not suffer too many severe casualties during our hunts."

"It is your job to ensure that this will never happen. Your scouts and spies are essential to giving us accurate assessments of the combat power of every alien fleet."

"We will do our best, but we cannot guarantee that we can get it right every time. If the aliens make use of stealth technology or other measures to prepare an ambush, our forces are in for a tough fight."

Ves nodded in understanding. "I know. We should remain cautious once we start to approach any of these dangerous regions. Still... given the quantity of raiding fleets and the difficulty of intercepting them, it may be a better idea to split up our fleet. We have over thirty-thousand mechs and numerous ace mechs at our disposal. That much combat power is overkill against these alien rabble."

The alien raiding fleets were never meant to fight against the red human's main forces. They were purely cannon fodder meant to chip away at the territorial foundation of the extragalactic invaders!

It was a clever strategy all-considered. The native aliens still controlled the majority of the Red Ocean and had a vast amount of population and combat assets at their disposal.

Even if they suffered a lot of losses in the following years, their abundant territories would ensure they could replenish their troops with ease!

In contrast, red humanity could not possibly keep up with this attrition rate. Its technology and its combat power may be better, it had lost its effective numbers advantage ever since the greater beyonder gate had fallen silent!

A good way to limit red humanity's chances of catching up to the indigenous aliens was to raid a lot of colonies!

Each loss of population and infrastructure directly reduced red humanity's ability to persist in the long-term!

This was pure attrition warfare, and the indigenous aliens enjoyed a huge advantage in this aspect!

In any case, that meant that the Red Two was quite eager to foil all of these raids. They were willing to issue plenty of MTA merits or CFA merits to clean up the alien raiding forces.

"We will have to be careful, but I think we can use this as a good warm-up exercise." Ves remarked. "We need to win a string of victories in order to integrate the Adelaides and the Boojays into our alliance. Find us a couple of good targets, please."

## Chapter 5029 Increasing Contradictions

As the expeditionary fleet continued to approach the more dangerous side of the Torald Middle Zone, the Golden Skull Alliance gradually shook off its complacency.

The chances of meeting a powerful alien fleet may be low, but it was not zero. The peculiarities of alien warp drives meant that it was difficult to catch any trace of them in transit until they had already arrived!

The only consolation was that most alien warp drives were much slower when it came to hopping from one star system to another. FTL drives worked according to different principles and took advantage of the shorter distances in the higher dimensions.

Of course, that meant that the aliens had begun to employ FTL drives themselves!

Only a few ships belonging to the Red Cabal showed the capability of this stolen tech. It would not take long before FTL drives became ubiquitous among every newly built alien starship!

That was a concern for the future. For now, the Golden Skull Alliance only set its sights on the rabble.

A mixed variety of alien races and civilizations beset the closest human colonies. The pioneers who chose to settle at these planets over there had always taken into account that they had taken risks when settling so close to the frontlines, but this was the only way for them to claim the most valuable star systems!

According to the normal pattern, once the Big Two's warfleets made another successful push into alien space, the Torald Middle Zone would become just as safe and secure as the Krakatoa Middle Zone, which meant that another wave of pioneers and colonists would flood in to occupy all the star systems that were left!

If a pioneer wanted to grab a high-value port system or a location that was rich with phasewater, the only ways to do so was to plant their flag early or conquer it afterwards!

The pioneers who committed to the former strategy endured a lot of pressure at this time. They sunk an enormous amount of time, funding and resources into building up their colonies, only for the Great Severing to happen that profoundly ended any further pushes into alien space!

Not only were the Red Two unable to secure more territories for their flock, the aliens were coming back with a vengeance!

As news of alien incursions began to flood the galactic net, the Larkinsons along with their allies increased their combat readiness.

Many scout vessels and lone combat carriers split off from the main fleet and began to traverse the surrounding star systems for signs of alien activity.

Although the Black Cats and several other intelligence sources had already weaved a net of listening posts and other means of monitoring throughout the Torald Middle Zone, it never hurt to be certain!

The addition of the Adelaide Mercenary Company and the Boojay Family vastly expanded the scouting capabilities of the Golden Skull Alliance. So long as the core fleet remained sufficiently well-protected, it did not matter if they sent out a quarter or a third of their combat carriers in smaller and more independent reconnaissance detachments!

