

## Mech 2971

### *Chapter 2971: Repurposed*

Spiritual energy possessed all kinds of mysterious and profound effects. Some of these effects seemed to bend or break the laws of physics.

Yet Ves thought that was merely because his understanding of spirituality and how it functioned as part of the fabric of reality was incomplete.

As far as he was aware, spiritual energy obeyed the first law of thermodynamics, just behaved like any other kind of energy.

Otherwise known as the law of conservation of energy, this law stated that energy didn't magically come from nowhere. No matter how many transformations or movements a given amount of energy underwent, there should be just as much energy at the end, just in different forms due to the processes it underwent.

If for some reason any extra energy showed up from nowhere or a bit of energy was missing at the end, then the model applied to understand what was happening was either flawed or incomplete.

In any case, what this meant to Ves in his current situation was that he needed to find an input source in order to get his power generator working.

When cavemen created fire, they used wood as their input or fuel.

When ancient industrialists started changing Old Earth, they used coal to fire their steam machines.

When the first human spaceships started to explore the Sol System, these vessels relied on a variety of synthesized fuels to propel themselves forward.

At this point in time, human civilization had reached a point where it developed many sophisticated means of energy generation to power all of the technology it depended on to dominate the galaxy.

Yet what pained Ves the most at the moment was that he could not rely on all of this known body of knowledge to design his energy generator!

"It's not like I can go down the cargo hold of the Spirit of Bentheim and pour a glass of high-density ship-grade reactor fuel in my mouth." He depreciatingly said to himself.

Augmented body or not, ingesting all of that highly toxic fuel would definitely result in his death!

He pressed his palm on his face. The problem he was suffering from right now was an enormous disparity in understanding between technical knowledge and spiritual knowledge.

He felt very confident about his mastery of the former. Even though his utilization and fluency of advanced technical theories and applications fell short of that of his wife, he was still considerably better than the average Journeyman when it came to designing complex, technical systems.

"As for the latter..."

He felt ashamed to call himself an expert in spirituality. His current degree of mastery of the spiritual domain was so rudimentary and scattered that he might as well call himself a witch doctor instead of a scientist!

The only reason why he did not feel ashamed was because he probably grasped more knowledge in this field than pretty much every other mech designer in existence!

When every other mech designer around him only knew how to swing clubs, he felt pretty proud of himself for knowing how to mix certain weeds together in order to brew herbal medicine.

This was the basis of his strength and the foundation of his career as a mech designer. It was the reason why his mech designs became so successful.

Yet applying his sometimes experimental innovations on products meant for other people was different from performing an experiment that directly affected his own life!

Considering how the first companion spirit he had ever created became such an integral part of Ketis' mind, spirit and will, Ves was a lot more lurid about proceeding with this risky project.

He thought back on the many experiments he performed on the test subjects his airfleet captured on the surface of Prosperous Hill VI.

He couldn't even count the amount of heads he exploded in his quest to develop a safe and viable method to activate spiritual potential in people who lacked this rare quality.

In the end, he never managed to succeed. All he got in return for all of the blood he spilled was another way to kill people or drive them mad.

This incident reminded him that not all of his experiments succeeded, let alone work out well for his test subjects.

Of course, he didn't care what happened to the latter. Unless they were Larkinsons or someone else he had reason to care about, he felt nothing if they died or received a

crippling injury. If they were criminals or something, their eventual fate was already set in stone. There was no way that Ves would allow them to live and expose his dubious experiments.

He never had a problem with this callous but effective approach until now. His lack of rigor towards safety and risk management became a lot more questionable when he was the one who sat in the shoes of his test subjects!

The worst part about all of this was that he could not effectively perform tests on other people in order to verify that his plan was sound.

First, he was working with scarce resources. The spiritual fragment of the Unending One was unique and irreplaceable. Even if Ves did not intend to use it all up at once and even if he theorized that he could grow it like a plant, it was still an extremely rare commodity that he shouldn't have possessed under normal circumstances!

Second, the nature of his production method inherently induced a lot of variability. The seed he created was merely the starting point of his companion spirit. Once he planted it in his mind, it could sprout in many different ways and grow to maturity in countless different ways based on an endless amount of variables.

In other words, performing an identical experiment on a different Larkinson would probably yield a drastically different companion spirit, not the least because the ingredients and the person it bonded to had already changed from the beginning!

Did this mean it was useless to perform an experiment on another person? Not exactly.

"I can still use this opportunity to verify whether some of my assumptions on companion spirits are realistic."

He had several weeks of time to plan, study, experiment and learn a couple crucial lessons.

Yet before he considered this option, he turned his attention back to his previous preoccupation, which was deciding what extra ingredients he should add to make his companion spirit.

An energy generator required a lot of spiritual energy as input, and he had a number of sources he could choose from. The most ambitious choice he had so far was to try and harvest spiritual tribute from as many humans as possible.

He stood up from his chair and approached the four Aspects of Lufa stored in his personal workshop. The organic statues looked as radiant and exceptional as ever. The texture of their skin and the fluffiness of their feathers made them seem as if they were actual angels who just happened to be put in a form of eternal stasis.

If not for the fact that Ves knew for certain that the statues each possessed solid inorganic cores, even he would have doubted whether they were more than ornaments!

"The fact that even I am affected by their charm means that their attraction to ordinary people is even greater!"

The Aspect of Tranquility and the Aspect of Healing had proven to be enormously popular among the Lifer refugees that had joined his airfleet.

Of course, this was not entirely reflective of how other people in the galaxy would react to them. Organic statues appealed a lot more to the citizens of the Life Research Association than other people.

"Even so, I can just make a conventional statue if that is what it takes to attract people."

The only problem involved with this was that he had to craft the statues by himself in order for them to function as valid totems. If he simply ordered the Spirit of Bentheim to mass produce a large batch of statues of Lufa, they would not possess any intrinsic life and possess any connections to his angelic design spirit.

Ves frowned. "This is a troublesome bottleneck. How can I mass produce a vessel that can compel people to donate their spiritual tribute to Lufa?"

The more input Lufa received, the more the design spirit could supply fuel to his companion spirit!

An idea suddenly came to mind. "Wait a second, don't I have a design available that is suitable for mass production?!"

Ves activated his comm and pulled out one of his finished mech designs. A projection soon came into existence which displayed his Sanctuary mech.

Despite completing this design a long time ago, Ves always hesitated in publishing it onto the market. Selling a third-class mech that was able to counter his existing LMC mechs would definitely result in a lot of upheaval in the mech market! Once it began to enter circulation, the Sanctuary would definitely make a lot of existing customers unhappy, so it was not wise to put it up for sale without greater considerations.

For now, Ves had ordered the design to be held back from release unless there was a suitable reason to put it out. One scenario where the Sanctuary could be useful was to suppress any counters published by his competitors.

That did not happen yet. While the Fridaymen managed to come up with some limited counters to his glows, the solutions developed by Master Olson were too expensive for the third-class mech market.

As long as this did not change, it was not necessary for the Sanctuary to see the light of day.

Yet what if he had another reason to put it out onto the market? What if he repurposed its primary function from countering glows to providing psychological comfort?

His eyes shone. "This idea has a lot of potential!"

Previously, Ves always treated the glows of his design spirits as supplemental tools to enhance the combat capabilities of his mech designs.

This meant that he always imagined how glows affected both friendly and hostile mech pilots on the battlefield. What they did off the battlefield was of little concern to him. Mechs existed to fight. Every mech designer had been trained to think on how they could maximize the combat performance of their products.

A mech model that looked pretty in parades but fell apart at the first blow in a combat scenario was not worth the money it took to produce a copy!

"What if... looking pretty is the main point? What if the combat application of the mech is secondary to its ability to attract spiritual energy donors?"

This was a great idea! Unlike his statues and other totems, he didn't have to craft his mechs in person for them to become alive.

Otherwise, all of the millions of mechs the LMC sold so far were overpriced by at least 30 percent if they were all lifeless!

Ves did not have to task the Marketing Department to perform any in-depth market research in order to know that his Sanctuary would definitely be able to catch on as a peaceful tool to provide mental comfort.

While he knew that there were bound to be drugs and all kinds of other treatments that could induce similar effects to humans, their different mechanisms meant that the outcomes would always be different.

The advantage of his Sanctuary was that it acted directly on the mind and spirit without fail. There were no side effects to worry about and the physical condition of the people in question was completely irrelevant.

He did not believe that the medical community had a better and more convenient way to calm or heal someone's mind!

Even if such solutions existed, the treatments were probably so high-end that it was only accessible in more advanced states.

As for his Sanctuary? It was just a third-class mech model!

Its production cost amounted to around 1.5 million hex credits under normal conditions. This might be a hefty amount of money to a third-class organization, but it was very cheap by second-class standards!

A typical Bright Warrior Mark I Version B cost around 500 million hex credits to produce, so the Larkinson Clan could easily produce over 300 Sanctuaries for the same amount of money!

"This is a much better solution than producing mech-sized statues or smaller-sized medallions or something!"

If he chose to do the latter, he would not only have to commit a lot of days of his life to fabricating individual totems, but he would never be able to supply them to enough humans to earn enough spiritual tribute.

Yet if he chooses to repurpose his Sanctuaries and market them as mental healing solutions, Ves predicted that they would definitely be able to catch on in their new capacity!

If he was able to sell a million copies to customers who used his Sanctuaries for their intended purpose, then Lufa would be able to receive an immense amount of spiritual feedback on a continuous basis!

Better yet, since the Sanctuary mechs weren't supposed to be deployed in battle, their longevity would become a lot higher. Perhaps a century from now, the original Sanctuaries that the LMC initially put out on the market would still be performing their roles without any loss of effectiveness!

His mouth started to drool at the possibilities. Since his Sanctuaries were so cheap to produce by the standards of the current Larkinson Clan, it was not impossible to fabricate a billion copies within a couple of years.

If that was the case, then Lufa would definitely be able to supply an endless amount of spiritual feedback to his companion spirit!

His body suddenly shuddered.

"Since the cost of my product is disproportionate to its value, I can easily justify the decision to jack up its price. What if I sell a third-class mech at the price of a second-class mech?"

Perhaps earning a huge amount of spiritual feedback wouldn't be the only profit he could earn with this radical plan...

## *Chapter 2972: Picking Ingredients*

The plan he had just come up with sounded like the greatest scam he had ever conceived!

"It's not a scam." He corrected himself. "It's a legitimate business venture!"

Ves only had to recall how eager the Lifers wanted to bask in the glows of the Aspect of Tranquility and the Aspect of Healing to know there was an enormous market appeal for the unique services he could provide.

The key was to package Lufa's glow in a form that was easy to produce, easy to distribute and would last as long as other statues.

The Sanctuary design fit all of these criteria, though it could be better.

"I designed this mech as a combat machine, after all. It's supposed to be a space knight that can negate glows and similar phenomena. Even if it is a defensive mech that can take some hits, it is not meant to be put in the hands of civilians or peaceful organizations who aren't always diligent in maintaining their machines."

Most outfits barring the poorest knew better than to neglect the mechs they bet their lives upon. Typical mechs required at least periodic servicing in order for all of its functions to remain in good shape.

Ves could already foresee that if he brought the current version of the Sanctuary to market without any modifications, then all of the civilian buyers would probably neglect this aspect!

Perhaps nothing might happen in the first ten years or so, but after that the Sanctuaries would increasingly suffer malfunctions that crippled some of their functions, reduced their mobility or caused it to collapse in front of a crowd of people who were enjoying their moment of tranquility!

It was clear that he had to modify the Sanctuary design in order to ensure it could withstand the test of time. Optimizing a mech for long-term dormancy required Ves to make different design choices that would make his Sanctuary a little different.

Ves once recalled he designed a few special edition mechs in the past that was similarly suitable to be put on display instead of on the battlefield.

"Hmm... if I am going back to the drawing board in order to modify the Sanctuary for peaceful use, I might as well overhaul some additional factors in the process.

He intended to make two mech versions of the Aspect of Tranquility and the Aspect of Healing. It was no problem for him to tweak the glows so that they induced the right

effects. He also contemplated adding in some safety precautions in order to prevent people from developing severe addictions to Lufa's influence.

