

The Mechanic 351

Chapter 351: The Black Star Will Bless You

Through battlefield repairs, Han Xiao had gotten a few new blueprints, including the Hovering Turner, High Caliber Defensive Machine Gun, and the Offensive, Defensive, and Scouting Enlistee Class armor. As he expected, the NCO Class armor required [Heavy Machinery Modification], so the progress was stuck.

The Great Mechanic Han was not one to return with nothing, so using his relationship with the military, he bought three different types of NCO Class armors with 2,000 or so Enas. When he returned to the Juberly Hub and learned [Heavy Machinery Modification], he would be able to get its blueprint. He would then build the different sets of armor and sell them to the players. The cost of buying the armor could easily be earned back.

Everyone received twelve thousand, so their purchasing power is largely increased. Han Xiao was exuberant. This kind of mass-produced armor sold very well, and its attributes could be increased just by him putting in some experience to level up the blueprint. Furthermore, he had the boost from Machinery Affinity, so the armor that he produced would be much better than the ones from assembly lines. After selling them, he could still earn from long-term repair fees.

The commission that he received from the hire could only buy about one class advancement knowledge, but through profiting from the players, that earning could be multiplied many times.

The Credibility Points of the Black Star Mercenary Group increased quite a bit, and they finally had their first combat mission experience. The Sunils detailed their missions, including them requesting for the most dangerous missions and completing it perfectly without any deaths. This new information was very valuable.

The relationship with the Sunil was unlocked, and it increased to 1,000 points immediately, reaching the 'Friendly' level.

On top of all that, their Renown increased five points as well, two points more than the original reward, so Black Star's name started to spread around the mercenary industry. The most direct increase was the Faction single mission reward quota was increased by 10,000 experience, which meant that there was 260,000 more daily experience due to the twenty-six times multiplier.

After the rewards were given, the mercenaries left one after another, but Han Xiao stayed in Forest City. The players stayed for a few days and got a little impatient.

On this day, the players found Han Xiao, and Frenzied Sword asked, "Black Phantom, you..."

"Call me Black Star." Han Xiao knocked on Frenzied Sword's head.

Frenzied Sword then said, "Black Star, when are we going back? What are we staying here for?"

"Waiting for someone."

The players thought that after the Catastrophe ended so did this hiring mission, but in Han Xiao's eyes, it was just the beginning!

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One day later, the Sunil Military sent someone to tell Han Xiao that Herlous wanted to meet him. Han Xiao narrowed his eyes and smiled.

"Finally."

Following the soldiers to a base facility, he entered a private room, where Herlous was waiting. The man stood up, waved, and sent the soldiers away—he then closed the door, leaving the two of them alone in the room.

There were two glasses of alcohol on the table. Han Xiao glanced around and sat down directly. "I thought you'd find me sooner."

"It was delayed by something. I had to fully cooperate with the military for publicity and lend the armor that my older brother left me to the research institution." Herlous sighed. He had never expected to receive such treatment, but it was mainly caused by three reasons. Firstly, they needed to wash away the effect of the split up. Secondly, Herlous was strong, and strength signified position. There were only two known grade B Supers in the entire race—Fernas had left, and Herlous had appeared. Thirdly, they now had a chance to resurrect the Commander Class armor.

"You seem to have many questions for me, but first let me ask you a question..." Han Xiao raised the glass up, swirled it gently, and purposely said in a very slow tone, "Do you believe I'm a foreseer?"

"Half." Herlous' eyes were sparkling. "Did you foresee the future of me protecting the race long ago, and that was why you came to contact me?"

"Of course, I didn't know a bar owner is actually a hidden grade B Super, and I also didn't know that he would wear a Commander Class armor called Shattered Light to fight the Catastrophe." Han Xiao said mockingly.

Herlous smiled bitterly. No one knew his armor was called Shattered Light, so the foreseer identity was proved. Yet, that left him with another question. "How many things can you foresee? How far can you see into the future?"

"Hahaha, frankly, I can only foresee parts of the future, bits and pieces. I don't know much. If I didn't accidentally peek into Planet Sunil's future, I wouldn't have come," Han Xiao said sincerely without even blinking.

"I see, although I don't know much about the galaxy, I did hear that foresight usually has limitations." Herlous understood, and he was glad that Han Xiao had seen Planet Sunil's future instead of something else's future. Maybe this was the long-awaited luck of his race.

Suddenly, Herlous' eyes became sharp. He stared at Han Xiao and said in a low voice, "So, what is your real motive?"

The atmosphere suddenly became intense, and faint flames flickered around Herlous. He felt that Han Xiao definitely had a goal, or else he would not have exposed his foresight. This mysterious man definitely wanted something from the Sunil race.

Han Xiao put the glass down and said slowly, "Let me tell you a story..."

"In a planet where its surface civilization lagged behind, there was a handsome man who was a test subject. One day, he went through an experiment, awakened the ability of foresight, and saw many pieces of the future. Relying on his foresight, he escaped successfully and gained freedom, then he destroyed the evil enemy of this planet, becoming a legend known throughout the entire planet. However, at this time, he saw a new future, a man-made disaster from the sky would fall on his mother planet. The people behind it hid in the depths of the universe, so he left the planet and stepped into a broader world, searching for ways to save his mother planet..."

Han Xiao adjudged his collar. "Naturally, I am that handsome man:"

Herlous suddenly could not keep a serious face, and his lips started twitching. He did not know if calling oneself like that was common in the galaxy, but it was shameless in the Sunil culture...

"We are from different races, so it's normal to have aesthetic differences," Han Xiao said.

"Okay..." After being momentarily stunned, Herlous suddenly remembered what they were discussing. "So, you're saying that you entered the universe to save your mother planet. What does that have to do with Sunil?"

Han Xiao smiled. "My mother planet is located in the Garton Galaxy, soon to face a disaster. I think you Sunils are more than familiar with the name of the people behind it."

Herlous blinked a few times, then his expression suddenly changed. "DarkStar?"

He suddenly felt that everything made sense, and everything was connected!

DarkStar was their common enemy; therefore, he came to Sunil. This was the motive!

"The mercenaries under me are warriors from my planet as well," Han Xiao added. "They know of this as well, and they followed me because they wanted to search for a way to save the planet. They can vouch for me anytime. I helped you not only because we will share the same tragic experience but also because I'm looking for an ally. Since you know why I came, you don't have to worry anymore."

Herlous' expression softened, and he was immediately filled with respect for Han Xiao. "So, you're the same as the guardians of Sunil, a hero wanting to protect his planet."

Without any blushing, Han Xiao said with humility, "I'm not a hero. I just have responsibilities on my shoulders."

The Great Mechanic Han felt like he had traveled back in time when he acted like he was brainwashed. Giving an Oscar-worthy performance, his actor's soul was on fire.

This moment, Herlous felt that Han Xiao looked much taller and greater, and he felt a bit ashamed.

Han Xiao had the resolve to immediately look for ways to save his planet just because he foresaw parts of the future—he was a complete doer. He, however, even after his race went through a disaster, still escaped from reality for so many years. Just thinking about it made his face hot—he was ashamed and could not remain tough in front of Han Xiao anymore.

Chapter 352: Dropping a Chess Piece in the Galaxy

Upon understanding Han Xiao's reasoning, Herlous' expression softened. He paused before asking the question that he had been curious about. "What's my future like?"

"You..." Han Xiao picked his ear, tutted, and said, "You sacrificed yourself during the Catastrophe, dying a horrible death."

"Ho-how horrible?" Herlous' face froze.

Han Xiao grabbed the glass, tightened his grip, and shattered it into pieces. Then he shrugged and said, "Something like that."

With a doubtful expression, Herlous said, "Although I'm not one of those grade A Supers, the beasts on this planet are not strong enough to slaughter me."

"From the parts I saw, the beast wave breached Forest City. You firmly defended the opening and fought till your last breath, using up all your energy. Alas, you were torn apart by the beast wave."

Herlous was surprised. He knew himself too well, and protecting the race was taking on a supposed responsibility. However, he definitely did not have the strength to never retreat even in his last breath. If he met lethal danger, he would run away immediately. How could he become so firm?

"How far in the future is that?"

With a shrug, Han Xiao said, "Do you think I'm some Spirit Emperor who's worshipped by the Ethereal Sect? I'm just a normal foreseer, not all-knowing."

He knew that he could not be too ahead when playing a foreseer—it was for his own protection and to make Herlous guess.

Han Xiao knew Herlous' growth path very well—he would become a selfless hero of the race in the future. As a main character that was growing, he was young, unlike Bennett who had completely matured.

Seeing Herlous' frown, Han Xiao's eyes sparkled, and he said, "What I saw were just the parts of the future from the existing scenario. If there are other factors at play, the future will change too. With Sunil's current situation, the Catastrophe will become harder and harder for you people to deal with, but that future can be avoided."

Hearing that made Herlous feel relieved. Han Xiao said that his foreseeing ability had limitations, which Herlous thought was more trustworthy. He would easily doubt those people who claimed to know everything.

“You said you have a solution?” Herlous asked sincerely.