The analysts working for the Larkinson Clan and the other alliance partners became incredibly busy. They meticulously worked to catalog every alien fleet and break down their likely combat

power. They also tried their best to predict their trajectories for the purposes of intercepting them if they were weak or avoiding them if they were strong.

Even with the increased strength and numbers of the expeditionary fleet, the analysts had already uncovered a handful of fleets that were too strong to challenge in a direct confrontation!

Though the analysts believed that it was still possible to defeat these formidable alien raiding fleets and obtain rich rewards as a result, the losses they would have to incur outweighed any possible gains!

There was no need to initiate a desperate fight. Resources and manpower had become more precious in a post-Great Severing era.

Ves especially did not want to see his clansmen throw away their lives for marginal gains!

The lack of reinforcements pouring in from the Milky Way meant that the Larkinson Clan could no longer hire an unlimited amount of mech pilots and other personnel anymore.

This not only troubled the Larkinson Clan, but every other pioneering organization!

Ves did not have too many concerns, though. The clan also supported a large and extensive civilian population, so it had no concerns about expanding its manpower pool in the long term.

As the mech pilots of the Larkinson Army started to drill against a variety of simulated alien raiding fleets, Ves and his fellow colleagues spent much of their time on completing their ongoing mech design projects.

The changed environment had caused the Design Department to rethink a lot of projects.

Not only did the lead designers have to rip out any problematic materials that were prone to mutation when exposed to exotic radiation, they also had to take the changes of their design applications into account!

Messier 87 completely changed the game for every mech designer.

Ketis already noticed that her First Swords and Monster Slayers cut through tougher materials with greater ease.

Sara Voiken measured a small but noticeable improvement in the damage resistance of her defensive mechs.

Juliet Stameross grew excited about the inexplicable increase in acceleration of the Dark Zephyr and other mechs that she worked on in the past.

Although the performance only deviated by around 1 to 5 percent in most cases, this was already enough to advance a mech model by half a generation back in the old galaxy!

It was clear that this trend was just the beginning. It had only been a couple of weeks since red humanity first became exposed to exotic radiation. What would it be like if this continued on for years?

Many visionaries already predicted that red humanity would look nothing like original humanity at that point!

Ves harbored a lot of concerns about this transition. While his fellow mech designers in the Design Department mainly focused their attention on the rise in power of all of their products, he started to have more and more questions about the foundation of mech design itself!

One big variable that occupied much of his thoughts as of late was the current and future state of the Kingdom of Mechs.

How was it doing? Had the Great Severing damaged it in any way? Was it capable of functioning properly across millions of light-years of distance? How was it supposed to support the diverging mech industries of two separate galaxies?

None of the Journeyman Mech Designers around him spent any thoughts on these important matters. They were still too ignorant and had yet to be initiated into the greater secrets of their profession.

The only person in the fleet that could help him answer his doubts was Master Benedict Cortez.

This was why he took the trouble to shuttle over to the Cyclical Engine.

Though she was a factory ship like the Spirit of Bentheim, the Cross Clan had not spent a ridiculous amount of MTA merits and resources to refit her into a resilient quasi-first-class capital ship!

The Crossers would rather invest in building up their fleet carriers or obtaining more high-grade exotics so that they could construct stronger mechs.

Ves was able to obtain glimpses of the latter effort as he traversed through the interior of the factory ship.

When he finally met with Master Benedict, they briefly chatted with each other before they moved to a highly secure chamber where they could talk about more sensitive matters.

Multiple jammers and other security measures came online. Neither Ves nor his conversation partner could afford to be careless as they both made strong vows to maintain the secrecy of what they were about to discuss.

Once everything was set, Ves immediately asked the question that had been hovering at the top of his mind.

"What's going on with the Kingdom of Mechs?"

"That... is not an easy question to answer." Master Benedict replied.

Though Ves had a lot of different contacts, he was still limited by his rank and relative youth.

Master Benedict was different as he gained the basic qualifications to get in touch with the higher level discussions of their industry.

It was clear that Benedict had obtained a bit of insider information throughout the weeks.