"These aren't the only changes I intend to make."

What Ves truly cared about was to improve their external appearances so that they became more effective at attracting spiritual energy donors. As the Aspects of Lufa proved, beauty was justice!

Though the Sanctuary already looked pleasing in its current iteration, its overall appearance tended to lean towards a sober and pure aesthetic. This was fine when Ves wanted it to convey a clear role on a chaotic battlefield, but the base model looked too plain for his liking when used for peaceful purposes.

"I think I can make it look grander."

He already developed a number of interesting ideas, but he did not whip out his design interface in order to apply them to his current design.

"I don't have to waste too much time on this side project."

Designing a couple of new variants of the Sanctuary design was not a core component of his self-augmentation plan. It was a follow-up project meant to shovel lots of 'fuel' into his new energy generator.

"I can worry about establishing a supply line later. I should invest the limited time I have available on completing my companion spirit to the best of my abilities."

He decided to delegate much of this work to his subordinates. In any case, the Design Department wasn't working on any significant projects right now, so his design teams should all have enough time to explore different ways to increase the Sanctuary's attraction.

He decided to call Miles Tovar. His projection soon came to life.

"What is your request, sir?"

"Do you recall the Sanctuary design?"

"Uhm, yes sir." The Apprentice Mech Designer answered. "Have you decided to release it on the market?"

Ves smirked. "Yes, but not in the way that you are thinking. I've changed my mind about how it ought to be used. Let me explain my thoughts and tell you what I need from the Design Department."



He explained his intention to repurpose the Sanctuary design to a skeptical-looking subordinate. He subsequently handed over some tasks to the design teams.

"Tell the other assistants to explore visual designs and motifs that are effective at attracting people from many different states and cultures. The broader the appeal, the better."

"That... is a difficult request for us to fulfill." The former member of the Tovar Family said with a frown. "Every mech market is different. For example, the LRA's mech market consists almost entirely of biomechs. Other states have other quirks that can cause the Sanctuary to receive a poor reception."

"Just do the best you can. I don't need the Sanctuary to sell well in every state, but it has to be able to reach a wide enough audience. Do you understand?"

"Yes... sir."

Even if he did not follow through with his intentions on making use of Lufa, this was still an interesting way to earn money if nothing else.

In any case, Ves made up his mind and added a spiritual fragment of Lufa to the list of ingredients.

He felt that blending Lufa in his companion spirit was a great choice, and not just because it had the potential to supply Ves with lots of fuel.

He valued Lufa's spiritual attributes. The ability to purify and restrain dangerous spiritual phenomena was extremely valuable in minimizing any chaotic aspects of his upcoming companion spirit.

At the very least, Ves believed he could make good use of this ingredient to keep the negative effects of the spiritual fragment of the Unending One in check.

In the most ideal case, Lufa's contribution would also increase the purity of his companion spirit, thereby allowing him to use more ingredients without suffering too many negative side effects.

With his choice on Lufa set, he felt he could add one or two major ingredients to the mix in order to round out his companion spirit.

"Let's see what else I can work with." He murmured as he mentally listed his available spiritual assets. "I can't casually replace my first companion spirit with another one, so I better make this right from the start. I don't want to have any regrets when I make my choices today."

He first ran down his list of design spirits. As spiritually-strong entities that were useful enough for him to attach to his mech designs, they all possessed useful powers and attributes.

Whether they were helpful to him was another matter, though.

"Vescas. I already forgot about this one."

"Solemn Guardian. Hell no! Pursuing duty above all else is the most important reason I parted ways with the Larkinson Family."

"Bravo. Pass. I'm already a man!"

"The Golden Cat. Hmmm..."

He paused at this choice. He did not necessarily need to rely on her to supply with fuel when Lufa had the potential to tap into a much greater population of humans.

There wasn't much left aside from this benefit. Goldie was still young and immature, so she did not possess a lot of strong traits. Ves couldn't really figure what concrete benefits she could bring if he borrowed her strength to create his companion spirit.

"Maybe my new companion will take the form of a cat or something."

This was actually a nice outcome to Ves, but he did not want his companion spirit to become influenced by the Larkinson values that the Golden Cat espoused.

The Larkinson Clan was the Larkinson Clan. Ves was Ves. They were two separate entities who both operated in different ways.

After a bit of thought, he decided to make use of Goldie as a minor ingredient. He only really wanted to borrow a portion of her strength in order to turn his companion spirit into a cat and to develop a small connection to the Larkinson Network.

"Let's continue down the list. Zeigra. No. I don't need to pour any more fuel on the fire. My reckless tendencies are already bad enough. I'll probably become outright suicidal if my aggression increases any further!"

Zeigra was an uncontrollably angry design spirit that did not have the best impression of Ves. The pride, fury and aggression of the former Crown Cat might be suitable for warriors, but mech designers didn't need these traits.

"Ylvaine. Nope nope nope!"

"Qilanxo. Hmmm."

Her protective and space manipulation abilities were very formidable. The exobeast was one of his most powerful and definitely the oldest design spirit in his collection. Ves felt very tempted to request another spiritual fragment from his friendly spiritual ally.

If he was able to make good use of this fragment, he might be able to unlock some of those protective abilities himself. Even without a shield generator, he might be able to project a protective barrier around his body that was not inferior!

Ves shook his head. "My companion spirit will get too muddled, though. Qilanxo doesn't quite fit in with the other ingredients. If I truly want protection, then I should build a dedicated defensive tool."

He wanted to make his companion spirit as strong as possible, and the best way to do that was to set a single purpose and make sure that every subsequent decision supported it. Adding Lufa's spiritual fragment made sense because combining it with the Unending One's spiritual fragment would result in an energy generator that came with a reliable supply of spiritual fuel.

It was difficult to imagine whether Qilanxo was able to add additional synergies to his companion spirit. Perhaps it could borrow the output of the energy generator to sustain a powerful defensive shield, but this brought him to his earlier point.

Technology could already fulfill this function, though he conceded that there might be cases where others might strip him of his equipment.

Eventually, he decided to forgo this choice. The introduction of Qilanxo added a lot of additional complexity and increased the chance that the growth of his companion spirit might deviate from his intended plan.

He resumed his selection.

"The Superior Mother. Nope. I don't need to explain why."

Even if the Hexer design spirit possessed a strong connection to Cynthia Larkinson, Ves was deeply afraid that his companion spirit would become too assertive as a result.

He did not want to get bossed around by yet another entity!

"Then... that leaves the Illustrious One."

Ves felt that this was an intriguing idea. For some reason, he had multiple entanglements with the extinct sentient alien species known as the luminars or crystal builders. These tiny humanoids developed a dazzling crystal-based technology base and manipulated light and energy to a degree that not even the MTA managed to decipher their methods.

The Illustrious One was a potent design spirit in itself. It inherited many aspects of the Blinding One, who was a remarkable existence as well. The dark god may actually be the only remnant of his once-prosperous race who had managed to survive all the way up to the Age of Mechs until he picked a fight with Ves and his mother.

It made little sense to add a spiritual fragment Illustrious One to the list of ingredients, though. He already possessed the Amastendira, which was already powerful enough to remain relevant for at least several decades.

Even if its power level eventually could not keep up with his demands, he could always build a new weapon.

Still, the irrational part of him wanted to throw the Illustrious One in the mix anyway.

Perhaps he used to be a member of the luminar race in a past life.

Perhaps he felt he might have a use of light-manipulation capabilities one day.

Perhaps he just wanted to borrow the Illustrious One's mysterious charm to look cool.

Though it made little rational sense to him to consider this choice, he decided to put it in consideration.

"If I don't have any better choices, I'll go back to this option and let my feelings decide."

Now that he had gone through his list of design spirits, Ves began to set his sights towards other, more unconventional sources of spiritual ingredients.

"What if... I borrow a fragment from one of my expert pilots?"

*Chapter 2973: Major and Minor Ingredients*

Expert pilots were also possible sources of spiritual ingredients.

Though their primary source of power was their willpower, they relied heavily on their spirituality to perform their feats.

This made it possible for Ves to harvest and make use of the spiritual component of their force of wills.

He had to be careful not to make too much use of the willpower component, though. Expert pilots possessed a strong sense of self and he didn't want his companion spirit to become affected by another person's personality.

"Still, just because I can, doesn't mean I should." He frowned.

He could inflict real harm to his expert pilots if he dug into their minds and took away a chunk of their force of wills. This was especially possible since all of the expert pilots under his command, barring maybe Venerable Davia Stark, had advanced relatively recently.

Venerable Joshua, Venerable Jannzi and so on had yet to mature their force of wills to the point where they could measure up against seasoned expert pilots such as the ones in the Cross Clan.

"Let's consider my choices."

Neither Venerable Jannzi, Venerable Orfan, Venerable Tusa, Venerable Dise or Venerable Stark offered anything that could complement his companion spirit.

Each of them possessed a range of useful specialties, but they only had the potential to add an isolated benefit to his design. This was not the best use of the limited capacity he still had left.

"I'm not a sword-swinging, gun-toting soldier like Ketis." Ves muttered and shook his head. "I already have my honor guard to relieve me from entering the fray myself."

Perhaps the spiritual ingredients of these expert pilots could provide him with other benefits, but he seriously doubted whether they would be relevant to him in any way.

It wasn't worth the downsides. By integrating a piece of a strong and willful expert pilot into his companion spirit, he vastly increased the amount of impurities or undesirable elements.

This was not a completely unacceptable outcome, but it had better be worth it in order to put up with all of the potential issues that might ensue.

This was why he took a serious look at Venerable Joshua. As far as Ves was aware of, their spiritual attributes were almost identical. Not quite, but close enough to ensure an extremely high compatibility.

Still, there were differences.

His own life domain was slanted towards instilling life where there was none.

Venerable Joshua was a lot better at empathizing and synergizing with other lifeforms.

In other words, both of them developed specialties that were most suitable for their respective professions.

The question that Ves faced was whether it was useful for him to acquire a part of Joshua's specialty.

"I can already communicate with other lifeforms on a spiritual level, and that has served me well so far. Do I really need any improvement in this aspect?"

He was inclined to say no. One of the main reasons why he leaned towards this direction was that he mainly took a brief moment of time to create another lifeform before letting the new entity fulfill its purpose by itself.

There was no need for Ves to handhold his own design spirits and other products all the time. Since he was not a mech pilot who directly interfaced with a mech, there were no acute situations in his life where the ability to understand and synergize with other lifeforms on a deeper level could make a very real difference in his life.

Perhaps there were other benefits to absorbing a part of Joshua's strength, but they weren't worth the cost.

Ves knew for certain that if he proceeded with this course of action, he would be robbing Venerable Joshua with something quite fundamental and helpful to his future growth.

He definitely shook his head. "I can't do this to my favorite expert pilot. I need you to grow as fast as possible so that you can be of greater use to me and my experiments."

The advantages of keeping Venerable Joshua whole and in good condition far outweighed whatever possible benefits Ves might obtain if he harvested the young expert pilot's fragment.

When the equation was this clear, Ves no longer entertained this direction.

"I still have other sources, though."

He briefly recalled some of the treasures he stored in his vault.

The most notable ones were the spiritual fragments of various deceased entities.

Aside from the spiritual fragment of the Unending One, he also possessed a fragment of the so-called Inexorable One.

Unlike with the Illustrious One, Ves did not feel any bond with the avian dark god.

The only impressive part about the Inexorable One was her sorcerous ability to conjure strange storms in space that could disturb an entire area. Yet this was yet another function that did not synergize with the primary purpose of his companion spirit.

"I'm not a speed freak like Tusa."

He had more ingredients in storage beside the fragments of the dark gods.

At the end of the Battle of Reckoning, he managed to settle his scores with a couple of his old enemies. Since they died in his presence, Ves took advantage of the opportunity to harvest as much of their spirits as possible.

He currently possessed three spiritual remnants derived from humans.

One of them was Venerable Ghanso Larkinson's remains.