“Sunil’s current situation is very bad. The Catastrophe is the most obvious danger, and the retreating route toward Godora is unsafe. Plus, DarkStar is hiding in the darkness. If you rise up again, you might face DarkStar’s attack...” Han Xiao gave a simple analysis, and Herlous’ expression gradually turned grimmer.

The Sunils faced danger from everywhere. Herlous could not figure out a solution, only feeling that the road ahead was filled with darkness. “That means Sunil has no way out...”

“Of course not, the way out has always been obvious, but you people subconsciously did not think in that direction.” Han Xiao smiled knowingly.

“Obvious?” Herlous was a little surprised. He frowned and thought for a while. Suddenly, his eyes widened, and he exclaimed, “You’re saying... to destroy DarkStar?”

If DarkStar is destroyed, the largest threat will no longer exist, but we are incapable of that!

Herlous widened his eyes. He did not expect Han Xiao to be this ambitious. This idea was completely insane!

“DarkStar has destroyed the home of many civilizations,” Han Xiao said calmly. “They’re notorious in the Garton Galaxy, and even in the entire Colton Star Cluster, comparing them with you people is like comparing a giant to an ant. However, they’re not invincible, or they would not hide from Godora. You people have always ignored this possibility, and it’s because of nothing other than the fear toward DarkStar, which is now deep-rooted in your hearts. You don’t even dare to think about it; you feel it can never be done.”

“It really cannot be done. DarkStar is too large and mysterious. I vividly remember every scene back when DarkStar attacked us; countless battleships covered the sky as well as countless laser beams, the planet’s crust cracked, lava shot out...”

Han Xiao cut him off, shook his head, and said, “DarkStar has many enemies. There are potential allies everywhere. Other than this path, you can only join Godora. If you are willing to give up, you will not have to fight the Catastrophe. I didn’t say to fight DarkStar right now—this is just the final target. Before that, we need to hoard our resources and stay low profile.”

“You really are daring...” Herlous shook his head. “The hope is too little. I don’t think this is a good solution.”

As if he had expected such a response, Han Xiao smiled. He did not plan on convincing Herlous with such a large target—he just threw it out to broaden Herlous’ mindset. Thus, he changed the subject and said, “Let’s put DarkStar aside for now. Regardless of whether your race rises up in the future or not, the imminent problem has to be dealt with first. Sunil’s largest issue right now is exploring this planet and dealing with the Catastrophe. About this, I have a very direct solution.”

Herlous became more focused. Plans regarding DarkStar were too far away, and the Catastrophe was an imminent and real disaster that he was more concerned about. “What solution do you have?”

“I can bring many Supers here.”

Herlous had thought that he would hear some brilliant solution, but Han Xiao's solution was similar to Sunil hiring mercenaries. After all, the 'many' in Han Xiao's sentence was surely at most thousands.

Herlous was disappointed, and it showed on his face. "Just Supers is not enough."

"Not enough?" Han Xiao smiled mysteriously. "Then what about hundreds of thousands of Supers?"

Hundreds of thousands? Herlous' expression said, *Do you think I'm three years old?*

A small mercenary from a surface civilization, how can you find so many people to help? Furthermore, Supers!

Did simplicity limit my imagination?

"I can bring waves of people even more horrifying than the Catastrophe! They don't fear death, they are brave, and they can fight well. Not just for the Catastrophe, they can also help you explore the planet during the rest of the time, digging Prophecy Stone veins, and what they need is just a small reward."

At this moment, Han Xiao smiled brightly! This was his biggest target of the trip! He was interested in the NPC resources of the entire race!

If the players were seeds, these NPCs were the soil!

Sunil was just a start; the Great Mechanic Han's plan was much deeper and longer than that!

In the late stage of Version 2.0, Planet Aquamarine's players would start to enter the galaxy through guidance from a galactic organization. Han Xiao wanted to replace that galactic organization and become a mentor.

The players knew nothing as they took their first steps into the vast galaxy, so it was the best time to be convinced. If he could give them guidance in a similar way to when he guided the new players in the novice village, he would be able to guide the players into their next area of activity. Han Xiao wanted to turn his own faction into the faction that the players joined after they entered the galaxy, to make it a compulsory part of their player career!

If he succeeds, he could have every player in Planet Aquamarine join his faction!

After all, he had already made a strong impression in the hearts of the Planet Aquamarine players!

To guide the players through their galaxy career, other than the rewards, there was another thing that had to be present, NPC resources.

Although the galaxy was vast, the players would need time and a stable activity area for them to develop themselves, and the best way would be to have one or more storylines to lead their activities. This was why Han Xiao targeted NPC organizations—not only could they provide NPC resources, they also had storylines.

Black Star Mercenary Group gave many rewards, and with Bun-Hit-Dog's videos that helped to spread publicity, it was very attractive... but that was not enough!

Faction rewards had a quota, and it was an indirect limitation to the number of members. However, if he could come to an agreement with some organizations, guiding the players there for missions and monster killing, he could break through this limitation. It was reaping the benefits of other NPCs.

Since he needed help from other NPCs, he had to emphasize on what his faction could provide in order to let the players realize the benefits of joining the Black Star Mercenary Group. Other than reward and item exchanges, there had to be privileges! As such, if he became an ally with some organizations, players in Black Star Mercenary Group would receive better treatment from that organization, or he could put prerequisites in certain areas, and joining the Black Star Mercenary Group could grant them access to better areas for development... Through various methods, he would make sure that the players knew that not only was Black Star Mercenary Group full of rewards, it would also give them many indirect benefits.

One special characteristic of a mercenary group was that the members could be spread out across maps, which was an advantage of his faction.

The players would get access to areas to do missions and ally with organizations to receive help. His faction would further develop, and in turn, he would reap benefits. This was a win for multiple parties! The players were like manpower resources, and these organizations in need of help were like the customers looking for hire. His faction would be the middleman to provide them with manpower, but the difference was, all of these manpower resources belonged to his faction, the 'middleman'.

These were just considerations from the perspective of benefits. Another way to look at it would be from the perspective of emotions.

Most mercenary groups did not have a history, and through 'helping' NPC organizations and having the players experience the storyline of these NPC organizations, it would give the players a stronger sense of reality. The mercenary group, as the bridge connecting these storylines together, would then become something that went through ups and downs with these players, adding history to the mercenary group, hence enhancing the sense of belonging that the players would have for the mercenary group.

The players not only needed benefits but also good stories, only then would they feel the role-playing part of a 'Role Playing Game', hence feeling a sense of belonging for the faction. Therefore, Han Xiao decided to shape a common enemy, and DarkStar was the most suitable target. Working together to fight against a common enemy was the easiest way to develop a sense of belonging. Thus, the Sunil race, which had a deep-seated hatred toward DarkStar, was a very suitable ally.

Furthermore, by introducing NPC organization areas to the players by the mercenary group, it could develop a blurry sense of territorial awareness in the players, which would also indirectly increase the attractiveness of his faction.

Emotions like a sense of belonging could bring many long-term benefits, even exceeding the attractiveness of the reward itself.

Players were the representatives of chaos, and the Great Mechanic Han always did everything that he could to shape himself as 'one of them' among the players, to become a shadow that followed every step that the players took in their gaming career. Developing a Faction was a key component to achieving this target.

His plot was enormous, but it needed time to slowly make it a reality. For now, he had merely taken the first step.

Chapter 353: Abducting a Man

Herlous was filled with doubts. Just as he was going to say something, Han Xiao spoke first.

“Don’t be too quick to make an assumption. Not long ago, you didn’t believe that I was a foreseer. If you hadn’t changed your mind, this meeting wouldn’t have taken place. I don’t need you to believe it right now, but think about this, do I have any reason to lie to you? Sunils never promised me any benefits, and even if what I said is not true, you people will not suffer any loss.”

“That’s true.” Herlous nodded and agreed. Indeed, even if Han Xiao was lying, his race would only maintain its current state. Herlous actually wished that what Han Xiao said to be true—if they had so much help, their losses during the Catastrophe would be vastly reduced, and they would be able to develop much quicker.

Although there was the potential threat from DarkStar, the Sunil civilization was just a tiny shrimp to them. As long as they kept a low profile, they would be able to grow stronger in the environment filled with danger.

With a solemn face, Herlous said in a low voice, “If you really can help us overcome these obstacles, Sunil will be your firmest ally. I cannot decide for the entire race, but I believe that the leaders will definitely make the same decision. Please believe in the resolve and quality of us Sunils.”

“Of course, I never doubted that.” Han Xiao’s compliment made Herlous feel very delighted.

“About your standpoint, I’ll immediately report to the Superiors...”

Han Xiao waved and said, “I suggest that you don’t say it yet. A surprise is better than a torturous wait. Plus, your words alone might not be enough to convince the Superiors of your race to believe that I’m a foreseer.”

Herlous was stunned for a moment, then said while thinking, “That’s true...”

“If I guessed correctly, just like the other Supers, you’re heading toward the galaxy to become a mercenary as well, right?” Han Xiao said.

“Yes, I’ve stayed here for too long. It’s time for me to go out and make some contributions. I’ll be leaving in two days.” Herlous nodded. Although he was very strong, he had never explored the galaxy alone.

Han Xiao’s eyes sparkled, and he smiled.

“Since we have come to an agreement, how about you join my mercenary group and become my associate?”

