

Mech Touch 6581

Chapter 6581 Old Acquaintances

After concluding their visit to the Dimension Observatory, Ves and Ketis finally climbed their way up to the Sacred Temple.

There, they entered the Courtyard of Envoys and checked on its only occupant.

"I am... at your service." A ghostly and floaty version of Venerable Imon Ingvar slowly bowed and conveyed his deepest respect.

Enough time had passed since his 'death' and conversion to a Chosen Envoy that he had regained more lucidity.

However, he was too far from becoming a good conversation partner. The Chosen Envoy still hadn't recovered much of his humanity.

"It will probably take a few more years before he becomes lucid and intelligent enough to deploy him in the field."

"What purpose would that serve?" Ketis wondered. "All I see is a ghost. Are you expecting him to haunt people to death?"

"Not per se. He used to be an expert pilot. I think it may be possible to have him pilot a mech again, though I will need to design a machine that is specially tailored to him. The latest System upgrade has given me the option to spend AP to create a physical body for him. That will make this much easier. Perhaps this is a way for me to cultivate an absolutely loyal mech pilot for myself. The only question is whether he will retain the extraordinary willpower of an expert pilot and whether he can still break through. If he has lost it all, then I will have to find a different way to use him to my advantage." Ketis frowned. She found it rather distasteful to focus so much on turning Imon into a productive asset.

Why not try to make him alive again so that Saint Commander Casella Ingvar could be reunited with the brother she thought she had lost forever?

She refrained from speaking up. She could understand Ves' priorities. None of this was cheap. They would have to spend valuable Ascension Points to create a new organic vessel for Imon Ingvar. The least he could do was work to pay off his debt.

The pair of mech designers left the Courtyard of Envoys and entered the main temple structure.

There, they inspected their Status before heading to the Sacred Hearth.

There, they beheld their Divine Cores, each of which had changed and grown to varying degrees since their last visit.

Vulcan had become Ves' strongest incarnation.

Years of practising a custom high-end cultivation method optimized by his mother

had allowed Vulcan to enter the second major cultivation rank ahead of his principal! Ves could not help but feel amazed each time he confirmed Vulcan's rapid progress. His rate of improvement was high. Much of it was because his cultivation method directly allowed him to leech from the energies of the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown. His rapid growth in spirituality in turn accelerated his ability to connect to craftsmen and artisans that worshipped him as the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship. With the help of the totems that the Creation Association commercialized and distributed across human-occupied space in increasingly more sophisticated ways, Vulcan was able to ride along so many master craftsmen that he was able to familiarize himself and gain at least partial proficiency in many different productive activities!

From learning how to tan puelmer skins to obtaining the secrets on how to process a Mentalist Crystal into an edible ingredient, Vulcan slowly embodied the concept of human craftsmanship in the Red Ocean.

He even began to receive incidental worship of 'alchemists' who had recently learned the previously obscure craft of converting extraordinary plant and animal reagents into useful pills and elixirs!

Ves was especially happy with that recent gain because it opened the door to enabling the Larkinson Clan to produce these strategic goods.

However, traditional alchemy was a pointless activity without a large and continuous supply of alchemical reagents. The majority of them could not be bought on the open market. The demand for

them was far too high, so every major group converted several territories into extraordinary farms and grew the reagents that matched their alchemy formulas.

The growth and care of those plants was not an enterprise that could be set up with ease. It took a large number of knowledgeable experts as well as special soils that could grow the sensitive and picky reagents.

The Larkinson Clan currently lacked the territories, the expertise and the knowledgeable manpower needed to cultivate all of the essential plant reagents.

If the Blinkyverse had begun the process of converting an intangible planet and a star into real physical satellites, then Ves might be able to get away with growing all of

those valuable reagents inside a part of himself!

That was still a fantasy, though. Ves did not have the faintest clue what he needed to

do to kick off the materialization process of the Blinkyverse.

Either Blinky needed to become a True God first, or he needed to upgrade the Blinkyverse manually by feeding it with rare and precious materials.

Ves inwardly shook his head. There was no need for him to be impatient about this stuff. The Larkinson Clan was not large and established enough to set up a complete supply chain for alchemical products. He and his clan could make do with exchanging the end products from the Red Three by spending war merits.

In any case, even if Vulcan would not be able to practice his newly gained skills in refining pills and elixirs, at least not directly, he could still do so more indirectly as long as the worshiping alchemists allowed the spiritual entity to possess their bodies

for a time.

Even so, it was harder for Vulcan to achieve success through this method. Even refining the simplest pill not only required a lot of understanding of theoretical principles, but accumulate an abundance of experience on the timing and execution of the production steps.

Domain Shaper or not, Vulcan needed to be honest and learn alchemy step-by-step if he wanted to be able to produce these products on an independent basis.

That was not a high priority at the moment. Ves resolutely set this subject aside and studied the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown in greater detail.

The symbol of authority traditionally associated with the lost Metal Scroll still stuck to Vulcan's Divine Core like barnacle.

When Ves tried to peel it away, the stubborn crown refused to relinquish its perch and prevented him from having his way.

"Ketis."

"Uhm, whatever you are about to ask from me, I do not think it is a good idea. These Divine Cores represent our essence. What will happen if we actually damage one of them? I cannot contain the Heavensword if it ever goes wild."

"That's a risk that I am willing to accept. Just do what I ask, please. Slowly draw the Heavensword and try to make contact with the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown. Just a light touch will do. I just want to know what happens if the two get into contact." To be honest, Ketis' concerns were justified. What Ves just asked her to do could go wrong in so many ways. If a fight broke out in the Sacred Hearth, then there was a risk that all of their Divine Cores may suffer from collateral damage in the process! However, Ves did not believe that the Heavensword would be stupid enough to start a fight in a space where Ketis' Divine Core would also be at risk of getting harmed. The biggest wildcard was the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown. Ves knew way too little about its history, its motivations and its threat level to himself.

This was why he proposed this dangerous experiment. Ves needed to gather more data on the symbol of authority so that he could better account for its presence in his

life.

"C'mon, Ketis. What are you waiting for? It is better that we try to get a reaction out of it rather than let this potential time bomb detonate on its own terms. If it turns out to

he throat then it is hotter to deal with it now than later"

Though Ketis still felt this was a bad idea, she cautiously drew out the Heavensword and slowly brought it closer to Vulcan's Divine Core.

Ves wondered what would happen if an ancient grand work came into contact with an ancient relic of a different nature.

He still did not have a clear idea of the true nature of the symbols of authority. He had heard that the special crowns were originally derived from the blood shed by the creators of the Sacred Scrolls.

This gave Ves a hint on how he could elevate his user status within the Mech Designer

System.

If his fears became true, then the only way to gain greater authority over the System was to harness the power of an actual symbol of authority!

It all fit with each other!

Sacred Scrolls were not supposed to be used by themselves. They were incredibly

powerful and offered a lot of benefits to those that were able to access them, but only the supposed 'Holy Sons' and 'Holy Daughters' could gain administrator rights over

their functions.

The ability to control the usage of the Sacred Scrolls and the opportunity to unlock their greater mysteries were incredibly tempting benefits to those favored leaders, but the problem was that the sources of the blessings most definitely had impure

motives!

This was why Ves never trusted the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown and constantly had to put up his guard against it. Only the fact that it had remained fairly inert aside from allowing itself to get exploited by Vulcan had caused him to feel less acutely threatened by its continued presence.

His mother was aware of the problem, but she believed that the Metal God Method that she specifically improved to siphon the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown's strength

should be enough to keep it safe.

Ves was not entirely convinced. Hence why he insisted on this test.

Vulcan most certainly began to feel more and more nervous as one of the most powerful weapons in the Red Ocean came closer and closer to his Divine Core! Even though Vulcan greatly admired the Heavensword, that also made him fear its power even more!

If Vulcan had not already cultivated his Heart of Steel to a considerable degree of success, he would not have been able to remain so stoic in the face of a potential

disaster!

Even the symbol of authority could no longer maintain a dull and lifeless face

anymore. It visibly began to show signs of activity by shaking from its current perch and releasing a distinctly metallic glow!

Ketis slowed down, but did not stop. As the tip of the Heavensword approached the surface of the crown, the latter most definitely could not remain calm.

When the two apparently metallic objects finally made contact with each other to the point where one of them may actually suffer a scratch, both of them briefly flared with

power!

The crown released a pulse of high-grade metal energy in an attempt to physically push away the sharp edge of the Heavensword!

The grand work on the other hand surrounded itself with heavenly energy, enabling it.

to withstand the energetic pulse and remain firm!

"Stop." Ves commanded.

"Stopping now."

Ketis did as instructed. The activity between the two powerful relics quickly died

down. "Did you sense anything special during the moment of contact?" Ves curiously asked.

I was as if they never conflicted with each other.

"Hmmm." Ketis thought for a few seconds. "I could feel through the Heavensword that

it had tried to assert its dominance over the crown. Neither of them managed to gain the upper hand, but that may be that they are unwilling to initiate hostilities in this time and place. The weapon harbors a familiar sort of disdain towards the crown. The

two... may already be familiar with each other, but I can't know for sure. The best way I can characterize it is two old acquaintances meeting with each other after they have lived out most of their lives. Even if they used to be openly hostile towards each other, they no longer care so much about their past disagreements. That is all I can surmise." "That is okay. You have given me more than enough information."

This told Ves that the Heavensword may actually have the ability to harm or destroy the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown!

He grinned when he made this inference. The balance of power between him and the

symbol of authority had finally shifted!

Although it had not changed entirely in his favor, he at least proved that he had the

means to deter the crown! This was good news!

Chapter 6582 One Man's Trash is Another Woman's Treasure

The experiment yielded plenty of useful information to Ves.

He learned that the Heavensword and the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown may have belonged to opposing parties in the past.

This made sense as the creator of the Metal Scroll and its associated crown used to be an 'Immortal God' that sundered the extraordinary source of the Milky Way Galaxy in an attempt to ascend to a higher stage!

If the wielder of the Heavensword lived during those ancient times, then he or she would definitely be a part of the huge cultivation community that had unanimously turned against the five Immortal Gods that sought to devour the heavens themselves! The outcome of this cataclysmic collision was mutual annihilation.

The Milky Way became broken and degenerated into a low-energy environment. Cultivators died off en masse as they were no longer able to sustain themselves due to the disappearance of E energy radiation.

The five Immortal Gods 'died, though how extensively they perished still remained unclear.

The Heavensword had to enter into a power-saving mode in order to survive in the barren environment.

The grand work also had to get accustomed to a new reality where the environment was unable to spawn a worthy heir to its precious legacy!

Considering the sheer devastation that resulted from that ancient war, it was understandable that neither relics of the past felt eager to revisit past grievances.

Too much time had passed since that cataclysm occurred. Ves previously thought that it happened several hundreds of thousands of years ago, but that was obviously far too implausible of a timeframe.

It was much more likely that tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of years had passed since the ancient disaster took place. Ves was not an expert, so his assumptions may be false.

Whatever the case, after living through such a long period of ruination, the two relics of the past had already moved on from this ancient calamity for the most part.

There was one possible reason why the Heavensword see reason to act against the symbol of authority despite the risks to Ves and Ketis' Divine Cores, but it had mercifully restrained its edge.

Ves actually found it curious that the Heavensword did not treat the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown as an archenemy. This may have happened if the crown was actually a surviving remnant of an Immortal God that had managed to cling to life throughout the passage of time.

Since that ultimately did not happen, the crown probably had a weaker relation to its creator. It was practically impossible to negotiate and subdue an Immortal God!