Ves immediately scowled when he thought about the loathsome blood relative. He did not have anything kind to say about Ghanso, but even if he disregarded his personal bias, the dead expert pilot did not introduce anything relevant.

His next choice was Venerable Relia Foster.

Unlike Ghanso whose spirit was already collapsing by the time Ves was able to preserve what was left, Venerable Foster maintained her complete spirit and will before they were harvested.

Her spirituality still possessed a strong and lingering will component, which was a testament to the powerful Vesian expert pilot's unwillingness to die that day.

However, just like before, Ves didn't think that using a portion of Venerable Foster's surviving spirituality would introduce anything useful aside from making him more stubborn and pigheaded.

"I have plenty of that already. I don't need to amplify this character trait any further." He muttered.

The two ingredients he just dismissed were dangerous elements that required a lot of thought before he was willing to put them to use. He felt that there were definitely some good uses for them, but for now he couldn't come up with any useful ideas.

Perhaps he would use them to create other companion spirits for other people, though Ves wasn't sure if this course of action was entirely safe.

He shrugged. "Oh well. It won't be me who will suffer."

There was one more spiritual ingredient where Ves had to put serious thought in its use. He carefully contemplated the possibility of integrating the dormant design seed he had managed to scavenge from Lady Aisling Curver's mind.

Unlike his previous choices, Ves recognized a lot more potential benefits to making use of this unique ingredient.

"Curver may have been a crazy and obsessive woman when she was alive, but she is still a competent and capable student of a genuine Master Mech Designer."

Ves was attracted by her design philosophy, which delved into a specific application of neural interfaces. The neural networks that Master Huron and Lady Curver excelled at inspired him to create his spiritual networks and battle networks.

The fact that he was able to do this already proved that his specialty possessed intersections with Lady Curver's design philosophy.

Ves imagined what it would be like to gain access to Lady Curver's design seed. Would he be able to channel her design philosophy as if it was a part of himself?

"Perhaps it might be possible for me to develop two design philosophies at the same time!"

At first, this sounded impossible. No mech designer was able to develop two design philosophies at the same time.

"Yet people also say that it is impossible for someone to become both a mech designer and a swordmaster at the same time?"

Ketis managed to break this rule and achieve the impossible by using Sharpie as a vessel for her second profession.

If Ves applied this model to himself, could he enhance his mech design capabilities by allowing his companion spirit to absorb Lady Curver's design seed?

The idea excited him, but once he started to think it through, his enthusiasm slowly fell.

"It's... not that simple."

Ketis' unique situation worked out because her professions complemented each other. Both of them shared many common spiritual attributes, which meant that his student did not have to divert any attention to fields unrelated to her current interests.

In the situation that Ves was thinking about, it would be different. While he was fascinated by neural interfaces and neural networks, he did not possess an affinity in this delicate field. If he wanted to progress and make full use of Aisling's design philosophy, he would have to acquire all of the knowledge and expertise that she possessed before performing further research in a field that was not a part of his original ambitions.

Though it was undeniable that a greater grasp and understanding in neural interfaces would help him make his mechs bond with their pilots on a deeper level, this was not a necessity.



"The benefits aren't enough for me to commit to this choice. Aisling's design philosophy is too far removed from mine to allow me to rely on my existing spiritual attributes to excel in her specialty."

He felt it was a pity to abandon this choice, though. He still felt that absorbing at least a part of her design seed would be helpful in creating better spiritual networks.

Ves also had a hunch that Aisling's network specialty might also play a useful role in increasing the networking capabilities of his companion spirit.

"I don't need to use her entire seed as an ingredient. It is already enough to cut off a relatively small chunk of it, if that is even possible."

This was probably not the best possible use of an intact design seed, but his interests trumped above everyone else's. As long as it was useful to him, he was willing to squander its amazing potential.

"Besides, what else can I do with it? I'm not going to implant it into the mind of a low-ranking mech designer in order to see whether I can create an artificial Journeyman."

A design seed was a unique natural spiritual construct that contained the essence and a bit of personality of a Journeyman. The design philosophy it supported was completely tailored to that of a specific individual. Rashly implanting this seed into the mind of another person would definitely lead to a mismatch in attributes, inclinations, personality, interests and other aspects.

There was no way that someone with an incompatible design seed would be able to develop it any further, let alone advance to Master!

Ves was quite strict and traditional in this aspect. He respected the mech designer tradition and did not want to make it easy for anyone to become a Journeyman.

After reluctantly settling on this choice, he briefly summarized his current list of ingredients.

"My core ingredients are my own spiritual energy, a portion of the Unending One, a portion of universal life energy and a spiritual fragment of Lufa. My possible minor ingredients are a spiritual fragment of the Golden Cat, a spiritual fragment of the Illustrious One and a shard of Lady Curver's design seed."

That amounted to seven ingredients in total. Even if he did not intend to rely heavily on the latter two, combining them all was still a considerable challenge.

It was not challenging to mash them all together and create his companion spirit right away. Yet if he did so without any preparation, who knew what kind of monstrosity he would end up with. Even if nothing catastrophic happened, his resulting product might

suffer from a lot of inefficiencies and wasted potential because its underlying ingredients clashed against each other.

Ves did not look worried though. "This is why I have several weeks to figure this all out. I will definitely design something greater than Sharpie!"

It was not enough to equal his earlier accomplishment. He initially created Sharpie in haste and without any thorough planning. This time was different. Now that he was able to treat this like a proper project, he was determined to make his companion spirit the best he could ever create!

"Let's begin!"

*Chapter 2974: Processing Energy*

Ves worked intensively from the moment he embarked on this project. He cut down his sleep and tried to make the best use of his limited time to perform as much research on his upcoming companion spirit as possible.

Whenever he designed mechs, he did so with the knowledge that it would be another paying for any of the mistakes, shortcomings and compromises he made.

While it was certainly not good if he slipped up in a way that caused the mech pilots of his products to die unjustly, Ves had always taken psychological comfort in the fact that it wouldn't be him losing his life.

As long as he managed to cling to his life, what did it matter if he lost his reputation and credibility? He could always earn it back over time or simply move to another market and start over again.

If he died, then there was no possibility to make a comeback.

Someone who valued safety would never engage in reckless self-experimentation. Yet that was exactly what Ves was doing right now. Against his better sense, his greed and his desire to augment himself with his own version of Sharpie drove him to utilize all of his accumulated knowledge of spirituality in this personal project!

He was well aware of the risks involved with creating a complex living product inside his own mind, but he possessed an abundant amount of confidence.

Sharpie's successful birth and evolution provided him with a ready-made model. He had already inspected Ketis' companion spirit thoroughly and recorded every observation he made in his Archimedes Rubal.

Though he did not understand the exact mechanisms of many aspects of Sharpie's current configuration, Ves nonetheless gained plenty of inspiration from looking at a more advanced model of a companion spirit.

It helped that Ves still recalled the simplistic design of the initial seed form of Sharpie. Though the two forms differed drastically from each other, he could still infer a couple of clues on how certain weaker components grew into more advanced versions of themselves.

His fascination increased as he pursued multiple directions of research and developed a lot of small theories on spirituality.

It was too bad that many of his new ideas lacked solid support. They were mere speculation as long as Ves did not verify their accuracy in practice.

Though Ves devoted some of his time to perform a number of experiments, he lacked the time and resources to verify everything.

What was worse was that he would only be able to verify some of his assumptions once he performed the main procedure. This left him with a lot of question marks and uncertainties that constantly weighed on his mind.

His experiment wouldn't necessarily fail if he made a mistake. Yet each mistake had the potential to produce an unexpected outcome that might prove detrimental to his life and safety.

"I don't have much choice but to press onwards."

This was his chance to rise another step and acquire yet another unique advantage. The best part of it was that he was the one who created it. Though he still wished he retained his Grand Dynamo, lately he felt it might have been for the better that he got rid of this fantastic marvel of spiritual engineering.

"It's brilliant, but it's not mine. If I still had it in my possession, I would have never been stimulated into creating a replacement of my own making."

He thoroughly enjoyed creating and using products that he made himself. Not only would Ves be able to grasp their mechanisms and possess a deep affinity with his own creations, but they also carried his personal touch.

While it was fine for non-creators to depend on items and gear produced by others, Ves was different.

He possessed all of the requirements to make his own comm, weapon, combat armor and so on. Though that didn't necessarily mean he had to rely on himself to fulfill all of his material needs, he trusted in his ability.

"I might not be able to replicate a device as sophisticated as the Amastendira, but I'm getting closer and closer to shortening the gap. In fact, as long as I can get good materials, I can probably create something just as good as my Unending Regalia."

He was slowly catching up to the level of a first-class mech designer. Just a few years ago, designing second-class mechs used to be a dream, but now designing one was as easy as drinking water to him. He even had the confidence to embark on a second-class expert mech design project!

"It's a pity that the gap between second-class and first class is far larger than I thought." He regretfully shook his head.

The sight of how Uranus managed to squash all native opposition on Prosperous Hill VI with ease only to get toyed to submission by just twelve MTA mechs made Ves recognize reality.

If transitioning from second-class to first-class was easy to accomplish, then Uranus should have been able to put up a better fight against the MTA mechs.

Even if the Association fielded mechs of a higher quality than those deployed by first-rate states, that still did not change the fact that Ves still had a steep hill to climb!

He shrugged at the thought. "I have plenty of time, at least. With hundreds of years of time, I don't believe I'll stay stuck as a second rater forever."

Many citizens of second-rate states tried to overcome this gulf, but few succeeded. Those that did mostly entered the service of other first-class organizations instead of relying on themselves to elevate their status.

Not even Ves was arrogant enough to believe he could catch up to the enormous head start that other first raters enjoyed. The most he could do was to get closer one step at a time and hope he would reach his destination before his lifespan ran out.

"It's not as if being a second-rater is dull. There are plenty of options to keep me occupied."

His desire to catch up to the likes of Master Willix and be able to speak to her on an equal basis revved up his motivation and ignited his passion!

The longer he worked on this personal project, the more its importance weighed on Ves. He became more and more aware of how his efforts in this brief moment of time could alter the trajectory of his life and either launch him into orbit or crash him into an ocean.

It did not help that Ves decided to go all-out on the initial creation of his companion spirit.

One of the reasons that enabled Sharpie to bloom so drastically in such a short amount of time was because Ketis took advantage of an existing promotion track. If swordsmanship tradition didn't exist, then Sharpie would have just been a relatively minor presence in her mind.

"It's clear that I can't adopt this approach to accelerate the growth of my own companion spirit." He muttered.

He had no choice but to rely on his own resources to make up for the shortfall. He did not want to start off with a weak and undeveloped seed, not when he needed as many advantages as possible when he was about to design his first batch of expert mechs.

He held a vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum in his hands. Its glowing contents swirled in slow, leisurely patterns. The sheer amount of life energy contained in the vial was vastly more than he needed to elevate his companion spirit to the level he desired!

"In fact, it's too much. Growth is good, but excessive growth is a cancer."

Determining how much energy he supplied from the beginning was one of the most difficult decisions he had to make. Too little and it might take years for his companion spirit to reach a satisfactory level of strength. Too much and he would not only deprive his creation from growing under more ideal circumstances, but also risk breaking or distorting it if he exceeded its capacity.

Raising the growth capacity of his upcoming product therefore became one of his highest priorities. He had to design a seed that could tolerate explosive growth and not run out of control.

This forced Ves to employ a lot of imagination. Though he could use Sharpie's evolved configuration as a reference, he was forced to fill up the gaps with theoretical templates that would hopefully channel all of the excessive energy in a safe and useful manner.

"It's like inflating a balloon, but at least a million times harder."

The second major challenge that he had to solve was to combine and balance all of the different ingredients.

He collected and extracted all of his potential ingredients relatively early on. He quickly took out seven P-stones from his vault in order to contain the harvested spiritual fragments.

He spent days trying to familiarize himself with them. He not only wanted to gain a deep understanding of their spiritual attributes and other traits, but also develop a sense of intimacy with them. Soon, he would be putting each of them in his mind, so it was important that he attuned his mind to be as compatible with them as possible.

A couple of ingredients clicked with him straight away as soon as he began to pick up the P-stones that contained the extracted essence.