This moment, Han Xiao felt like he was blessed by the soul of Luffy¹. If combined with the sun behind him, outstretched arms, and hot-blooded background music, he felt like he could trigger the super strong buff [+100% Recruit Success Rate].

“Join your Black Star Mercenary Group...” Herlous was tempted. He was going to become a mercenary anyway, and working in groups would not only mean a stronger power, but he could also stay in touch with Han Xiao in the long term to witness his actions and confirm whether what he had said was true or not.

If Han Xiao was sincere in helping Sunil, he would have the chance to pay him back and help Han Xiao save his mother planet. Plus, the two of them could have detailed discussions on how to combat the DarkStar and improve on their plan. It would really be very convenient.

Furthermore, Han Xiao was very important to Sunil. They could not allow an accident happen to him, so if they were acting together, he would be able to protect him. After all, Han Xiao’s strength in Herlous’ eyes was not considered strong at all, mediocre at best.

He’s one grade lower than me, so being a mercenary is dangerous for him. If I follow him, I can prevent him from dying accidentally.

After careful consideration, Herlous felt that such a course of action was very advantageous, so he agreed on the spot. “Okay, I’ll join your mercenary group.”

Han Xiao nodded calmly, but in his heart, he was laughing uncontrollably.

Finally! All my effort in convincing him did not go to waste. I’ve finally abducted this main character!

Other than the point of contact of Sunil, Herlous would also be an NPC cadre of the mercenary group itself. He was a high-level combat power!

This job has resulted in great benefits!

Their conversation’s details were not reported to the Superiors, just as Han Xiao suggested. The rest of the Sunils did not know, only Herlous.

Two days later, the Galactic Travel Agency that they had called arrived at Planet Sunil. The group of players followed Han Xiao up the spaceship in anticipation. Suddenly, a tall and wide Sunil in casual clothes walked over. After staying so long in Forest city and seeing the promotions from the military, they immediately recognized that it was Herlous, the character who was being shaped as a hero figure.

“Where’s your armor?”

“Lent to the researcher institution. When they derive the blueprint, I can take it back to use, so I only brought this weapon...”

Herlous turned sideways, displaying the rectangular metal silver block tied behind his back. It was the folded Battleship Slicing Blade.

“I see...” Han Xiao felt a little disappointed. The Commander Class armor was a piece of great equipment, but he did not even meet the prerequisite of the NCO Class armor yet; Commander Class would be even more impossible for him to derive. There would be chances in the future anyway, so there was no need to be impatient.

Han Xiao turned to the players and made the introduction. “This is Herlous, a grade B Super. From today onward, he’ll be our comrade, a new member of our mercenary group.”

Holy! The players' jaw almost dropped on the floor—they were stunned.

The captain has abducted the hero of a race!

"Why did you join us?"

"What's your class?"

"Did you make some kind of deal with Black Star?"

They were very curious about this new friend and overwhelmed him with questions. Herlous was surrounded in the middle and felt the passion from his 'teammates'. He was very not used to it, and he was forcing a smile.

The result of the detection from players was all question marks. They were very curious as to how Han Xiao got in touch with a grade B Super. This was someone who was at the top of high-level areas, probably the strongest in their mercenary group.

Someone who was even stronger than Han Xiao joining their faction had made the players very excited.

After some time, the spaceship slowly landed. Herlous finally escaped from the players and walked to Han Xiao. He stood beside Han Xiao, looking up at the spaceship, and his face was a little stiff.

Han Xiao turned to look at him, raised an eyebrow, and said, "You seem to be a little nervous. Have you never been into the galaxy before?"

"This is my first time." Herlous rubbed his hands against each other to wipe his sweat off. "I'm actually a little scared of heights..."

"You're a shame to Pugilists." Han Xiao was speechless.

They boarded the spaceship. It slowly rose and flew into space with Forest City becoming smaller in their sight. This hiring job was finally complete, and they had left with one more member than when they came. The Catastrophe on Planet Sunil was very beneficial for all of them, especially Han Xiao.

Planting the seed in Sunil this time means I'm on track with the DarkStar storyline. The first step of the plan is also complete. Han Xiao crossed his arms as he pondered.

The spaceship's destination was Juberly Hub. Before the next operation, Han Xiao wanted to return to rest and digest the things that they had earned on this trip.

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In Forest City, one of the military bases was open as a recruitment site.

After the Catastrophe, it was the time for new soldiers to join the army again. Youngsters coming of age had to join the compulsory military service and undergo military training. Youngsters came one after another, accompanied by their parents.

Lana was very early. He was only allowed into the recruitment site after displaying his ID card—any unauthorized personnel were not allowed in, including parents.

When he turned back to look, Lana saw his parents waving. They had kind and loving smiles on their faces as usual.

He looked at them with a lot of emotions in his eyes, then followed the group into the military base.

After queuing for a very long time, it was finally Lana's turn. The officer sitting behind the table said casually without even raising his head, "Name, then take a number to go for a medical examination."

Lana took a deep breath before saying seriously, "Sir, I'd like to request to join the army."

The officer looked up and glanced at him. "Do your parents know?"

"No."

"Youngster, your parents definitely warned you not to join the army, didn't they?"

"Yes sir, but I believe I'm making the right decision."

"Once the request is approved, you have to be fully responsible for your decision," the officer said coldly. "You won't be allowed to take it back, are we clear?"

"Crystal clear."

A slight smile appeared on the officer's cold face. He opened the drawer, inside which was a thick stack of army application forms. He took one out and passed it to Lana.

Lana was about to take it, but he realized that the officer was holding onto the application form too tightly. At that moment, the officer said coldly, "This is your last chance to change your mind."

Lana snatched the application form with a firm expression.

"Good, the area to join the army is at that side. Don't block the people behind."

Lana followed the officer's finger and looked over. It was an empty warehouse that served as the recruitment site for the official army. Youngsters waiting to fill out their application forms had already filled the entire warehouse.

Chapter 354: Speeding! (1)

After a month on Planet Sunil, Han Xiao and the others finally returned to Juberly Hub. As soon as they were in the Hub Hall, the first thing that Han Xiao did was change the medium resting room into a large stronghold. The rental increased, from 40 to 100 Enas, as did the space.

The better the faction's base looked, the more reliable the players would feel. Han Xiao actually thought that a spaceship was the best mobile base, but a spaceship was way too expensive; they would not be able to afford one even if they sold the kidneys of all the players. The human body did not sell very well in the Galactic Organ Market after all.

Excess money was meant for splurging—the consumption concept of a Mechanic was always 'money spent will always make returns'.

This trip was very profitable. More than ten thousand had landed in the players' pockets, and Han Xiao would take that off their hands to gather the funds to buy two class advancement knowledges.

Pro players will always use their residual money to buy equipment. There were private equipment stores in Juberly Hub, and these were all Han Xiao's competitors.

It's impossible to have the players only buy things from me. Players have their personal preferences, so I can't rob away their freedom, or it will be bad for faction development. Nobody likes to be forced. Plus, the things I sell might not satisfy all of their needs... Anyway, I only need a part of the players' fortune, and the profit is high enough.

Although Han Xiao had plenty of ways to make money, he always kept that desire controlled.

He updated the faction exchange list, adding Offensive, Defensive, and Scouting Enlistee Class armor, with a prerequisite of 500 faction relationship points. Then he set the exchange price at 800 Enas.

In the new stronghold, before the players had started roaming outside, someone had already discovered the new items in the faction shop.

"Is this the Enlistee Class armor that we saw in Sunil?" Frenzied Sword said in surprise.

"It is their technology indeed," Hao Tian said. "Why can we purchase another organization's equipment from the faction?"

The players became curious.

Bun-Hit-Dog had a flash of insight and gave a sensible guess. "A mercenary group might be a faction with growing potential. After completing different mission hires, the faction shop will be updated. The more missions completed, the larger the faction will grow..."

The players thought of Herlous joining and the growth potential on the faction interface when they first joined Black Star, and they felt it made sense. Instantly, they became excited.

The actions of the players could make the faction grow!

"We might have joined a special faction!" Frenzied Sword was overjoyed.

They were all pro players, so they immediately realized the advantages of the mercenary group. If they underwent missions from different organizations, the exchange list would be updated with equipment from those organizations, which meant that the more missions they did, the richer the faction exchange list would become. All they had to do was increase the relationship points with the faction itself—it would save them a lot of time!

They were the first batch of players entering the galaxy, and they had gone through a very difficult selection process. Was joining this faction the hidden benefit?

The players felt that this specialness of the mercenary group came from Han Xiao. After all, storyline main characters would definitely possess something special. The players trusted Han Xiao very strongly. No matter how shocking the things that he did were, it all seemed possible—this was the impression that Han Xiao had forged in the players' minds.

To make the players feel that the growth of the faction was 'driven' by them, when they clearly saw the growth of the faction, they would slowly develop a sense of belonging. This was the development path that he had set from the start. Now, the players finally felt this specialness and freshness; his strategy had achieved its anticipated result.

At this time, the players had money in their pockets and were willing to spend. A few of them bought the Enlistee Class armor on the spot. Han Xiao did not have any completed products with him, so it had to be built. The other players wanted to observe when the finished product was made.

