

Mech 3141

Chapter 3141: Witshaw & Yeneca

Ves woke up one day and readied himself for another productive design session at the design lab. The Sentry Project was almost feature complete and only needed a bit of work in order to move on to the next phase.

It helped that Master Willix had already performed her end of the job and seamlessly integrated all of the resonating materials in the near-complete version of the design.

Of particular interest to him was the changes made to the luminar crystal rifle. The material known as Opticonium merged in the luminar crystal rifle in an odd fashion that caused him to question how resonating materials actually worked.

He knew that there had to be some sort of profound mystery behind it all, but Ves lacked too much information to figure out the mechanisms.

Still, even if he wasn't able to understand this aspect, this did not stop him from developing great expectations for his second expert mech.

Once he completed his morning routine and headed out, his wife stopped him and pulled him in another direction.

"Uhm, where are you taking me, honey?"

"The doctors over at the Dragon's Den have just sent back word that they have completed their preparations to conceive our first child. With all of the goods and services that we have provided to them, they have finally completed the design for our first baby! Isn't this great?!"

Ves looked flummoxed. "We're starting today?!"

"Of course! I can't wait any longer. I want to raise our first designer baby as fast as possible. Let's go!"

The pair along with Clixie quickly moved to the hangar bay where they took a shuttle straight to the only half-organic capital ship of the Larkinson fleet.

Once they arrived at the bioresearch vessels, they moved directly to the research labs where they entered a recently-renovated biolab that contained a whole suite of high-tech equipment.

Some of these machines even looked similar to the ones that used to occupy the Supreme Sage's pinnacle lab!

The couple first approach Dr. Ranya, who was supervising a team of experienced Lifer geneticists and doctors performing a very precise operation.

Gloriana looked through the windows and studied the lab-coated experts operating their respective lab equipment.

"Are they..."

Ranya nodded. "They have already formed the embryo and are currently in the process of verifying its health and genes."

Prior to this, the biotech experts had already cultivated a specially-prepared sperm and egg cell based on the original genes of Ves and Gloriana.

It would be too boring to allow them to come together without any further changes. In order to form a true designer baby with improved and optimized genes that imparted greater benefits, the genes had to undergo many targeted changes.

There was a whole industry around determining which genes offered the greatest help to a designer baby. These gene sequences were immensely valuable, but could not be easily copied.

This was because every human was different. General gene templates had to be adjusted to the specific individual in order to provide the greatest possible enhancement.

When Ves thought about how much it cost to improve the genes of this little embryo, his heart was already bleeding.

"Don't be concerned, Gloriana. Witshaw & Yeneca do good work. The genetics company wouldn't have been able to offer its services through the MTA if the quality of its products was not on par." Dr. Ranya attempted to calm her nervous cousin.

Gloriana couldn't get rid of all of her worries. "Formula S-635006-CIN was not the best gene package on offer. We could have gone for a newer and higher-quality offering."

"4000 MTA credits is more than enough to ensure a healthy child." Ves insisted. "Just like every other sector, the designer baby industry is subject to diminishing returns. We have to spend exponentially more money in order to obtain increasingly marginal improvements. From what I've learned, we could have obtained 80 percent of the effects of this gene package if we spent only 200 to 300 MTA credits."

400 MTA credits roughly equated to 800 billion hex credits. This sum was so amazingly high because the starting point of a designer baby was the most crucial step to raising an augmented child!

It would be too late to implement many difficult improvements after the embryo or baby had already grown to an extent. It was even more difficult to change someone's genes when they were already grown up! The younger, the better, so the best time to apply augments was right at the beginning!

"That 20 percent matters, Ves!" Gloriana placed her hands on her hips. "Don't act as if 4000 MTA credits is a big deal. You have already spent more on our capital ships, and they are much less precious than our own child. In my opinion, you should have found a way to borrow more money so that we could have bought the next best package."

Formula S-635006-CIN was actually a midrange offering from Witshaw & Yeneca. The company developed a whole line of leader-oriented gene packages that provided a suitable option for many different budgets.

The problem with Gloriana's demand was that the next best product from the genetics company was at least forty times more expensive!

This was obviously a price that wasn't even targeted towards second-raters. Only first-raters, and wealthy ones at that, were willing and able to fork over so much money to obtain a designer baby that was only ten percent or so 'better'.

"Are you sure the genes are sequences in a way that will give me a daughter to raise as a leader?" Gloriana asked in a nervous tone.

"We carefully worked with the specialists of Witshaw & Seneca to combine their gene package with the genetic material that we have prepared. We paid a lot of money in order to receive a lot of follow-up services."

The augmentation and modification process did not end once the embryo was put inside Gloriana's belly. In order to ensure that designer babies did not grow too much in the wrong direction, geneticists constantly had to supervise the growth process and manually alter any problematic genes or gene expressions that could lead to undesirable consequences.

This was actually how Gloriana was raised. She regularly received gene tune-ups throughout her life. It wasn't until she reached adulthood that she no longer needed any further gene corrections, though she was free to receive a different gene treatment.

Twenty minutes went by before all of the relevant experts verified the embryo's health and nucleic acid sequence.

Though rare, even the best-controlled processes made mistakes every now and then. This was the process of mutation and was essential to making evolution possible.

The problem was that mutation and evolution were uncontrollable factors. The whole point of obtaining a designer baby was to control their genes to the greatest extent!

"What would happen if you discovered a mutation?" Ves curiously asked.

"We dispose of the flawed product and try again." Dr. Ranya factually answered. "That hasn't happened, fortunately. The new lab equipment that we have bought from the MTA is highly capable. By the way, you should prepare for the implantation procedure, Gloriana. Now that we have confirmed the embryo is fine, we can move on to the most crucial step."

"Finally!" Gloriana grinned.

A doctor arrived to guide Gloriana to another facility.

Ves and Dr. Ranya moved over to an advanced operating theater that currently held a transparent coffin-like chamber.

"The implantation procedure will take place here. The entire process will be automated in order to guarantee the highest degree of precision. Before you ask, we have already checked all of the relevant machines multiple times. They're completely isolated from any other networks so they are not susceptible to outside signals. I even invited Calabast to inspect and improve our security measures."

Even now, quite a lot of Black Cats and other guards were stationed around the operating room. The importance of this moment couldn't be overstated as the embryo that was about to be put inside his wife would probably become his first-born child.

When Ves looked at the high-tech chamber and recalled the rather impersonal nature of preparing the genetic materials and bringing them together, began to develop more and more misgivings about this entire routine.

It all seemed so... detached to him. Compared to the wonder of natural conception, Ves felt a distinct lack of emotions towards the process, the embryo and what he had in store for the future.

Would his first-born daughter truly end up as well as she could be if he allowed these arrangements to go through?

He couldn't say for sure. As much as many people hyped the success of designer babies, the truth was that humans were products of both nature and nurture.

Better genes certainly gave children an advantage over the competition, but the truth was that even baseline humans were capable of reaching greatness. The way they were raised and what kind of life decisions they made were just as important if not more to how much success they accomplished in their lives.

In fact, the best example of this was Star Designers. From what the general public knew about them, only 7 percent of the best mech designers of humanity were designer babies!

This was the strongest example that success could not be bought. In the end, improved genes was just one of the many possible tools to raise an accomplished descendant.

This attitude caused Ves to care a lot less about the quality of the genes of his child. He cared much more about his emotional connection to his upcoming daughter.

"I can't go on like this." He muttered.

"Pardon, sir?"

"Uhm, nothing."

Roughly half an hour passed by before the big moment had arrived. Gloriana wore a special suit as she entered the operating room and slowly entered the chamber. Once she lied down, she was quietly put to sleep.

The chamber automatically injected several parts of her body with several substances. Ves had no idea what they did, but according to Ranya they were all necessary to ensure that his wife would receive the embryo without any problems.

Soon, a thick mechanical arm extended from the ceiling. Ves immediately drew his eyes towards the tip of the robot arm. He could intuitively sense that it held something of great importance to him. He had no doubt that it held the embryo.

"It's starting."

Complete silence followed as the arm smoothly lowered and pressed against the top of the transparent chamber. A small opening emerged, allowing a smaller and thinner arm to reach down to Gloriana's stomach area.

Ves' body froze as he concentrated all of his focus. As the delicate operation approached the crucial step, his senses had become incredibly attuned.

The moment when the embryo reached its new home, Ves secretly made his move!

Mrow!

Blinky had especially prepared a tiny spiritual mote. The cat had expertly stripped every spiritual attribute except for the one revolving around life.

Ves took this purified mote and carefully wrapped it around a spiritual projection before moving it out of his mind.

Just as the embryo was beginning to settle in its warm and comfortable location, Ves silently deposited the spiritual mote inside the embryo.

Much to his surprise, he did not encounter any rejection or barrier. Despite the possible risks, the embryo hadn't suddenly blown up or displayed any adverse reactions.

To Dr. Ranya and the doctors supervising the operation, the implantation procedure had gone perfectly.

"The embryo is in excellent condition, just as we intended." Ranya smiled at Ves.

"Congratulations, sir. You're about to become a father to a fantastic daughter. Even though she doesn't carry a large portion of your current genes, she bears much of the DNA you were born with. That still makes her your child. Mostly."

Ves didn't quibble over these details. All he knew was that the growing embryo inside his wife was his child in both flesh and spirit.

"I trust in you and your team's abilities. Make sure to perform frequent checks on Gloriana and her growing baby."

"That goes without saying."

Chapter 3142: Wonder of Creation

Gloriana's pregnancy changed everything.

After the implantation procedure, Ves finally began to feel as if he was becoming a true family man. He no longer viewed issues from the perspective of his own interests anymore.