It went without saying that the universal life-prolonging energy that he had extracted from one of his vials resonated strongly with him. He felt he could do anything as long as he had enough of it. He couldn't even tell that much of this potent energy originated from the brains of deceased expert pilots if not for the slight impurities contained within.

"That's odd." He frowned. "These strange attributes weren't there in the the previous sample of high-grade serum that I have obtained."

The first serum he obtained in the past originated from the Starlight Megalodon. The crashed battleship generated a spacetime anomaly that caused the entire planet it was on to experience an accelerated time flow that stretched on for millennia.

Yet despite enduring such a long passage of time, the aged serum still retained a high degree of purity and potency! In fact, Ves guessed that it hadn't deteriorated at all over time!

This meant that centuries ago, the CFA's production method was already far superior than what the Supreme Sage managed to achieve.

He looked thoughtfully at the P-stone that contained the slightly impure universal life energy.

"Is this one of the reasons why the Supreme Sage failed his consciousness transfer procedure? Could these remnants of deceased expert pilots be the reason why Uranus developed such a savage and bestial consciousness?"

Though he had no proof that this was the case, the implications were dire if his guesses strayed close to the truth!

Fortunately, it was not that big of a challenge for him to remove these anomalous elements with his existing spiritual capabilities. The only downside was that it took quite a bit of time to remove the impurities due to his lack of fine control.

Perhaps the Supreme Sage would have reacted with shock if he saw how easily Ves managed to solve this problem, but it was too bad he was no longer alive.

He processed the equivalent of 30 percent of the energy contained within a single vial. This was a hefty amount of energy and probably more than what he needed to grow his companion spirit.

Ves was actually a bit confused why each vial contained so much concentrated life energy. If all of it was channeled into the mind and spirit of a typical old geezer, their

heads would be filled with so much energy that their heads would have burst apart many times over!

One explanation made sense to Ves was that much of the life energy was diverted to activate other processes.

Another possible explanation was that the treatment process was so wasteful that much of the universal life energy spilled into the void.

Regardless, all of this meant that Ves had plenty of energy to last for a long time. He even thought about using one or two vials to apply the treatment to himself and his wife if there was no other pressing need for all of that energy.

"Of course, I should purify their contents as well before I do so. I'm pretty sure these weird trace elements don't belong here."

Ves trusted the CFA's technological prowess a lot more than that of the Supreme Sage. Since he had the opportunity to transform the products in his possession to resemble that of a genuine product of the CFA, then why shouldn't he make the effort?

#### *Chapter 2975: Irrational Intimacy*

Ves was sure that the serum synthesized by the Supreme Sage had a lot of secrets that he had yet to grasp. Due to lack of time and lack of comprehension in anything related to biotechnology, he had not gone over the research files of Project Cain and Special Project 'V'.

Instead, he tasked Dr. Ranya and Dr. Perris to work together on deciphering them in secret. Since much of the data and theory contained in the files related to extremely high-level research, the two young biotech experts were far from capable of grasping all of the knowledge.

He did not expect any quick results, but that was fine. He did not need to know all of the ins and outs on how the serum was produced to make use of its amazing properties.

After purifying and doing his best to develop a bond with the universal life energy he reserved for this experiment, he moved on to attuning himself to his other ingredients.

Nyaaaaa.

The Golden Cat looked a little glum as she materialized and stared mournfully at one of his other P-stones.

Ves gently caressed the ancestral cat's back with a spiritual projection. "I'm sorry, but I really need this piece of yours. I know it hurts, but you'll be able to make up for it in no

time. Aren't there a lot of people who joined our clan lately? The spiritual feedback that our members provide is no longer a trickle."

In fact, Goldie no longer depended as much on the low-quality spiritual tribute provided by ordinary clansmen. Much of her growth came from the more potent spiritual feedback provided by the expert pilots and Journeyman Mech Designers of the Larkinson Clan.

Compared to someone as weak as Melkor Larkinson, people like Ketis and Venerable Jannzi provided much more substance at greater qualities.

Nyaaaa!

Goldie still acted petulantly, though. She perched close to Ves and gazed at him with recrimination in her resentful eyes.

Ves just reached out and petted her with an even greater degree of affection.

"There, there. You'll recover in no time. If all goes well, I'll be able to create a new cat and companion for you. Don't you love it when our family expands? Best of all, with the portion you have donated, the new addition will become your younger brother!"

Technically, it was more correct to state that Goldie would be one of the 'parents' of his companion spirit, but she was too young and the family relation wasn't that strong, so it was too excessive to treat her as if she was the mother.

In any case, since Ves was the main progenitor of all of his spiritual products, he was unquestionably their father. It didn't make sense to apply the human framework of family relations to his growing collection of spirits.

If he started doing that, then the genealogy of his spiritual family would become very weird.

Despite Goldie's grumpiness, Ves did not feel any reduction in closeness to the tiny spiritual fragment he harvested from her spiritual body.

After making sure that his intimacy with this piece remained high, he turned his attention to his other spiritual ingredients.

The relatively modest piece he carved out of the original fragment of the Unending One was a completely different ingredient. Though it appeared dormant and unresponsive, Ves always kept his guard up while he inspected it and tried to make sense of its confusing mix of spiritual products.

Just like the spiritual remains of other alien entities, Ves encountered a lot of alien and incomprehensible components that he felt very wary about.



He did not dare to assume that the Unending One was permanently dead. A dark god should have more tricks than that, and out of the three of them, the tentacled whale should have the richest means.

What was dead could come back to life. Ves had already inadvertently brought one fossil of history to life in the form of Ylvaine, could an entity that was much more powerful than a human prophet do the same?

"I have to minimize this risk as much as possible."

This was why Ves spent a lot of effort on cutting away the pollution. Every attribute that was not related to devouring and converting spiritual energy was useless in his eyes. This was why the lesser fragment of the Unending One grew even smaller as he did not hesitate to err on the side of caution.

It didn't matter if he reduced the fragment to just around 20 percent of its original strength. As long as he combined it with the universal life energy he prepared, the energy processing functions he damaged would definitely be restored and could very well even reach a higher degree of potency!

Compared to these difficult ingredients, the next one he handled was much simpler.

Lufa was one of his more recent spiritual products, so he possessed a high degree of understanding on how he worked. The spiritual fragment Ves requested from this design spirit actively cooperated with him when he wanted to cut out some unnecessary components.

The shard he carved out of Aisling Curver's design seed was much more unfathomable. It took quite a lot of force in order to damage the orphaned design seed in the first place, and Ves guessed that he only managed to achieve this much because the mind it belonged to was no longer alive.

"It's quite hard!"

He was sure he may have damaged something in the process, but Ves didn't care. He got the ingredient he wanted.

The only problem was that Ves couldn't figure out how to process or purify it any further. The dense but inert chunk was a different form of spiritual energy than he was accustomed to handling.

Still, it was fine if he kept it like this. The shard was so small and weak that it shouldn't have a major influence on his companion spirit.

The final spiritual ingredient that Ves had to process was the spiritual fragment that he had obtained the Illustrious One.

Though the transformed design spirit was not very communicative, it acquiesced to his request without any fuss.

The moment he held the P-stone containing this special fragment in his hand, he felt an unexplainable closeness to it. Much to his surprise, he did not even have to do anything to develop an immediate intimacy with the Illustrious One.

Out of all of his design spirits, the Illustrious One was a bit more special than most. Its origin along with its drastic upgrade caused it to undergo a drastic evolution that caused Ves to feel less and less familiar with what he initially brought to life.

"Do I have a special relation to the luminar race?"

Sure, he may have stumbled upon one of their ruins and raided some treasures by chance, but was that enough for him to develop any strange thoughts about this extinct race.

"This is irrational. There is no reason why I should feel so close to the Illustrious One."

Though he doubted his judgement, a part of him nonetheless insisted on making use of it. He was already happy with his other ingredients. Each of them brought something solid to the equation.

The only exception was the fragment of the Illustrious One. Even though he only harvested a lesser fragment, its unique and different qualities caused it to become a wildcard in his hands.

If he handled it correctly, he might be able to augment his companion spirit with a powerful new function that complemented its functioning.

If he handled it poorly, it could easily cause his companion spirit to mutate in an undesirable direction!

"Should I take this gamble?"

Who was he kidding? Of course he would! He was not ignorant of all of the ways this decision could backfire on him, but he was confident he could deal with them. As long as the creation process did not go out of control like it did during the time he created the Superior Mother, then he would definitely be able to intervene before the situation blew up in his face!

After he finished all of the steps from designing the initial seed to preparing all of his ingredients, he was ready to proceed with his experiment.

Though he originally thought about creating a more modest companion spirit for another Larkinson in order to test whether some of his assumptions were accurate, he decided to skip it because it was too cumbersome.

He already spent several weeks preparing for his companion spirit. How could he devote so much time and labor to benefit someone else? Though he thought about experimenting on his wife, he eventually dropped this idea.

"There is no way I will let Gloriana overtake me! I have to stay a step ahead of her. I can't let her run the entire show once we begin our work on our expert mech design projects!"

With time running out, Ves decided to put an end to all of his preparations.

When he had to decide where he wished to perform this crucial procedure, he chose to shuttle over to the Dragon's Den.

He did not have to perform his spiritual experiments in an isolated mech workshop anymore. His options were much better these days. Not only did he induct Dr. Ranya into his inner circle, he also had access to an entire bioresearch vessel that possessed sophisticated treatment and monitoring capabilities. He would be a fool to ignore all of this advanced tech!

When Ves stepped aboard the Dragon's Den and allowed an attendant to guide him to one of Dr. Ranya's personal labs, he entered a large medical lab that was filled with conventional machines instead of organic machines.

"Ah, you're here now." The lab-coated woman looked up as he arrived with his honor guard. She glanced at the floating crate behind his back. "You informed me you wish to perform a sensitive procedure on yourself. I am always happy to assist, but there is only so much I can do by myself. If you give me permission, I can invite a team of trustworthy doctors and specialists to work with you. They possess a lot more relevant expertise."

Ves shook his head as he approached a table and ordered the crate to rest on it. "I won't be doing anything weird to my body. Instead, I'm trying something new with my mind. The only reason why I chose to come here and put my body under your care is because I don't know if my body will become affected in some way. I need you to monitor my physical signs and be ready to intervene if something awful happens."

While he was sure that the Lifer specialists that had recently joined the clan would be able to do a much better job, Ves did not trust them as of yet. They had yet to thoroughly integrate into the clan and he was quite wary of encountering someone like Dr. Nigel Redmont-Larkinson who intentionally sabotaged the clan in the mistaken belief he was doing the Larkinsons a favor!

"I... will do my best to take care of you." Dr. Ranya reluctantly promised.

Ves briefly explained his goals and described his plans. Much of it wasn't relevant to Dr. Ranya due to her inability to perceive and interact with spiritual energy, but it was better to keep her in the loop to an extent.

As expected, her reaction was quite drastic.

"What?! So you want to create an even stronger 'spiritual' augment than the one that Ketis currently enjoys? And you intend to perform this experiment right now when much of your model is untested?"

Though Ranya had a lot of objections, Ves overruled them all. He was determined to make progress today and nothing would stop him except for suffering failure.

He changed his clothes and prepared to undergo a thorough physical examination.

"This isn't the first time I have done something like this, doctor. This is the right moment for me to augment myself. I have already waited weeks for this. I don't want to wait any longer."

The examination lasted a couple of hours before Ves was free to start his experiment.

#### *Chapter 2976: Ves the Test Subject*

When Ves was about to embark on his experiment, he laid his body down on a comfortable operating platform.

The chamber he was in was well-lit and completely cleared of any bugs and monitoring equipment. He and his guards had already swept the entire lab beforehand to make sure that no one would be able to hear him scream or something.

Just to be sure, Ves even took the initiative to disconnect communication lines and isolate wireless connections. This wasn't as difficult and time-consuming as it sounded as the private lab was already configured with confidentiality in mind.

It seemed that the previous owners of the Dragon's Den were quite meticulous about this aspect. They had to be in order to perform illegal experiments without alerting the authorities.