During the battle on Sunil, every player had been tempted by the single unit armors, but sadly, they had not been given a way to purchase them. Second Prince almost wanted to steal one.

"We have battled for more than a month; let's all take a break and rest for some time."

Han Xiao dismissed them, left the stronghold, and rented a mechanical modification room.

He first spent millions of experience and upgraded the armor blueprint level to Lv.6, only then did he start to build. There was still a lot of material left from what he had brought from Planet Aquamarine—only a small part of the Sunil Enlistee Class armor required him to buy materials from the galaxy. The cost to make one was only about 50 Enas.

For the time being, there was no mission for the mercenary group. The players could finally explore Juberly Hub freely, and naturally, they would not just spend money in one place.

There were many shops in the hub center, and it was full of variety and choices. During this resting period, they witnessed equipment from many different civilizations and bought a lot of gear, such as arms with stronger power, small supportive machinery, and so on.

At the same time, they noticed that some machinery shops were selling single unit armors as well. This was very common in the galaxy, and although these armors' designs were very different from the ones on Sunil, their technology levels were all rather basic. However, these shops were selling them at a way higher price than exchanging in the faction—even the cheapest one was 3,200 Enas, four times the faction price!

The players became worried because of this. They knew that the price was usually correlated with quality, but Han Xiao's armor was so cheap. Would its attributes be very low?

They memorized the attributes of the armor in the shop and planned to make a comparison when the finished product from the faction was complete.

Although Black Star's equipment had good prices, when the pro players were rich, they never looked at price, only quality.

...

Herlous went to the mercenary hall alone to register. He joined the Black Star Mercenary Group then opened the mercenary group records.

Black Star Mercenary group

Credibility Rating: 154

Scale: 53 members

Class C: 52 members

Class B: 1 member

Missions Completed: 1 (Daily Low-Level Missions Excluded)

Active region: Garton Galaxy

Records: [Sunil Defense Battle] (Expand/Collapse)

Creator: Black Star – Han Xiao

Creation date: Galaxy Calendar Year 688, 02 October

Summary: A small mercenary group with a certain amount of combat power and one grade B Super.

“A mercenary group created little more than a month back. Black Star didn’t lie to me...” When Herlous saw there was only one grade B Super, he knew that he was the strongest in this mercenary group. He could not help but feel a sense of responsibility.

For the future of his race, he had to protect Han Xiao. He hoped that this captain would not choose hiring missions that were too dangerous.

On the other side, Han Xiao received a notification from the interface while he was building armor in the workshop.

Faction Reward Limit: 135,7000

Faction Leader Level: 80 (+64,000 reward quota)

Cadres: Herlous (B) (+20,000 reward quota)

Faction Size: 52 (+20,000 reward quota)

Renown: 7 (+14,000 reward quota)

Legendary Points: Leader (3) +15% reward quota

Allies and Enemies: None

His friendliness with Sunil was on a personal level, so it had yet to become a faction ally.

Han Xiao felt refreshed. The faction had gained its first cadre and taken its first step. Plus, the quota had increased by 20,000, showing that recruiting cadres was indeed a good way to quickly increase the quota.

Two days later, Han Xiao had built six sets of Enlistee Class armor. The players could not wait to equip them, and they instantly felt the benefits of the armor.

Single Unit Armor was something that most civilizations would research on when they reached a certain technological level. Its original purpose was to let users have stronger physical capabilities and adapt better to different environments. The first time wearing single unit armor was like opening the gate to a new world for the players.

In the stronghold, a few players that bought the armor were controlling them excitedly. The fresh feeling had them overjoyed, and the other players surrounded them and touched the armor with curiosity.

“How does it feel?”

“It looks heavy, but it’s actually really easy to move. There are parts inside that helps me move.”

Rainy Kim frowned and said, “Piles of iron, they look so ugly.”

All the male players stared at her. It was the first time that they had shared a common enemy.

“You don’t know sh*t. The mechanical suit is men’s romance!”

Chapter 355: Speeding! (2)

After playing with the armor for a while, only then did the players remember to compare the attributes between the Sunil Soldier Armor with the armor in the shops, and the result was that it was almost the same!

Same quality, a quarter of the price—this was more than worth it!

The players were over the moon. The rest of the players did not observe anymore and paid willingly.

Fifty something people, more than 40,000 Enas, about the price of two knowledges... Han Xiao smiled. There was more!

Right after, he added a new option in the faction shop page—equipment enhancement!

Han Xiao had held back when he built the armor. Their attributes were just the ‘Basic Version’. This was to provide room for enhancement so that he could open another revenue stream!

Repairs and enhancements were long term incomes. Han Xiao had multiple machinery enhancement abilities, so he had what it took to enter the enhancement business. Naturally, Han Xiao was not going to miss this opportunity. Also, he was going to control the level of enhancement that he gave and would not do full enhancements the very first time, leaving room for improvement, hence attracting the players to keep spending.

The Great Mechanic Han was not greedy—by dividing one thing and selling them separately, he could maximize his profits, and the players that did not know this were willing to pay for it. Han Xiao competed with other shops by using cheap, high-quality equipment, to first let the players buy the equipment, then introduce the enhancement option, turning a one-time sale into long term profit.

After all, he had occasionally played single player games in his previous life too, and he was inspired by the gaming companies turning one game into several DLCs ¹.

Han Xiao felt nostalgic. Back when he was young, he had been an honest man, but his tiny and pure heart had become polluted by society. Turning bad was not one man's fault, it was the world's fault.

For the following few days, Han Xiao built all the armor. Every player wore Enlistee Class armor—it was like the mercenary group had its uniform. Although the players were all Supers, Enlistee Class armor still proved to be helpful.

As a firm supporter of the Great Mechanic Han, Frenzied Sword was the first one to buy the enhancement. The attributes of the armor increased by around ten percent after the enhancement. Multiple enhancements of the same equipment would have an increased cost. As for the Enlistee Class armor, the first enhancement only cost 60 Enas, the second cost 100, and the third 150. Every fourth enhancement in a row, the price would have a big leap from the previous one; the fourth enhancement cost 300.

The attributes increased by eight to twelve percent every enhancement. It was low-cost, high profit, and Frenzied Sword vouched for it. The others thought that it was a good deal and followed. After the Sunil mission, the players all had more than 10,000 Enas, and it was burning a hole in their pockets.

Han Xiao had left plenty of room for enhancements when he made the armor—it had to be enhanced at least seven times to reach the limit of his ability. The enhancement business brought made him 23,000 Enas, which meant on average, the fifty plus players all enhanced their armor at least three times!

Han Xiao made 40,000 from selling the armor and 23,000 from enhancing them. Now with more than 67,000 Enas in his account, he more than enough to buy knowledges.

He was having a great time selling, while Herlous was speechless. He found Han Xiao and said with surprise, "How do you know our single unit armor technology?"

He had built Sunil's armor, which would definitely make Herlous question him. Han Xiao laughed and said, "I derived the blueprint during battlefield repairs. Aren't I very skilled?"

Herlous' face twitched. Han Xiao had stolen Sunil's technology, yet he had asked a Sunil to compliment his skill. Even his Battleship Slicing Blade could not cut through skin this thick!

Anyway, with Sunil at its current state, there was no point dwelling on this. Herlous still had to stay with Han Xiao, so he did not care about it. Furthermore, it was not any kind of rare technology—most civilizations had basic single unit armor, just with different styles.

...

In the Area Exchange Center of Juberly Hub, Han Xiao was looking to buy some knowledge.

Having finally made enough money, he was about to complete the class advancement that he had been stuck on for so long. It went without saying, he was quite excited.

The Colton Star Cluster area only had eight Mechanic class advancement knowledges, and Han Xiao glanced through and swiftly chose two.

[Heavy Machine Modification], selling at 25,000!

[Advanced Electromagnetism], selling at 37,000!

Learning... Successfully learned! You have learned [Heavy Machine Modification]!

Learning... Successfully learned! You have learned [Advanced Electromagnetism]!

Class Advancement Requirements: LV 80, 400 INT, learned 5 Mechanic Class Advancement Knowledges

Class Advancement Succeed!

LV 80 Class Advancement Mission completion detected!

Class Advancement Succeed! END Attribute Boost enhanced. 1 END = 40 Max Health = 50 Max Stamina!

You have received a new class, [Data Mechanic LV 1].

+100 Energy, +3 DEX, +2 END, +4 INT

You have received 5 Free Attribute Points.

You have received 1 Potential Point.

You have acquired skill [Blueprint Refinement]!

You have acquired skill [High Concentration Refining]!

You have acquired skill [Magnetic Vision—Data Flow]!

You have acquired talent [Machinery Analytical Comprehension]!

The energy in his body was cheering. His class advancement made Han Xiao feel like he had broken through some kind of shackle. His vision became black, and it felt like hours had passed. However, it was actually only half a second. His vision then recovered, but it was very different with before—he could sense much tinier things.

Every time his strength increased, he felt like he had been reborn.

Data Mechanic was also called Experienced Mechanic. His understanding of machinery became even better. The Machinery Affinity at this period would make a huge leap, and among the four new abilities that he had just received, [Magnetic Vision—Data Flow] and [Machinery Analytical Comprehension] were both able to largely increase Machinery Affinity.