He actually began to consider the needs of his children, starting with his first daughter who was quietly growing in the belly of his wife.

How should he raise her? How much did he have to fight against Gloriana's extreme teachings? Should he raise her along the lines of a leader which she would probably excel at or should he try to win back some freedom for her so that she could pursue her own desires? Should he devote less time on mech design so that he could spend more quality time with each of his children?

His new priorities also colored his views on other matters. Should he dial back his adventurism in order to provide his children with stabler lives? Should he allow his children to become mech pilots and risk their lives in battle if they possessed the right genetic aptitude? Was it too premature to make preparations to establish important leadership positions so that his children could inherit his clan?

Suddenly, his life no longer revolved around him and his ambitions. The prospect of having children who would follow him when they were young and grow into adults in their own rights a few decades later was almost frightening to him. How could he ensure they would grow up as stable, healthy and happy as possible? What kind of measures did he have to employ to make sure they became competent enough to meet the challenges of their chosen careers?

One thing was for sure. Gloriana would definitely work hard to raise her children into talented, capable and successful adults. Ves did not have to worry about that, at least.

What he was actually concerned about was whether his wife would go overboard. He already heard from Calabast that female Hexers placed extremely high expectations on their daughters.

As someone who enjoyed a more normal upbringing, Ves did not want his children to experience too much pressure throughout their youth.

"Children are children. Let them have fun."

Ves could already predict he would have to counterbalance his wife's insistence on training her children, especially her daughters.

"We live in the Larkinson Clan, not the Hexadric Hegemony. We are not turning our daughters into Hexers!"

"Whatever you say, Ves." His wife said as she rubbed her belly.

"Miaow."

Clixie jumped up to the bed and began to sniff Gloriana's stomach. The cat then pressed up against it and began to purr, as if that would make the baby more comfortable.

"Hihihi!" Gloriana radiated happiness as she stroked Clixie's fur. "You'll watch over my daughter, right? Don't let anything happen to her if I'm not with her. Are you up to the task?"

"Miaow~!"

"We should provide our children with their own animal companions." Ves suggested.

"I'm fine with that, but not too soon. We have to pick them out carefully. I don't want our children to be accompanied by weak and stupid pets. They have to be at least as good as Clixie!"

"Miaow."

That was a difficult demand to fulfill, but Ves had a number of ideas.

He briefly focused his spiritual senses towards his wife. Aside from her strong spirituality that was centered in her head, her belly also started to exude life.

The second presence was weak and tiny. So tiny in fact that even an insect probably exuded more life.

His unborn daughter was too young. Despite investing more than 800 billion hex credits to form an extremely high quality gene sequence, his first child was little more than a collection of cells at the moment.

Yet that could be said of every human. When it came down to it, even Ves was mainly a collection of cells. He just had a lot more of it than his daughter.

While Gloriana mainly paid attention to her baby's genes and physical state, Ves didn't really care all that much. He would have loved his daughter even if her genes were completely unremarkable.

She was family. A bond had already formed between them. Even if this connection wasn't as concrete as the bonds that made up his spiritual network, Ves felt an undeniable attachment to what was currently just a small collection of organic cells.

It was like magic, and it reminded him of the wonder that was life.

Two humans came together and contributed to the creation of another human. Even though the designer baby process 'improved' this natural process, the fundamental nature of this process was still the same.

He would become a father soon. A year from now, he would have the opportunity to hold his baby in his arms and experience the full joy that every father felt when they looked at a product of love.

From how Gloriana's eyes turned dreamy, she must be fantasizing about a similar future. The joy of motherhood filled her with warmth and caused her to pay less attention to her work tasks.

Just yesterday, she would never waste so much idle time in bed. She would have risen up and freshen up for the day before immediately heading over to the design lab.

It was quite strange how the prospect of motherhood caused an immediate shift in her outlook. Ves was already liking this change. There was more to life than work, and as much as he was willing to dedicate his life to his ambitions, he was a human as well as a mech designer.

Ves spontaneously reached out his hand and gently pressed his palm against Gloriana's flat stomach.

"Miaow."

Clixie moved a little back in order to give Ves room to marvel at his wife's tummy.

"My belly isn't close to swelling yet." Gloriana looked amused at his antics. "I will take quite a few months before our child takes actual shape."

"I know, honey, but it's the thought that counts."

Ves actually had another reason to touch her skin aside from satisfying his emotional needs. He wanted to examine the spiritual characteristics of the life that was slowly growing inside.

From what he recalled of the implantation procedure, the embryo that the doctors and geneticists had cooked up did not actually contain a notable trace of spirituality.

While it was definitely alive, it was still too early for it to accommodate the mind and spirit of a living human. Ves guessed that this would only come when the brain grew large and vigorous enough to support an actual consciousness.

Even so, with his sensitivity, he still detected enough of a presence for him to act on it. He didn't know why, but he impulsively gave in to his urges and formed a spiritual mote that contained a small but pure trace of life that was slanted towards creation before depositing it into the embryo.

In hindsight, Ves realized that this act could have easily led to disaster! He was well aware of the consequences of messing with the spiritualities of grown adults. Now that he had done something similar to an embryo that was literally just a few days old, the chances were high that all of its cells would have blown to pieces from the excessive pressure that his relatively powerful mote exuded!

He was glad that didn't happen and that the Lifer doctors didn't have to produce a second embryo. For some reasons that he wasn't aware of, his tiny unborn child was able to absorb his spiritual energy without a problem.

He was pretty sure that this was an abnormal result. This was why he was keen to track the spiritual state of his future daughter as she was slowly growing in her mother's womb.

When Ves examined the current spiritual state of his child, he noticed that much of the spiritual mote that he had injected yesterday was already gone.

He already felt that the presence in Gloriana's belly had grown weaker compared to yesterday right after the successful conclusion of the implantation procedure.

That was strange.

Fortunately, his growing child still felt healthy from what he could feel from her weak spiritual presence.

Where did all of that missing spiritual energy go? Had it leaked out of her like water pouring out of a bucket that was already full?

In order to find out what exactly happened, he quietly requested Blinky to prepare an even smaller mote of life-attributed spiritual energy.

Mrow.

His companion spirit knew how important this was to his child, so Blinky worked carefully to form another pure mote.

This time, it was only a fraction as strong as the one the spiritual cat had prepared a day ago. When Ves slowly introduced it into the embryo inside Gloriana's body, he attuned his spiritual senses as much as possible to perceive even the subtlest of changes.

Contrary to his expectations, hardly any of the spiritual energy he put in was leaking out. Though Ves detected faint traces of spillage, it was hardly significant.

Yet as a full minute passed, he could sense that the embryo's spirituality was gradually growing weaker. He had the sense that it was slowly returning to its original level of strength.

Ves faintly began to frown. If the energy he put in wasn't leaking out, then where was it going?

It took another minute of careful examination before he managed to come up with a possible answer.

From what he could tell, the faint leakage wasn't pouring out of his daughter's spirit, but actually came from her cells!

It was extremely hard for Ves to distinguish the two sources considering that she was so small right now, but his intuitive senses somehow gave him the idea that the spiritual energy he put in his unborn daughter's mind was flowing into her microscopic body.

Considering the fact that far less energy eventually escaped her body than what he put in, Ves tentatively concluded that his spiritual energy was merging with the embryo's cells!

His eyes widened. This was something that he had never witnessed before.

Spiritual energy usually didn't interact with organic cells. They just passed through them as if they existed in different planes.

In order to verify this, Ves lowered his hand to Gloriana's leg and experimentally injected a bit of spiritual energy through her skin.

"What are you doing, Ves?"

"Uhm, have I told you that I love your legs?"

"Oh, Ves..."

He paid close attention to what his little spurt of spiritual energy was doing. It turned out that it did exactly what he expected. The jet of energy phased right through Gloriana's leg and slowly faded through the bed and deck while rapidly dissipating from the material realm.

Normal organic flesh wasn't capable of holding spiritual energy. If the reverse was the case, he would have long produced enormous masses of flesh so that he could employ them as organic versions of P-stones!

Ves frowned. What made the embryo different?

He thought about other instances where he managed to empower flesh through spiritual engineering.

"This kind of reminds me of..."

His eyes slowly widened. He recalled the moment where he managed to create highly-potent organic totems in the form of the Four Aspects of Lufa.

When Ves shifted his eyes towards Gloriana's belly, he suddenly realized that he wasn't merely looking in the direction of his future daughter.

He was looking at a developing product!

When Ves thought back on how he formed his mech designs, his totems and his design spirits, he recognized that their creation process had one thing in common.

As long as they weren't 'finished', he could engineer their living aspects!

His heart beat faster when he thought about the implications that his future daughter might also fall into this category. As a product in making, the embryo was highly receptive towards the energy of life and creation that Ves just happened to possess.

Would he be able to... edit his unborn daughter in this fashion?

It sounded extremely uncertain and most definitely violated one of the fundamental taboos of nature. There were so many ways it could go wrong. Yet the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to experiment on his unborn daughter!

This could be a way to give her one of the greatest gifts of her life! The more powerful she became, the more Ves would be assured that she would grow into a happy and successful child!

An important question came up in his mind.

"How should I design my daughter?"

Chapter 3143: A Good Parent

Ever since he made a huge discovery about what he could do to his unborn child, Ves had spent an entire day in a daze.

Though Gloriana was also affected by the realization that a new life was growing inside her body, she did not let that pull her attention away from her work while she was on duty.

"Ves!" A small hand smacked the back of his head, causing him to pull his attention away from his daydreams. "Stop fooling around and finish your work on the Sentry Project's energy transmission systems. Make sure it is capable of feeding enough power to its crystal luminar rifle when it is operating at its peak!"

"Uhm, I'm on it!" He quickly replied.