Ves briefly wondered how they got caught when their precautions were already so thorough. He could only conclude that they had probably been ratted out by a traitor who they mistakenly trusted.

This guess caused him to feel even more justified in his decision to put his trust in Ranya and no one else. He already had a good judgement of her character. Ves was her greatest patron and the only person who supported her as the director of the Larkinson Biotech Institute.

She stood to lose all of these benefits if she acted against Ves in any way. A rational person would never screw up such a fantastic deal!

"Everything is green, sir. I will continue to monitor your life signs and refrain from intervening unless they spike. You can proceed at any time."

"Then I will do so right away." Ves said as he continued to lay flat on the platform.

He had already placed the P-stones containing all of his ingredients a short distance to his left.

With his spiritual capabilities, he did not have to reach out and pick them all up in order to proceed with the first phase of his creation process.

He simply formed a spiritual projection and yanked out the spiritual ingredients from their containers one by one.

In order to prevent them from decaying or floating away, he rapidly stuffed them all into his own mind.

This was a very rash action to make. The insertion of even a single foreign element in his mind without performing any adjustments had the potential to cause a lot of upheaval in his head, but the disturbances in his mind were not as bad as he feared.

He grinned. "All that time spent on attuning with these ingredients paid off. They're behaving quite well."

Everything that consisted of spirituality was alive in some way. Even if the fragments did not exhibit much activity, it was still helpful for him to befriend them. This not only caused him to get used to their presence, but the respective ingredients also did not react with hostility when put into his mind.

Of course, that didn't mean it was healthy to have all of these ingredients floating around. They were still foreign elements, and unlike Gloriana's spiritual fragment, their attributes and roles were too dissimilar. He had to process them as soon as possible in order to forestall any compatibility issues.

"I'm beginning the critical process now!" He loudly announced for Ranya's sake. "Once I take this step, I will have passed the point of no return. I will have to direct all of my concentration to directing the process that I have started, so I won't be able to pay any attention to outside matters. Don't try to pull me out unless the situation has grown too dire."

"Understood. Good luck, sir. I hope you succeed."

"Thanks. If this procedure goes well, I may start rewarding companion spirits to other clansmen. If you do a good job, then you are also eligible to receive this boon."

This was definitely a great opportunity for anyone! Since Ketis managed to transform her entire life with the help of Sharpie, then many other people might be able to elevate themselves with the help of a companion spirit.

Ves did not pay any more attention to Ranya. He instead concentrated his mind and began to ready his spiritual hammer.

"Shatter!"

He violently slammed his ingredients in quick succession, causing them to lose so much integrity that they split into many smaller shards!

While many of these loose elements started to fling in different directions, Ves devoted enough concentration to keep them all contained. He did not want some of these pieces to escape his attention and lodge into an obscure part of his mind. Who knew what they would do once these foreign elements settled in for the long haul.

After shattering all of his ingredients, he began to push them together in order to merge every piece with other compatible pieces.

This time, he had a solid structure in mind. All of the planning and preparation he did beforehand instantly came to mind.

As he proceeded to perform this familiar task, he paid close attention to a couple of factors.

First, the shape of the living spiritual construct had to conform to a specific shape. In this case, Ves chose the form of a cat.

Whereas Ketis was happy with settling for a companion spirit that resembled her greatsword, Ves preferred to share his mind with a more adorable presence.

He already had a bunch of cats in his life, but there was never a situation where he had too many of them. He still missed the times when he was surrounded by clever cats on Felixia.

His progress wasn't fast. Even though he knew that time was critical, his work was slower than usual because he had become a lot more selective on which kind of shard he chose to merge with another shard.

Instead of mixing everything together on a random basis so that he would end up with a spiritual construct that was internally balanced, he wanted to create local imbalances that would hopefully produce specific effects.

For example, he specifically sought to merge as many shards of Lufa with shards of the Unending One.

This was quite difficult as their attributes actually repelled each other to a degree. Ves had to press them together and force them to play nice with each other.

While this was not an ideal situation, Ves believed in his theories. It made a lot of sense to put the shards from these two ingredients together.

One of them was responsible for establishing the crucial energy generator. The other took care of the supply of input materials.

On another level, Lufa's light and positive attributes effectively canceled out the Unending One's dark and negative attributes.

If Ves did not use elements of Lufa to suppress the undesirable elements of the Unending One, then Ves was quite afraid that the latter might claw his way back from the dead!

Fortunately, there was no sign of that as the process went on. The shards of the Unending One did not exhibit any strong fluctuations that might suggest that his worst fears might come true.

"Phew. Let's continue."

He merged shards of Aisling Curver's design seed with the shards of the Golden Cat. Both of them possessed strong associations with networks, so Ves hoped that he could amplify this trait if he combined them together in his upcoming companion spirit.

The only ingredient that did not pair exceptionally well with any ingredient was the shards of the Illustrious One. Ves merely merged them across the entire body of his spiritual companion. He did not set out to achieve anything specific with them, but was willing to take a chance that something might come good out of this, though it was hard for him to predict the final result.

"I can't foresee every detail, especially since this seed will grow once it comes to life."

He infused his own spiritual energy and bits of universal life energy into the shards and growing amalgamations whenever possible. He relied a bit more on the former than the latter. He was saving up the latter for a later phase.

Slowly but surely, his companion spirit took shape. The intangible form of a brand new cat took shape in his mind. The more his future companion spirit gained definition, the more Ves developed an affection for it. If all went well, he would be spending the rest of his life with this animated and semi-independent construct!

Of course, compared to Sharpie's current condition, the companion spirit that took shape in his mind was a lot weaker. This was fine to him as his highest priority was to form a solid foundation.

Minutes passed as Ves continued to lie on the treatment platform. Standing inside an adjacent observation room, Dr. Ranya nervously inspected all of the readings for anything unusual.

"His brain activity is continuing to increase." She whispered. "I hope it slows down. I don't know whether I have to intervene if his head keeps accumulating pressure."

Ves was ignorant of her worries. After a lot of diligent effort, he had finally completed the most crucial phase of his creation process!

The prototypical shape of his companion spirit had finally reached completion! As the life that Ves had infused in his new spiritual product started to take effect, the new cat finally opened his blazing bright eyes!

Mrow!

From the moment his spiritual cat truly came to life, a small shockwave emanated from his mind.

Ves was amazed at what he managed to create. He had created numerous spiritual products throughout his career, but this was the first time he explicitly used a portion of his own strength to create a living extension of himself.

The difference this made was palpable. His new spiritual companion clearly possessed a mind of his own, but he was also an inseparable part of his own Spirituality.

He took a moment of time to behold the initial form of his new companion spirit.

Though his appearance didn't make it obvious, his new cat felt unquestionably male. This was a deliberate choice as Ves did not want to deal with Gloriana's nonsense if she found out about his new cat.

His new creation's appearance looked a bit strange, though. In his spiritual perception, he sensed that the newborn kitty exuded a shimmering purple vibe.

Not only that, but shining sparkles of light flowed across his entire body. This strange light show reminded him of the random flashes that constantly flowed across the Illustrious One's body.

Just as with the luminar design spirit, the unexplainable light flashes added a lot of mystique to his new pet!



As the newborn cat managed to get a better sense of his own identity, he expressed a feeling of desire and expectation towards his creator.

"Clever boy." Ves. "You already know what comes next, do you? Well, before I proceed, let me name you first."

Throughout the past three weeks, Ves came up with several possible names. From Leo to Aslan, each of these possible choices sounded elegant or grand.

Yet from the moment he created his companion spirit piece by piece and built him up to his current form, all of those suggestions flew out of his ears.

They didn't fit with the close and intimate sentiment he was feeling towards this animated piece of himself. He felt so much love and affection for his new cat that he spontaneously came up with a different name.

"From now on, you are Blinky, the Star Cat."

Mrow~!

Blinky eagerly accepted his new moniker. Since the newly-named cat was a part of Ves from the beginning, it was natural that he shared many of the same tastes and preferences.

As much as he would like to bond further with Blinky, Ves still had one more step to complete.

"Are you ready for your power-up, my cute pet?"

Mrow mrow mrow!

"Then get ready, because this will not be easy for you. Absorb as much as you can!"

After checking that Blinky was okay so far, Ves decisively channeled large quantities of universal life energy into his newborn creation.

MROW!

Though Blinky immediately began to suffer as his body rapidly grew from absorbing so much highly-concentrated life energy at the time, he still managed to keep himself together. Many portions of his spiritual body expanded according to a preset plan that Ves had already prepared beforehand.

"So far, so good." Ves muttered as nothing seemed to go amiss.

However, it was at this time that he encountered the first true accident of the entire procedure.

Blinky's bright and luminescent eyes suddenly turned dark. The purple shimmer across his spiritual body rapidly began to darken as something ominous expanded from within.

Ves cut down the answer transfer as he reacted in shock at what was happening. In the end, no matter how many precautions he took, the worst had finally come to pass.

"Unending One! So you really did manage to claw your way back to life!"

Blinky's corrupted body released a flare of dark energy that instantly caused Ves to feel a spike of pain in his head.

"Ahh! Goddamnit!"

#### *Chapter 2977: Vicious Cycle*

Many humans in the galaxy tried their best to avoid dying. Death was not pleasant, and no one knew what happened once their time in the material realm ran out. The fear of death was such a deep and primal fear to people that it was no wonder that old geezers were willing to do almost anything to gain an extra century of life!

The strong reactions against the prospect of death indicated that human life was too fragile.

Modern technological and societal advances significantly improved the survival chances for average humans compared to when they first evolved, but that did not change the fundamental problem that mortals were too weak in the face of many dangers in the galaxy.

This reality fully showcased that it was still easy for people to lose their lives in this day and age. Human civilization made many advances, yet it had yet to progress into a utopia where absolute power and perfect control allowed its people to live their lives in total comfort and security.

Even Ves was still a mortal, though he sometimes acted as if this was not the case.

Many members of the Larkinson Clan who he trusted and befriended such as General Verle, Melkor, Juliet Stamos, Gavin Neumann and so on would eventually become memories to those who had ways to cheat their own mortality.

The scarce supply of life-prolonging serum made it impossible for every clansmen to live as long as those who could earn it. While Ves didn't want to think about it, he knew that he would definitely lose friends left and right if he managed to live long enough.

Humans were too weak. It was as if a single gust of wind could cause someone to collapse.

Yet... there was another class of existences that 'suffered' from the opposite problem.

They were dead, yet they did not disappear from the material realm. These powerful spiritual existences somehow managed to grasp a method that allowed them to cling to life when by all rights they should have been dead!

No matter how much pressure they endured, these undying people and aliens relied on their individual strengths to cling to life even when their mortal coil had already decayed into dust!

Was this bad? Not necessarily. Ves would have never been able to reunite with his mother if she was not a powerful spiritual sorceress. He would have never been able to join hands with Qilanxo and enter into a mutually-beneficial pact with the so-called sacred god. Ylvaine, annoying as he was, provided critical aid in the form of foresight that relieved several crises.

Ves felt very ambivalent towards these existences. On one hand, they fought against the natural order and put up a ferocious struggle against their actual fate!

On the other hand, these entities were all friendly and helpful to him, so he had a strong interest in enabling them to stave off their final end.

The problem was that hostile entities were also capable of staving off their permanent deaths!

The three dark gods that Ves fought against were clear examples of this. Just like Qilanxo, they used to be living beings with real bodies in the past. After their fleshy containers expired, their spirits not only lived on, but grew vastly stronger over time.

Ves already anticipated that it was difficult to deal with these entities! Though he succeeded in merging the spiritual fragment of the Blinding One with one of his older design spirits without any issue, the Unending One was different.

Back during the Battle against the Abyss, Ves had a clear impression of all of the dark gods. The Unending One was clearly the more powerful, more senior and more wily of the trio.

Would such a cruel and self-serving bastard be resigned to dying for real? No!

A spiritual entity with that much power and that much time to develop all sorts of brilliant methods should never be easy to take care of. Even an inert and highly-purified spiritual fragment of the Unending One managed to come back to life!