Machinery Affinity was a key attribute of the Mechanic, representing the speed, attributes, and power of building and using machinery. [Magnetic Vision—Data Flow] was an active skill, and after activating it, he would enter a special magnetic vision. His magnetic property energy would become his extended senses, revealing the details of the machinery with a magnetic field.

Han Xiao immediately leveled up this skill to Lv.10. Its effect was a twenty-five to fifty percent increase in Machinery Affinity with a twenty energy cost per minute. The percentage increase changed randomly every minute. As its cost was very low, this skill could be activated almost continuously. Unlike [Surging Mechanical Force], this skill could be used in the building process too.

[Machinery Analytical Comprehension] was a passive talent, increasing machinery affinity directly according to Intelligence. Its effect was very powerful—every ten Intelligence increased machinery affinity by one percent. Han Xiao had more than four hundred Intelligence at this moment. This was a key ability for the current stage, increasing the benefit of the Intelligence attribute toward Mechanics. For the foreseeable future, this would be a core ability.

[High Concentration Refining] was the upgraded version of [Basic Refining]. It increased the strength of the raw materials, a very important effect. [Blueprint Refinement] was a passive skill, and it had a chance to be triggered during equipment building. That equipment's blueprint level would temporarily increase by at most three levels, increasing the end product's attributes. There was also a chance to 'crit' during the building process, resulting in an equipment of a higher grade. The chance depended on the user's Intelligence and Luck.

Han Xiao still had 2,500,000,000 experience, so he immediately leveled up all those skills and talents to the max level, using close to 50,000,000 at once. Then, Han Xiao also increased his main class to the max level, LV 15.

After LV 80, the experience to level up multiplied. One level required tens of millions of experience, so leveling up fifteen levels at once cost him 900,000,000 experience. Yet, he did not even blink.

[Data Mechanic] leveled up to LV 15 (max).

+240 Energy, +3 DEX, +2 END, +4 INT

You have received 5 Free Attribute Points.

You have received 1 Potential Point.

From LV 80 to LV 95 in a flash! It even exceeded the max player level allowed in Version 2.0!

Han Xiao's advantages of being ahead were even more enlarged.

Energy filled his body. If it had been a stream before, it was now a wide river!

Han Xiao took a deep breath and felt the strength of his body. Reveling in the raging energy within him, he opened the interface, spending all the Free Attribute points in Intelligence. Then, he observed his attributes go through astonishing changes.

Level: 95

Main Class: Mechanic

Attributes: 121 STR, 244 DEX, 214 END, 570 INT, 21 MYS, 14 CHA, 1 LUK

Free Attribute Points: 0

Potential Points: 82

Health: 13,057

Stamina: 15,420

Energy: 5,210 (LV 9)

Power Level: 5,377 Ona

Grade: B

[You're a strong enough Super, a pillar level even in the galaxy. With this level of strength, you're superior to most beings.]

I became grade B! Han Xiao smiled. 5,000 increase in just max health and a new attribute boost level when my energy reached 5,000. My attributes should be thirty to forty percent higher than before!

Finally, he was grade B. He could now protect himself to a certain level even in the galaxy, his combat power was far beyond grade C, and he had two new class advancement knowledges. His combat style could be improved once more!

Chapter 356: Breaking News, Universe Royalty's Reward

The prerequisite of the Sunil NCO Class armor had been met, and Han Xiao could reverse engineer the armor and draw up the blueprint. He did not want to sell it to the players at the moment. After all, he had just finished selling the Enlistee Class armor, and releasing the new armor would affect the rewarding buff from the Enlistee Class armor. So, he chose to wait for a while.

I have five class advancement knowledge in my hands right now. With all these new blueprints, I can finally upgrade by equipment... Han Xiao stroke his chin and fell into deep thought. He currently had four battle styles: the core Amphiptere, Compounded Magnetic Chain Split Blades and Thermo-Electrical Incisor Gloves for close combat, Sonic Sphere for mid-range combat, and Wrath of Garrett while kiting for long range combat. All four modes provided well-rounded combat abilities for Han Xiao.

[Heavy Machine Modification] gave him the skill to create large scale machinery, and [Advanced Electromagnetism] could help Han Xiao create more stable weapons running on electromagnetic force. Electromagnetic weapons were the next stage for normal weapons, and they were more powerful compared to weapons running on gunpowder. These two knowledges were extremely important, and Han Xiao had to upgrade them sooner or later. Thus, he used sixteen potential points to max out both knowledges.

If he wanted to update his combat styles, then his close combat weapons were outdated. Luckily, he could use these new knowledges to build bigger and badder toys. For mid-range weapons, he just had to change his gunpowder weapons into Electromagnetic weapons. The Ghost sniper rifle had always been incomplete, and the Advanced Electromagnetism was the key to completion.

For Amphiptere, since there was nothing that could drastically revolutionize the armor, Han Xiao only had plans to just add a few new functions and attachable charms. He cracked his knuckles and got to work.

Not only was he going to renew his combat styles, he also had the power to create large machinery. Han Xiao planned to create a vehicle on the ground to travel with the entire faction. As soon as he thought of this idea, one word popped out in his head...

Genius!

Han Xiao's eyes sparkled.

The vehicle can also be the symbol of this mercenary group, which can raise the interests of the players as it shows that our group is growing together. If I can use the Advanced Electromagnetism to improve this heavy machinery, then isn't it just a simpler version of an Electromagnetic Rail Cannon? A ground vehicle is the best out of all other vehicles!

He dove straight into his work. He bought plenty of spare parts and locked himself in the tuning room. Before he went in, he told the players to rest well in the Hub.

The crowd did not have any objections. They had changed compared to when they first arrived in space. The players understood the benefits that they would get if they listened to Han Xiao—even Li Ge stayed put in the Hub Center. The players talked and interacted with travelers from different races. Getting to know more about civilization was an entertaining experience. Although the professional players were materialistic and focused on results, there were quite a lot of players like Maple Moon who enjoyed stories, and they were attracted to the fascination of the galaxy.

During the resting time, Bun-Hit-Dog started to make his second episode of the Black Star Series. He continued with his TV show editing style. Not only Planet Aquamarine, audiences all over the galaxy could not wait for the second episode. As soon as the show was released, hundreds of thousands of viewers joined in an instant.

The show continued from the last episode. It started off from the first mission of the Mercenary Group, and the show told the tragic story of Sunil and the scenes from the Catastrophe. The players who did not step into the galaxy were sucked into the narrative as if they were there. The mercenary group was the eyes of millions of viewers. Through the experiences of the journey, the audiences got to know more about the galaxy along with the mercenary group, so they already had a deep bond with the group.

The episode continued until the end of the Catastrophe. The mercenary group gained a new member along the way named Herlous, as if he was a main character in a TV show. This person instantly grabbed the attention of the audience. Bun-Hit-Dog showed the new items in the Faction stop while the narrator explained the potential growth of this faction. The audience had a lot of expectations for the future adventures of the mercenary group, and at the same time, they became even more jealous of the players that had joined Han Xiao.

Han Xiao also watched the show and was satisfied with Bun-Hit-Dog's work. The show could slowly be integrated into people's lives and create an emotional bond with the audience.

...

In the Hub Center's Battle Simulation Room, Herlous swung his Battleship Slicing Blade and tore the simulated beasts into pieces. He had not fought in a long time, so he came back to the room and to practice every day. Because Han Xiao was drowned in his building and creation, he did not update the mercenaries' information. So, in Herlous' mind, he was still the only Class B Supers in the group. Thus, he felt a huge responsibility on his shoulder and practiced diligently.

After battling for a few hours, all the simulations disappeared. The battlefield filled with corpses turned back into an empty white room. Herlous withdrew his sword, wiped his sweat from his forehead, and headed out the room. At this time, Frenzied Sword, Hao Tian, and King Admiral walked out from the gravity room on the side. They saw Herlous and hurriedly walked up to him.

"So, you guys are training, too." Herlous nodded at the members. Over the past few days, the players had been nice to him and were full of passion. He felt that he was getting along with the team. Although, Herlous was out weirded out by their names. It seemed that different cultures had different ways of naming. He thought that it was the culture of Han Xiao's planet.

He was just wondering why these players could not die. Of course, the players could not tell the truth, so Herlous just thought that it was an Esper power in this group.

"Can you teach us some battle techniques?" Hao Tian asked.

In the eyes of the players, Herlous was an unopened chest. They tried to activate some certain events such as learning a new skill. However, Herlous did not have the ability to pass down skills, so all he could do was offer a few pointers. However, under his teaching, the players' close combat skills would significantly improve. One would need some luck to activate the event, which mostly depended on Herlous' mood. However, the players would still try and ask once in a while.

Herlous felt important after being in this team. Suddenly, a local news agency building sounded an emergency alarm.

"... Breaking news. A team of Silvers were attacked by scavengers during their travel in the Shattered Star Ring. Some of them were kidnapped. From our intel, the point of attack was Colton Star Cluster, Fawn Galaxy, Star Zone 4. The size of the scavenger pack is unknown. The escaped Silvers are now hiring mercenary groups to save the remaining Silvers with a high reward..."