"You should have been on it three hours ago, but from what I can tell, you only worked on it for ten minutes at most. This is pathetic!"

"Hey, can't I have a moment of time to enjoy the prospect of becoming a dad?"

Gloriana's expression grew terser. "Look, I'm looking forward to raising my first baby as well, but that means we have to get as much work done as possible while we still can. Once my daughter is born, we'll inevitably have to cut back on the amount of time we spend in this design lab. I love my work, but I won't ever forsake my responsibilities as a mother. So before we start this new phase of our lives, I at least want to complete the development of all of our expert mechs. Besides, the faster they come online, the safer our fleet and our family will be. No one must threaten our baby!"

Ves fully agreed with sentiment. He didn't want his children to experience the same dangers and be compelled to take the same risks as him. Much of the reason why he had to go through so many ordeals was because he lacked better opportunities.

If he was born in a second-rate state, it would have been much easier for him to become a second-class mech designer.

If he was born in a first-rate state, then even if he didn't enjoy as many luxuries as Axelar, he would have still gained access to fantastic opportunities that would make any second-rater green with envy.

If he was Master Willix's grandson, then he would have truly won the jackpot! His family would probably provide him with the best augmentations that humanity had developed at that point. As long as he wasn't incompetent, his 'grandmother' would probably ready him for a promising career in the MTA. At a minimum, he would likely turn into someone similar to Jovy Armalon.

Yet the plain reality was that he lacked all of those opportunities. Instead, he was born in a small and inconsequential third-rate state and spent most of his time growing up on a rural planet with his somewhat normal father.

The only element that completely threw his normal life out of whack was his mother.

The gifts that his mother passed on to him opened up a radically different set of opportunities to him. While they were all associated with danger, the rewards were truly rich, as evidenced by his current success!

Did he want his daughter and subsequent children to become at least as successful as him? Certainly! Would he want to subject them to the same life-threatening crises that he had lived through? No!

Even though the motto of the Larkinson Clan was about overcoming hardships, Ves did not want to subject his children to any significant risks. Perhaps it was fine to give them a scare every now and then, but putting them in the line of fire was absolutely unacceptable!

Well... perhaps he might make some allowances if they possessed the right genetic aptitude and chose to become mech pilots. At least Ves and his wife would be able to do their best to design the safest and most powerful mechs for their babies.

Whatever the case, the point was that his children didn't have to go through so many dangerous ordeals in order to become successful in their lives. As their father, Ves could provide them with much safer futures.

In fact, Gloriana was already many steps ahead of him. His wife wanted to groom her firstborn daughter into a leader. While Ves did not object to her desire to pave a road of success for her child, the problem was she was making far too many decisions in advance!

Their unborn daughter hadn't even grown up in her womb yet and already Gloriana had completed a comprehensive plan that started from birth all the way to graduating from university and beyond!

This degree of determinism felt profoundly wrong to Ves. Though he knew that his daughter's genes were already geared towards leadership roles, he abhorred Gloriana's approach and didn't want to go down the same road.

However their daughter turned out, Ves vowed to raise her in his own way according to his own principles. Much of them were based around the rather casual but also purposeful way the old Larkinson Family raised its own descendants.

From what he could recall of the time, the Larkinsons didn't put that much pressure on the children when they were young. A lot of family members were veterans who had come back from the frontlines after experiencing a lot of death and killing. The last thing they wanted to do was to pass any of that on to their innocent kids.

Things changed when the children reached ten. Once they were tested for their genetic aptitudes, the kids split up into two groups.

Those without genetic aptitudes were treated as casually as before. The only change was that they would receive slight support for any careers they wished to pursue. The choice was completely up to the children themselves, though their parents might nudge them in one direction or another.

Ves was grateful for receiving his father's support. When he decided to study to become a mech designer, his dad probably knew that the likelihood of breaking into the industry was small.

Yet his father not only approved his career choice, he even dug up the System from wherever his mother had stashed it and gifted it to Ves without any reserve.

Ves couldn't have asked for better support from his father. He did everything within his means to help his son, up to and including departing for the Nyxian Gap in order to divert the original owners of the System!

"My father is a good model for a parent."

While his upbringing was nowhere near as extravagant as that of his wife, Ves had fond memories of those simpler times. If possible, he wanted his children to grow up in a similar fashion.

All of these thoughts and considerations slowly shaped his own approach towards raising and helping his daughter.

As someone who possessed unique talents in creating and strengthening different forms of life, he could not refuse the temptation to employ his abilities on his own daughter.

Though there were definitely ways that this could go wrong, he felt rather confident in his abilities despite embarking on something completely new and unprecedented. The initial signs were encouraging and his intuition hadn't steered him wrong so far.

After all, the developing embryo was just another product from the perspective of his domain. The only distinguishing factor was that his unborn daughter was probably exceptionally compatible with his spiritual energy due to their blood relationship.

"It's similar to how my mother can harness my energy without a problem." He muttered.

Family mattered and the closer the ties, the greater the compatibility.

In fact, Ves had the suspicion that the compatibility between mother and child was even stronger! After all, there was no closer family bond than to literally grow your offspring inside your own body.

This indicated that Gloriana's spirituality might spill over in her baby over the course of her pregnancy. Though this effect probably wasn't as strong as the direct influence that Ves was able to exert, his wife had the advantage of being in constant close contact with the life growing within her belly.

What this exactly meant for the future of their daughter, Ves wasn't exactly sure.

"I should focus on doing what I can on my own end."

This caused him to arrive at an important question. How should he employ his spiritual engineering capabilities on his future daughter?

"Well, one thing's for sure. I'm not going to do anything that will narrow her future choices!"

This was simply antithetical to his design philosophy. Though he was in the business of designing specialized mechs that were already geared to perform certain tasks well, that was because this was the fundamental purpose of mechs.

No one bought mechs without aim. If they weren't good at fighting in a specific way, then they didn't have much value.

Even so, Ves still managed to add some leeway to his mechs by infusing them with life but leaving their future development up to their own experiences.

Every living mech had the potential to be great. Even if they didn't reach the heights of the Devil Tiger or the Ouroboros, the lesser machines still had the opportunity to develop their own unique identities based on their mech pilots and their own experiences.

Ves could just drop by the hangar bay and study the older living mechs to see examples of this growth.

"In fact, a better example are my spiritual products."

His design spirits and companion spirits may have been created with specific goals and capabilities in mind, but once they were born, they were free to direct their own growth.

Nothing had gone wrong as far as he was aware of. Existences such as the Golden Cat and the Superior Mother had all grown far beyond their initial states.

He eventually decided to adopt a looser approach for his children.

"The differences between my products and my children is that the latter aren't created to fulfill specific jobs."

His wife might have something to say about that, but he didn't have to listen to her on this as she wasn't capable of interfering in any of his spiritual actions.

Ves began to develop a tentative framework for augmenting his daughter. His goal was to make her stronger and more capable of overcoming any challenges or difficulties she might face in the future, whether it was leading the clan, designing a mech, piloting a machine or simply teaching a class of schoolchildren.

His priority in preserving the choices of his child meant that he couldn't go too specific on how to improve his daughter. Any spiritual upgrades he applied to the growing embryo had to help his future child in a more universal manner.

This was why he never attempted to inject any spiritual energy related to mechs in her body. Though he would love it if she followed in her father and mother's footsteps and developed a passion for mechs, he did not have the right to impose this decision.

"If I want to inject her with spiritual energy, then I have to make sure that their attributes are versatile and widely applicable." He decided.

If possible, he wanted to inject spiritual energy from other sources. Just like how he was able to create better and more diverse spiritual products by mixing different ingredients, he intended to do something similar to his child in order to achieve a stronger result.

"After all, just mindlessly dumping my spiritual energy in her body is too primitive."

He didn't even know how this affected his daughter. Would her body become more compatible and susceptible to spiritual energy? Would her chances of developing spiritual potential be maximized? Would she become something more than human when she was born?

Ves didn't know, and that was what made this situation so exciting. He didn't want to leave everything to chance, though. He wanted to provide her with at least some solid spiritual advantages.

"Hmmm. How can I do this?"

He soon turned his thoughts to Blinky.

Mrow?

Ves slowly grinned... "Maybe... a companion spirit is a good vector."

Chapter 3144: Spiritual Vector

Ves did not completely disregard his wife's warning. After making some initial decisions on how to 'improve' his future daughter, he eventually set aside his thoughts on this new personal project and focused on finishing his work assignments.

It was only when he completed his quota for the day that he had time to puzzle out his Daughter Project in peace. He returned to his personal workshop and began to list out his methods and resources.

At this point in his career, he developed quite an extensive spiritual toolbox.

Today, he added another spiritual technique to his collection.

Spiritual human embryo engineering was his ambitious method of strengthening his children. He hoped he would be able to impart as much strength as he was capable of passing to them without breaking them or dictating their future.

While there was an inevitable degree of influencing involved if he embarked on this road, he felt it was worth it. After all, the gifts he intended to bestow on his children would give them extra options instead of taking their choices away from them. They could choose not to make use of their extraordinary talents, though admittedly this was not a likely outcome.

After all, if a teenager had the choice to become a waste plant technician or the president of a powerful state, the kid would definitely choose the latter!

This example essentially encapsulated his purpose behind his planned actions. If his first daughter aimed high and chose to pursue an ambitious vocation, then Ves hoped that his intervention gave her a much better chance of doing well.

"Even if she ends up choosing to become a leader like her mother wanted, then the aid that I have given to her should also help in that capacity."

The need to provide his daughter with a universal enhancement was quite a challenging project. This was because if he wanted to do anything more complex than pumping her with bland life-attributed energy, he needed to impart her with a more specific and purposeful design.