"Ahhhh! Damn! I should have cut more pieces out of you!" He screamed as he fought back against the forceful invasion and assimilation of the resurrected remnant of the Unending One!

He didn't know how, but the Unending One managed to restore and retain his identity even when Ves was using his shards to birth another lifeform.

This should have been impossible! Any ingredient that Ves used up to create another spiritual product should have lost all of its associations to its past identity. He had never encountered a case where a consumed ingredient managed to come back to life and be strong enough to launch a takeover attempt.

It was like Ves eating a chicken sandwich, only for the spirit of the dead chicken to wake up inside his stomach and try to take over his body!

The consequences were extremely dire if the Unending One managed to corrupt the newborn Blinky. Since the new companion spirit was actually an extension of Ves, the powerful and greedy dark god would not hesitate to use this unbreakable connection as a springboard to take over a much more useful human!

If such a disaster came to pass, then his life, his dreams and the future of the Larkinson Clan would all go down the toilet.

"Hang on, Blinky! I won't let you die! Not when you are actually me in another instance!"

Blinky was not just a pet like Lucky and Clixie. The Star Cat was truly an aspect of himself that he happened to grant a lot of independent autonomy. This had a lot of fascinating implications that Ves was eager to explore, but could only set aside in order to deal with the immediate crisis.

Mrow! Mrow! Mrow!

His new companion spirit was not doing so well at the moment. In his perception, an oily tar seemed to have poured out of Blinky's shimmering form. The beautiful glitter that resembled shining stars began to dim before the darkness swallowed it entirely.

The Star Cat was slowly transforming into a Dark Cat!

"Hang on, Blinky! I am with you! I'm not a pushover!"

Ves leveraged all of his spiritual strength to reinforce Blinky and prevent the dark wave from taking over the rest of his body. It barely helped. While his intervention helped his companion spirit stave off the dark tide, the problem was that the resurrected Unending One had already taken over the rear half of the Star Cat's body!

It was at this time that a drastic change took place. A powerful suction force emerged from the stomach section of Blinky's possessed body. The Unending One had captured enough of the companion spirit's body to activate the devouring ability integrated in the design of the living spiritual construct!

"Damn!"

Ves immediately felt that some of the spiritual energy under his direct control disappeared into the vortex. Soon enough, the vortex's suction force grew a little stronger, which was a clear sign that the Unending One had no problems converting Ves' energy into his own strength!

This was the powerful capability that Ves had poured a lot of effort into reproducing for Blinky. While he was glad that his efforts succeeded, it was quite awful that his enemy was the one who benefited from this feature!

In fact, Ves was also able to sense that the Unending One was making certain changes in the design of the spiritual sub-components related to his original abilities.

The dark god's mastery in this field was much greater, and he knew exactly how to maximize the performance of the features that Ves had pirated from the Unending One!

"I can't let this go on any further!"

Ves was not stupid. He could already extrapolate the eventual outcome of this struggle. Despite exerting all of his considerable spiritual strength, he not only failed to drive back the dark god from Blinky, but was actually feeding his own spiritual energy to the Unending One!

As long as his spiritual energy disappeared into Blinky's stomach, it was no longer under Ves' control. Everything the vortex spat out was fed back to the Unending One, who immediately pumped all of that converted energy into strengthening the vortex.

This was a vicious cycle that only grew more difficult to resist over time!

At this moment, Ves felt as if he was traveling on a starship that had inadvertently crossed over the event horizon of a black hole.

In this harsh region of crushing gravity, the nearby singularity distorted space to such an extreme extent that there was no way to avoid the hungry maw. No matter which direction his starship flew, the curved space caused his path to always end up at the center!

This was why not even light could escape a black hole under normal circumstances!

Of course, not everything was absolute. There were several instances where light and matter were able to defy the common conception of black holes.

Sometimes, they spat out powerful beams of plasma that stretched on for thousands of light-years due to the extreme rotations of electrically-charged matter.

In addition, energy at the edge of an event horizon sometimes did weird stuff and caused some light photons to be ejected outwards.

This was why Ves did not despair despite having the illusion that he was caught up inside the danger zone of a black hole.

His face began to snarl even as the pain on his body and soul grew harsher.

"You think I haven't prepared for your resurrection? Then think again! I always have a contingency plan for foreseeable problems!"

After putting so much effort into preventing the return of the Unending One, there was no way he had run out of answers already.

Ves placed a number of props at his side in case his worst fears came true.

He did not spend his three weeks of preparation time in vain!

After contemplating several possible options, he ruled out the use of his F-stone. While its offensive charge was definitely powerful enough to cut the Unending One to pieces, doing so would also harm Blinky. This was an intolerable outcome!

What Ves needed to do was to drive out the Unending One presence from Blinky's body and annihilate the revived remnant of the dark god in isolation.

He already had a suitable solution in mind. He mentally reached out to the Larkinson Mandate placed at the side of the treatment platform.

"Goldie, I need your help!"

Nyaaaa!

The brilliant glowing form of the ancestral spirit immediately materialized into view.

There was no rule that stated that Ves had to duel against the Unending One by himself. Since his strength alone was not enough, he did not hesitate to call upon his spiritual allies!

Goldie had already been monitoring Ves' condition from the beginning, so she immediately went into action. Her form glowed brighter as she poured the spiritual

energy she had under her command into pushing back the Unending One's possession of Blinky's body.

"It's not enough!" Ves gritted his teeth.

He could see that while Goldie assistance did indeed help in recapturing lost territory, the devouring vortex was already absorbing and converting the spiritual energy she brought to bear.

If this continued, the Unending One would eventually grow strong enough to resist them both!

"Then let's call in the rest of the gang!"

Though he could call out his other design spirits by himself, he had to divert too much of his concentration to do so. He had a much better solution in mind.

His head turned to the side and caught sight of all of the small figurines he made. He shaped each and every one of these metal figurines in person with the use of artisanal tools. While these small Breyer alloy statuettes were not that big, they were easy to carry around and granted Ves a direct channel to all of his design spirits.

"It's time to leverage the network of spiritual allies that I've built up over the years!"

#### *Chapter 2978: Unforeseen*

Ves never summoned all of his design spirits at the same time. This was the first time he did something like this. It took a lot of time for Ves to realize that he was not alone when it came to spiritual manipulation.

He always lamented the lack of spiritual adepts at his side who could assist him in his spiritual engineering endeavors, but it turned out that he already had a number of them in his company!

They just didn't come in the form of living, breathing humans!

Now, he was ready to test whether their collective strength was enough to fend off a resurrected dark god!

"Solemn Guardian! Bravo! Qilanxo! Illustrious One! Ylvaine! I call upon all of you to resist this invader and prevent him from doing any more harm!"

Six figurines seemed to glow as the design spirits behind them readily answered his call!

A formidable wave of mixed spiritual energy flooded into the mind that Ves had opened on his own accord and immediately poured into Blinky's spiritual body.

The dark tide was receding, though the devouring vortex absorbed a lot more spiritual energy than before due to the vast increase in input.

Seeing that this was still not enough, Ves did not hesitate to call upon his final two friendly design spirits.

"Lufa! Mother! Help us drive back this invader! Purify the Unending One and eliminate this remnant!"

A pure and holy glow washed over his body and began to enter Blinky's body. Since parts of Lufa were freshly integrated into the Star Cat, Lufa was directly able to strengthen Blinky's resistance against the dark pollution!

As for the Superior Mother, the moment a giant, translucent hand appeared above Ves, its giant index finger poked into his head and directly touched Blinky's body.

WUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU!

An inhumanly deep spiritual scream echoed through Ves' mind and poured out into the surroundings.

"Ahhh! What is this?!" Dr. Ranya cried out in pain while clutching the side of her head.

The intervention of the Superior Mother finally managed to break the unfavorable status quo. Against the entity that was connected to a spiritual sorcesses who excelled in devouring energy, the Hexer ancestral spirit was a lot better prepared to fight against their current foe than the other design spirits.

When the Superior Mother's finger pressed upon Blinky's semi-possessed body, strong Hexer-flavored spiritual energy poured into the companion spirit.

Under the Superior Mother's exquisite control, the energy she commanded first reinforced the Star Cat's unpossessed portions and formed an impervious wall that completely blocked the dark pollution from advancing further.

Qilanxo also helped with reinforcing this defensive barrier.

Unlike the spiritual energy leveraged by the other design spirits, the Superior Mother's energy was more tenacious and denied the Unending One any chance of converting her strength into his own.

Sure enough, an expert with the same abilities knew how to counter them the best. It was the right choice to call in the Superior Mother!



With the assistance of the other design spirits, the Superior Mother led the counterattack against the resurrected Dark god. The impervious wall she erected began to push forward and capture more and more lost ground.

As a result, more and more parts of Blinky's body turned back to normal. The dark pollution that dimmed the blinking light flashes visibly retreated as time went by. Though the Unending One performed various attacks against the Superior Mother, the difference in their current strength was too vast to make up in a short amount of time!

The remnant of the Unending One that came back to life only leveraged a portion of Blinky's strength along with what he absorbed.

The Superior Mother was not only a design spirit connected to many millions of LMC mechs piloted by brave Hexer mech pilots, but she also served as an object of worship to trillions of Hexer citizens who had put their faith in her as the Komodo War continued to press upon the Hegemony.

With all of this spiritual feedback, the current form of the Superior Mother was more than a match for a dark god that was not only isolated, but only a pale shadow of his former glory.

Blinky's body continued to clear up as the Superior Mother did not yield at all throughout the struggle.

Once she rescued the subcomponents responsible for devouring and converting energy from the Unending One's hands, the outcome was set! Without any viable means to increase his strength, the dark god lost his final chance of gaining enough strength to resist the collective might of so many design spirits.

The pollution kept receding further and further. Soon Blinky's hind body had cleared up. Only his tail remained dark, but at this point in time the remnant of the Unending One had lost so much ground that the Star Cat was finally able to put up a good fight!

In the end, Ves, Blinky and all of the design spirits that had answered the call managed to scour every polluting energy from the companion spirit's body.

Strangely enough, the only portion of Blinky's body that remained dark was the tip of his tail. Ves checked it extensively but found nothing wrong with it. Neither the Superior Mother nor Lufa found anything amiss over there either.

It was evidently a souvenir from the previous struggle. Blinky had yet to grow older than an hour but he had already gained his battle-scar!

"That's the life of a Larkinson." Ves proudly muttered as he relaxed. "We don't shy away from challenges. We fight back as hard as possible!"

Mrow!

Blinky experienced a lot of relief now that he had gained control over his own body again. The Star Cat squinted his glowing eyes and brushed his cheek against the giant finger of the Superior Mother.

As the different design spirits pulled back their presence now that they had done their jobs, the Superior Mother's giant hand patted Ves' prone body a couple of times, causing him to feel like he was being squashed like a pancake, before disappearing entirely.

"Ooof! You've grown stronger since last time!"

The crisis had passed. Though Ves couldn't completely rule out that the Unending One had disappeared entirely from Blinky, he believed in the judgement of the Superior Mother. Since she felt comfortable enough to leave at this junction, the risks shouldn't be too great anymore.

"Are you happy now, Blinky?"

Mrow.

It was strange for Ves to interact with his new companion spirit.

On one hand, he felt as if he was talking to a pet like Lucky.

On the other hand, it was like talking to himself because he possessed an undeniable connection to Blinky.

In fact, as he concentrated on his companion spirit, he even felt as if he shifted a portion of his consciousness over.

For a moment, he became swept up by the illusion that he had become a newborn spiritual entity that was inhabiting a warm and comfortable mind.

Yet at the same time he was experiencing this novel new perspective, Ves still retained awareness of his main body.

This odd situation caused him to think about the relationship between the Superior and his birth mother.

Had Ves inadvertently created an avatar for himself?

Though he was fine with letting Blinky maintain his autonomy over his own existence, if Ves needed to, he might be able to take more direct control in order to act through a different body!

Mrow?

"It's not time yet to test out your abilities. Your spiritual body is still in flux. We have to strike while the iron is hot and finish your initial evolution now that you are still in a flexible state.