"From what I understand, the Kingdom of Mechs is powerful enough that it is not limited by distance." The Master Mech Designer spoke. "It is a creation that transcends many boundaries, and it is supposedly able to work across the entire universe. Technically speaking, it was designed to operate at normal efficiency from one end to the other end of the known cosmos."

Ves raised his eyebrows. This was not a completely unexpected answer, but he was still impressed nonetheless.

He admired the Progenitors of Mechs even more. Their grand design truly surpassed many other works with this feature alone!

"If this is the case, then why do I sense a bit of doubt in your words?" Ves pointedly asked.

"I have received more and more word that there are intensifying divisions within the Mech Trade Association." Benedict cautiously spoke. "No, that is not an accurate description. There is not only division within the Red MTA itself, but also between the Red MTA and the original MTA."

While Ves fully understood that the Association was too big to make everyone agree on every issue, he still felt concerned about this news.

Too much division was not good! If the mechers spent so much time arguing with each other, how would they be able to get anything done?

"What are these divisions all about? What are they fighting about, exactly?"

"I do not have the full story, so I cannot fully satisfy your curiosity, Ves. What I can tell you is that there is increasing word about splitting up the Kingdom of Mechs."

"WHAT?! Why?!"

"Selfishness, for one." Benedict answered with a cool expression. "The Kingdom of Mechs is a shared piece of heritage that binds both branches of humankind together. That brings both advantages and disadvantages. The greatest disadvantage is that it becomes vulnerable to the enemies of both groups. Once the red humans make contact with the native races of Messier 87, there is a high likelihood that the latter is able to pose an existential risk to the Kingdom of Mechs due to their much greater mastery of E energy."

"Isn't it protected by a hundred or so god pilots?"

"Yes, but what if our new enemies bring even more firepower to the fight? Do not forget that M87 is up to 200 times more massive than the Milky Way! The greatest alien civilizations will definitely not lack for numbers!"

Ves understood one of the root causes for the high-level disputes.

The humans left behind in the Milky Way were afraid!

They were afraid of getting dragged down by the red humans!

Humanity in the old galaxy still enjoyed a dominant position and had little to fear from its surrounding enemies.

Red humanity was in a completely different position! Extinction had become a real possibility in this new cosmic neighborhood.

While it did not hurt the humans of the Milky Way all that much if their cousins in a distant galaxy got wiped out, the former would suffer a lot more if the aggressors took down the Kingdom of Mechs as well!

Ves grimaced even deeper. "Are our brethren from the Milky Way willing to express any solidarity?"

"There are." Benedict nodded. "There are still enough factions and higher officials at the original MTA that wish to help red humanity in every way possible. However, they aren't doing so for free."



You see, any major advancements that red humanity makes will eventually get reflected back to the Kingdom of Mechs. Given the much more prosperous environment of M87, anyone can see that our technological advancements will eventually surpass the efforts of original humanity. If this goes on for a couple of generations, how do you think that red humans like us would feel about this growing disparity?"

Ves did not have to think too hard about his answer.

"We would be thinking about how the original humans are freeloading off our hard work."

"Exactly. This is why the Red MTA is becoming increasingly more internally divided as well. There are a growing number of proponents who support the initiative to split up the Kingdom of Mechs so that we can keep most of our industry-wide gains to ourselves!"

"Damn!"

It was no wonder that most of his contacts within the Red MTA had become a lot less responsive as of late!

"There is more. Do you know who happens to be the greatest proponent of this radical initiative?"

"Who."

"The Polymath." Benedict replied. "I have heard that she and her supporters within the Red MTA are the strongest proponents to forming our own separate kingdom!"

"What?!"

## Chapter 5030 Rumors

Ves was taken aback by all of the explosive intelligence shared by Master Benedict.

While he was glad that the Kingdom of Mechs was apparently able to function properly across all distances, he did not expect for the mechers to talk about splitting up this magnificent feat of spiritual engineering.

This was too fast and radical!

Ves hardly knew whether it was even possible to cut off a chunk of the kingdom and have it function on its own without any apparent issues.

What if the people advocating for this option were wrong? What if tampering with the creation of the Progenitors of Mechs to such a radical degree would end up ruining it entirely?