The gap in status was simply too big even if the latter had turned into a remnant of its former self.

If the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown possessed its own personality that was independent of the original Immortal God, then that was a lot more advantageous to Ves!

He was already forming plans based on his observations and assumptions. He still had to maintain a certain degree of caution considering how it successfully managed to corrupt the Polymath, but he became a lot more confident about subverting it to his

cause.

After all, what else was it supposed to do? Unlike the Golden Laurel Wreath Crown which at least remained tied to a completely intact Sacred Scroll, the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown had lost its 'partner' after the shattering of the Metal Scroll!

Ves speculated that the breaking of the Sacred Scroll had invalidated some of the programming of the Iron Resonant Crucifix Crown and caused it to become less eager to follow its original directives.

If this was the case, then Ves may be able to take advantage of this opening and convince it to accept a new purpose!

As Ves continued to observe the crown with cautious interest, Ketis gazed suspiciously in his direction.

"What are you thinking about doing now, Ves?"

"Ideas. Some of them are dangerous. It's not important for the time being. I am not ready to break the status quo yet. Let's leave the crown alone since it isn't doing any apparent harm for the time being"

The pair of mech designers exited the Sacred Hearth and left the temple building. Both of them admired the view of the idyllic clouds and mountain range for a time.

However, they both needed to return and get back to work.

"Make sure to be ready to enter the System Space four days later." Ves broke the silence. "We need a lot of AP if we want to raise our chances of surviving the ongoing

war."

"I know. I am eager to upgrade the Dimension Observatory further and begin this dimension breaching stuff. There is also other stuff that I want to exchange with AP. There is far too much of the former and not enough of the latter."

Their biggest constraint right now was that the System offered increasingly more attractive benefits, but charged AP for almost all of them. This was also one of the reasons why Ves favored the second upgrade track.

Five Element Mastery and Superdimensional Transformation were decent options as well, but Ves could clearly tell it would take a huge amount of Ascension Points to fully realize their benefits.

That was way too much for Ves!

His earning potential directly limited how extensively he could take advantage of the System. This was one of the reasons why he embraced an option that suggested that it would impose the least amount of drain on this scarce currency.

The Demoncasting Forge did not disappoint his expectations. Sure, it cost AP to upgrade the facilities and unlock the ability to summon stronger demons and expand the capacity of the Demon Prison. That did not bother Ves too much because its current state already satisfied his demands.

He could freely engage in Demoncasting without spending AP as long as he supplied the demons himself.

Lucky's gems gave him a buffer which he could use to buy time to secure another supply of demons.

When Ves finally bid farewell to Ketis and exited the System Space, he returned to his underground design lab as if nothing special happened.

His eyes suddenly burned with greater purpose.

He suddenly stood up and tried to track Lucky down.

According to the monitoring system, the cat was currently lounging in Gloriana's company.

"Meow"

"Hihihi! You are so cute and close to perfect, Lucky."

Gloriana playfully threw another chunk of high-grade exotic at the cat. Lucky lazily caught the ore with his mouth and chewed on it before swallowing his latest snack.

"There you are, Lucky" Ves said as the gem cat began to glance vigilantly in his direction.

"Why have you returned, Ves?"

"I need to have a good word with my lazy pet here" He said as he moved closer and unceremoniously picked up the archemetal feline. "I will be taking him away."

When he moved out, he suddenly gained an interesting idea and halted. He turned back towards Gloriana and extended an arm.

A very strange and deadly pink knife suddenly materialized in his palm. Gloriana gazed at it with a puzzled expression. Her perplexment gradually made way

weapon.

"What... what is this? Where did you get this knife? Did you make it yourself?" "It's a test product that I have developed in secret." Ves succinctly answered. "I am trying out a new means of enhancing weapons and possibly mechs. It is a considerably more dangerous and risky means of metaphysical empowerment, but the initial result is already powerful enough for me to follow up on this radical new

approach."

Even if Ves couldn't explain where he obtained the knife or managed to produce it, he still wanted to leave behind a clear record that introduced his D-arms and D-mechs to

red humanity.

It would be much less dramatic for Ves to introduce his first fully fledged D-mech when there was no prior warning that such an outrageous product could even exist!

By exposing a small trinket like the Maiden Knife first, Ves could forewarn the Red Association about the existence of demonized products.

As Gloriana studied it more, she inexplicably felt attracted to it. She unconsciously

drew closer, but Ves drew back the knife.

"Hey!"

"Careful, Gloriana. Did you forget that I said it was dangerous and risky? I am being

serious. As long as you keep it in your possession, there is always a chance it will turn hostile towards you. This isn't a regular living knife. The intelligence inside the Maiden Knife is powerful and malevolent. You will get your arm pricked by these curved thorns if you let down your guard."

His wife did not appear to take his warning seriously. "That is because the knife hates

you. This is a woman's weapon. It is a travesty that it remains in your hand! You should transfer it to me right now!"

She snatched the knife from Ves and held it with growing interest and admiration.

"This knife! It is... more beautiful and perfect than I thought!"

"Huh?"

"At first, these thorns appear wasteful and inefficient, but there is a sense of elegant

lethality in its design language. Ah, I can feel the woman that gives this weapon a soul. My suspicions are right. She much prefers to be held by me than you. I do not blame her at all. This is a woman's accessory!"

One of the knife's inherent effects began to affect Gloriana's charm. Unlike the earlier enhancement applied to Ketis, the Maiden Knife had a much

stronger effect on Gloriana!

She was already beautiful from the onset and always groomed her appearance to perfection every morning.

Now that she held the Maiden Knife, she had gained a metaphysical boost in attraction

that complemented her physical attraction!

The result was that she looked a lot more enchanting than before!

It was as if his wife had turned into a graceful elf. Though Ves was strong-minded enough to keep his head clear, his fascination for his wife grew when he witnessed her beauty reaching an unprecedented peak.

He tried his best to refrain from telling her how much more beautiful she had become. He did not want to feed her already overinflated ego.

She was perfectly capable of doing that herself, in fact. She activated a mirror projection and admired the view of herself. She swayed her body around and noticed

that she unconsciously made many subtle movements that directly amplified her attraction!

"This knife is amazing! What an amazing effect! What is its name?"

"I call it the Maiden Knife, because the soul trapped inside is derived from a long-dead maiden."

"I see. Do you know how much money you can raise if you put it up for auction?"

"Millions of MTA credits. No. Women are obsessed with beauty. Tens of millions of MTA credits."

"Try billions of MTA credits." Gloriana smirked. "If this knife is able to improve the appearance and beauty of any woman, then this Maiden Knife is worth at least that much! In fact, if this new weapon is one-of-a-kind that cannot be replicated, then do

not be surprised that its value can rise to over a trillion MTA credits if it is placed in a grand auction!"

Ves genuinely looked shocked at his much more charming wife!

He never thought that a failed experimental product could actually had the potential

to raise so much money!

"What?! Are people truly willing to spend money that is worth as much as a first-class

fleet carrier on a knife that only makes you look more attractive? We are in the middle of a war!"

"So? Beauty is a woman's weapon. Don't you know that, Ves? If this weapon's ability to

amplify the charm and allure of a lady that already scores high in those criteria, then this is an accessory that defies reality. If you combine it with a curated cultivation method that increases a woman's attraction even further, then hardly any human will be able to prevent themselves from worshipping that goddess!" Woman's pursuit of beauty was limitless. It was not implausible for women to be willing to trade an actual first-class fleet carrier just to possess such an amazing

artifact!

"Then..."

"Forget about auctioning it. I am keeping it. Just consider it my early birthday present." Gloriana said with determination as she gripped the Maiden Knife tighter in her slender hand. "Do you have any objections, Ves?"

"No... you can keep it... dear."

Chapter 6583 Lucky At Work

Gloriana decisively claimed the Maiden Knife as her latest possession.

Even if she identified that the knife could be bought for the price of a first-class fleet carrier if it was put up for auction in front of wealthy ladies from the upper echelon of first-class society, Gloriana never thought of relinquishing it to others!

At least Ves did not have to worry about selecting the right birthday present for his wife.

As Gloriana practically gushed over the knife despite the presence of spikes that could easily prick her vulnerable skin, the woman did not appear to harbor any fear that the weapon would harm herself somehow.

This was incredibly foolish, yet Ves strangely observed that Gloriana apparently did not encounter any meaningful resistance from the Maiden Knife.

The D-arm's behavior had changed drastically.

Ves wondered whether the Maiden Knife had forgotten its identity as a weapon inhabited by a resentful and irrational demon.

When Ves held it in his hands, he could feel the anger and fury that the so-called ancient maiden held towards him. He was the creator of the Maiden Knife, yet it never showed him any gratitude!

Of course, that made a bit of sense as Ves had put the ancient demon through a series of painful transformations before converting her into the unwilling power source of a D-arm!

What was strange was that the Maiden Knife showed clear rejection towards Ketis, but grew unnaturally docile as soon as it fell into Gloriana's palm!

Why did it exhibit such an enormous difference in treatment?

Was it because the Maiden Knife disliked Ketis because she wasn't pretty enough?

Did Gloriana's more classical beauty and excellent hair and skincare earn the appreciation of the ancient maiden?

As twisted and crazy the remnant of the ancient maiden had become, it appeared that she was still capable of playing favorites!

This observation was of great significance to Ves. It taught him that demons were not universally hostile to everyone, and was willing to temper their aggression when coming into contact with more compatible individuals.

This meant that Ves had to pay attention to the nature and inclinations of individual demons. He had to match them up to the right objects and the right users in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative side effects.

Shortly after Gloriana claimed the Maiden Knife, she already began to craft a matching pink scabbard for her latest knife.

She did not attempt to create curved caps in order to cover the sharp spikes. She instead took a page out of Ketis' book and designed a floating device that could safely keep the weapon close at hand without risking anyone getting picked by one of the many thorns.

Strangely enough, losing contact with the weapon did not remove the charm enhancing effect right away, unlike what happened when Ves and Ketis held the Maiden Knife.

This made Gloriana more determined to go through with her current plan.

Ves could only lament the unfair treatment. He simply did not understand the thinking of these women.

"Let's leave them alone and have our own little chat, shall we, Lucky?"

"Meeeow!"

The gem cat resisted Ves' hold. Lucky valued his freedom and did not want to get dragged away.

The feline clearly sensed that Ves did not have good intentions when he arrived this time!

Sadly, Lucky had no chance of getting away. His phasing abilities had improved continuously over time, but trying to play around with spatial abilities in front of a phase lord was futile.

Once Ves carried his cat to his own design lab, he sat down on the nearest chair and held Lucky in front of a face as if he was holding up a baby.

"Meow?"

The dark-plated archemetal cat played innocent this time. It was as if Lucky thought he could get away with whatever Ves tried to accuse him of if he acted cute.

It didn't work.

"Lucky."

"Meooww?"

"I have been tolerating your laziness and persistent lack of productive activities for a long time. You have been a good companion for the children, and you generally kept your nose out of trouble, so I have been letting you wander around without care."

"Meow."

"While I am still willing to let you continue to play around, what is different is that I expect you to meet certain quotas."

"Have you forgotten who you are? You are a gem cat! The primary purpose of your existence is to produce gems!"

"Meow!"

"When was the last time you used the kitty litter box? With how many exotics and hypers you have eaten in the last year, I would have expected you to produce absolutely marvelous gems, especially given that you have taken a bite out of EE-343F-00334R! Yet here we are. So many months have

passed while you have refused to generate any output! What is going on in your digestive system?! Are you embezzling all of those valuable nutrients into upgrading your functionality?"

"Meeooow...?"