After Blinky nodded in understanding, Ves resumed what he had been doing before the Unending One spoiled the show.

He channeled large quantities of universal life energy into his companion spirit.

Mrow!

Blinky cried in pain yet again as his entire spiritual existence rapidly grew in multiple measures. Yet despite his distress, Ves never saw any signs that he was about to break.

Since Blinky was also an aspect of himself, Ves keenly understood how far he could push it. He was confident he would be able to cut the flow before Blinky reached his breaking point.

"Just bear with it. You have already grown a lot stronger than before."

Mrow...

Ves patiently expanded his companion spirit until the very end. At some point, Blinky's entire spiritual body had absorbed so much universal life energy that it simply could not integrate any additional strength!

Blinky had reached saturation!

Seeing that there was nowhere for the remainder of the universal life energy to go, Ves stopped spilling it in vain and left the remainder in its P-stone.

As Blinky slowly adjusted to his greater power level, Ves estimated that his companion spirit had almost but not quite caught up to Sharpie yet. There was still a small gulf that separated the two, but Ves was already satisfied with the eventual outcome.

As long as Blinky finished adjusting to his current state and completely digested all of the energy poured into her body, Ves believed he could gain a lot of use out of his companion spirit!

"...Sir! Sir! Are you okay now? Your life signs have stabilized, but are you feeling well?"

Ves finally paid attention to Dr. Ranya's persistent questions. He smiled wryly and lifted himself to a sitting position. "I'm good now. A complication had taken place during the

procedure, but I managed to fix it before it did any significant harm. I already foresaw this problem so I was able to apply a countermeasure that I already prepared beforehand."

"That sounds... great. Will you agree to another physical examination? I cannot tell whether your experiences have affected the functioning of the rest of your body. It is best to be safe and perform an immediate examination in order to determine whether any of your body functions have changed."

Though Ves wanted nothing more than to return to his workshop and experiment with Blinky, he knew it was a good idea to cooperate with Dr. Ranya.

"Then let us get it over with." He answered.

"Great. You can just lie over there while I put my scanners to work."

As various devices began to hover over Ves in order to identify any anomalous, he began to relax in order to recover from his previous exertion.

He had lost a considerable amount of spiritual energy during the procedure. Some of it was locked inside Blinky, so it wasn't really lost, but he also expended a lot of energy in trying to resist the Unending One's invasion.

Fortunately, he had not lost enough energy to enter into a low mood. He simply felt a bit weary, that was all. He would probably be able to return to his peak a couple of weeks later, but Ves wasn't willing to wait that long.

"You'll help me top off my energy reserves, won't you, Blinky?"

Mrow~

From the way that the Unending One managed to leverage Blinky's energy devouring and digestion capabilities, he was already assured that he had met his most important goal!

Though Blinky's energy production capabilities were doubtlessly not as advanced and sophisticated as that of the Grand Dynamo, Ves didn't care. Blinky was his own creation and not a black box to him. Though the companion spirit's rapid growth meant that the relevant spiritual subcomponents had evolved far beyond what he could understand at the moment, he had all the time in the cosmos to decipher each and every spiritual mechanism.

Just as Ves started to bask in his success, Blinky suddenly grew alarmed when his connection to Ves resulted in a strange reaction.

A part of the companion spirit connected directly with a portion of Ves' body!

"Your heart-rate is spiking and your stress levels are rising!" Dr. Ranya called out in alarm. "Your body is heating up and the scanners are saying that a lot of pressure is building up in your chest at the moment!"

"What?!"

Ves could feel the heat and pressure emanating from his chest. Had the Unending One left a final surprise or something? Was there something with Blinky that caused his body to exhibit an adverse reaction?

As he tried his best to study his body, he did not perceive any unusual spiritual fluctuations except for one strange phenomenon.

He managed to perceive a strange spiritual connection between Blinky and the high-level energy cycle that had been running through his chest for a long time.

"What the hell...?"

Mrow! Mrow!

*Chapter 2979: Escalating Danger*

Blinky didn't know what was going on, but a part of him seemed to resonate with the energy cycle somehow. Whatever he was doing was causing the energy cycle generated by his Jutland organ to fluctuate.

It was starting to grow unstable for some reason!

"Damnit, of all of the events that could go wrong, how come I got this?! I didn't prepare for this possibility!"

Throughout many of his adventures, Ves never had any issue with his Jutland organ and the energy cycle it established.

Though it was disconcerting to run around in this state, after months and years of no notable activity, Ves had instinctively begun to dismiss their existence and peculiarities.

The high-level energy generated by his Jutland organ was not spiritual energy and something he was able to harness. Since that was the case, it might as well not exist.

Yet this time was different. Ves couldn't explain why Blinky was able to interact with this energy cycle, but he knew that it was critical that he prevented the situation from going out of control.

Yet how could he do so? Blinky was clueless at what was going on and Ves instinctively felt that cutting the odd spiritual connection would lead to very unpredictable

consequences. What other means did he possess that could allow him to get this energy cycle under control before it burst his chest apart or something?

A forgotten idea came back into his mind.

"Nitaa!" He yelled!

"Yes, sir?" His loyal bodyguard stepped forward.

"Go back to the Spirit of Bentheim and retrieve the Worclaw crystal from my vault. Wait, that's too slow. Just order someone trustworthy to enter the vault and retrieve it on my behalf. I remember that the Cross Clan traded it to us months ago, but I never had the time to study it. Move quickly!"

Since the private lab they were in right now prevented transmissions from going in and out, Nitaa had to leave the compartment in order to execute her orders.

While the bodyguard went outside, Dr. Ranya became increasingly more puzzled at the odd reactions that were taking place within Ves' body. There was no explanation for what was happening! The heat and pressure seemed to come out of nowhere. While the patriarch's Jutland organ absorbed some of the energy building up within the chest, not all of it was solved this way.

While she had not been able to provide any meaningful assistance during the earlier event, this was different. She might not be able to affect the cause for the current incident, but she was confident she could relieve the symptoms!

"Sir, with your permission, I would like to relieve the buildup of heat and pressure from the center of your body."

Ves thought about it for a moment and didn't think it would cause an adverse reaction. "Do it! Keep me informed of any dangerous signs."

A pair of robotic arms extended from the ceiling and began to press on opposite sides of his chest. They did something that gradually directed the harmful heat and pressure out of his body, causing him to feel a lot more at ease.

This was not a permanent solution though. When Ves studied the energy cycle with his extraordinary senses, he noticed that it was flowing faster and growing in power.

"Patriarch Ves, your Jutland organ has become 28 percent more active compared to its normal state. It is continuing to grow active as we speak."

The Jutland organ that had pretty much replaced his heart had always presented a lot of mysteries to Ves. Even if a considerable amount of years had passed since the insane

researcher planted it into his body, the doctors who examined it never managed to figure out all of its mechanisms.

Though Ves managed to obtain some relief in the form of gene optimization treatments and a couple of other measures, the source of the problems still remained.

It was difficult for him to pass the time it took to transport the Worclaw crystal from one capital ship to another. This was one of the downsides to choosing to perform this procedure aboard the Dragon's Den.

"Blinky, you're related to this issue. Is there any way you can stop yourself from disturbing my energy cycle?"

The Star Cat blinked his luminescent eyes. Ves already knew that his companion spirit had made no progress at all.

Blinky wasn't doing anything in his perspective!

That meant the root of the problem was tied to an intrinsic factor of his companion spirit. A part of Blinky's existence was somehow related to the abnormal phenomenon in his chest.

Ves urgently needed to find out which part of Blinky was responsible for his current predicament!

Behind the observation window, Dr. Ranya grew increasingly more distressed as she tried and failed to come up with a solution to the current problem.

She was smart enough to know that she was dealing with a situation where she wasn't able to perceive all of the interactions. The longer she worked alongside Ves, the more she became aware of special interactions between forces of nature that were not commonly known in the general scientific community.

It frustrated her that none of her personal abilities or lab machines was able to capture all of the interactions!

"I need to find a way to solve this problem." She muttered in determination.

Until then, she could do little else than to treat the symptoms.

She still had some questions, though.

"Sir, why do you believe the Worclaw crystal can solve your predicament?"

"If you are familiar with my condition, then you should know that CFA doctors managed to identify that the energy generated by the Jutland organ resembles that of the energy wielded by the Alshyr race."

As an exobiologist, how could Ranya be ignorant of who the Alshyr were? These giant avian aliens used to be one of the dominant alien powers of the galaxy!

"I recall that the Alshyr grew up on a very remarkable home planet called Worclaw. This planet is notable in that it was littered with huge deposits of a crystalline exotic that is vital to their biology."

The Alshyr physique was so powerful that the members of their race were able to ascend into space and even travel at FTL speeds without relying on any technology!

While Ves wasn't entirely clear of all of the abilities that the Alshyr race were able to perform, it was undeniable that their natural advantages made their empire very formidable.

Unfortunately, this powerful alien race suffered from the same problem that afflicted other powerful aliens.

Their race was only able to grow and multiply if they had access to Worclaw crystals. Their properties were so essential that a population of Alshyr aliens simply wouldn't be able to survive in any regions of space that lacked this exotic!

While the Alshyr were capable of mining and transporting Worclaw crystals from one location to another one, there was never enough to go around once their population had grown to a certain point. As long as the total supply of Worclaw crystals did not increase, there was no feasible way for this alien race to expand the borders of its empire any further!

Dr. Ranya gradually widened her eyes as she recalled these details. "Do you suspect that your Jutland organ caused you to turn into a similar existence as that of an Alshyr alien?"

"It makes the most sense." Ves sardonically replied as he continually tried to cope with the disturbances in his body. "The so-called Worclaw energy running through my body didn't come from nowhere. Dr. Jutland absolutely had a hand in this somehow. If I was an insane scientist who got kicked out of a deranged cult for being too crazy to their liking, I too would have wanted to develop an organ that could emulate the powers of one of the most powerful apex races of the galaxy."

As Ves engaged in more and more innovative research, he began to develop a greater understanding of Jutland's motives and objectives.



Though he still didn't agree with what the insane scientist had done to him, Ves had to admit that Dr. Jutland was still brilliant in his own way. He could have contributed a lot of useful discoveries and inventions if he hadn't taken the wrong turn in his life.

Yet the fact of the matter was that Dr. Jutland was a huge bastard who exhibited no restraint at all and did not hesitate to experiment on innocent people. He was a heinous criminal who fully deserved to get impaled by a giant mech weapon!

Time passed by as the heat and pressure generated inside Ves continued to escalate without any signs of slowing down. The energy cycle had become a little more unstable, but Ves could barely do anything to affect it in any way!

"Nitaa suddenly returned with a lockbox in her possession. "The crystal is inside!"

"Great! Put it beside me so I can pull it out. I am sure it can help me somehow!"

Dr. Ranya did not like this idea. "Wait, sir! Let's not be too hasty. We don't know how Worclaw crystals interact with your unique condition. If this unstable cycle that you have described is suffering from an excess of energy, then attempting to use a Worclaw crystal that likely holds even more energy might make your conditions worse! We should cautiously perform some tests in order to verify that this will not lead to any life-threatening consequences."

Ves shook his head. "Too slow! I can't wait that long. I can feel my body growing more unstable by the minute. Don't worry. I don't think a single crystal will cause me to blow up or something."

He unlocked the lockbox and retrieved a murky-looking white crystal that looked quite rough. It looked like a piece of cheap quartz, though it looked a little more remarkable.

For some reason, Ves felt as if there was something very special about the Worclaw crystal.

Mrow!

Blinky suddenly reacted as well. The light patterns around his spiritual body became more energetic and his eyes glowed brighter as he developed a strong desire to grasp the Worclaw crystal!

Through his intimate connection with his companion spirit, Ves finally learned the reason why Blinky developed this reaction.

"It's the wildcard ingredient!"

For some reason, Ves used the Illustrious One as a minor ingredient in Blinky's creation. There was no logical justification for it, yet he still pushed through because he treated it like a gamble.

Ves felt quite a bit of regret at this reckless choice. He didn't know why he decided to go through with this unexplainable decision, but it was far too late to question himself. He had to solve the immediate crisis first!