This information got Herlous' attention. The Silvers? This race was from the Silver Spirits Sea that was far away. It was the race of Universe Royalty!

Some powerful and advanced civilizations were called the Universe Royalty. The three Universal Civilization that colonized the universe were of course the Universal Royalty. The Silvers were not on that level yet, but it was a long-lasting advanced civilization, and they also had a special position in the universe. At the same time, this Universe Royalty was highly demanded in the slave market, so they were the perfect prey for the scavengers.

The Silvers were rich, so the reward would undoubtedly be insanely high. Herlous, who was short on cash, was slightly moved. He had to try and convince Black Star to seize this opportunity to earn free money.

The area under the rule of Godora was the Garton Galaxy. The Fawn Galaxy was next to Garton, but it was not as large as Garton. A few civilizations that were slightly weaker than Godora had control over different Star Zones, but conflicts often occurred on the borders. Although they were no actual wars, there was a lot of chaos, and no one had power over those areas.

Fawn Galaxy's Star Zone 4 was right on top of the borders, where it was under no one's jurisdiction. The neighboring civilization ignored the calls of help from the Silvers, so they had to pay high rewards to search for mercenaries to help.

Chapter 357: New Gear, New Objectives

"Silvers?"

Han Xiao received Herlous' message while in the machinery repair room and was shocked. He quickly turned off the humming equipment around him, and the room instantly quieted down. The smell of red-hot metal drifted through the room.

He knew that the Silvers were an advanced civilization that hailed from a prosperous region of space in the Silver Spirits Sea. They were a member of the Federation of Light along with many other advanced civilizations. They minded their own business, and their region of space was very safe, completely unlike the precarious living environment of the Shattered Star Ring.

The Silvers had a very long history. This kind of space royalty rarely visited a place like the Shattered Star Ring. Yet, they were... travelling there? Han Xiao honestly did not know what tourist attraction in the Shattered Star Ring could have attracted such high-end folks. What would these people, born in the magnificence of their planet-sprawling cities, want to see in the broken streets of the Shattered Star Ring? The danger level there was ten out of ten. Did this group of Silvers travel there for the thrill?

Having their companions kidnapped to become slaves was indeed thrilling.

The Silvers' reproductive capability left much to be desired, so they did not have a very large population. However, they were a species that had evolved to a very high level. To many forces, highly evolved species' DNA was like a treasure cove, filled with the secrets of the species' powerful and ancient lineage. One of the common things of these space royalties was that they were very rare. The Silvers

could be used to net an astronomically high price on the slave market, and this was probably why the scavengers had been willing to take the risk.

“Black Star, the Silvers are willing to pay a hefty sum. They are currently holding a massive recruitment for mercenaries. This is a good opportunity to make money,” said Herlous in a deep voice. Herlous had not been doing anything for the few days prior, and he was in a hurry to make money. Thus, he had notified Han Xiao of the news the moment that he heard.

However, Han Xiao shook his head. “The Silvers are indeed quite generous with their reward, but this isn’t an assignment we can take on. Large mercenary groups such as the Sky Ring Army will fight tooth and nail to take on the job. We won’t even get a chance to compete for it.”

“But we should at least try. There has to be a chance.”

The mercenary game was full of competition. The large, higher-end mercenary groups could easily get the big jobs. The clients trusted in their reputation and credibility rating. This time was no exception. Only those big-name mercenary groups had gone to answer the Silvers’ recruitment posts. Herlous actually knew that what Han Xiao said was very logical, but he would not give up.

Han Xiao remained silent. An event like this was not in his memories. Based on the timelines, this event probably happened during Version 1.0, and all of the players back then had still been rolling around in the dirt on their own beginner planets with no chance to interact with an event in space such as this. There was no news on an event like this even after the players finally went to space. This meant that it was not anything major and was most likely resolved successfully, without the chance to affect the future much.

To a sudden event like this, Han Xiao tended to be more careful. He already had the knowledge of many other Storylines, so should he still take the risk of participating in an unknown Storyline? It was not him being afraid of getting in harm’s way or changing the development of the Storyline; he was someone full of the adventurer’s spirit and also a stout believer of the man’s romance. However, the most pressing task right now was to get stronger, and taking on the Storylines that he knew about was the safest way to achieve that. He did not want to cause any trouble that could be avoided.

“Let me think about it,” said Han Xiao.

“Okay. I will be on standby.” Herlous nodded. Han Xiao was, after all, the leader of their Mercenary Group. Although he was currently the strongest member among them, he would never let pride cloud his judgement.

After switching off his communicator, Han Xiao turned to inspect the fruits of his labor from the past few days. All the firearms had been replaced with electromagnetic versions. This included pistols, sniper rifles, and assault rifles. The conventional firearms that he was able to produce now were all at least purple gear, with an attack power of around 80 – 140. However, although the electromagnetic weapons that he had created were only of green or blue rarity at best, the damage was at least above 230. The effective range had also been increased by three to five times.

The electromagnetic weapons were much different from the conventional firearms in structure. The inside of the gun barrels consisted of intricate layers of magnetic coils, while the outside was covered by an insulating material that was connected to a bolt. It looked like a long, rectangular box. Every time

that the gun fired, the bolt would contract backward before springing back into its original position. As the ammunition for electromagnetic weapons consisted only of singular pieces of metal, there was no need to discard the ammo shells like for conventional firearms, greatly increasing the firing rate. Also, electromagnetic guns had great penetrative power.

A sickle-shaped sword was resting on the workbench to the right. This weapon was nearly two meters in length and looked like the scythe used by the reaper himself. Han Xiao held the scythe, and a burst of energy snaked out from his palm into the handle. The next moment, a blinding ray of electrical light shot out from the handle, and lightning-like patterns could be seen all over the blade of the weapon.

The scythe's blade gave off a faint bluish glow while giving humming noises. Han Xiao casually swung his hand and left a crescent shaped afterimage, with sparks of electricity remaining in the air, as if the air itself had been burned apart. After doing a few more test swings, he pressed hard on the end of the handle, and the blade that was well over a meter long broke off into pieces and reformed into a thick electrical snake. This greatly increased the range of the weapon, and the individual pieces of the blade could reform into all manners of shapes, suitable for all types of melee attacks. Han Xiao nodded in satisfaction and reined in his energy. The black blade instantly shrunk until it was only a forty-centimeter-long baton. It could even be further folded for ease of travel.

[Battle Scythe – Razor's Edge] was a Super equipment and extremely powerful. He had been able to produce this original weapon by combining the blueprint of some sort of mechanical scythe with the Incisor Gloves using the electromagnetic blades theory. This was his own creation and suited his own combat style. It had a more-than-formidable attack power and was going to be his new main melee weapon due to his recent increase in strength.

Other than that, he also gave Amphiptere a major upgrade. The exoskeleton was outfitted with a thick armor, making it look like the armor of a heavily armored knight. The double layer of armor made the suit taller than 3.5 meters. Both the defensive and damage output had been improved. This was his trump card for assaulting heavily fortified positions head on and would not be used all the time.

Han Xiao did not give the new savage-looking exoskeleton a name. However, Amphiptere had basically gained two new modes since its creation. When equipped with the wings, it would be [Amphiptere – Flight Mode], and with the thick layer of armor, it would be [Amphiptere – Siege Mode].

The transport, due to the internal structure being too complicated, was still in production. However, he did manage to synthesize a blueprint for it. It was a transport method that would be able to move in the air, on the ground, and underwater. It was just that the appearance was far different from Han Xiao's ideal.

Basically, it was a big ball...

Han Xiao was able to make a lot of new equipment and tools just by utilizing the basics of the two newly acquired advanced knowledges. However, most of them were add-ons at best, and he still had not made any revolutionary breakthroughs. Based on his current level, the features of the mechanic class that was available to him were early to mid-game.

He was currently already LV 95, a level that had only been attainable for players after Version 3.0 back then. This just went to show how disgustingly difficult the class change requirements were. The abilities

that Han Xiao wanted to obtain were the abilities that signified the rise of the mechanics in Version 3.0 as a player class—Instant Assembly and Advanced Compression Technology.

Only by getting those abilities could a Mechanic truly start treading upon the path to become a one-man army.

The release of those abilities would mean that the mechanic players had finally made it out of the early-game. Many kinds of mechanical combat styles were based on the different kinds of Compression Technology.

Due to the increasing weight of the equipment, mobility and ease of carrying became extremely important for items. Like the Godoran equipment, Compression Technology could help mechanics significantly reduce the size of inactive machinery and other equipment. This meant that the number of tools and items that a mechanic player could bring along in battle would increase drastically, and they no longer had to carry along a burdensome bag everywhere. They could instantly raise an iron fortress out of nowhere.

For example, Amphiptere's newest exoskeleton add-on would be able to be folded over and over until it got an easily carryable size. However, it could also go into siege mode whenever needed. Or, the mobile rover turrets that were originally impossible to bring around would be compressed into small cubes that could be chucked into battle to gang on an opponent.

There was a total of three core knowledges for this kind of ability: [Instant Dismantle and Repair], [High-density Material Compression Technology], and [Beginner Spatial Technology]. They were all advanced knowledges.