The more elaborate his spiritual design, the more it could drive his daughter into a specific direction, which was exactly what he wanted to avoid.

This contradiction put him into a bind until he realized he might have a way of having it both ways.

"I'll just make the spiritual augment alive."

He already had a ready model for that in the form of his companion spirits. So far, both Sharpie and Blinky provided immense help to their partners.

Yet designing and imparting a companion spirit to a small and tiny embryo was vastly different from doing so for an adult human who was already spiritually active.

When Ves recalled how weak his daughter's spirituality registered to his senses, his expression became pensive.

"She's too weak to carry much weight."

Of course, that was incredibly obvious considering she was only a few days old! The real problem was that Ves didn't expect her spirituality to grow to the point of matching that of a spiritual adult while she was still calmly growing inside Gloriana's womb.

If he wanted to impart her with a companion spirit as powerful as Sharpie in its initial form, then he at least had to wait until she grew into an adolescent who activated her spiritual potential.

"I can't wait that long!"

The earlier his daughter gained an advantage, the better her foundation and the further she could go in the future.

Just like how Gloriana purchased an extremely expensive gene package from the MTA, Ves had to find a way to make a significant upfront investment in order to give his daughter the greatest help he was able to provide.

This was why he didn't immediately give up on the plan to implant his daughter with a companion spirit.

"It's the best way I can strengthen her without directly influencing her inclinations."

While companion spirits acted like an extension of the people they were attached to, they were also discrete existences who possessed a high degree of autonomy. Ves basically hosted two separate personalities in his mind.

The relationship was probably similar to the one between Cynthia and the Superior Mother.

All of this meant that Ves could program the companion spirit of his daughter in a more specific way without worrying too much about letting all of that bleed over to his child.

"Of course, I can't rule out that at least some influencing will take place."

They would become part of the same whole, after all. Yet Ves had enough confidence that his scheme would work as intended, especially if he focused his attention on the separation between the pair.

He began to design a tentative draft in his mind.

"First, it has to be a cat." He stated.

A loose image of a cat emerged. The animal's exact shape and appearance didn't matter too much. He just wanted to provide his daughter with a trusty companion who she could rely on for her entire life.

While he could have chosen to design something more impressive or complex like an outright guardian angel, Ves did not want the companion spirit to become too domineering.

"The great things about cats are that they are just pets."

A more humanoid entity would be able to manipulate his daughter to a much more extensive degree, and that was exactly what he didn't want. A young kitty who grew up alongside a little girl was a lot more casual. The cat was supposed to grow into a form that better complemented his daughter instead of the other way around.

As long as he was able to pull this off, then regardless of the functions of the cat, he would definitely be able to guarantee that his daughter would start off with a decently powerful spirit.

The System oddly scored his own Spirituality as 4.9. While he didn't feel drastically more powerful after acquiring Blinky, he definitely gained a lot of benefits.

The challenge was accomplishing this in the first place. Ves couldn't simply pile up a huge rock on top of a narrow wooden stick. The stick would instantly break from the excess weight acting on its structure.

In order to resolve this problem, he either had to lighten the rock or strengthen the stick.

"I'll have to start off with a spiritual seed." He murmured. "It doesn't have to contain much. It just has to carry the essentials along with a general framework for its early growth."

As long as this companion spirit seed successfully took root in his daughter's miniscule spirituality, then he would be able to accelerate both their growth by watering the seed with universal life energy derived from a high-grade serum.

While Ves could have chosen to feed this energy directly into his daughter, he thought that was a terrible idea because the growth would become completely forced and uncontrolled.

It was a lot better to use the companion spirit as a vector. As a purely spiritual lifeform, the cat was a lot more capable of absorbing, digesting or processing any spiritual energy it absorbed.

In fact, Ves even thought about making another version of Blinky for his daughter. Regardless of what she chose to become in the future, there was always a use for an abundant amount of spiritual energy!

Yet when Ves thought about slicing another fragment from the Unending One's spiritual remains, he was not that certain whether it was a good idea to put a piece of a dark god in her mind.

"Wait... I have a safer option!"

He briefly focused his attention on Blinky.

Mrow?

Ves grinned. "Yes, you will do."

Even if using an ingredient derived from Blinky would result in a weaker outcome than going straight to the source, it was probably a much safer course of action.

Unlike Ves who already possessed a mature and firm spirit, his daughter was completely defenseless. She wouldn't be able to defend herself against direct malicious influences when she was still young.

"In fact, this is another major purpose of her upcoming design spirit."

A companion spirit could also function as a protector and guardian. While they were most effective against spiritual threats, there were also ways to allow them to defend against more material threats.

His daughter's pet didn't have to be as strong as Lucky, at least not at the start. Her parents would make sure that she was well-protected.

What actually worried Ves was how well he would be able to protect her when she grew up. If he and his daughter ever parted ways for some reason, then he wouldn't be able to come to her aid in person.

However, Ves wouldn't have to worry as much if her companion spirit already experienced a couple of decades of growth. At that point, the cat that grew up alongside his daughter would probably be able to match Goldie or Blinky's direct combat strength.

He was becoming more excited at the thought. With a strong, wiley and loyal spiritual companion by her side, his daughter would always have an ace up her sleeve even if every other layer of protection failed!

When Ves reviewed the current list of parameters that he had set, he already felt he had the basis of a decent design.

"It's not enough, though."

All of the parameters that he had set so far were necessary but basic functions for his daughter's companion spirit. They were never supposed to be the central features of the cat.

"The reason why Blinky is centered around absorbing and digesting spiritual energy is because I need it for my work. It's not a given that my daughter will follow my footsteps, so it isn't necessary for this to become a core feature."

He wanted to keep this capability as a secondary function in order to leave space for other capabilities. If his daughter ever reached a point in her life where she needed access to more spiritual energy, then her companion spirit could steadily evolve in this direction and turn it into a primary function.

For now, Ves felt his future children would be better served if he focused on granting them a different advantage.

"Let me think..." Ves rubbed his chin.

Gloriana wanted their first child to become a leader, so the gene package she chose inserted genes into the embryo that were designed to help her in this capacity.

The genetic blueprint designed and adapted by Witshaw & Seneca contained proven gene sequences that enhanced a human individual's leadership, charisma, empathy, acting and many other relevant skills. Even beauty was part of the package as everyone who spent this much money expected their designer baby to look good.

Although Formula S-635006-CIN was indeed capable of setting up designer babies to become political leaders, there was no rule that stated that his daughter had to become the next matriarch or anything.

"All of these skills are highly relevant to leading states or major organizations, but they are not limited to that."

Ves possessed the same skills as well, but he was primarily a mech designer. He found a way to leverage all of them into improving his work.

"Which skill should I focus on augmenting, then?"

After a brief consideration, he eventually settled on empathy.

He wanted his daughter to inherit his ability to understand and communicate with different lifeforms. No matter what she chose to become in the future, it was always helpful to make more friends and gain a greater understanding of her enemies.

This would become her greatest advantage if she chose to become a politician, but it was still useful in many other professions, particularly if they involved a lot of people.

Still, the only caveat of this choice was that his daughter might center so much on this advantage that she would follow her mother anyway.

Ves suddenly began to doubt this choice.

He really wanted to improve his daughter's empathy because he derived a lot of advantages out of it himself, but he did not want to exert the same influence as his wife.

"I... need to rethink my approach."

Chapter 3145: Nominations

While Ves pondered about how to augment his future daughter in a spiritual fashion, he continued to work on his mech design projects.

The design lab became a hive of activity after Gloriana got all fired up. The drive to finish all of the expert mech design projects before the birth of her daughter caused her to become extremely motivated. She also became a lot more demanding and expected every other mech designer to get more work done.

Surprisingly, the rest of the Larkinson Clan actually responded positively to the news of her pregnancy.

"She might be a Hexer, but she'll probably be a good mother."

"We finally have some continuity."

"I'm happy for the patriarch. I hope that parenthood will calm him down."

Though not every clansman thought highly of Gloriana, the revelation that she was carrying Ves' child pleased many clansmen who were pleased with serving under the current patriarch.

While the Larkinson Clan tried its best to become a meritocracy, the reality was that some Larkinsons were more significant than others.

A drastic change in leadership accompanied by a profound shift in direction scared a lot of clansmen. They didn't want the good times to end or see the Larkinson Clan turn into an entirely different beast.

If Ves ever decided to step back from holding the top post, then it would be great if one of his children took over the mantle. People already developed a lot of expectations that his successor would be able to lead the clan to even greater heights in the future!

As a former citizen to a state that vehemently fought against a feudal kingdom, Ves couldn't make sense of this sentiment.

"This is ridiculous. Who can guarantee that my upcoming daughter or any of my other kids are qualified to lead my clan in the future? They haven't seen anything yet and already they're assuming that everything will go fine as if I'm still in charge!"

Gavin shrugged. "Citizens from former republics like us are accustomed to thinking that way, but a significant portion of our clan are accustomed to other regimes. Remember the Sentinel Kingdom? We picked up a lot of people over there who are completely used to thinking that nobles and royals have an intrinsic right to rule. They don't care about your current title. To them, you're the king of the clan while Gloriana is your

queen. That automatically means your sons and daughters will become their future princes and princesses."

Ves palmed his face. This was an idiotic development.

"We're not a monarchy and I'm not a king!"

"I know that, you know that, but it's hard to shake people's beliefs in you, boss." His assistant told him. "There are some people in our clan who think it's a good idea to rotate the leadership every once in a while and there are others who want the opposite. It doesn't help that you're so high profile. The founder and first-generation leader of any organization will have an outsized role among the people, and the fact you have done nothing to diminish that means that it is natural for you to be treated as our king."