"GIVE ME GEMS!" Ves violently shook Lucky back and forth! "Producing gems is the least you can do after I allowed you to take a bite out of a super-class alloy! If there is any of it left in your digestive system, then get it out right now! I am not going to wait

any longer!"

"Meeooow! Meeooow! Meeooow!"

"What has changed is that I have new use for your gems now! Previously, I needed them to elevate my mechs to masterworks and give my champions an additional boost. in combat. These demands became less important over time because of the shifting focus to ace pilots and Gloriana's god body method. I thought that this would have phased out the value of your gems, but I have recently found a wonderful new application that can make even better use of them than before! Isn't that great,

Lucky?"

"Meeooow!"

Ves gave his cat a serious glare. "Okay, that's enough talk. It is time for concrete action. You have two choices, little buddy. Either start producing your output now, or wait until I find a piece of B-stone other materials that can 'stimulate' your digestive

organs. It's your choice."

"Meeooow!"

The gem cat made an immediate choice.

After receiving a serious warning that Lucky needed to abide by a new quota, he went to work right away.

Ves lowered the cat on one of the kitty litter boxes used by one of the numerous cats that prowled Diandi Base.

The members of the Premier Branch did not have a strong tradition of keeping cats and other pets. There were still plenty of people who originally resided in the expeditionary fleet and brought along their existing pets, hence why kitty litter boxes could be found with ease.

responsibilities and actively stimulated his digestive tract through his own means,

A few awkward minutes passed until Lucky completed his shameful business and

floated away with an ache on his backside.

"Meooooow..."

"Don't forget that I expect you to produce another set of high-quality gems in the next

12 months!" Ves yelled after his cat. "If you produce more of them, you will earn a bonus. I might even find a way to give you another bite out of a super-class material. You don't want to know what I will do to you if you fail to produce any gems that meet my minimum standard. If your output continues to disappoint me, then do not blame me if I use you as a test subject for one of the experiments I have been dying to start."

"MEOW!"

Lucky dashed away pretty quickly after hearing this ominous threat!

Becoming Ves' test subject was no joke!

Ves didn't care about Lucky's departure. He got what he wanted out of the cat.

Perhaps the gem cat had taken the threats seriously, because he truly made a serious effort to produce a substantial amount of gems this time.

Each of them looked bright and special, which increased Ves' expectations towards

their attributes.

Due to the large variety of materials ingested by Lucky, the gems came in several different variations, Ves already placed them in different sub-categories. Right now, the so-called dark gems attracted his interest the most. Ves had a feeling that gems tied to negative attributes had the greatest demonization potential. They could be used to create the most powerful but also the most dangerous D-arms!

[Shadow Lord's Betrayal]

The regret of an alien assassin towards betraying his mission and his master is captured in this gem. Greatly increases affinity towards the shadow attribute and amplifies the single attack power of an attack onto a target's rear by 100 percent.

"What a powerful effect."

Ves had encountered much more powerful amplifications in performance, but he had never seen such a strong attack multiplier in a small and handy gem!

This was definitely a boost that was perfect for the Phobos, the Larkinson Clan's only

expert stealth mech.

However, Ves felt it was wasteful to merge the next iteration of the Phobos with a

gem. It would only remain useful so long as Venerable Zimro Belson remained a high-tier expert pilot.

If he broke through and became a saint, then his Saint Kingdom would begin to subject his Phobos to willpower baptism.

This would steadily override the extraordinary amplification effect of the Shadow Lord's Betrayal with a persistent boost that originated from the ace pilot himself!

From his examinations of the Dark Zephyr Mark III after Saint Tusa piloted him for a time, Ves already ascertained that the 20 percent boost in agility bestowed by Bastet's Regard had worn away.

The ace light skirmisher retained nothing from the original gem.

Ves did not feel there was anything regretful about the expiration of Bastet's Regard. It

had served its purpose and Tusa had gotten plenty of value out of the effect during his expert pilot days.

However, Ves would not be stupid enough to squander one of Lucky's gems on a mech piloted by an ace pilot or another individual that was close to breaking through.

Ves speculated that the only way to preserve a gem's effect was if the remnant soul trapped inside retained at least some of the strength of a True God.

Only a higher major cultivation rank was strong enough to resist the willpower baptism of an ace pilot, at least up to a point!

It did not sound likely that Lucky would be able to capture True God-level remnant

spirits in his gems anytime soon.

That was okay. Ves had studied the Maiden Knife and the tools of the Demoncasting Forge just enough to possess greater confidence in their ability to withstand willpower baptism.

That meant that he could definitely find a way to make this gem useful for the current

and future Phobos.

Ves turned his attention towards an even darker gem that looked related to the previous one.

[Shadow Lord's Mark]

The insidiousness of an alien assassin is contained in this gem. Greatly increases

affinity towards the darkness attribute and allows a mech to plant intangible marks with every melee weapon strike. If enough marks are planted in the same area, then they can be detonated on command, inflicting instant damage based on the total

darkness energy contained within the marks.

"Interesting!" What a great effect!

Even if Ves did not intend to integrate it in a gem, he still hoped he could preserve this

unique function if he integrated it into a D-arm.

It would be best if he employed Demonforging, but since he had no idea how to do

that, he could only resort to Demoncasting.

Ves could see two immediate uses for the Shadow Lord's Mark.

He could either use it to Demoncast a suitable weapon for his own use, or he could

use it to augment one of the Dark Zephyr Mark III's knives in order to make the weapon useful.

Chapter 6584 Lucky's Output

Where there was darkness, there was light.

Lucky also produced gems that possessed a notable alignment towards positive E-energy attributes.

Although not all of the bright gems possessed benign effects, they at least possessed a more positive vibe than the dark gems.

Ves actually doubted whether the remnant spirits trapped inside some of these bright gems could be characterized as demons.

[Bastet's Encouragement]

The encouraging yowl of a feline patron can be found within this gem. Enhances the dignity of a mech and amplifies the mental suppression it exerts towards allies and enemies within a large range.

The white diamond-like gem shone with a relatively bright inner light. Its facets sparked mysteriously under the power of a familiar 'feline patron!

This was hardly the first time Ves encountered the name 'Bastet. He began to feel increasingly more certain that this was not a coincidence.

Did real gods exist?

Were they observing red humanity in real-time?

Was one of them peeking at him right now?!

Ves had no idea!

He refused to believe that there was a massive difference between Bastet and other powerful cultivators at the True God-level or above. They were only called gods because the weaklings at the bottom were ignorant and did not know any better.

While Ves was willing to take the System's description more seriously and believe that Bastet may very well exist, he did not really think that this female patron would one day materialize in front of him and bestow him her personal blessing!

Ves turned his attention back to the gem. He came up with two tentative plans for this gem. He could use it to upgrade the Lionheart in the future, or he could use it to improve the Minerva Mark II when the upgrade process was scheduled to begin.

"Hmm, compatibility and fit are important. This gem is clearly more useful to Uncle Ark and his Lionheart"

He would have to devise a different solution for Saint Commander Casella Ingvar.

Ves examined another bright gem produced by Lucky.

[The Adjudicator's Light]

The undying hatred against evil of a lost peacekeeper is contained within this gem. Enables a mech to glow brighter in the presence of evil according to the laws upheld by the forgotten peacekeeper and enables it to inflict up to 200 percent damage against such beings depending on the severity.

Another amazing gem! This square gem glowed with a harsher and more judgemental light. It vaguely felt similar to the Subjugation King's harsh pale light, which caused Ves to suspect that the 'lost peacekeeper' may have been a fellow member of the krelion race.

Had Lucky been catching spiritual remnants that originally came from Messier 87? How many of these gems derived their power from the remnants of once great and mighty beings from the Milky Way?

The lack of information was grating at Ves. He felt it was incredibly important to know more about the entities captured in the gems.

In any case, Ves had multiple good options to use this gem for the benefit of multiple candidates.

Yet for whatever reason, he instinctively felt was a great match for Venerable Jannzi Larkinson and the Bastion from a thematic perspective.

Jannzi had changed drastically since her first breakthrough and turned herself into a crusader of sorts. She was one of the more politically active expert pilots and cared the most about 'doing the right thing!'

This meant that she possessed a great dislike towards 'evil' Even if her values and principles different a lot from the lost peacekeeper, the two should at least be able to overlook these problems and find a kindred soul with each other.

"Is it worth it to use up a potentially devastating offensive hyper gem to one of the most defense-oriented expert mechs in my clan?"

The mismatch in attributes made this decision a lot harder than it should!

The Bastion possessed the weakest offensive power out of all of the high-ranking mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

She was just so damn slow that she hardly had any opportunity to clash with enemies. She mostly used her superior defenses to shield damaged warships from destruction. That might change somewhat if Venerable Jannzi managed to become an ace pilot. It would be a lot easier to improve the mobility of the Bastion Mark II.

Every ace mech was a potential asset in the fight against alien phase lords.

Ves could not rule out the possibility that Jannzi and her future ace mech would be dispatched against such mighty opponents.

If that ever happened, then it was worthwhile to enhance the offensive power of the

Baction

The only question was whether the alien phase lords were actually evil from the perspective of the Adjudicator's Light.

Ves did not pretend that the native aliens were in the wrong in the Red War.

Humans arrived into the Red Ocean as unwelcome guests and started a brutal campaign of conquest and colonization.

It was only fair for the native aliens to rise up and drive away the invaders from their

home galaxy!

From this perspective, the native aliens were the good guys while humans were the bad guys!

If this was the case, how would the Adjudicator's Light feel when it realized that it was being utilized by the 'wrong side'?

The D-mech or D-arm might actually rebel and turn against its wielder!

Perhaps Jannzi's strong sense of self-righteousness might be able to avert such a potential disaster.

"Well, there is plenty of time before the Bastion is due for an upgrade, so there is no rush to decide." Ves smiled and set aside this problem.

That settled the gems that shone the brightest.

Lucky had produced a single archegem this time. He likely produced archegems whenever he ate significant chunks of archemetal.

The gem cat did not have a lot of archemetal in his diet. The only opportunity for him to eat products of archetech was whenever Gloriana discarded her experiments related to this alien tech base.

That was a shame, because Ves considered archegems to be the most advanced variant of gems produced by Lucky so far.

The descriptions of their effects were more vague but also grander in scale and scope. This may be a hint that they were much more accurate reproductions of the domains

of once-powerful cultivators.

[FLAMES OF RUINATION]

A gem that contains the fires that once contributed to the fall of a civilization, Strengthens and amplifies the flames spread by a mech whenever it is used for similar

purposes.

The fierce red arche-gem may not match the color of Saint Isobel Kotin's domain, but their inclinations matched pretty closely!

This gem was perfect for Saint Isobel's upcoming ace mech!

The Promethea Mark II Project was scheduled to start after the completion of the

Minerva Mark II Project and the Riot Mark III Project respectively.

Since Gloriana was no longer involved with the First Sword Mark III Project, she could start to design the next iteration of the Promethea sooner than anticipated.

Ves would figure out a way to convert this arche-gem into a powerful offensive enhancement for the Promethea Mark II.

He had high hopes for the Flames of Ruination in particular. There had to be a reason for arche-gems to adopt a more sophisticated structure. Perhaps they contained more powerful or complete spiritual remnants.

After Ves completed his inspection of this wonderful gem, he finally turned to the pair of gems that looked ugly and misshapen.

This was the disadvantage of forcing Lucky to empty his digestive system 'in advance! The gem cat did not have the time to properly complete the formation of his products. Still, Ves did not regret this decision because he needed to reassert discipline onto his

pet.

Besides, what if the flawed gems were more useful than expected?