Both branches of humanity would suffer as a result!

If not for the fact that the survival and future development trajectories of all humans were at stake due to the Great Severing, the mechers would never tolerate such talk!

Ves continued to mull over what he heard.

He realized that there was strong pressure to split up the Kingdom of Mechs on both sides of humanity.

"The original humans back in the Milky Way are scared witless by Messier 87." Benedict told Ves.

"They are unable to accept a reality where they are no longer the galactic overlords. While there are still plenty of mechers in the old galaxy that look forward to benefiting from the explosive

advancements that we can make by taking advantage of a more supportive environment, there are also people who do not think the risks are worth it. What if a powerful alien supercivilization is able to use the Kingdom of Mechs to locate and teleport over to the Milky Way? Even if there is only a 0.01 percent chance of this happening, this is already too great of a risk! The Great Severing was considered an ultra-low probability event as well, but look what happened. The ancient phase whales played us all for fools."

Ves understood this sentiment. Not everyone was willing to take a gamble like himself. When the continued existence of original humanity was at stake, its leaders could not afford to play games!

He could already deduce that it was the Survivalists back home that were more eager than most to cut off such a strong direct connection between both branches of humanity!

"Then there are the mechers on our side of the cosmos." Benedict continued. "As long as we can overcome all of the new challenges, our mech industry will undoubtedly become strong beyond our imagination. Why should the original humans gain access to all of our hard-earned work when they have experienced none of the dangers and only made marginal contributions? Ever since our two galaxies have moved too far apart, it is no longer possible to keep our interests united anymore."

As a red human himself, Ves also felt that it may be a tad bit unfair to share all of his hard work related to living mechs to the lazy bums back in the old galaxy.

It was a lot easier for him to put his support behind this radical proposal as he did not have any strong attachments to any people in the Milky Way.

The same could not be said for other people. These folk were probably in favor of keeping the two branches of humanity as closely connected to each other as possible.

Any cutting of ties would definitely cause the two groups of humans to become more alienated towards each other!

"Why do you think the Polymath is such a strong proponent of this idea?" Ves asked the other mech designer. "Is it because she is concerned about the survival of original humanity?"

"That may play a factor, but there is a much more compelling reason why she wants red humanity to carve out its own kingdom."

"Is it because... she wants to obtain greater control over it?" Ves guessed.

Master Benedict nodded. "That is what I think so as well. Think about it. A single Star Designer cannot exert much influence over the Kingdom of Mechs when there are a hundred other competing mech designers of the same rank. The situation is radically different when the Polymath only has to share power with a handful of other Star Designers. Even if the separated kingdom is much weaker, the greater control makes up for it as the few Star Designers left can implement all sorts of plans that they could not push through back during the Age of Mechs."

For whatever reason, Ves easily believed this reason.

Although he only possessed a shallow understanding of the Polymath, her apparent usage of a fragment of the Metal Scroll clearly indicated that she was ambitious and hungry for power!

Ves couldn't determine whether it was good or bad to let the Polymath gain so much say over red humanity's entire mech community. It was too much power for any single person to handle in a responsible manner.

"Do you know how many Star Designers and god pilots we have in the Red Ocean? The Red MTA has never been quite clear about this matter."

"We have 14 Star Designers and 8 god pilots according to one of my sources." Master Benedict replied. "There are more Star Designers in our dwarf galaxy because they became attracted by the availability of phasewater and new alien technologies. The amount of god pilots is relatively less as the Big Two regarded the aliens of the Milky Way to be a greater threat than the natives of the Red Ocean. If not for the coincidental arrival of the Destroyer of Worlds, it would have been exponentially more difficult for our isolated civilization to resist the natives that now outnumber us by a massive margin."

Ves blinked. It turned out that he was not only responsible for enabling the rise of a god pilot, but also dragging her to the Red Ocean in time to get dragged along to this wild intergalactic adventure!

"That's not a lot of god pilots." Ves muttered. "I hope that the Red MTA figures out how to increase the success rate of breaking through to god pilot. There has to be a way to make this happen with the help of exotic radiation."