This was a wildly overblown talk to Ves. He considered this attitude to be so absurd that he didn't want to think about it anymore.

"Ugh. We need to step up the education of our clansmen, Benny. Tell the media folk and any other relevant people to fight back against this idea. Being a king is too troublesome and will only distract me from designing mechs."

Ves always considered himself to be a mech designer first and a leader second. If he had to choose between the two, he would pick the first one in a heartbeat because that was the root of his place in society.

"...Understood, boss. Speaking about leadership, Mr. Shederin Purnesse, General Quinlist Verle and Mr. Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson have all nominated their preferred candidates for the three available positions of chief minister."

"Chief minister?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "What the hell is that?"

"It's the replacement name for vice patriarch. Some of the clan leaders we've consulted think it is better to switch to a different title. Chief minister conveys sufficient authority but does not make it sound as if they will replace you. Their roles are similar to prime ministers in a way, but since we will be appointing multiple of them at a time, it is best to distinguish them from the traditional impression of a prime minister."

Though Ves felt this title sounded rather weird, he quickly grew comfortable with it after a few times of running it through in his mind. Chief minister made it sound as if the person holding this position was the head of other ministers. However, unlike prime ministers who were traditionally associated with leading entire countries, the title of chief minister was obviously less prestigious due to its uncommon occurrence.

"I... approve. It's not the most elegant title, but it does the job and does not convey any stuffy or pretentious associations to the job."

Alternative titles such as duke, chancellor, director, executive, vice president, marshal and so on were all problematic for several different reasons. The Larkinson Clan was foremost a clan, with a close family structure that was relatively closed to those who did not bear the name.

Even if the clan was gradually taking on the form of a state, Ves did not want to adopt a traditional structure. He wanted the clan to preserve its original ideals and retain its own identity as much as possible. Therefore, he had no problem with breaking galactic tradition and adopting more quirks.

As long as it worked, who cared about whether the Larkinsons abided by the handbook on how to build a state.

"Let's hear it, then. Who are the fellows who will be taking over most of my burdens?"

"Well, let's start with the obvious one. Mr. Shederin himself has formally nominated his son Novilon Purnesse. I'm sure I don't need to mention his qualifications. His prior experience in holding several government functions will serve the clan administration well. He also claims to be the best person to implement all of the reforms proposed by his father. Currently, his nomination has reached broad if tentative support from the Larkinson Assembly."

Ves already had a lot of time to weigh the pros and cons of this idea. While the risk of empowering the Purnessers over the other clansmen was significant, in the end the need to put someone in charge who knew what he was doing trumped every other consideration.

Even if Novilon overreached one day, Ves could always step in and rein the man back. The former Purnesse Family had to keep in mind that they were only able to gain power at the behest of others.

"If there are no strong objections to his nomination, then I'm fine with it." Ves eventually decided. "We need to counterbalance his presence with someone loyal and from the old guard, though. The purpose of nominating multiple vice patriarchs, er, I mean chief ministers, is that they all keep each other in check. This process obviously won't be as effective if they all belong to the same clique."

For example, Ves was sure that the Purnessers would ascend to become the highest-ranking sub-groups within the Larkinson Clan if they filled up the seats of all three chief ministers!

Gavin smiled. "Oh, you don't have to be concerned about that. From the business side of our clan, Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson has decided to put his own name forward. Since he came from the original Larkinson Family, his loyalty and dedication is not in doubt. He is also much more familiar with the Larkinson values than many other clansmen. The only possible concern is that he is old."

Though Ves saw the benefits to nominating the current Chief Operating Officer of the Living Mech Corporation, he felt irked at the fact that the old man did not conform to his criteria.

"I thought I told you all to look for someone who is not too old. Besides, the position of COO of one of our primary sources of funds is also an immensely important responsibility. Who the hell is going to replace Raymond?"

"I believe that he wishes to explain his decisions to you himself."

"I'll call him up, then."

Ves activated his desk terminal and directly hailed the man. A short moment passed by as his terminal apparently formed a connection to a new office set up in the center of Dawn City aboard the Vivacious Wal.

"Patriarch." Raymond's projection appeared and bowed. "What can I do for you?"

"I just heard from Benny here that you intend to nominate yourself to the position of Chief Minister. Aren't you being a bit too ambitious here? I mean, who nominates himself to become the vice leader of a powerful organization!?"

Raymond did not exhibit any nervousness. "I'm aware that you are looking to place someone younger and more flexible on these seats, but hear me out, Ves. You don't want all three of the chief ministers to belong to the same generation. It's best to take advantage of the fact that there are multiple chief ministers to add some diversity. Not only do I belong to a different generation, but I am certain that I am the only one put forward who has genuinely lived through the days of the old family. You need that anchor in the seats directly below yours."

This argument sounded compelling. Ves began to look thoughtful. "Maybe you have a point, but..."

"I'm old, yes, but I'm also getting on in my years. Just like your grandfather, I don't have much time left before I am forced to retire and live out my remaining years in peace. Compared to Mr. Novilon Purnesse, I hold no greater ambitions for myself. I only wish to make the clan a better place for my clansmen and more specifically my direct family. I don't want my grandson Tusa to risk his life for a clan that isn't worthy and that seeks to take advantage of him rather than provide sincere support."

This was quite an understandable sentiment, especially now that Ves was on his way to become a parent.

After thinking over Raymond's suitability a bit further, he felt that it wasn't completely necessary to hold to his original criteria.

"I'll consider your nomination." Ves carefully said. "If there are no better options, then I will give my approval."

"Thank you, sir. I don't plan to stick around forever, but I hope to make my mark in the few years that I will be able to take charge."

"Who will replace you as COO if you go? I don't want your departure to leave a gaping void behind in the LMC. Are you thinking about letting Calsie take over your current job?"

Raymond shook his head. "No. She is still too young and too far behind in terms of experience and skills. In fact, even I am feeling increasingly more swamped with my current duties. The LMC has grown far too big and complex in the last few years. My training is simply too insufficient and I'm too old to improve any further. This is why I have always been thinking about letting a better and more competent executive lead the company to greater heights."

This was quite a significant change. Ves sat up straighter in his chair.

"Who are you thinking about taking over as COO?"

Though the position of COO sounded less prestigious than CEO, everyone knew that Ves was far too busy to lead the company these days. He just wanted to hold onto the rank of CEO for the same reason why he insisted on holding to his patriarch title.

The COO of the Living Mech Corporation might only be the deputy leader, but he or she effectively wielded a lot of power and influence. Just the fact that the COO had a huge effect on the amount of money the mech company poured into the coffers of the Larkinson Clan made it critical that Raymond's successor was both capable and loyal!

"I'm thinking about putting forward someone who has an abundant amount of executive experience in mech companies but only joined our clan recently. In fact, we happened to have picked him up back when we were parked next to Talulah Silver."

Ves frowned when he heard that... This meant that Raymond was considering someone who had only joined the clan a few weeks ago.

Chapter 3146: Leadership Deficit

The choice of deciding who got to be in charge of the Larkinson Clan or the Living Mech Corporation was not a trivial matter. Either of them were incredibly influential to the lives of Ves and many other Larkinsons.

The right people in charge could lead them into prosperity while the wrong people could easily collapse everything that Ves had ever built!

Though Ves would have preferred to be in charge of everything, he was only one person and he did not wish to compromise his mech design career any further.

He had no choice but to embrace the necessary evil of trusting others to perform all of these jobs on his behalf.

Ves had no fundamental objection to raising Novilon Purnesse and Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson as two of the three chief ministers of the Larkinson Clan.

As the first ones to hold these new posts, they would be able to wield a wide amount of influence. They also had the privilege to set up a lot of precedents that subsequent chief ministers would feel compelled to follow.

It was therefore critical that the first batch of chief ministers were completely sound. While Raymond was not quite the perfect candidate that Ves had in mind, the current COO's age, pedigree, demeanor, prior performance and trustworthiness completely met his approval.

He was okay with letting Raymond take charge of the clan at large. In fact, he had already been doing this in a limited capacity as a member of the soon-to-be-defunct Executive Council.

The Executive Council was basically a weaker version of the body of chief ministers. Both of them were supposed to be the main executive branch of the Larkinson Clan, but the former proved to be inadequate due to the lack of strong leadership emphasis. It was quite difficult for the clansmen to get excited about being ruled by a glorified committee.

Therefore, changing Raymond's second responsibility into his primary one was not that drastic of a change. The only difference was that a chief minister was a lot more authoritative than a mere member of the Executive Council.

What Ves wasn't so sure about was who Raymond had in mind as a replacement.

Raymond's projection adopted a serious expression. "There is no easy way to say this, but the Living Mech Corporation has long suffered from an increasing shortage of executive talents. It's easy enough to fill up the vacancies at the middle and lower level of the hierarchy with existing clansmen who have been studying hard to increase their qualifications, but there are limits to how much you can improve. For a company as big as the LMC, you can't promote any average middle manager to a crucial executive position. We need to draw from a different pool of manpower, but the issue with that is that this pool is incredibly tiny within our clan."

Ves saw where this was going. "So you decided to draw talents from a larger pool."

"Correct. When our fleet was parked in the Pelsa Ryndover System, we instructed the recruiters to allocate some resources to headhunting potential executive talents. Talulah Silver's manpower pool is much more extensive than ours, so we had no problem finding plenty of decent executives. Still, when we brought them to our fleet, we encountered quite a bit of issues when we tried to induct them into the clan."

"Let me guess. These guys failed the loyalty test, right?"

"Yes." Raymond sighed. "Unlike the bulk of the recruits who have yet to achieve success and are sincerely grateful to our clan for giving them an opportunity to rise, those who already feel as if they are winners are considerably less committed."