Just because their physical shells looked ugly did not mean that their inhabitants were defective!

[The Heart of Vengeance that Smolders in the Dark]

A semi-processed gem that encapsulates the obsession towards vengeance of a betrayed warrior. This gem can periodically amplify a single attack launched by a mech against a target that is the bearer of a great amount of unfulfilled resentment.

"Damn."

The misshapen spiral gem promised great power against those who treated a lot of beings like crap.

Ves had a feeling that the Red Ocean was far from short of those kinds of individuals.

This meant that this gem would be a perfect fit for an offensive mech that was capable of inflicting a singular powerful blow!

Only one machine truly qualified. The Amaranto Mark III that the Design Department recently completed and shipped back to the expeditionary fleet could make fantastic use of the properties of this gem.

To be more specific, Ves felt that it would be best if he forged the Heart of Vengeance that Smolders in the Dark into the Instrument of Vengeance!

Their names happened to match, so that should definitely increase the compatibility between the demon and the weapon!

The only concern was whether the flawed and incomplete shape of the gem would negatively impact the Demoncasting process in any way.

Ves did not have enough information, so he could only give it a try and see what would happen.

[Technology Thief's Surprise]

A semi-processed gem that contains the ill intent of a technology thief towards his victims. This gem can progressively weaken and neutralize material technological products struck by a mech based on the knowledge and understanding of the utilized

tech.

"What?!"

This unfinished infinity symbol-shaped gem had an outrageous effect! If the

description was accurate, then it could potentially turn entire battleships into a collection of scrap metal!

The premise was that the wielder of the power of this gem actually understood all of the complicated tech.

This practically made this gem useless to all conventional mech pilots.

The only group of people that could make the best use out of the gem were top mech designers and scientists who happened to become Carmine mech pilots.

"This is absurd."

These intelligent minds were far too precious to risk on the frontlines. They should be kept away from the fighting so that they could continue to contribute to red humanity by furthering its technological development.

There were two exceptions that Ves could think of at the moment. The first was Ketis, who became even more encouraged to test herself in battle after she gained access to the power and the protection of the Heavensword!

Of course, it would be best if Ketis agreed to convert her Bloodsinger or one of her

other swords into a D-arm with the Technology Thief's Surprise. Another potential candidate that could make great use of this gem was Ves himself.

Even if he did not want to make it a habit for him to unfold his true body and fight against formidable enemies in person, Ves did not think he could avoid such confrontations in the future.

The Technology Thief's Surprise would not be of much use against purely organic opponents such as phase whales and phase lords, but it should work great against their increasingly more technologically sophisticated raiments!

Aside from that, the gem should also have a great effect against alien warships, though Ves was not sure if it would work against transphasic energy shields in particular. Whatever the case, Ves should have a much easier time crippling warships left and right due to his formidable knowledge base.

"I wonder how powerful this gem will become if it falls into the hands of the Polymath."

This was an absurd notion. The Polymath was a Star Designer with an awe-inspiring

domain. Ves did not think it was likely for a gem that likely contained a Middle Demon to be of much use.

"Well, that's it for now."

After Ves completed his inspection of the latest batch of gems, he stuffed them into his

pouch, causing it to get close to reaching its storage limit. He smiled. He had plenty of demons to work with this time!

Chapter 6585 Design By Template

While Ves happily inspected the latest batch of gems produced by Lucky, all the way out in the Milky Way, a certain Cyborg Cat just concluded her latest design session. Veronica let out a tired breath as she sat back on the floating pillow that served as her seat. The biomechanical feline incarnation had been working almost continuously on a single mech design project ever since the Evolution Witch unveiled the Oblivion Gates.

The Oblivion Empress personally commanded her daughter to design the first

Carmine mech for a massive human society that was frankly not ready to adopt it on a larger scale.

It was too bad that the Oblivion Gate Consortium had no intentions of prepping the masses for the immense disruption that would ensue after the mass proliferation of mechs that could be piloted by norms.

There were times where Veronica felt bad about becoming complicit to the outbreak of war and conflict on a scale that original humanity had never witnessed since the start of the Age of Mechs.

Her creation may very well serve as the first inciting factor that could ultimately lead to the downfall of the Big Two!

The Age of Mechs may finally come to an end in the Milky Way Galaxy!

Could Veronica bear the responsibility for contributing to these man-made calamities?

She didn't know.

Her mother gave her no choice but to work, so she did her best to set aside her misgivings and do her job as a mech designer.

One of the main factors that made the days and weeks so much more bearable was the company of an old friend from the Survivalist Faction.

Master Moira Willix served as a true heavyweight in the Rule Breaker Project.

While Veronica contributed her unique Carmine System, Master Willix practically excelled in taking care of everything else.

She made it possible for Veronica to tackle the high-level challenge of designing a series of modular mech platforms for every tech level that could also be localized to every region of human-occupied space.

That last part was especially tricky to do for a relatively young and inexperienced mech designer like Veronica.

Unlike red humanity which only occupied a single corner of a dwarf galaxy, original humanity had expanded its reach across half of a main galaxy.

This meant that it was not that simple to reproduce a single mech design in every region of human space!

The quantity and type of resources available in the Komodo Star Sector was much different than any of the star sectors in the galactic center!

In order to make a mech design work across almost every region of the galaxy, high-ranking mech designers developed a special approach to make it possible.

"It is called design by template." Master Willix explained to Veronica at the start of the Rule Breaker Project. "Have you heard of it before?"

"No." The silvery cat responded. "I never needed to resort to such means in the Red Ocean."

"I am not surprised. It is an advanced method that is beyond your scope normally. Design by template is an intermediate design process that introduces additional complexity, delays and cost. There is more room for error, and it is a nightmare to maintain consistency of a product line throughout the entire mech market. The only groups that can earn a profit while designing by

template are the major trans-galactic corporations. They have the funding, reach, manpower, scale and infrastructure to develop detailed mech templates and use them to design localized mech designs that perform very similar to each other despite their diverging material compositions." Master Moira Willix gave Veronica an example of a mech template by presenting the younger mech designer with one of her older works.

A projection appeared that showed a mech design... or at least it looked like one on the surface.

Veronica's artificial eyes glowed brighter as she became fascinated by how the template differed from a mech design.

The two possessed a lot of similarities. They consisted of a very detailed set of instructions on how to reproduce a mech.

The divergence came in the level of detail and specificity.

A mech design might demand that the head of a mech must be made out of Unending alloy.

A mech template would demand that the head of a mech must be made out of a metallic material that should closely match the mass, density, toughness, conductivity, flexibility and more.

The latter was not a mech design, but it could help mech designers make one themselves.

The simplest way to describe a mech template in this professional context was that it was a do-it-yourself kit of a mech design.

It was a rather interesting way to solve the lack of universality of the old galaxy's sprawling mech sector.

"I get it." The Cyborg Cat said as she studied the mech template of a first-class multipurpose mech design that was a few generations old. "These mech templates are preparatory works that are meant to instruct regional design teams on how to localize a mech line so that it can be produced and sold

within a single star cluster. This will reduce the dependence on long-distance shipping and thereby make the product line more competitive in terms of pricing and local market adaptations."

"That is a good summary of this approach. While it has become the established design approach for every mech design that is intended for distribution across the entire galaxy, the design by template approach comes with many disadvantages. Can you name them, Veronica?"

"Well, you have already mentioned them earlier, so I only need to expand on these factors." Veronica said. "The most obvious downside is that the mech template is not an exact mech design. Unless the original designer is willing to sit down and design hundreds of localized variants in person, the last stage of this expansive process must be completed by regional design teams that understand the market and supply conditions of their star clusters the best. These mech designers are usually not as good as the lead designers of the mech template, and they may occasionally misinterpret or make outright mistakes in trying to preserve the original intent of the mech template. That will not only cause the localized mech designs to be inferior in quality and performance, but also have difficulty reproducing the original design philosophies."

Master Willix nodded. "That is a good analysis. Adding an additional step between mech template and mech design introduces errors and mistranslations. This is an unavoidable consequence, but well-organized mech corporations try to minimize the deviations as much as possible by training the localizers as best as possible. The leaders in charge of them have usually worked directly under the lead designers for at least a decade. Even then, localized mech designs will still not be perfect."

"I take it that this is a big deal."

"It is, Veronica. Mech templates are notoriously sensitive towards deviations. If a localized mech design diverges a little too much from its original template, the end product no longer holds the empowerment of the design philosophies of the lead and contributing mech designers. That is regarded as a failure as the botched mech design is no longer competitive on the market. Other trans-national corporations will ruthlessly try to fill up the gap in the market with their own localized mech designs if they smell an opportunity."

Much of the mech market of the old galaxy was hypercompetitive. What Master Willix described was more than plausible!

"Does this happen a lot?" Veronica wondered as she rubbed her paw against her smooth metallic chin.

"I do not have access to the statistics, but according to my own unreliable estimates, it is likely happening on a fairly frequent basis. The trans-galactic mech corporations simply refuse to publicise these failures, preferring to delay the galaxy-wide release of their new product lines so that they can quietly remedy the problem. In the most egregious cases, the members of the original design team may have to serve as consultants in order to ensure that the localized mech design truly represents their

philosophies."

That indeed sounded like a troublesome issue.

"This is probably why the design work must be done inhouse." Veronica remarked. "It

is not a good idea to farm out these designs to third-party design studios. The mech designers for hire are likely unfamiliar with the design philosophies of the original design team, so they will do a much worse job and fail to complete a fully functional

mech design. Wait."

The Cyborg Cat looked increasingly more disturbed as she began to apply these descriptions to her own situation!

She and Master Willix were supposed to complete the Rule Breaker Project without.

the benefit of all of that manpower and infrastructure!

How the hell were they supposed to imitate those gigantic trans-galactic corporations and release a mech line throughout the entire old galaxy?!

"Calm down. Designing a mech template is challenging, but it is not as intimidating as you think." Master Willix said. "The simplest and crudest approach to forming a mech template is to design a normal mech design first. After that, you can steadily convert it into a mech template by replacing concrete material selections with more ambiguous material requirements. This is an imperfect method as the conversion from a mech design to a mech template will cause small but significant details to get lost in translation. It is best to design a mech template from the onset."

"That is too advanced for me, Master. I have no experience with this stuff. I don't think

I can get it right the first time."

"It is not a mistake to admit your lack of competence. It is good that you recognize your limits and be willing to inform me about it. We will adopt the simplest approach if that is the case. You can go ahead and design a mech with the exotics and alloys that

you used to work with in the Yeina Star Cluster. Once the design is complete, I will uphold most of the responsibility of translating it into a template, though you should be involved as well in order to accrue experience in this process. You will need to learn how to create qualified mech templates by yourself if you want to release other

Carmine mechs across the Milky Way Galaxy."

Veronica definitely harbored that ambition!

She did not want the Rule Breaker Project to be the only major work that catered to the demands of her customers across the old galaxy.

"If we do this, the mech template will most certainly be flawed. If we subsequently release it onto the galactic net and allow third-party mech designers to play with it,

they will soon come out with a huge quantity of even more imperfect mech designs. It will be a wonder if they still manage to retain my design philosophy which is essential to making the Carmine System work."

Master Willix did not appear bothered by these problems.