"Blinky! Since it appears that you have inherited a portion of the abilities of a luminar alien, you must know what to do with this Worclaw crystal. Please help me with figuring out how we can leverage it to stabilize the energy cycle in my body."

Mrow mrow!

The companion spirit had already begun to study the interesting crystal. Though it did not possess any intrinsic knowledge on Worclaw crystals, it was still a type of exotic that had a high affinity with the luminar race.

For the first time in his brief life, Blinky left Ves' mind and materialized right outside.

"Ah!" Dr. Ranya uttered in surprise as she saw yet another inexplicable sight.

The Star Cat floated right above Ves as he held the Worclaw crystal in his hands.

Relying on this trait that Blinky had partially inherited, the light show on Blinky's body grew brighter as the companion spirit managed to attune himself with the odd crystal.

Just as Ves thought that Blinky was slowly getting a handle on the precious object, the center of the Worclaw crystal suddenly glowed so bright that it brightened the entire private lab!

"The crystal! The crystal is disappearing!"

Mroooooow!

Even Blinky reacted with surprise. Even as he attempted to pull back his connection, the Worclaw crystal somehow broke down only for its pieces to enter another phase and gather onto the head of the hapless companion spirit!

MROW! MROW!

Fortunately, the strange transformation did not last long.

A tiny diamond-shaped crystal appeared on Blinky's forehead!

Mrow. Mrow.

The Star Cat cautiously lifted his paws and touched the miniature crystal, only to wince as it felt as if he was poking his own eye!

Mrow!

Ves frowned at this latest development. "I'm not sure what happened either, but we can find answers later. Right now, we can assume that since your body managed to absorb the Worclaw crystal and turn it into this form, you should be able to control it. Can you try and see if you can dampen the increasing energy cycling in my chest?"

Blinky snapped out of his stupor and did as he was told. The cute Star Cat concentrated on Ves' chest.

This time, the companion spirit wasn't as clueless as before. The crystal on his forehead glowed a bit before an immediate change took place.

The buildup of heat and pressure had finally stopped growing!

"Great job, Blinky! You're on the right track. It seems that the Worclaw crystal is truly the key to solving this problem!"

Mrow!

Blinky proudly swished his black-tipped tail.

"It's not over yet, though. Can you try and reduce the fluctuations in my body? We don't have to be in such a hurry now that you have relieved the immediate danger. Let's adopt a more steady approach."

It took a few minutes of fumbling before Blinky was able to use his new capabilities to calm the energy cycle.

Ves was saved!

### *Chapter 2980: Substitute Organ*

The crisis had passed and Ves regained his normal condition again. After several hours of intensive physical examinations, he slowly eased his worries. His body and his Jutland organ no longer acted out anymore.

In fact, he had grown a little more comfortable in his own skin. Though Ves had some close shaves earlier, he did not regret his decision to go through with the procedure. Blinky's addition to his life already made a substantial difference to his life.

Though Blinky did not come with a manual that clearly explained what he could do, Ves felt it was more interesting to find out what his new cat could do through his own efforts.

There were multiple facets to the young and elegant-looking cat.

On the surface, the purple spiritual companion exuded an intriguing charm that looked quite attractive. Ves was not immune to this effect, so he figured that Blinky would look even more charming to others.

The meaning of the strange blinking light pattern streaming over the surface of the companion spirit's body eluded Ves. It was clear that Blinky inherited this lightshow from the Illustrious One, and while it did make the cat more mysterious, too much attention wasn't always desirable.

"You're too handsome for your own good, Blinky! I bet that even if I cover you up in a coat, you'll still draw eyeballs."

Mrow~?

Blinky's glowing eyes blinked as he comfortably settled in Ves' mind. Out of all of the places he could settle, he chose to rest next to Gloriana's dormant spiritual fragment. The new cat rubbed his cheeks against the fragment as if to pass on his scent.

Fortunately, he didn't raise his hind legs in order to mark his territory. When Ves wondered whether it was necessary to neuter his new pet, a shudder ran through his back and his hands almost tried to cover his crotch.

Though Blinky was an autonomous existence, he was also an empowered extension of Ves. Neutering his companion spirit was no different from emasculating himself!

Mrow?!

The Star Cat possessed sharp instincts and already sensed a threat.

"Hahaha, it's nothing, Blinky! You just continue to relax. There is nothing wrong."

This little exchange highlighted the asymmetrical relationship between owner and companion spirit.

Ves was able to read Blinky's thoughts and could even take over direct control of his body. Of course, just like piloting a mech, this was much harder to do if his companion spirit didn't cooperate or actively resisted.

Blinky wasn't able to do the same to Ves. The cat was a weaker and subordinate existence to him, so it would be absurd if the companion spirit suddenly took charge.

This was a deliberate design choice. The purpose of companion spirits was to become the pets and helpers of the people they were attached to. In no circumstance should they ever usurp the original consciousness of the bodies they inhabited!

Still, Blinky was not completely ignorant of what Ves was thinking. Since the cat inhabited a mind, he was able to sense the thoughts and emotions swirling around him. It was easy enough to judge the general direction of what Ves was thinking and feeling by observing what was flowing through his mind.

In short, the relationship between people and their companion spirits was quite similar to that of a mech pilot and their mechs.

As a mech designer, Ves did not see anything wrong with copying this model. The power balance was also similar, though a companion spirit possessed a lot more autonomy than a mech since they weren't meant to be directly controlled.

It was in his best interest to develop a good relationship with Blinky's autonomous personality. Not only would they be able to cooperate to a greater degree, but also ensure that Blinky grew in a direction that was more favorable to Ves.

If a companion spirit did not provide any value to the people they were attached to, then there was little point to their existence. Ves used up valuable ingredients to create Blinky, and he expected a good return on investment for his troubles.

"Your checkup is over." Dr. Ranya said as she entered the main chambered and looked at Ves with a curious expression. "While there has been some change in parameters, none of it leads me to believe you are in danger."

"That sounds good. How is my Jutland organ?"

"I do not fully comprehend it, so there is little I can say with confidence, sir. My overall judgement is that your Jutland organ has returned to its normal, stable state. From what I have observed, it is a powerful energy-generating organ that is likely part of a greater system. The reason why you are unable to control it is because Dr. Jutland has likely refrained from implanting you with other organs that are able to do something with this energy cycle."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "That's quite a concerning guess. Do you have any proof of your assertion?"

"I don't have hard proof, no, but the interaction between Blinky and your Jutland organ suggests that you may have inadvertently moved closer to Dr. Jutland's original design. If my guess is correct, then Blinky capabilities may allow him to substitute the follow-up organ of this larger system. This could be a way to channel and make use of the higher-grade energy running through your body."

Her logic was sound. Ves was like a mech that possessed all of the basic functions but not much else. If he started off as a third-class mech, then Dr. Jutland upgraded many parts of the overall frame to second-class standards while replacing the old power reactor with a massively overpowered first-class component!

This caused a fundamental imbalance in Ves that never made much sense.

After completing the Groening Mission, he tried hard to figure out how to use the Jutland organ and the high-quality Worclaw energy it generated to his advantage.

Unfortunately, the high-quality energy running through his body did not do much aside from forcefully improving his physique. It could even pose a threat to him just like how the excessive power generated by a first-class power reactor could easily fry the power lines of a lesser mech!

No mech designer was crazy enough to invest so much effort and resources to insert a very potent power reactor in an ordinary mech, especially when the machine in question did not possess any powerful weapons, shield generators or other modules that could put all of that energy to good use!

This was why Ves became intrigued by Dr. Ranya's guess. If she was correct, then Dr. Jutland must have originally designed a powerful 'module' that would allow the unbalanced mech to leverage its excess energy in order to accomplish powerful effects.

It was too bad that Dr. Jutland was long dead. His bodily remains and whatever research he left behind fell into the hands of the CFA.

There was no way for Ves, Ranya or any other biotech expert in the Larkinson Clan to recreate Dr. Jutland's missing work.

Yet mechs did not necessarily have to contain the work of just one mech designer or mech company.

As long as other mech designers figured out how to tap into the energy generated by the power reactor, they could easily design and fabricate all manner of other weapons and modules that could complete the mech in question!

Ves gained a greater appreciation for Blinky. The companion spirit might finally allow him to make use of the energy cycle that he had long neglected due to helplessness!

He quickly reined in his excitement, though. He did not forget the danger he had just gone through.

"I think your theory has a lot of merit, doctor, but I'm not in the mood to rush anymore. I should get more familiar with Blinky first and give him time to familiarize himself with all of his abilities. I'm not sure why he was able to absorb and integrate the Worclaw crystal, but seeing how he was able to calm my energy cycle after this, I'm sure this is the key component to harnessing the energy in my body."

The two exchanged a few more ideas about this topic. If Ves felt his body was still unstable, then it was important to figure out how Blinky could help and prevent any further incidents.

Since this wasn't the case, Ves thought it was better to slow down and avoid doing anything drastic. He had already gone through enough difficulties for one day.

"I believe it is best to perform periodic checks on your body and more specifically your Jutland organ." Dr. Ranya advised. "You don't have to travel to the Dragon's Den for routine examinations. I will make sure to inform the doctors aboard the Spirit of Bentheim of what I require. The equipment over there should be good enough to gather the data that we need."

"Alright. I will be working intensely on my upcoming mech design projects in the next couple of months, so I won't be able to pay much attention to this issue. I seriously doubt that it is relevant to my mech design work."

They continued to discuss various concerns related to the procedure that Ves had just completed. Ves couldn't explain much, though, so he eventually bid goodbye to her and made his way back to his flagship.

As he settled inside his shuttle, he continued to explore his new companion spirit.

"Blinky. Can you come forward?"

Mrow.

The companion spirit exited his mind and materialized into existence. However, just like Goldie, Blinky wasn't completely able to enter the material realm. He just became visible to the naked eye and exuded a noticeable presence.

Only spiritual entities were able to touch him. When Ves passed his hand on Blinky's body, it went right through. He had to leverage his own Spirituality in order to physically interact with his new companion spirit.

"Come over here, please."

The cat floated over until he landed on Ves' lap. His large, glowing eyes blinked upwards.

Ves couldn't resist the cuteness and petted the lovely companion spirit. Though he felt like he was petting any other cat, a part of him had the illusion that he was patting himself on the head!

He subtly shook his head. "Ugh. This is confusing. I need to get used to this double sensation."

Ketis didn't seem to be bothered by this issue. While she was definitely aware that Sharpie was a part of her, she pretty much treated her living sword intent as a separate existence.

Perhaps this approach was for the best. Ves couldn't keep on doubting his own identity whenever he did something with Blinky.

As soon as he made this determination, much of the confusion in his mind faded away. As Ves turned Blinky over in order to rub the cute cat's belly, he did not feel as if he was babying himself.

"Hehehe. I am absolutely not rubbing myself. Nope. I am simply stroking my cat. That's all."

Mrow! Mrow!

Blinky quickly grew annoyed with the excessive pampering. He hissed and squirmed out of the reach of those touchy hands.

"Goldie. Come out and meet your younger brother."

Nyaaaaaaa.

A glowing golden form appeared in midair. Goldie soon locked eyes with Blinky.

For a moment, Ves was concerned that they would begin to wrestle again each other or something, but his fears turned out to be unfounded.

Nyaaaaa~

Mrow~

The two spiritual cats approached each other and bumped their noses. They liked each other's faces and began to explore each other.

They had already acknowledged their familial ties!

The two cats made for quite a striking contrast when they pressed their bodies close. Goldie was as radiant as a nearby sun while Blinky's body was like a tapestry of space where dozens of distant, blinking stars faded in and out.

Ves was glad that the two got along.

The Golden Cat gladly welcomed the arrival of another cat of her kind. Blinky was perhaps the second spiritual cat that was closely identical to her own existence. While Goldie befriended plenty of other design spirits, it just wasn't the same.



As for Blinky, he was still new and curious about his own state of existence. He had no friends yet aside from Ves and Goldie was a great relative to spend time with. Hopefully, she could quickly get Blinky up to speed on how to live his life as a spiritual cat.