"So all of those prospective executives you picked up were selfish bastards who only cared about filling their pockets and taking advantage of the LMC's lack of senior leadership talent to land a cushy job that allows them to play around with trillions of hex credits, is that right?"

"...Close enough. In the end, only a fraction of our selection managed to get through, but that makes them all the more remarkable. They are less selfish than others and developed a genuine bond with our clan and people."

Ves didn't care too much about the executive positions these newcomers took up. What he did care about was making sure that the person at the top was firmly in his pocket. As long as this was the case, the LMC probably wouldn't harm his interests.

"Tell me about the person you think is a worthy candidate to lead the LMC."

Raymond transmitted a brief record over the communication channel. Ves quickly read through the material. He was mildly impressed.

"Dr. Gilbert Hantler studied to become a mechanical engineer in the Ivena Federation and graduated with honors." The elder Larkinson said. "He went on to work for a major mech company that was founded by a Senior Mech Designer. He slowly climbed his way up the ranks before switching over to a management track. He did well in this capacity and continued to study in order to increase his leadership qualifications. In his last years at the company, he served as the company's chief production officer."

This was quite a solid track record. Dr. Hantler had managed to accomplish more than almost any other citizen of the Ivena Federation in the sixty years of his life. What impressed Ves the most was that the man possessed a common civilian background and slowly climbed his way up through his own efforts.

"Why him?" Ves probed. "Why not another recruit? I doubt he's the only candidate that is acceptable to you. What puts this guy ahead of your other choices?"

"There are several reasons why, but if I have to pick the most important one, it's that Dr. Hantler is the most steady and conservative out of all of the other choices."

"Oh?"

Raymond smiled. "When I interviewed them about what they wished to accomplish while they were in charge, all of them presented bold visions of a larger and more proactive Living Mech Corporation. They all had the impression that their primary responsibility was to do their best to grow the company so that it can channel more profits to the clan."

"Is there something wrong with that?"

"While it is certainly important to ensure the company's profits can keep up with the growth of our clan, I believe that it is more important to ensure our company is not at risk of collapsing at some point in the future. The plans the candidates set forth are too risky for my tastes. Many of them involve increasing our leverage in order to explosively expand our market reach and presence. While these plans are sound on the surface, when you look deeper they all serve as preludes to unbridled expansion and risk taking."

As someone who wasn't a stranger to risks, Ves didn't think it was wrong to pursue an ambitious goal. Sometimes, a company might end up in dire straits if it remained stagnant for too long.

That said, he understood what Raymond was worrying about. "Officially, the LMC is like any other company that exists to provide as much value to the shareholders as possible. In most cases, this means issuing fat dividends or raising the share price. While it's nice to earn more money, that's not all I want from my mech company."

"In our current state, the LMC is an irreplaceable source of income to the clan. If anything happens to the profitability of our main cash cow, our clan will heavily suffer. I don't think you want that to happen. This is why I have settled on Dr. Gilbert Hantler. Because of his engineering background, he is more focused on optimizing our company's processes than trying to expand our market shares. That is not to say that he is inept in marketing, but he is the best person to put in charge if you want to increase the stability and efficiency of our mech company."

Ves fully understood Raymond's rationale now. Many of the other executives who obtained degrees from fancy business schools were trained and taught to conduct business in a more entrepreneurial or proactive fashion. This made sense as what was the point of hiring a manager if nothing ended up changing?

However, the current state of the LMC did not necessarily require a bold leader who was willing to take risks. By putting someone in charge who mostly focused inwards

rather than outwards, the mech company might not make any waves, but the chances that a major crisis would erupt would become significantly less.

Of course, that wouldn't help much if an external crisis beset the company, but it hardly mattered who was in charge in that case.

"I'll need to meet with Dr. Hantler in person before I am comfortable with putting him in charge." Ves eventually said. "I'm not comfortable with appointing a newcomer to such a critical position without even meeting this fellow in person."

In truth, he was mostly convinced about this man already. The candidate's track record along with Raymond's endorsement were worth a lot. Ves just wanted to verify Dr. Hantler's qualifications in person as a final check.

If he detected something strange or if his intuition felt something amiss, then he could step in before Gilbert Hantler was in a position to harm the clan.

"I'll dispatch Dr. Hantler to you whenever it is convenient." Raymond promised.

The call ended a short time later. Overall, the Larkinson Clan was about to become a lot more elaborate once the new chief ministers started their terms.

"That's two chief ministers already." Ves turned to Gavin. "There's only one more to go. Who is the Larkinson Army's choice?"

His assistant responded with a nervous smile. "Uhm, I'm not sure you're going to like this. According to General Verle, he would like to put forward Commodore Abigail Evern."

It took a brief second for Ves to recall the name. He hadn't really immersed himself in the running of the mech forces lately so his memories of them had faded in the depths of his mind.

However, it didn't take long for Ves to recognize the two remarkable identities of this middle-aged woman.

"She's a Penitent Sister! Not only that, but she's a former scion of the Evern Matriarch Dynasty!"

Even though Abigail had disgraced herself to the Hegemony and no longer maintained ties to the matriarchal dynasty, this did not change the fact that her background was vastly more controversial.

She was a Hexer!

"General Verle predicted your reaction, boss. He said that before you say no, you should meet with Commodore Evern in person. In fact, he recommends that you pay a personal visit to the flagship of the Penitent Sisters. They've changed quite a bit over the past half year. They're a lot more likeable, especially after they expanded their ranks with lots of rookies. There's not as much Hexer baggage with them anymore."

Ves realized that he had indeed become out of touch with the clan in the last couple of months. He allocated so much of his time to his various design-related projects that he shut himself off to the other developments of the clan. Even though he wanted to leave most of the day-to-day responsibilities of leading the clan to the new chief ministers, that didn't mean he should remain locked in his ivory tower all of the time.

Still... with how much Gloriana was riding on everyone to finish the expert mech design projects as soon as possible, it wasn't easy to squeeze some time for a sightseeing tour.

"I'll head over to the Penitent Sisters when I have time. I think it is important to meet a potential candidate for chief minister in her natural habitat."

If he wanted to take the full measure of Abigail Evern, then he wanted to meet her in the environment she felt at home. Calling her over to his office aboard the Spirit of Bentheim was pointless because the radical change in environment would certainly cause her to become more restrained.

Ves scratched his head in frustration. "Does the Larkinson Army also suffer from a leadership deficit? If General Verle can't come up with someone better than a Penitent Sister officer, then our clan is probably in a worse state than I realized!"

Chapter 3147: Nurturing Talents

Good leaders were hard to come by, especially for an organization as young as the Larkinson Clan.

"Our leadership deficit is caused by several reasons." Gavin explained. "First, our clan is far too young and we grew way too fast. A more reasonable growth rate would have given us more time to train our existing managers and hire external ones that can quickly plug our gaps."

Ves nodded. "I'm aware of that. We can't help it, though. We need to keep growing if we want to do well in the Red Ocean."

"Second, our clan doesn't have much of a reputation in the areas we are traveling with. If we were based in a fixed location, we would have been able to integrate in the regional community and become a known entity in the job market. Yet because we are constantly on the move, our clan simply hasn't been able to gain any traction in the local scenes we visit."

"That will change once our clan will develop a greater reputation in the Red Ocean over a longer period of time. Right now, we're just passing through."

"I hope that will be the case, but that doesn't address our current setbacks. Now, the last major reason why we aren't able to attract enough senior leaders is because we set our standards way too high."

Now this was an interesting reason. Ves grew curious.

"Aren't they supposed to excel at their jobs?"

"They are, but we are asking more out of them than many other organizations. They not only have to be senior professionals, which are already in smaller numbers, but they also have to pass our loyalty test. That alone cuts down the majority of these folk. With older and more successful people like these, it's a lot harder to earn their loyalty right away. They need to take office within our clan first before we can truly win them over."

This was the trouble of hiring old dogs. They were not as naive as kids fresh out of school. They were also highly desirable and had access to a lot of lucrative job prospects.

"Shouldn't we be able to buy their loyalty by offering higher wages and benefits?" Ves asked.

"That's not possible for these types of people." Gavin shook his head. "Raising the remuneration to higher levels will only cause us to attract a greater proportion of talents who are mainly motivated by their greed. These are exactly the people who are least likely to pass the loyalty test. What we seek are earnest applicants who want to become a part of us because they believe in our cause and care about family and so on. There are actually quite a number of people like that out there but hardly any of them apply to join the Larkinson Clan."

"Why so? What scares them away?"

"We're heading into completely foreign territory. Not only that, but we're heading into a very dangerous territory that has already become notorious for the amount of pioneering fleets that disappear every day."

Those who valued family and were less driven by greed were not as attracted to the prospect of traveling to the Red Ocean. Instead of abandoning everyone they knew to travel hundreds of thousands of light-years away, they would rather settle for working for a more boring company that was closer to their current homes.

Gavin mentioned several credible factors why the entire Larkinson Clan was having trouble with recruiting enough senior managers and executives to fill up the upper hierarchy.

"The Larkinson Army suffers from this deficit the most, with the LMC coming second." Gavin mentioned. "The clan administration is better off at the moment due to the participation of all of the Purnessers, but that will only help us for a while."

Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "This is a difficult issue, then. What do you suggest we do to resolve the shortage?"

"Well... how about rescuing other fallen influences like the Purnesse Family? This seems to be the easiest way for us to obtain a batch of highly capable upper management types."

"We're not going out of our way to pick another fight, Benny. Any confrontation is dangerous and I don't want to delay our journey to the Red Ocean. It's also unreasonable for us to keep butting into local affairs all of the time."