"We are working under highly suboptimal circumstances. It is a dream to design a high-quality mech template. You should accept our less-than-ideal working conditions and focus on doing your best to put actual working Carmine mechs in the hands of many humans. The machines do not have to match the performance of market leaders. They just need to work well enough to give norms a chance to transform their lives and fulfill their fantasy of becoming mech pilots. Trust me, these customers will not think too badly about the inferior performance and the imperfect localization efforts. There are no other competitors in this galaxy aside from yourself, so you can completely capture this market regardless of quality and performance

issues." The RA Master Mech Designer made a good point. Veronica fell silent for a while. She obsessed too much about the quality of her

products when the norms of original humanity frankly didn't care about that kind of

stuff! Even if her Carmine mechs came in the form of shambling rust buckets, there would still be an astronomical amount of norms willing to bond their lives to these machines! If that was the case, then Veronica might as well not worry about this issue anymore and focus on meeting the most essential demands of her future customer base.

Chapter 6586 The Finesse of Mech Templates

Designing a good mech template was not as easy as it sounded.

Technically speaking, even a Novice Mech Designer could convert a mech design into a mech template.

However, it took great expertise in materials science, broad understanding of the material usage in every major region of human space and a large amount of experience in mech design in general to develop a good template.

A bad one could easily be overly specific to the point where not everyone was able to find the right substitution materials.

Perhaps no viable alternative existed.

Perhaps the ones available in a region may be unaffordable.

Perhaps a close substitution material just happened to possess a deviating property that caused the mech to behave much differently than what the ideal design dictated. Other problems occurred when a mech template became overly broad.

Localizers became flooded with choice. They lacked enough direction to select the most optimal substitute materials. People could spend weeks or months on narrowing down the list of viable materials to use in a localized design.

It was easy for them to settle for suboptimal choices that ultimately caused the localized mech design to exhibit inferior performance.

It was also easy for all of the little changes to cascade into increasingly more divergent performance when the localized mech was built into reality, thereby losing the connection to the original intent and philosophy of the original design team.

When it came to developing mech templates, the overall rule was that I was better to be too loose than too specific.

Yet going too far would ultimately result in a lot of confusion and significant drops in quality throughout the galaxy.

This was also why only the biggest mech corporations made use of mech templates. By meticulously training and organizing in-house mech designers to develop localized mech designs according to company guidelines and with great familiarity of the design philosophies of the lead designers, they could minimize the error rate.

Mech corporations that engaged in this kind of business for a long time tended to develop a lot of specialized expertise in localizing mech templates. They employed large teams of metallurgists who proactively developed an expanding collection of new alloys just to achieve a closer match with the ideal mech design!

There was a huge amount of depth and intricacy in running a business model based on mech templates.

It was the only way for mech corporations to release mainstream mech models that could be sold in one variation or another in every corner of human space.

Smaller players could never achieve the enormous reach by using their own mech designs, as they were localized to specific regional conditions by default.

These factors not only included material availability, but also cultural and legal restrictions.

It was no surprise that these massive mech corporations employed an enormous amount of mech designers. Every regional branch had to keep their own design teams on retainer just to fulfill the localization demands.

None of this had anything to do with little ol' Veronica. The incarnation just needed to design the ideal versions of the Rule Breaker Project and assist with converting them into mech templates, one for each tech level.

After that, the mech templates would be released into the wild, where norms who were desperate to pilot mechs would embrace the new works with great enthusiasm!

"Usually, a mech designer that has developed a mech template but lacks the infrastructure to release it on a wider scale must proactively contract competent and reliable third party design studios across the galaxy to complete the localization step. This is an impossible undertaking for most, but we are different." Master Willix patiently explained to Veronica. "The unique and unprecedented value of our mech templates will ensure that third parties will do whatever it takes to convert them into localized mech designs."

In other words, as long as the demand was high enough, third party mech designers would be clamoring to adapt it to their regional mech markets!

Not only did they smell an amazing opportunity to raise their sales figures and expand the reach of their businesses, but they also wanted to associate their names with a historic and prestigious product release!

These favorable conditions meant that Veronica and Master Willix were in the rare position of not needing to worry about these troublesome issues at all. Nobody could compete against the Carmine System.

For a long time, the Rule Breaker mechs would be the only machines in the Milky Way Galaxy that could enable norms to pilot mechs!

Of course, in order to make sure that every norm could make good use of their Carmine mechs, Veronica and Master Willix worked hard to make the designs practical, versatile and adaptable.

In the span of two months, Master Willix had fully invested her capabilities as a RA Master Mech Designer and did much of the heavy lifting in raising and optimizing the utilization of technology.

Since the Rule Breaker Project was meant for mass adoption on the widest possible scale, the three versions had to be as affordable as the budget models at every tech

level.

This heavily limited the quality and performance of the tech and materials that could be used to make the machines combat worthy.

Master Willix put great focus

simplifying the designs as much as possible. She readily rejected solutions that could raise the performance of the machine just because they added an excessive amount of complexity in the design!

The Carmine mechs had to be as simple to manufacture and repair as possible because that made it easier for them to spread far and wide.

Master Willix had another reason to prioritize simplicity over maximum performance.

"The Class I design philosophy that I am simulating is much more effective on simpler modular and semi-modular mech platforms." She explained to the Cyborg Cat. "Wild Modularity is a philosophy that produces the greatest value when it is highly compatible with a large variety of cheap and low-quality modular parts. If the Rule Breaker Project only accepts modular parts of such high quality and sophistication that they can only be developed by Master Mech Designers, then only a limited number of people can modify and diversify the Carmine mechs over time. This is not conducive to establishing a rich industry and market for third-party Rule Breaker parts and mod kits. Not every Carmine mech pilot has the means to request upgrade and customization services from Master Mech Designers."

That was very much true. The point was that the Rule Breaker Project had to keep everything simple whenever possible. That did not mean that Veronica was forbidden from employing more sophisticated design solutions. She just needed to make sure that it was her last resort.

It helped a lot that attaining competitive performance was not a high priority this time.

Even so, Veronica could not afford to make the Carmine mechs too shabby, or else they would get torn apart with ease by the modern conventional mechs that were utilized today.

"It is best to ensure that the Carmine mechs are at least as good as the mech models that used to be popular two mech generations ago." Willix said. "That gives us enough leeway to successfully complete the project within the accelerated deadline. It will also put a hard floor on how extensively we allow the performance of the Rule Breaker versions to slide. We should not use this excuse too often to avoid the need to develop difficult solutions. Overly simplistic mech designs will generate too many bad impressions and will slow down the adoption and improvement rate."

Wild Modularity was a rather radical approach towards modular and semi-modular mechs.

It treated an initial modular mech as a level 1 player character in a typical game.

The starting version of the machine was weak and limited, but as the pilot continued to use it over time, the mech 'leveled up' and gained an allowance to modify or upgrade the design while remaining true to its original concept.

This was normally not possible unless at least some of the original mech designers participated in the upgrade project.

Mech forces that employed their own in-house mech designers did not have to worry too much about this requirement, but there were many smaller groups and outfits that lacked the financial muscle to employ their own competent mech designers.

Veronica and Willix wanted the Rule Breaker Project to become accessible to the masses, so they needed to make sure that the initial mech designs could be improved by any decent Apprentice Mech Designer.

Simply replacing the stock parts with similar versions based on stronger and more expensive materials was an easy way to improve the performance of the Carmine

mechs!

Replacing basic modular parts with more advanced and more sophisticated versions was another way to upgrade the low-level Carmine mechs, but this demanded greater skill and better access to advanced tech than usual.

This made sure that most segments of the mech market would be able to transform the initial Carmine mechs into their own unique and personalized machines. Wild Modularity became such a pivotal aspect of the Rule Breaker Project that Master Willix even decided to lower the emphasis on the other design philosophies. The rational mech designer had initially chosen to simulate a Class III design philosophy that increased the damage tolerance of the internal structure and the cockpit, a Class IV design philosophy that increased the reaction speed of the mech and a Class VIII design philosophy that increased the processing power and the deep learning capabilities of an AI-assisted and controlled machine.

Each of them were relatively basic design philosophies compared to Wild Modularity, but they all contributed to the survival of the Carmine mechs, which was especially important when they were controlled by total beginners with no actual training in piloting their new machines!

Master Willix laid out her argumentation.

"Once the Carmine mechs have 'leveled up' as it were, the Carmine mech pilot does not necessarily have to rely on these crutches anymore in order to remain effective in combat. He or she may develop his own ideas, and commission the services of a mech designer of his choosing to strengthen a specific aspect of the Carmine mech. This can range from converting the machine into a drone mech to replacing the starting armor system with a much thicker and more damage-resistant alternative. Each of them can perform much better when backed by a specialized design philosophy. I intend to give third-party mech designers the room to replace one of my simulated

design philosophies with their own ideas. I will expressly mention this in the design notes so that they can do so without fear of breaking the end product." "Won't the latter change affect the efficiency of the Carmine Systems and Wild Modularity?" Veronica asked.

"It will, but as long as the mech designer in question is careful enough, the negative

impact will remain in a tolerable range. Some Senior Mech Designers and all Master Mech Designers should be perceptive and knowledgeable enough to make good use of the opening that I have created in the Rule Breaker Project."

This was another advanced concept that Veronica had not encountered before. The Rule Breaker Project was so massive in scope that she was finally beginning to enter the true world of high-level mech design!

Even if not all of the lessons she learned was applicable to the Red Ocean, Veronica enjoyed them anyway.

She did not intend to waste her the sheer potential of the Milky Way's mech market. Her radical and subversive product strategy for the Milky Way Market may be different from her more cautious and upright product strategy for the Red Ocean, but that made this challenge all the more interesting!

Veronica could get away with designing and releasing a lot more interesting mechs in the Milky Way than she could get away with in the Red Ocean!

The release of the Rule Breaker Project was just the first of many radical mech designs to come!

Chapter 6587 The Productivity of a Proper Master Mech Designer

As the design of the mech templates came closer to completion, Veronica became amazed by many of the design solutions put forward by Master Willix.

She had collaborated with Master Benedict Cortez in the past on a number of high-ranking mech design projects, but there were still vast differences between Master Mech Designer.

Veronica did not look down on Master Cortez. No matter what, he had proven his dedication, competence, diligence and ingenuity by successfully realizing his design philosophy.

The problem was that his background was too poor. He was raised and educated in the Friday Coalition, and spent several decades of his life slumming in the frontier of the old galaxy.

He had only advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer fairly recently. This meant that he did not have much time to accumulate a lot of high-end knowledge and build up more experience at his current rank.

Master Benedict also had little to no experience working with genuine first-class mech designs, just like Ves.

This meant that a vast gulf existed between Master Benedict Cortez and Master Moira Willix.

The latter was lucky enough to be raised and educated within the Mech Trade Association from the start. Instead of becoming a normal passionate mech designer, she chose to pursue the rarer and much more difficult path of becoming a rational mech designer.

She immediately began to work on first-class multipurpose mech design projects right after she graduated and steadily improved in rank and status.

Though she never really excelled in a notable way compared to her peers, she produced consistent results as a rational mech designer and learned how to simulate a new design philosophy once every couple of months.

"Is there no limit to how many design philosophies you can learn to simulate?" Veronica curiously asked.

"Not that I know of." Master Willix answered during a design session. "It gets easier over time, especially if there are already similarities between the one I am learning and the ones I have already mastered to an extent. The career of a rational mech designer is similar to a snowball. The ones who have lived longer and spent more time on accruing design philosophies are walking libraries. I am no exception to this rule. The selection of design philosophies and the overall direction we have chosen for most of them dictate how useful we may be in certain mech design projects."

Rational mech designers were truly outrageous in this way. As long as Moira Willix learned a new design philosophy every once in a while for over a century, she would literally be able to simulate hundreds of them with great familiarity!

Even if she would never be able to channel the full passion and expertise of the original creators of those design philosophies, just the quantity and ability to switch to many different choices were already huge advantages!