Benedict smiled. "I have news on that as well. The mechers have gathered more clues that suggest that it will become easier for expert pilots to advance to ace pilots. The quantity of ace pilots will likely explode in the next decade as many high-tier expert pilots who have been hindered by their bottlenecks are able to break through with the help of the constantly improving conditions."

"It will take a lot more time for them to grow into senior ace pilots and even more time than that to have any hope of going through the Mech Body Merger Process." Ves pointed out. "It is still questionable whether red humanity will remain alive by that time."

"That is true, Ves, but leave this matter to the Red MTA. Since the mechers are so eager to retain their rule over our society, they must also take up the corresponding responsibilities."

The two talked a bit more about major developments and high level matters.

Ves did not know where Master Benedict got all of his news from, but he turned out to possess a surprising amount of insider information despite the fact that he was still a relatively new second-class Master Mech Designer!

"The mechers have already discovered a lot of different properties and uses of E energy radiation. This is not that difficult to understand as it is merely an external source of psionic power. It is R particle radiation that is truly perplexing to everyone. None of us have worked with it before. It doesn't even exist in our extensive scientific theories. We have to start completely from scratch to even gather basic information about its properties. Taking advantage of it is another difficult hurdle. We do not even know how it affects life and matter as of yet. It will take many years for basic research to emerge."

Ves frowned when he heard this. "If R particle radiation is so new and elusive, why did the Red Two mention it in their public address? How did they manage to catch it in the first place?"

Master Benedict looked a little less certain. "From the rumors that I have heard, it is actually the god pilots that have initially picked up on its existence. They have near-absolute control over their god kingdoms. Even the most subtle changes cannot escape their detection. Whatever they found out about the particles that are spewing out of the Dark Source, it was important enough to mention it in the same speech that announced the Age of Dawn."

It made sense. God pilots should indeed be able to pick up on R particle radiation. They may even have a few clues on how it affected red humanity. The big speech certainly suggested that it might be able to make a massive difference in the long run!

However, Ves and many other mech designers became frustrated by the lack of useful information about this phenomenon. Nobody possessed the hardware to capture R particles and study their effects on different objects.

It was not as if they had a pet god pilot on hand who could conveniently assist in the study of R particles!

"What do you think R particle radiation can actually do?" Ves asked.

"I have heard many rumors about that, but none of them are credible. I think it is safest to assume it can amplify the effects of E energy radiation. That not only conforms with the Red Two's publications, but also fits a certain logic. Both kinds of radiation originate from the same galaxy. Just as there are exotics in the Red Ocean that synergize well with phasewater, it is not that big of leap to assume that E and R radiation have a close relationship with each other."

Ves grew more and more suspicious about the value of R particle radiation. Not everything produced by a black hole was valuable, but he had a growing hunch that it would become a key resource in the future.

It may take a generation or two before red humanity figured out the truth, so there was little point in thinking about it further.

Ves and Master Benedict eventually shifted their discussion to other topics.

They exchanged their findings on how exotic radiation changed their work and how they expected it to change in the future.

Even though their design philosophies were far apart, it was always useful to share their own views and gain a second opinion on many matters.

Ves happened to be able to provide a lot of feedback due to his extensive understanding of spiritual energy and spiritual engineering.

Master Benedict might not be as well-versed in this area, but his foundation and insights in regular mech design were much stronger!

"It is not just us that are trying to adapt to the new circumstances." Benedict warned Ves. "Don't forget about the aliens. The puelmers and the other native alien races are trying to improve their technologies as well."

"Do you know if exotic radiation is affecting phasewater in any way?"

"E energy radiation has no discernable effects on phasewater. That does not mean the native aliens have other ways of strengthening their forces. They are stealing more and more tech from us. Any

advancements we make will eventually fall into the hands of the Red Cabal. There are still cosmopolitans lurking in the shadows who are trying their best to complete their misguided goal of uniting humans and aliens."

"Those bastards pushed us into this desperate position in the first place. They're fools if they think we would feel any gratitude towards them for 'saving' us from a problem of their own making!"

The continuing interference from the cosmopolitans was definitely making everything worse. These crazies would not stop until humans and aliens magically joined hands and formed a true cosmopolitan society across the Red Ocean and beyond!