The incident with the Purnesse Family proved that no one was as innocent as they looked on the surface. Ves did not want to risk the lives of his Larkinsons yet again just to bail out a bunch of bastards who held no sincerity towards the Larkinson Clan.

"Besides, I don't think we'll be able to find a suitable organization that is conveniently in need of rescue."

"The galaxy is quite big, boss. Who knows what you'll find in the local star sectors."

"We're not going to adopt this strategy of recruitment again. We need time to develop in peace."

Once they ruled out this option, they didn't have any easy answers left. Eventually, Ves just threw his hands up and let out a loud sigh.

"Whatever! Let the chief ministers handle this problem. That's what they are for, after all!"

Ves felt much more at ease once he made this realization. Before this moment, he primarily placed his attention on how much control he would lose. It was only now that he acknowledged the benefits of these arrangements.

He could just dump every difficult leadership problem onto their laps and let them sort out the mess!

If the chief ministers failed to do a good job, then they could just take all of the blame!

In just a single minute, Ves turned from feeling reluctant about appointing the chief ministers to embracing their coming!

After finishing his briefing session with Gavin, Ves handled a few other chores before heading over to the design lab.

The Sentry Project had already progressed quite a lot under Gloriana's motivated drive. It had reached feature completion a while ago and was now in the process of refinement.

If everything went well, then the Journeymen would be able to fabricate their next expert mech within a couple of weeks!

Surprisingly enough, Gloriana hadn't dove into her design work at this time. Instead, she was looking over the lab section where the second batch of assistant mech designers were in the process of studying essential subjects.

Due to his wife's high technical standards, she demanded that every member of a design team possess at least a minimum amount of competence in technical design and quality control. She didn't want anyone with a poor foundation in those areas to botch their future assignments and cause delays because of their sloppy approach.

Ves approached her side and looked in the same direction. "How are they?"

"Hmm, there are some mildly promising seeds, but I'm not seeing anything exciting yet." She casually replied. "The good news is that they're all young, so they might be able to surprise us in the future."

When he swept his gaze towards the hundred men and women who were still not ready yet to participate in the design projects, Ves wasn't quite as hopeful.

"It's not that easy to become a Journeyman, as I'm sure you know. We can train them and push them all we want, but at the end of the day, they have to find it in themselves to reach beyond the boundaries of what is possible."

Gloriana smirked at Ves. "Aren't you helping Maikel and Zanthar do just that? The latter has been especially enthused about his studies lately. I think that at least some of these assistants will be able to stand out as long as we nurture them correctly."

"The two can't be compared. The seeds that I'm raising are younger and more malleable. These new recruits all come from different backgrounds and they're not even the cream of the crop of their respective states. We'll have to invest a lot of time in mentoring them if we want to see an actual difference."

"I don't think we have to waste so much time and effort to achieve results. We already have a robust reward mechanism in place, but I think we can expand it a bit in order to motivate the assistants into working even harder."

"Oh? What do you have in mind?" Ves asked.

"We need several different Journeyman-level specialists in order to expand our versatility. For example, we need an energy weapon specialist, a kinetic weapon specialist, a neural interface specialist, a heavy mech specialist and so on. We don't have to obtain them all, but it would be a considerable help if we can get two or three additional specialists."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Don't you realize it, Ves? Since we already have a firm idea on which specialties we need, we can split the assistants in different groups based on their specialties and force them to compete against each other. We can offer them attractive rewards such as tutoring, exclusive textbooks and even opportunities to publish their own mech designs however bad they might be compared to our own work."

Ves looked skeptical.

"I'm not sure about this. You'll pile up too much pressure on their shoulders. Also, the camaraderie of the assistants won't be as good if they have to treat each other as competitors."

"Then we can just skip that." Gloriana simply replied. "We can still keep them grouped together in order to encourage them to swap ideas and gain new inspiration from their exchanges. The main point is that we can encourage them to study specific topics and complete specific assignments that will lead them to developing the specialties we need."

Ves immediately frowned. "That sounds too controlling for my tastes. We should give them the choice to pursue their own specialties without interference from above. What you're doing is pushing them onto a path they might not be truly passionate about but aren't able to recognize this due to their youth and inexperience."

"Hey, that's not the case! In my plan, the assistants are free to choose which specialty group they want to join. It can be related to their current interests or not. As long as they have made their decision, they will receive thematic instruction in one of several broad categories of specialties."

For example, an assistant mech designer who joined the heavy mech group would be able to learn all about heavy armor systems and receive exercises related to heavy mech design.

What exact specialty the more talented assistants ended up developing was up to them. The chance was likely that their choice directly reflected their specialty group.

As Ves thought this over, he felt that it could work. While it provided the assistants with more direction than he liked, as long as the Larkinson Clan would be able to produce a handful of extra Journeymen this way, then he did not object.

"It's kind of like a virtual game..."

Gloriana nodded. "That's exactly the inspiration that I got. In some games, you have characters that can choose to specialize in several different classes or professions. I think that we'll be able to cut down on their confusion by a large margin if we structure their development in this fashion."

"Choice..."

There was something about this approach that Ves found compelling. When he looked down at the rows of silent mech designers who were quietly immersed in their studies, he realized why he felt this method was so significant.

"Classes... choice... specialties..."

What if... the person that Ves and Gloriana wanted to nurture was their daughter instead of a lowly assistant mech designer?

What if the different classes and specialties were spiritual specialties instead of mech design specialization?

Inspiration suddenly dawned upon him. He merged Gloriana's idea with his ideas on how to give his future children a spiritual advantage and came up with a bold merger!

First, he could implant companion spirits in his children when they were still young. These lifelong partners would grow alongside the kids, but wouldn't show a lot of power at the beginning.

It was only when the children reached their teenage years and already experienced some spiritual development that they had to make a choice.

Which spiritual specialty should their companion spirits acquire? Should their spiritual cats help them become more empathic? Should their companions be able to summon defensive shields in order to protect them in battle?

It was not possible to impart all of these abilities in a single companion spirit at full strength. However, if Ves only included the basic seeds of them at the start, they could slowly gestate and grow in line with the childhoods of the children until they were on the cusp of reaching maturity!

To put it in a simpler analogy, the companion spirit of his daughter would start off as a blank sheet. While this companion spirit would be able to acquire several special abilities based on the ability seeds that Ves put in, they weren't too impressive when his children were still young.

It was only after they had 'leveled up' to a certain age or stage that their companion spirit was ready to evolve.

At that moment, his children would have to choose which evolution form or specialty their companion spirit should develop!

It was a two-stage growth process! One that sacrifices some power at the first stage, but allowed for greater fit and power at the second stage!

Compared to his original idea, this two-stage growth process offered his children much greater choice in determining their own futures. After all, Ves would no longer be making that choice in their children's stead when he decided upon the abilities of their companion spirit.

Only they had the power to choose!

"What a brilliant idea! I can even apply it on a wider scale!"

This spiritual augmentation approach was not only applicable to his children, but anyone else he wished to provide with the same treatment!

Chapter 3148: Growth Framework

The moment Ves came up with the concept of a two-stage or evolvable companion spirit, it was as if lightning had struck his body.

The potential of this idea was a lot greater than a regular companion spirit. Instead of deciding everything on behalf of the recipient from the start, Ves could just create a more open-ended spiritual product and allow the user to choose from one of several different specializations in the future!

"In fact, this idea can be applied to more than just a companion spirit!"

Ves even felt it could be applied to mechs as well as many other applications with spiritual components.

He could already imagine a future where he incorporated this novel concept in a versatile mech like the Bright Warrior Mark III. While there was no denying the mech had to be bland from the start in order to ensure maximum compatibility with different kinds of mech pilots, as they grew from continual use, that might slowly change.

Along with slowly becoming more adapted to their assigned mech pilots, the next-generation Bright Warriors would also be accumulating energy for a breakthrough. Once a given mech gathered enough energy, the pilot could choose to initiate a breakthrough, allowing the user to choose and lock in a particular spiritual specialty or advantage that complimented the person's fighting style the best!

"Still... it's a bit premature to apply it on any mechs."

He immediately recognized several problems with this particular arrangement. First, mechs were rarely the exclusive property of any mech pilot. It was customary to reassign mech pilots from one mech to another one when situations changed.

This meant that it was not entirely practical to apply this tiered evolution concept to mass production models. The only way this arrangement would make sense was if the owners of the mechs deliberately adopted a long-term pairing approach, essentially turning mechs and mech pilots into married couples that lasted for at least a decade.

Ves could implement this easily enough in the Larkinson Army, but he wasn't entirely sure if this was the right strategy to adopt for his troops. As a mech designer, Ves frequently designed new mech and better mechs. Since the founding of the clan, the oldest Larkinson mech pilots already had to switch their mechs several times as newer and better machines became available.

"Ugh, all of this is too complicated. I'll just talk to General Verle about it in our next meeting."

The most relevant part about the evolvable companion spirit concept was that he could easily apply it to his children and other people for that matter.

The only real limitation he had to take into account was the spiritual capacity of the recipient.

While Ves could attempt to create a living spiritual construct that was stuffed with powerful abilities, that would increase its spiritual weight to a point where it could easily crush any person's spirituality if he tried to merge them together!

The good news was that his unborn child's spirituality was stronger than normal, most likely due to her lineage along with his own active intervention.

The bad news was that she was only strong in relative terms. She was still a rather small collection of cells at the moment and had many months of gestation ahead. Even if she was born and grew up into an active toddler, it was highly unlikely that her spirituality would match that of himself.

"She's too young."

Just like mech design, Ves could not possibly add everything in his wish list into a single mech design. He had to plan the capabilities of his next companion spirit extremely carefully in order to add what was necessary while leaving out as little bloat as possible.