Naturally, it was not easy for rational mech designers to persist in their efforts for so long. They had to endure their own challenges.

"Rational mech designers have to balance their attention between working with other design philosophies and developing their own ethos in mech design." Master Willix explained to Veronica. "No matter how many design philosophies we simulate, we are ultimately retreating existing ground. We are not necessarily inventing anything new. In order to prove our value and advance to a higher rank, we must still design mechs that embody our own original concepts."

"That must be difficult since you don't spend as much time with your own design philosophy as others." Veronica surmised.

Master Willix stoically nodded. "That is true. I have many colleagues who are unable to switch between rational mech design and conventional mech design. The inability to separate between these two modes leads to many problems over time. There are also cases where their passion and dedication towards their own design philosophies may wilt because they have lost their drive and ambition to make their own mark on the mech industry. In short, rational mech designers can design mechs with much greater variety than normal, but they must work harder to meet harsher requirements in order to succeed."

"Was it worth it for you, Master? I mean, would you have become a much better mech designer if you became a passionate mech designer instead?"

That sounded like an intriguing question to Willix.

"I cannot state with a great amount of certainty whether this alternate version of myself would have attained greater success. The work and effort I put in to become a rational mech designer at my current rank is multiple times greater than that of more conventional mech designers. I would have been able to get much closer to becoming a Star Designer if I did not commit to this approach towards mech design. However, it is exactly because I learned so many design philosophies and spread my knowledge base far and wide that I was able to earn many opportunities, befriend so many knowledgeable colleagues and design the most successful products of my career. I definitely believe it was worth it for me to become a dedicated rational mech designer."

Veronica grew more and more impressed at Master Willix. She was really a Master Mech Designer of a radically different breed than Master Benedict!

The latter could still be regarded as a respectable Master Mech Designer, but it was clear that he was still at the beginning stages of his current rank.

Master Willix was far ahead of him in terms of experience, knowledge accumulation, augmentations, industry knowhow and more.

It was incredibly pleasant to work with such an amazing helper. Despite the many limitations imposed by budget and other practical constraints, Veronica was nonetheless able to ensure the Rule Breaker Project closely aligned with her vision with the well-thought solutions provided by the Master Mech Designer.

In fact, Master Willix's greatest strength was to solve problems before Veronica became aware of them! The Survivalist proactively anticipated and resolved many potential issues that could have caused delays and slowed down their progress. Normally, Master Willix wouldn't have done this because it would be better for Veronica's growth if she tackled these issues herself at first.

Time was of the essence, though. Since the Rule Breaker Project had to be released in a working condition in just two months or so, Master Willix had no choice but to increase her responsibilities and unveil her formidable strength as an RA Master Mech

Designer.

While doing this caused Veronica to miss much of the challenge of designing the Carmine mechs of the Rule Breaker Project, she liked it that she had been reduced to

designing mechs in easy mode.

This was especially important as Veronica could no longer readily borrow the processing power of Ves over in the Red Ocean.

Ever since the idiot of a phase lord accidentally locked himself in a so-called Deep Research Mode, Veronica's synchronization with her principal had been dropping with each passing day.

That was not a big deal in the short term, but she had a growing suspicion that it would lead to increasingly more severe problems if this continued on for too long!

Anyway, the most immediate disadvantage of Ves' unavailable state was that Veronica had to design mechs by relying on her own mind.

This was hardly her best state, so Master Moira Willix perfectly compensated for her lack of conveniences.

The work proceeded so smoothly that they even chatted about topics other than work

once in a while.

Veronica still had many questions about Master Willix. He hardly knew her on a

personal level. This did not matter much when the two went their separate ways, but now that they were reunited once again, it became important to figure out the person

behind the rational mind.

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Polymath's discipline."

Master Willix gave Veronica a very faint smile. "The timeline does not match up. She is too young to have taken me as a disciple. While I do not care so much about age, others do. It is not likely for a mech designer such as myself to become her disciple. I do admit that she has seen fit to teach me a number of lessons in the past. I am grateful for her tutelage. As for who actually taught me, it is not important. My teacher is not a Star Designer."

"Oh. I thought you would have been seeing how competent you actually are." The

Cyborg Cat responded. "Why did you leave the RA and join our side and agree to design the Rule Breaker Project with me? I mean, you had a pretty good life as a Master Mech Designer. It is hard to imagine anyone else making the same choice in your position. Now you stand to lose all of your status and much of your friends within the Association and become a fugitive. Are you truly okay with sparking an

upheaval?"

Master Willix fell silent for a few seconds. "I have my doubts and misgivings, but... now that I have become an outsider from my own society, I can look at it from a different angle. What I have seen

is... disconcerting. My discussions with the members of the Oblivion Gate Consortium have reinforced my initial impressions."

"What have you seen?"

"A society of humans that have become increasingly more stagnant and complacent.

Long-term peace has made the lives of many people more prosperous, but aside from making themselves helpless against a speculative future threat from Messier 87, I am disappointed that people are no longer pursuing progress on a societal level. Humans who live today are almost indistinguishable to those who lived a century ago. With so much industry and prosperity, humanity can do so much more, yet they refuse to do so because the old guard have maintained their stranglehold onto society for too

long." "Things aren't exactly improving quickly, but they aren't deteriorating rapidly either. Most people think that is good enough."

"Humans thrive when they are affected by external pressure." Master Willix said. "The opening of the Red Ocean was a brilliant masterstroke of the Big Two. By starting an invasion in a nearby dwarf galaxy that just happens to be filled with a strategic exotic material that can easily facilitate mass invasions into other galaxies, the MTA and CFA were on the cusp of transforming human society for the better by using conquest as a motivating factor. Yet..."

"The Great Severing ruined it all." Veronica flatly said.

"Correct. This setback has inflicted enormous damage to the Expansionist Faction and others who invested heavily in the Red Ocean. It has lowered the stature of the leading supporters and shifted the balance of power to the old guard who are most concerned with maintaining stability. I knew that our society would regress and become even more insular than before. Overly cautious leaders such as the Chosen Human will contribute to this development due to his lifelong fears about causing greater disruptions than is necessary."

Ah, that was right. While the Red Ocean gained a disproportionate amount of leaders who tended to be more proactive and willing to take radical action, that meant that their political influence had disappeared in the Milky Way! This firmly tilted the balance of power in favor of the old guard.

"The root of the problem is that our leaders have clung to their positions of power for

too long." Master Willix said. "It is bad enough that the same leaders have been in charge for over a century. Many of them make use of exclusive high-grade life prolonging treatment scrums to stay alive long after the Age of Conquest had come to an end. God pilots and Star Designers have lifespans that are on another level compared to mortals such as ourselves. What if they continue to retain their positions of power? What if they refuse to step down from their thrones?"

"They occupy their positions for so long that they might consider it their sacred right. They may also become corrupted by the power they wield for so long." Master Willix gravely nodded. "The power distribution of our society has become more and more skewed in the wrong direction. One of the underlying problems of the current order is that the power of the middle and lower echelons has decreased with each passing year. More and more power is concentrated in the oligarchical club of tier 1 and tier 2 galactic citizens. None of them have any intention of relinquishing the power that they have gained while living for so long. If their lifespans were more finite, then they would have worked harder to establish orderly succession plans. That has not happened, so we are moving into a future where human civilization in the Milky Way will largely be ruled by the same individuals 500 or 1000 years from today. Is that truly what is best for the common good?"

Not everyone thought that there was anything wrong with this premise. Yet Veronica

new without a doubt that he would never want to live in such a boring and stagnant

society!

It sounded as if Master Willix also shared this sentiment.

Chapter 6588 The Dehumanization of the MTA

"It is human nature for the strong among us to take measures to consolidate their power base." Veronica told Master Willix. "What is happening in the Age of Mechs has happened in the Age of Conquest and prior periods of human history as well. All empires eventually fall. Even if the Big Two doesn't get toppled by the conspiracy hatched by the Oblivion Gate Consortium, other factors will eventually get the job done"

"You may be correct, but I do not want to leave this matter to chance." Willix expressed her resolve. "One of the problems with this age is that many of our most powerful leaders are blatantly not human anymore. They have become existences that rival that of gods, which means their life spans are completely different. It should not be too much of a problem for them to live for longer than modern human history. If that happens, more and more of our people will become accustomed to being ruled by a fixed group of gods whose authorities have become unshakeable. That is not a sign of a healthy human society. If our existing order cannot induce our existing leaders to pass on their

positions of power to the next generations, then we must give the disenfranchised masses the power to fight to regain their own rights."

"Even at the cost of a huge amount of bloodshed?"

"As long as the conflict can be controlled to an extent, then the total extinction of the human race is off the table. I can reluctantly accept this outcome if the alternatives are worse. It is better to attempt to detonate this contradiction earlier rather than later. Now that an opportunity has arisen due to the confluence of multiple favorable developments, I am willing to lend my aid to this cause."

"Do you think that humans will end up in a worse position if the status quo continues to hold for a couple more centuries?" Veronica asked.

"Yes. That is exactly what I think based on my understanding of our current society. The longer the masses are being trained to revere their betters, the less willing they are to challenge their leaders. The only possibility that a conflict may break out is if the powerful leaders of opposing camps have fallen out and have begun to wage open warfare against each other. This is a worse outcome because the longer passage of time has put more human lives in danger. A war between two top human power blocs may also be cataclysmic enough to sunder planets and ruin star systems."

"Ah. I think I get your argument. The human suffering in a straightforward fight between two human power blocs can easily spin out of control if the fighting grows more intense. Ordinary people have no power to resist at all. This is different when a huge amount of smaller fights and wars occur across the Milky Way. A lot of people will still get killed, but it is much less likely that people on one side will escalate too far and engage in mass slaughter and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. Since most of the petty wars are started by random people whose egos became

overinflated after becoming Carmine mech pilots, they would become much more prone to starting fights getting dragged into them. That was not an excuse to commit genocide, though.

From this perspective, it should at least be possible to keep the damage of the Rule Breaker Project contained to an extent.

Of course, there were a lot of questionable assumptions about this future speculation that could very well disappoint Master Willix. The warring along with the intervention of increasingly more human and alien powers might cause the wars to rapidly spin out of control!

This was not Veronica's problem. The Mech Trade Association had long claimed ultimate dominion over mechs, so it must undertake this responsibility as well.

When the mechers would try and fail to maintain the crumbling order, that was when the Big Two's precious hegemony came under genuine threat for the first time in several centuries.

This was when it became possible to reshape the human order. The MTA's longstanding dominance may come to an end, and the masses may finally turn away from the leaders that they looked up to for so long.

It was quite brave for Master Willix to openly aspire to plot the downfall of her own organization in order to build up a better future for the humans of the Milky Way. "Aren't you afraid that we will get set back in almost every way at the end of all of the fighting?" Veronica asked. "Instead of being ruled by two large but stable overlords, human space might fracture into hundreds if not thousands of petty kingdoms. Each of them no longer answers to any higher authority. Since most of them are led by individual strongmen, they are more easily provoked into wars for all kinds of reasons. More and more humans will fight against each other, but without the suppression of the Big Two, there is no one able to keep them in line aside from their rival neighboring kingdoms."

"Such an outcome is plausible, but it is still better outcome than letting too much power concentrate under a single stagnant regime." The Master Mech Designer argued. "As unfortunate as it sounds to expose humans to greater conflict, it is exactly because so many of them are trying to kill each other that their upward mobility has improved. They have greater chances to earn merit in combat, prove their competence and rise up the ranks. A kingdom or society that does not reward their hardworking subjects will most likely fall due to being ruled by incompetents. If this cleansing process can happen in every layer of our civilization, then we can purify the rot that has tainted our order and reignite the vitality of the human race."