Unfortunately, these three important knowledges would most definitely not be allowed to circulate around the market in the Shattered Star Ring, and their possession was highly monitored by the large space civilizations.

Frowning, Han Xiao fell into deep thought. *These abilities are crucial for a mechanic's growth. Since the markets in the Shattered Star Ring doesn't offer them, the most direct way would be to join a large intergalactic organization and grind their contribution points to exchange them for them. This is the method most players decided to go with in the past.*

However, there was another way—leave the Shattered Star Ring and try my luck in another region in space. The even more advanced civilizations don't treat this kind of knowledge with that much importance, and it could be leaked. However, finding them on the market will be completely based on luck, and the chance isn't very high...

After touching his chin, the Great Mechanic Han muttered in a grave voice, "The Silvers are a considerably advanced race. They definitely had access to those three knowledges. If we can get employed by them, then maybe I could try asking for that knowledge in exchange for the job reward. But the chance will also not be that great..."

After thinking for a while, Han Xiao decided that he might as well try. There was nothing wrong with dreaming. The Great Mechanic Han was the kind of person to always buy a lottery ticket. So what if he never won? At least then there would be no regrets.

After sorting out his equipment and paying the fees for using the repair room, he left for the Mercenary Alliance's lobby. There was a sea of people here, and there were many more mercenaries than the usual. They were probably there due to the Silvers' recruitment notice and wanted to try their luck.

Han Xiao switched on the mercenary interface and saw the recruitment post sent out by the Silvers at the very top of the notice board. However, he got a shock immediately after opening up the message.

"Minimum Credibility Points: 400"

400? We don't even have half that number. Han Xiao was speechless. *What is this? Are my dreams going to be crushed before I can even dream?*

"Hey, Black Star!"

Just as he was about to leave, someone suddenly called over to him from the side. Han Xiao turned and saw a gown-wearing blue-skinned shorty sprint over with that short pair of legs of his while running out of breath.

Han Xiao widened his eyes and slapped his forehead as he realized and said, "Hey, uhm, you're that... right? Wait, don't tell me. I almost got it. You're called... called the... Nylon people?"

"It's Blue-Ni!"

Martin was mad, and his nail like hair all grew longer, turning from nails into long metal needles. This was one of the signs that a Blue-Ni was angry.

"What the..." Han Xiao's eyes shook. He was almost feeling sorry for himself that he had to hold back from calling the other person a porcupine.

Chapter 358: Sky Ring's Invitation

"What do you want?" Han Xiao thought that this was odd.

He had only met Martin once—a month ago when Martin tried to recruit mercenaries personally. Han Xiao had somewhat of a bone to pick with this blue-skinned shorty as the latter had turned his mercenary group down due to their lack of an impressive resume.

Martin rubbed his hands together awkwardly and said in a sincere voice, "Uhm... Are you interested in accepting a job? It's the same one as before. Our research team is going to investigate a barren planet..."

"It's already been a month, and you still haven't found anyone to go with you?"

Martin did not know what to say to that. Recruiting personally like he did would normally only attract the weaker no-name mercenaries. After a long time, he finally could not wait anymore and posted this

job onto the Mercenary Alliance's job board. However, there were still no willing recruits due to the laughably poor pay, so the investigative operation was still on hold.

A few days ago, after the mercenaries who had participated in the Sunil missions returned, news of a Mercenary Group full of people capable of revival spread around and piqued the interests of many other mercenaries, causing them to become somewhat famous in the Juberly Hub.

Martin heard about this news by chance and realized that the group that he had rejected earlier was actually very powerful and that he had missed out on a good opportunity. He was full of regret and so had sprinted over the moment that he saw Han Xiao in the lobby.

"It's still the same price. 400 Enas per person. Let's hurry and go now." Martin had a face full of expectations. Han Xiao had registered once earlier, and he thought that he would not reject the offer.

"Go look for someone else." Han Xiao shook his head and turned to leave. He had only wanted to take on the job last time because he could make some quick bucks on the way to the Sunils' planet. Now that the moment had passed, why would he even care about this meager pay? He even had to travel to some faraway planet for it.

Martin held on to Han Xiao's arm and hurriedly said, "Is it because of the price? We can pay more! 500... no, how does 480 sound?"

Martin had firmly latched himself onto Han Xiao's arm, leaving the latter speechless. Martin turned around to be the one doing the begging this time.

The trip to Planet Sunil had earned Black Star Mercenary Group a decent amount of fame, which was the only reason this scene was even happening. A Mercenary Group with reviving soldiers that was also decently powerful would of course be paid a certain amount of attention.

The two pushed and pulled until another voice came from the side. "Oh, so you're Black Star?"

Han Xiao turned around and saw the owner of the voice walk over, clad in a pure white battle suit with a surface so smooth that it was undoubtedly made out of some special alloy.

"Sky Ring's people?" Han Xiao focused his eyes and plucked Martin off of him.

This person was wearing the Sky Ring Army's battle uniform and was a mercenary from Sky Ring.

The Sky Ring Army was among the mercenary groups at the top of the food chain in the Shattered Star Ring. They had over ten thousand members, and the Army head was even a Calamity Grade Class A Super. They did business across numerous clusters such as the Colton Star Cluster and the Gelock Star Cluster.

He should not have had anything to do with Sky Ring at the moment, so Han Xiao was curious. "What does Sky Ring want with me?"

"You have a decent team. My Division Captain would like to discuss cooperation with you. Are you free now?"

Han Xiao blinked. *Cooperation... Doesn't sound too bad...*

However, with Sky Ring's power, there truly was no reason to look for a small team like his. Unless Sky Ring was interested in something special of their group. Han Xiao was able to guess the general reason for Sky Ring's interest in them.

No doubt. They were probably interested in the fact that we don't die... Han Xiao smiled in his mind. *Looks like the gossiping between fellow mercenaries has done its job.*

He was curious as to what kind of cooperation Sky Ring wanted to discuss with him. A force as big as theirs would definitely not have something simple up their sleeves.

"I am free. Let's go." Han Xiao threw off Martin and left with the Sky Ring mercenary.

Martin sat on the ground with a dumbfounded expression. The Sky Ring Army's name was known in all corners of the Shattered Star Ring. He could not believe that the Mercenary Group he had turned away just a month ago had been able to gain their interest and even receive an offer for cooperation.

Martin could only think about his previous decision of turning them down with regret and pain.

"But I was the first one here..."

...

Han Xiao walked into the Sky Ring mercenaries' stronghold and immediately saw around twenty to thirty of their members around the place. They were all of various species and races, and all eyes turned onto him when he walked in.

"I am Gashley. The captain of this small division." A mercenary with golden eyes stepped out. He had an impressive physique, with a muscular body that stood over two meters tall. His species came from a region in the Gelock Star Cluster.

Gashley's battle suit was a little different from the other members. There was a golden ring that circled a triangular crystal at the center of his chest. Although a mercenary group as large as this offered its members a good amount of freedom, they still had their own hierarchy. The more rings that circled the crystal on the suit, the higher the wearer's rank. Rank was decided based on one's strength.

The Division Captain had one ring, and there were four more ranks above that, with the Army Commander having one more than the highest rank.

"Black Star, Han Xiao." After the simple self-introductions, Han Xiao cut right to the chase. "What do you want to cooperate on? What's the situation?"

"Sky Ring is devoted to recruiting capable warriors," Gashley said slowly. "You have a great team, and we would like to invitation to you and your team—join Sky Ring."

Recruiting other mercenary groups was a crucial step for mercenary groups to grow. The Sky Ring Army was a relatively free organization that consisted of many individual teams that were all originally from other mercenary groups. Successfully recruiting strong members would earn the recruiters quite a reward, making all Sky Ring mercenaries pay great attention to potential new recruits, like part-time scouts.

Gashley's team just so happened to be stationed at the Juberly Hub and had heard news about the 'undead Black Star Mercenary Group'. After validating the authenticity of this information, Gashley had immediately decided to extend an invitation to Han Xiao, as he wanted to take in the whole Black Star Mercenary Group.

He was mainly interested in the 'revival' ability. Otherwise, with their average class C combat ability, they would not even have entered the sights of the Sky Ring mercenaries. Of course, Gashley also did not bother paying Han Xiao himself any extra attention. This was because, in Sky Ring, the average members were all class C, while they had several hundred class B officers. They even had two Calamity Grade Supers, which entire civilizations feared.

The sudden invitation surprised Han Xiao. However, after some thinking, Han Xiao also thought that it was not too unreasonable. Mercenaries that could revive as much as they wanted would be able to become the best vanguard and cannon fodder. Even a large organization like Sky Ring would not ignore this ability.

He calculated the losses and gains in his mind. Joining Sky Ring would guarantee them special privileges, and they would be able to enjoy Sky Ring's influence, which had been built up over the centuries. He could also gain access to many new shop items...

But if the Black Star Mercenary Group worked under Sky Ring, they would cease to be their own faction. The long-term losses were too much to bear, and he was not willing to give up on having his own faction just for some short-term gains.

"Your offer is very attractive, but I'm not really interested in becoming part of another organization," Han Xiao declined politely.

The onlooking Sky Ring mercenaries all started to whisper among themselves after hearing that.

"He actually declined."