It sounded as if Master Willix was a strong believer in the infamous Societal Revival Theory, but Veronica was not fully convinced that a rational mech designer like herself was so easily willing to embrace this radical course of action.

"How much of your story comprises of your original beliefs, and how much of it is actually ex post rationalization?"

The design lab grew tense as Veronica directly questioned Master Willix's motives. The two stared at each other for almost a minute.

In the end, they implicitly agreed to move past this awkward moment. Veronica slowly learned more and more about Master Willix's life within the MTA.

"Do not be mistaken about the members of the MTA" The older mech designer said. "We may belong to one of the most powerful organizations in the Milky Way, but we are all under constant pressure to outperform our peers and rivals within the Association. Unless you retire or voluntarily withdraw from this rat race, you are expected to study for long hours, design mechs to the point of cutting your sleeping schedule and be able to complete spontaneous missions and assignments with perfection."

"Isn't that good?" The Cyborg Cat asked. "Even if it doesn't sound pleasant for people like you, this will ensure that only the most competent and hard-working individuals will rise up the ranks. The MTA is probably better run than everything else." "I am not expressing too much regret for all of the difficulties that I needed to overcome in order to become a rational Master Mech Designer. Enduring so much pressure is a reliable means to draw out the potential of my colleagues and I. What I find troubling is that we are being educated and pushed into work so heavily that we rarely find enough time in our busy schedules to live as actual humans. We rarely take vacations. We do not partake in too many hobbies or leisure activities. Many of us do not even bother to develop intimate relations with others."

"What? Are you being serious?"

"Very much so, Veronica. If we feel the need to start a family and reproduce, we simply use an automated matching service and agree to donate our genetic material. The MTA will take care of the rest. We can even choose whether we are willing to sacrifice our precious time on raising or visiting our children. If not, we can leave the child rearing to the professional caretakers of the MTA while we spend our time designing mechs or mastering new knowledge."

That sounded far too inhuman to Veronica. The MTA was filled with workaholics, so much so that many of its mech designers and other hardworking personnel even choose to give up the precious time to experience the joy of raising their own

children!

This was a sacrifice that Ves and Gloriana were deeply unwilling to make. They chose

to raise three children so far and did not regret their decisions.

Their work was important, but their families were no less vital to their lives.

The former gave them purpose while the latter warmed their hearts.

Perhaps it was the lack of heart that caused the MTA to develop into such an efficient but ruthless superorganization. It only saw people as numbers because it did not have enough leaders who experienced genuine love and affection in their stressful lives.

Veronica took a good look at Master Willix.

"Did you... grow up like this as well?"

Master Willix responded with a mild smile. "Not precisely, but.... close enough. It is one of the reasons why I am well disposed towards the rational mech design approach. I can easily detach myself from my emotions and maintain a neutral mindset. Even so, there are times when I think about whether I have made a mistake by declining the opportunity to find love and become a mother."

"It is not too late, Master. You are what, 180 or so years old? You still have a couple more centuries to go. That is more than enough time to find a spouse you can live with and raise a few lovely children. As a parent myself, I can tell you that there is nothing that can give you more satisfaction than receiving the earnest love of a son or daughter. There is nothing rational about love, and that is exactly what makes it so wonderful. Only when you break your mind from the cage of your own rationality will you be able to appreciate the joys of life."

The Master Mech Designer did not appear too receptive to this suggestion.

"I have passed the stage of my life cycle where I have a need to express my maternal

instinct. For better or worse, I am married to my work. I will not deviate from my plan until I have finally broken past the final barrier and successfully advance to the rank of Star Designer. This is my overarching imperative. I cannot stop now that I have caught a strong opportunity to transcend the existing boundaries of human technology. After I have completed my ultimate life's mission, I may consider other pursuits, but I fear that I have lost so much of my humanity that procreation no longer holds the same

meaning anymore."

Veronica lifted her paw to scratch her head. If that was the case, why not cherish her remaining years as a human and become a mother the old-fashioned way?

"It sounds to me that the MTA, which professes itself to be a superorganization that stands up for humans, has become far too dehumanized over the centuries. That sounds incredibly ironic to me. The constant competition and the incessant drive to do better has led to a warped culture where mechers such as yourselves no longer know what it means to be human anymore. I think your Association would have been in a much healthier state if most of its members actually bothered to start their own families and raise their children in person."

"You may very well be correct, Veronica. This is ultimately a dream that cannot be realized. The MTA is too set in its ways to introduce such a radical change."

Chapter 6589 Anemic Performance

The Rule Breaker Project had almost reached its end.

Veronica and Master Moira Willix did not have the time to fabricate and test a few specially modified prototypes in person. They delegated this responsibility to the other mech designers that had come to offer their services to the Oblivion Empire in the past few years.

Although these prototypes had been altered so that they could be controlled through a traditional neural interface as opposed to the revolutionary Carmine System, this still offered enough empirical data about the hard performance characteristics of all three

versions.

The prototypes did not exhibit any major performance issues. That was an expected outcome considering that a Master Mech Designer as skilled as Moira Willix designed their structures.

The biggest complication was the semi-modularity of the mech designs. Each version could be configured in a number of different ways.

Veronica and Master Willix initially decided to make it so that the Rule Breaker mechs could be configured into swordsman mechs and rifleman mechs.

However, the design process proceeded so smoothly and briskly due to the exceptional degree of competence shown by Master Willix that they decided to

expand the scope.

Now, all three versions of the Rule Breaker Project could adopt 4 different

configurations, ranging from a swordsman mech, a knight mech, a frontline mech and a rifleman mech.

This should cover a broad majority of interests from prospective Carmine mech pilots. If they wanted to pilot a different mech archetype such as a light skirmisher, a spearman mech or a heavy artillery mech, they could always rely on Wild Modularity to steadily 'level up' their machines and implement incremental modifications over time.

While the cost and effort required to morph the Carmine mechs to a different archetype were disproportionately high, it at least gave Carmine mech pilots hope of piloting the machines of their choice.

Unfortunately, Veronica did not foresee the possibility of undergoing radical transformations anytime soon. It was far too impractical to gradually transform humanoid mechs into beast mechs.

One of the other complicating factors was that the Rule Breaker mechs had to be designed to operate on land as well as in the air and in space.

In the total that had erupted between red humanity and the native aliens, most battles predominantly took place in space.

The unscrupulous use of city-destroying warships by the native aliens made a lot of landbound mechs irrelevant.

If the native aliens did not want to bother with conducting a planetary raid or invasion in order to capture a large amount of intact human tech and materials, they could always resort to plain old planetary bombardment to absolutely wipe out any presence of human life and civilization!

As such, most mechs in use in the Red Ocean today had to possess spaceflight capabilities.

The Milky Way operated under a different set of rules. The people here were still stuck in the past. They abhorred the use of warships and weapons of mass destruction and made serious efforts to avoid regressing into the barbarism that characterized the end of the Age of Conquest.

Veronica therefore expected a lot of major battles to take place on land. This meant that a lot of mechs in use would probably come in the form of landbound mechs. They might lack flight capabilities, but they were often more robust, more adept at fighting on solid ground and lasted much longer in the field.

Landbound mechs were also a lot simpler and faster to master. Carmine mech pilots required many years to become proficient in piloting their powerful new machines, but if they did not have to learn how to maneuver in space and comprehend the theory of mechanics, they could become qualified fighters a year or two in advance! The two mech designers therefore put a decent amount of effort into optimizing the Rule Breaker Project for landbound combat. They made the flight system of the mech designs semi-modular and detachable.

If desired, mech manufacturers could even produce Rule Breaker mechs without the inclusion of the flight system. This would definitely reduce the cost of the Carmine mechs and impose a lower burden on logistics.

However, Veronica and Master Willix could not go too far in this direction. They still made sure that the Rule Breaker mechs possessed adequate combat capabilities in space.

This lack of commitment kept the Rule Breaker Project's options open, but it also led to an uncomfortable compromise where the Carmine mechs neither excelled on land or in space.

There was still a way out for Carmine mech pilots that wanted their machines to gain an edge in a single environment.

As long as third-party mech designers developed modest variants Rule Breaker designs or upgraded existing machines, they could further optimize the Carmine

mechs for landbound or spaceborn combat.

The Cyborg Cat had great confidence that lots of mech designers would begin to enrich the ecosystem around the Rule Breaker Project.

It was the first Carmine mech line available in the Milky Way, and it would be the only one that ordinary people could get their hands on for a long time!

In summary, all of the choices that the pilots and owners of the Rule Breaker mechs could make resulted in a fairly intricate package of mech designs.

Even if Veronica and Master Willix had done their best to keep everything else as simple as possible, the extensive modularity meant that it was not possible to simplify them too much.

"It will do." Master Willix said after she studied the data from the testing sessions. "The minor performance issues are largely expected. It would be surprising if the prototypes did not suffer from all of the extensive compromise design choices that we

have made in order to make them more versatile."

The Cyborg Cat looked a little glum as she studied the same data. "I know what to expect, but seeing it in action... these Carmine mechs are truly crappy if measured by the standards of modern mechs at the same price classification. They indeed perform as if they are 2 mech generations out of date. In fact, I would say that this is an optimistic estimation considering that the prototypes are being piloted by professionals. Once these machines fall in the hands of completely rookie Carmine mech pilots, their ability to utilize their machines will be vastly inferior to those who have attended a mech academy for at least 10 years and accumulated decades worth of experience."

In other words, the fairly clean performance demonstrated by the prototypes was likely the ceiling of what could be accomplished with the final versions of the Carmine

mechs.

The actual performance of the Rule Breaker mechs once a few years had passed would likely cause them to have no hope of beating a conventional mech troop.

The former was already being set back by their inferior hard performance parameters. The machines fought as if they were 10 to 20 percent weaker than modern machines despite using much of the same tech and standards.

Combining that with barely trained and highly inexperienced Carmine mech pilots meant that the Rule Breaker mechs would become so weak that they could be mowed

down with ease by professional mech units!

Master Willix obviously picked up the Cyborg Cat's concerns.

"How many Carmine mechs do you think it will take to defeat a single conventional budget mech?"

"It depends on a huge amount of factors." Veronica quickly responded. "If we assume a

level playing field where many factors are equal aside from the skill and experience of the mech pilots, the conventional mech should easily be able to defeat 3 to 5 Carmine mechs while incurring light to moderate damage in the process. This is not an absolute, though. The equation changes when we are talking about greater quantities of conventional mechs. 40 conventional mechs controlled by military mech pilots who know how to cooperate with each other should be able to trounce 400 Carmine mechs piloted by poorly trained and inexperienced norms. In fact, the latter will probably break and run like headless chickens as soon as they lose 10 percent of their compatriots in a short amount of time. This lopsidedness can grow a lot worse if the numbers are greater, or if the military mech force relies on combined arms." True combat was far more than a numbers game. Ves had witnessed and participated in enough battles to understand the impact of morale and other intangible factors on

the flow of combat.

"Your assessment is similar to my own, Veronica. The theoretical and actual performance of the Rule Breaker mechs will never win any awards, but... they are versatile, affordable and easy to mass produce. This is all that matters in the beginning. Do not forget that this mech line has one advantage that every other mech in the Milky Way lacks: it can be piloted by any human. That makes it much more viable to field them in far greater numbers of what our society is accustomed to. The Carmine System will introduce humans to a brand new approach to modern warfare that they have not seen in centuries."freewebnovel.com

Veronica's feline body shifted uncomfortably at that mention. "I guess that is true. Everyone can become a soldier now."