"There's only benefits to receive, so why wouldn't he accept? I didn't even hesitate when I was recruited."

Gashley had a face full of surprise, and he thought that Han Xiao did not understand the benefits they would be receiving after joining. Thus, he then went on to patiently explain. "You might not be too knowledgeable about the benefits that Sky Ring can offer. Firstly, we do not confine our members with strict rules. You can even choose to become an individual mercenary, or you can also join a team, as long as you complete a minimum of two job assignments every year. Also, there are many other benefits enjoyed by Sky Ring members such as..."

"Sorry." Han Xiao interrupted him and shook his head. "Sky Ring is indeed very nice, but I'm a man who believes that benefits always come with risks. Acting with my own faction suits me more, but I would still like to thank you for the invitation."

Chapter 359: I'm a Professional at Planting Flags

The crowd exchanged looks with surprise on their faces.

Gashley shook his head. Black Star had used polite words, and he was not angry at being rejected, just felt that it was a missed opportunity.

Although Sky Ring was a large organization, most of the members were not arrogant and did not feel superior. Sky Ring was an official and lawful mercenary group, so they would not make enemies in the same industry easily.

Gashley felt it was a shame. At this time, Han Xiao suddenly changed the topic and asked, "It's only been a month since Black Star Mercenary Group was created, yet Sky Ring's contacted us—is it because we have the reviving ability?"

Being an honest man, Gashley nodded and said, "Yes, it is."

"Although I'm not willing to join other mercenary groups, I feel we can be in a partnership. Sky Ring definitely takes on many dangerous missions—my group can accept tasks from Sky Ring and take on these dangerous missions with high risks of death."

Gashley thought that having a partnership was not a bad idea even though he could not recruit Black Star.

Sky Ring also had similar partnership relationships with other mercenary groups. There was a long list of records of these partners, who were like backups. In times of danger, Sky Ring could ask for help from these reliable partners any time.

The two discussed for a bit and agreed on their intentions on the partnership, which Gashley reported to the organization.

Many mercenary groups wanted to get in touch with such a large organization like Sky Ring, and people applied for partnerships very often, so the people of Sky Ring were very used to it. Most of the applications did not meet the requirements, but because of the special characteristic of being able to revive, Black Star's application was approved immediately. When its name was added to the partnership list, Han Xiao signed the partnership agreement.

What the agreement roughly meant was that all members of Sky Ring could contact Black Star for support privately at any time, and they had to pay a reward individually. The two parties of the agreement were in a partnership, and any form of combat between the parties was prohibited. If Sky Ring was hired by a certain party, Black Star could not accept hiring from its hostile party, and vice versa. If that happened, the agreement would have been breached, the first party to breach it would have to pay a fine, and the agreement would be voided. Other than that, the other terms were very free and easy. It was regulated by the Mercenary Alliance, compulsory to comply.

Han Xiao was rather satisfied with the result. It was like gaining a new customer and expanding his business by borrowing Sky Ring's name. Sky Ring definitely did not lack combat opportunities, which meant his mercenary group would not lack job opportunities as well. Anyway, the mercenary group had just been created, so it did not matter who their missions came from.

Although they could not enjoy Sky Ring's privileges through the partnership, at least they had some backing—it was beneficial for the mercenary group's development.

After signing the agreement, Han Xiao suddenly thought of something and said, "If I guessed correctly, you guys should have accepted the Silvers' request, right?"

Gashley nodded and said, "No large mercenary groups are going to give up this opportunity. My team has been summoned by the cadres, so we will be leaving and heading toward Fawn Galaxy later on."

Han Xiao's eyes sparkled and asked, "Can my group follow? If you guys get the mission, our help might be needed. I'm happy to accept a hiring from Sky Ring."

Gashley was stunned for a second. After some consideration, he realized that it did not seem like there was any downside to bringing a group of undying mercenaries. "Okay, bring your team to the pier later. We will take our spaceship together. However, be mentally prepared. If the mission is very easy, Sky Ring will not need help, so you will have wasted your time."

Han Xiao waved, signifying that it was not a problem.

He felt that this was a pleasant surprise. He could skip the Credibility Rating requirement using the relationship with Sky Ring. Although his mercenary group was still very weak and there was not much chance of gaining the Silvers' favor, they could expect good things from Sky Ring's hire.

The three knowledges of the compression technology were his target. There were plenty of strong people in Sky Ring, and class advancement knowledge should not be in shortage. If they were fortunate enough to be hired, he felt that he could try to make requests.

...

After deciding the time and pier number, Han Xiao went back to the stronghold and gathered all members.

"We have a new job, so get ready. We will be leaving in a while," Han Xiao said.

The people's face turned bright—they were thrilled. Knowing that the mercenary group had growth potential, they had been looking forward to the next adventure, and it finally came after doing very little for so long.

Maple Moon raised her hand and asked, "What are we doing this time? Why did the mercenary group information not show a new hiring mission?"

"The thing about the Silvers drew quite a lot of attention, so we're following the people of Sky Ring to Fawn Galaxy. I have brokered a partnership relationship with them, so we might have a chance to be hired." Han Xiao thought and added, "Also, you don't have to raise your hand if you have a question."

No wonder no mission had been triggered in their interfaces. They followed Han Xiao's lead and had no problem with the arrangement.

Herlous was quite surprised. He knew how huge the Sky Ring was, yet in only a few hours, how did Han Xiao suddenly become Sky Ring's partner? There was completely no sign of it beforehand.

Herlous pulled Han Xiao aside privately and expressed his doubts. Han Xiao, of course, did not have anything to hide. He told him about what had happened.

“I see.” Herlous understood, admiring Han Xiao discreetly. If he was the one to make contact, he probably would not have thought about suggesting a partnership. Then, they would have lost this opportunity. Although Han Xiao was not strong enough in his eyes, his ability to catch opportunities astounded him—a person like this was more suitable as the captain.

“So, did you foresee anything?” Herlous asked softly.

Han Xiao shook his head. There really was nothing at all.

The Silvers’ storyline was not a storyline that he was familiar with. He did not have any memory of it, so it was probably no big deal...

...

The Sky Ring Army was very large. Gashley’s team’s spaceship was a dozen-meter-long civilian spaceship. Its front was narrow, and its back was wide, streamlined like a water droplet but with clear edges. The exterior armor was covered with dark-gold metal plates, and the two sides of the tail had crossbars diagonally connecting into the spaceship body. At the ends of these crossbars were spiral shaped propellers, four in total, able to change angles agilely. This was a spaceship from some civilization in the Gelock Star Cluster. It was equipped with a light jump engine, suitable for galactic traveling, but weak in combat power.

This kind of small spaceship looked much cooler than the large and swollen spaceship of Galactic Travelling Agencies. The players kept sizing it up with glowing eyes.

Han Xiao touched his chin. He also wanted to buy a mercenary group private spaceship, but sadly, it was too expensive. Even the humblest one-man galactic spaceship cost more than 10,000 Enas. He could only build it himself if he wanted to save on that money, but building a galactic spaceship had too many difficulties—engine, energy source, armor adaptability, structure strength, detector, and many more, which required a large number of knowledges. He was way too far from being able to do that.

The gathering time came, and the Sky Ring mercenaries appeared. They walked up to the spaceship. Gashley set the auto route in the control panel, and the ship left the pier. After some trembling, it entered the exterior vacuum space.

The tail propeller emitted a golden glow, and it gradually entered the jumping state. The colorful galaxy outside the window rapidly became blurry, then into stretched lines, like it was infinitely long. It had entered a teleportation star gate near Juberly Hub.

“We will very soon arrive in the Fawn Galaxy through the star gate.” Gashley turned to the people and said, “The Silvers’ spaceship is parked at number 12 planet of Star Zone 4, and the travel time is about twelve days.”

There were eighty or so people in the spaceship, but there was still plenty of space. After the players were given their rooms, they took the initiative and went to chat with the Sky Ring mercenaries.

Han Xiao found Gashley. They had only met each other that day, so it was mainly to talk about the mission. However, Gashley did not know the details either. He only knew that he was one of the teams

summoned, and the representative of Sky Ring this time was a Three-Ring Level cadre, code named [Ice Sorcerer].

Three-Ring Level cadres were the backbone of the organization, mostly grade B Supers. This Ice Sorcerer was the leader of this mission, and that person would be the one that had the power to decide if Han Xiao was hired. Their codename suggested that it should be a mage.

Han Xiao had yet to come into contact with the Mage class. The Mage class was similar to the Mechanic class in the sense of their high difficulty, and its enchanting ability could enhance mechanical equipment too. Unfortunately, there were only Pugilists, Espers, and Mechanics on Planet Aquamarine.

After chatting for a while, Gashley went back to his room to rest. Han Xiao explored the spaceship himself. He came to the living area of the spaceship and realized that this spaceship had a Battle Simulation Room. Using virtual technology to simulate various enemies and environments, one could experience the effect of battle training. It was marked as 'Occupied'.

Han Xiao controlled the monitor, and the image from inside showed up, Herlous swung the Battleship Slicing Blade and was fighting nonstop against weird beasts. Silver flames splashed everywhere like waves.

Han Xiao watched for a while, licked his lips, pressed the pause button, opened the simulation room door, and walked in.