Master Willix nodded. "One of the reasons why mechs have been promoted so heavily

during the Age of Mechs is because it inherently imposes a hard ceiling on the degree of militarization of a state. That made them perfect to help humans recover from the end of the Age of Conquest without completely losing their combat readiness. However, now that the Carmine System has lifted this limiting factor, states can drastically increase the militarization of their population, converting more of them into combat capable troops than ever before. A distinction will form between conventional mech forces and Carmine mech forces. The former will likely develop into elites that are more likely to pilot premium mechs. The latter will turn into part-time or full-time militias that are poorly trained and equipped, but boast massive

numbers."

"Something like that is already beginning to happen in the Red Ocean. Veronica commented. "Aside from wounded or retired veterans, it just takes a bit of time for the new Carmine mech pilots to complete their initial training and earn the basic qualifications to fight on the battlefield. The numbers are quite impressive. If the production rate of Yellow Jackets isn't constrained by the limited amount of available industrial capacity, red humanity will be able to field a lot more Carmine mechs in a

few years."

"The industries in the Milky Way are much more developed than in the Red Ocean." Willix noted. "In addition, resources are also much more abundant in most regions. Once you give the mech industry enough of a reason to mass produce your Rule Breakers, the most formidable industrial sector of human civilization will mobilize to meet the unending demand of the population. The Mech Trade Association may step in and curb much of this production, but it will fail because the monster it raised

cannot be contained."

Veronica knew what Master Willix was referring to. In order to turn mech pilots into the protagonists of the current age, the MTA had made massive and persistent efforts to elevate their status and turn them into objects of admiration.

The mechers had managed to succeed in their goal. Mech pilots received widespread

respect from nearly every corner of human society. Their genetic aptitude and their exclusive mech piloting training set them apart from the 'norms' who by definition were unexceptional in comparison.

Yet how could the MTA anticipate that a rogue mech designer like Ves would suddenly dump the Rule Breaker mech templates throughout the Milky Way without warning? In an instant, every norm had a chance to become a mech pilot!

The artificial boundary that separated heroes from ordinary people would melt in an instant!

Everyone could become a hero, or at least that was what they thought!

The MTA had worked so hard to turn mech pilots into a privileged and idolized class of people.

Now, its centuries-long propaganda effort would most definitely backfire on the Association as norms would flock to become Carmine mech pilots above every other concern!

No law or regulation could come in the way of fulfilling their long-cherished dream of becoming a hero!

Chapter 6590 The Corruption of the Rule Breaker Project

In a near-future situation where the manpower pool of conventional mechs got dwarfed by the manpower pool of Carmine mechs, mech battles would never become the same again.

At least red humanity became too consumed by the Red War to even think about employing Carmine mechs against their fellow man.

Original humanity did not have any particularly threatening external enemies at this moment.

The people of the Milky Way would most certainly turn their shiny new Carmine mechs against each other!

This meant that the adoption rate and development of brand new mech doctrines centered around their usage would accelerate very quickly.

Those that understood the advantages of Carmine mechs faster than others would definitely invent pioneering new strategies and approaches towards warfare.

Carmine mechs would definitely be deployed in far greater numbers than ordinary machines.

Shipbuilding activity would pick up greatly as original humanity had a much higher demand for mech transportation capacity.

Many planets would probably form dedicated planetary militias for the sole purpose of mobilizing part-time Carmine mech pilots into somewhat effective defenders.

Every battle for the control of a planet would definitely cause collisions between mech forces that were easily ten times or even a hundred times greater than before!

Even if most of the additional machines on the battlefield consisted of cheap and disposable Rule Breaker mechs, the scale of devastation was bound to become a lot higher as well!

Collateral damage from all of this fighting would reach a scale that was not much different from being subjected to orbital bombardment.

Even if the starting forms of the Rule Breaker mechs performed poorly compared to modern conventional mechs, that did not change the fact that they were still mechanical war platforms that possessed enough offensive power to devastate a typical city district if given enough time!

Throw in tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands in a typical metropolis, and almost none of the tall structures would remain intact by the time the battle had reached its conclusion!

Civilian casualties could not be avoided no matter how well the local authorities evacuated them.

A huge amount of children would become orphans, and a large number of parents would also lose their precious sons and daughters.

As the mech designer who held ultimate responsibility for developing and introducing the Carmine System to both branches of humanity, Veronica could not escape the blame for indirectly triggering all of this human suffering.

It had been difficult for the Cyborg Cat to shoulder all of this future guilt.

Stopping was not an option, though. Her mother commanded her to design these mechs, so Veronica persisted despite her misgivings.

While it became easier for her to bear this abstract burden over time, Veronica could never completely get rid of her discomfort.

All of the high-minded reasoning and rationalizations could not completely excuse the death and destruction that would ensue in the coming years and decades.

Yet on a certain day, Veronica's perspective... changed.

When Ves finally dealt with the System upgrade, Veronica suddenly became infused by a brand new incentive.

Her new goal?

To harvest as many souls as possible in a galaxy that was filled with life!

In order to fuel Ves' newfound fascination with Demoncasting, Veronica needed to use her mech designs to set up the largest soul harvesting operation in modern human history!

The more souls she harvested, the better!

Humans, aliens and even living mechs could not be exempted from this new directive!

Veronica found it hard not to disagree with this sentiment.

Demoncasting was not just useful for Ves in the Red Ocean, but also Veronica in the Milky Way!

The only issue was that there were much less mech pilots she cared about at the moment.

The only person who she could truly help with Demoncasting was her father.

Veronica had not been able to meet with Ryncol Larkinson very often in the past few months and years.

The Dark Saint had been running around the periphery of the Oblivion Empire in order to solve a myriad of security problems.

His mental condition also fluctuated from time to time. There were times where he could go through his day while keeping his head sharp, but there were also times where Ryncol became angry and aggressive without good reason.

Whatever shenanigans Cynthia resorted to in order to accelerate her husband's growth, the sequelae were severe to the point where he lost control at times.

Veronica suspected that this may be the reason why her father chose to accept assignments that would see him travel far away from his wife and child. He did not have enough confidence to maintain control in front of his family.

That was a shame, because she really wanted to show off her groundbreaking Carmine mechs to her father.

She also wanted to take another look at the current iteration of the Devil Tiger. The best way she could employ Demoncasting in the Milky Way was to transform her first Masterwork mech into a D-mech, or at the very least equip it with a set of D-arms.

Oh well. Veronica was not in a hurry. It may be better to wait on this as she needed to accrue a lot more experience in Demoncasting or maybe even Demonforging before she felt confident she could bestow her father with a worthy D-mech.

In any case, now that Veronica gained a brand-new hunger for souls, she needed to implement a few last-minute changes to the designs of the Rule Breaker Project.

"Master Willix."

"Yes, Veronica?"

"A change has occurred. I... need to alter the designs in order to accommodate a new goal"

"Explain."

She did. Veronica did not reveal too much information, but she made sure to impress the need to add Helena as the secondary design spirit of the Rule Breaker Project.

Master Willix fell silent when she heard that Veronica wanted to make such a substantial change just when the Rule Breaker Project had reached the final stages.

If everything went according to schedule, they would have proceeded to convert the completed mech designs into mech templates that could be utilized across the Milky

Way Galaxy!

"I cannot fully foresee the consequences of applying this change so late in the design process." Master Willix eventually said. "From the beginning, we designed the three versions of the Rule Breaker Project according to a single vision that we have mutually agreed upon. Even if the Carmine mechs end up being a harbinger of death and destruction to many states throughout human space, that has never been their highest purpose. Their ultimate goal is to serve their mech pilots. This is why you installed an aspect of Lufa as the design spirit for the Rule Breaker Project. Changing the mech designs to include your 'eldest sister' Helena at this junction will be anything but planned and orderly. It is little different from corrupting the mech designs and

you want, Veronica?"

The Cyborg Cat grimaced a bit. She knew as well as Master Willix that this was

anything but an ideal circumstance. Mech designers learned early on that they should never allow themselves to become susceptible to feature creep. That had caused the demise and failure of far too many mech design projects in the past. However, the need for demons was too great. Without enough demons, Veronica would never be able to utilize the Demoncasting function to the fullest.

She could not afford to take it easy and ignore it for a few months or years as the Red Cabal was moving closer to collapsing red humanity's defenses.

"The Rule Breaker Project will change the humans of this galaxy forever." Veronica eventually said. "Many of the changes will have a negative impact on them. This is undeniable. However, I have witnessed the effects of large-scale warfare in the Red Ocean, and one of the more positive changes that I have noticed is how red humans are increasingly coming together and drawing out the potential that they previously kept dormant. They are more alive than ever. They are no longer taking their superiority for granted. They have solved many small problems that have long plagued their society in their drive to reduce waste and increase the efficiency of their war machine. In just the span of a few years, red humans have become the most exemplary version of the human race that I have the pleasure of witnessing."

"That sounds remarkable, but what does this have to do with the subject at hand?"

"I was getting there, Master. The Rule Breaker Project will become a catalyst for societal change. Many people's dreams will come true. The most exceptional among them may even be able to step onto the path of godhood. However, where there are winners, there are losers. Those who prove themselves to be superior in strength, skill, strategy and conviction deserve to triumph over those who do not score well in these aspects, because that is the only way for humans to make meaningful progress on a societal level. On a personal level, the growth of Carmine mech pilots is actively being rewarded with the inclusion of the transcendence glow as well as demonic cultivation. I don't intend to break these reward mechanisms. I am merely proposing

to levy a 'tax' on the latter."

A tax on demonic cultivation.

This sounded like an incredibly absurd concept, but was the most elegant way to approach this new issue.

Master Willix still did not appear to be pleased, though.

"Imposing a tax on the rewards that the mech pilots and Carmine mechs have earned

by risking their lives on the battlefield is... disturbing. This change will reinforce the already disconcerting attitude of treating the souls of the deceased as resources as opposed to the remnant of living beings. It will further degrade the sanctity of life, a principle that I assumed you would defend given your works. Instead, your implementation of the Rule Breaker Project may end up undermining it. When you

create so many incentives to fight, to kill and to resort to violence, it will become even more difficult to reassert peace and stability once the new rulers of the Milky Way

have won the great struggle. For as long as the Rule Breakers continue to exist, they will stand as a symbol for greed and strife."

Her concerns were quite valid, but that was not enough of a reason for Veronica to

change her course.

"Then so be it. When I set out to design these mechs, I already accepted the reality that I will receive both scorn and appreciation from my customers in this galaxy. If it makes you feel better, I will set the tax rate at 33 percent, which sounds reasonable enough considering how many benefits Carmine mech pilots enjoy by piloting their machines. The safeguards against potential abuse of demonic cultivation will still be intact. Neither the Carmine mech, the Carmine mech pilot nor Helena will benefit from harvesting the souls reaped from innocent human civilians throughout the Milky

Way Galaxy!"

Of course, Veronica conveniently left her own name out of this promise, but the wiley

Master was too sharp to let this pass.

"What about yourself?" "Oh, I guess I will not use these innocent human souls to taint my works." Veronica emphatically did not mention that she only talked about herself, and not Ves.

The two were completely separate from each other. Totally. A promise made by one

did not apply to the other. Why should that be the case? They were not even a part of the same race!

"That is... sufficient as long as you abide by what you have said." Master Willix did not

push any further. "From the moment you treat the masses who are spread across this galaxy as a resource to be exploited is the moment you have turned into a monster. Remember who you are and what you are fighting for. Do not lose your humanity. I have already lost much of it, but that is exactly why I make a greater effort to preserve what little of it I have left. You should pay attention to this as well."

"I will."