"It's like designing a third-class mech again..." Ves depressingly said. "No, it's worse. It's like designing a fourth-class mech that is only a quarter the size of a normal machine!"

Fourth-class mechs officially didn't exist, but it was a popular colloquial term that a lot of people used to describe a mech built way below standards.

If that was the only issue, then Ves could still work something out, but the fact that he had to slim his product down by a huge amount was especially painful!

Fortunately, Ves was not completely out of options. As a mech designer who played around with the concept of growth in several different occasions, he already had a good approach in mind.

"Instead of creating a strong and functional companion spirit right out of the bat, I'll create a seed instead!"

This approach reminded him of the biotech industry's method of production. Ves could never forget how the biomech designers of the Life Research Association literally grew their mechs as if they were cloned bodies.

The key to doing this was to artificially synthesize a biological seed. This ball of flesh and bone was not a functional mech but contained the core structure as well as the growth instructions of a biomech.

By placing these biomech eggs in giant nutrient pools, their biological programming would automatically extract useful materials from the culture medium and slowly grow the seed into a biomech.

While there were pros and cons to this alternate method of production, it was a viable and proven approach that seemed to work well for the Lifers.

"I can just copy this approach and apply it to my companion spirit!"

In fact, he was already doing something similar with his own spiritual products, though he did not explicitly think about it. Therefore, he didn't need to make too many changes.

He just had to condense his initial creation into a small and tiny spiritual seed before planting it in someone's spirituality. That person's spirit would essentially act as the culture medium in this case and would channel useful nutrients in the form of spiritual energy and possibly other intangible resources in order to allow the seed to bloom into a powerful companion spirit over time.

There were several potential ways that this could go wrong, though.

"What if the relationship between the two becomes parasitic instead of symbiotic?"

If the companion spirit voraciously absorbed its partner's spiritual energy, then the spiritual growth of his daughter might become stunted!

Even if companion spirits were supposed to be equivalent to the person they were merged with, who knows whether there was a way they might become separate.

Ves needed to employ a lot of precautions in order to avoid such a disaster.

"I'll have to account for a lot of other scenarios as well." Ves sighed as he pensively pressed his fingers against his forehead. "If I had more time, I could have performed experiments on other embryos in order to test my assumptions."

It was too late for that. Gloriana's belly was already growing as a child and Ves only had a limited amount of time to complete the initial spiritual augmentation process of his daughter.

Once she was born into this cosmos, Ves suspected that she would become a 'finished' spiritual product in the perspective of his life domain, and thereby close off any easy opportunity to 'design' her any further.

"Damn, if I knew about this earlier, I would have experimented on more unborn kids!"

Even though Ves felt a bit distressed at feeling compelled to experiment on his own unborn child, he wasn't too worried about it. He had tried out potentially dangerous innovations on himself and other people without thoroughly verifying whether his designs were safe.

His life domain was no joke. His intuition was directly tied to it, allowing him to detect many dangerous design elements in advance.

"Besides, this isn't even my most radical experiment. I'm just altering and expanding the concept of a companion spirit so that it can seamlessly merge with a child who hasn't even been born yet. This is totally not crazy!"

After assuring to himself that his plan was sound, he began to revise his initial design. He heavily reduced the companion spirit that he had initially designed until even he could barely notice it anymore. He then gradually added a few minimal spiritual components to it in order to put together its growth framework.

Essentially, Ves imagined a semi-structured growth process and programmed these instructions into the design seed. Since they were merely instructions rather than actual spiritual components, they hardly took up any capacity in the seed.

It took days for him to think up and define a complete spiritual growth process. He could not employ any simulations or calculations. He could only base this complicated

process around his own theories and assumptions. If not for his highly-sensitive intuition towards these matters, he would have probably ended up with an abomination.

"I'm still not too sure about this design, though." Ves frowned.

He was reasonably confident that the growth framework he came up with would allow the spiritual seed to grow from a tiny presence into a mature spiritual cat that was able to help his daughter develop her spirituality while at the same time providing her with powerful spiritual abilities.

The issue was that he could not account for the details. The growth framework was supposed to be adaptable. Just like every other form of life, the seed could grow in slightly different ways depending on the life experiences of his growing daughter.

If his daughter wanted to become a soldier, then her growing companion spirit would develop combat abilities.

If his daughter wanted to follow her mother's plan and become a politician, then her companion spirit would develop social abilities.

This was not possible if Ves imposed too many rules and restrictions. He had to loosen up the growth framework so that it offered room for flexibility. The danger was that each relaxation also opened up the possibility of undesirable mutations.

After all, an absence of rules often led to chaos!

"I need to find a middle ground that I'm comfortable with." He muttered. "I have to offer enough flexibility but only enough to give my daughter a better-fitting cat."

It was all down to how much risk he was willing to expose to his child.

If he took a big gamble, then there was a good possibility that his daughter's companion spirit would be able to mold itself into a highly potent assistant and protector that was completely right for the job!

If he made a more conservative bet, then the companion spirit would still be powerful and useful. The fit wouldn't be as good though and its potential would also be lower.

Faced with these two options, Ves didn't hesitate for long and decided to go big!

"Life is never completely certain! It is filled with random chance and happenstance! Even if I have to subject my child to greater risks, then so be it. I'll always be at hand to mitigate any accidents if anything goes wrong."

With that decision set, he rounded out the growth framework and largely completed the design for the first evolution phase of his companion spirit.

"Now for the second evolution phase."

This was the point where the companion spirit would truly come into being. Ves did not want to add a single evolution path to his daughter's companion spirit, but multiple ones. The more, the better, although adding too much would probably exceed his extremely limited design budget.

"I'll have to package all of the potential spiritual specialties as seeds as well."

This was challenging but not impossible. Ves merely had to treat them the same way as the core companion spirit seed. They would start off completely dormant, but would slowly grow as his daughter developed. The ability seeds might even be able to grant her some weak abilities.

However, it was only when the companion spirit was ready to evolve that his daughter had to pick a specialization to unlock.

The premise of this was simple. What Ves found difficult was selecting the possible options that he wanted to impart to his daughter.

"Which ingredients should I choose?"

Chapter 3149: Ves the Loving Parent

The key to the evolution process of his daughter's upcoming companion spirit was to provide her with several different options.

They had to be diverse enough to be relevant for different professions.

To put it in simpler terms, the options represented the specializations that the companion spirit and by extension his daughter would obtain.

"Let's try and stuff six of them into my companion spirit."

Six different ability seeds offered plenty of choice to his daughter. It was not too little and not too many. It granted his daughter enough variety without diluting the ability seeds too much.

"Six is a good number." He decided.

The source of these specialties came from the ability seeds, which Ves had to derive from different spiritual entities.

For example, one of them was himself. He already intended to give his daughter the possibility to gain his empathy and sensitivity towards life. Whether she chose to

embrace it or not, Ves did not want to deny her the benefits that he had frequently relied upon to achieve success.

Ves decided to use himself as the first ingredient.

For the other ability seeds, he had to look outward and derive them from other spiritual sources.

He went over his design spirits.

The first decision he made was to rule out any hostile or dangerous choices.

"Zeigra is out. He's far too aggressive to my liking."

"Trisk is too young at this point. She's still a baby bird despite the spiritual feedback provided by Venerable Tusa."

"Arnold has grown stronger, but his ability is a bad fit for my daughter."

"Ylvaine... hell no. I will not allow any of my children to become a religious nut!"

After contemplating several different options, he made a tentative selection that would hopefully offer sufficient variety but would not lead his daughter astray.

"I'll pick Goldie for family, Lufa for purification, Qilanzo for protection, the Illustrious One for light and the Solemn Guardian for duty."

These were all safe and positive influences that could provide a lot of power and utility in many different professions.

Since he had to reduce all of the ingredients derived from the design spirits into seeds, Ves was not able to determine how these abilities worked. That was what the growth process was for. Depending on how his daughter grew up, the ability seeds would organically develop in directions that best matched her needs.

This was why Ves wanted to do his best to keep the ability seeds as open-ended as possible. He could have programmed more precise instructions right away, but that would go against the principles of his design philosophy.

He smiled as his design for his first two-stage evolvable companion spirit took shape.

"This is an unprecedentedly efficient spiritual design!"

The companion spirit seed was so small and weak that Ves only required a miniscule amount of ingredients to make it. Of course, the challenging part was to make it on the

spot. The scale was so small and the energy levels were so low that he had to employ utmost precision in order to create a working seed.

Companion spirits were not actually self-contained but actually spiritual constructs that he brought to life. This meant he had to operate on his daughter's tiny and fragile spirituality in order to impart her with a companion spirit that possessed great potential.

When Ves checked his spiritual design, he tried to uncover any flaws while looking for any opportunities to improve it further.

"Should I add another evolution stage?" He briefly wondered.

He quickly shook his head. The companion spirit seed already possessed a large presence relative to the embryo inside Gloriana's womb. There was no room for any additional functionality.

Besides, the rationale to add a second evolution stage was not there. The companion spirit did not require any further specialization once it had already decided its major direction.

It would not stop growing once it had reached maturity. Its growth process would just follow a more normal and organic trajectory, similar to that of Sharpie and Blinky.

"There's no need for me to fix what isn't broken." He muttered.

Once he made his final tweaks and completed the design, Ves felt as if he had made a huge accomplishment.

Though it would take years if not decades for the full value of this design to bear fruit, Ves already had a vague image in his mind about a strong and capable woman undergoing a meteoric rise!

This was one of several gifts that he intended to impart to his future daughter. The fact that he was driven by pure love and affection caused the companion spirit design to hold a lot of significance to him. Though it was lacking in terms of instant power, Ves made sure to maximize its potential!

"This will be my version of the System to my children!"

Unless any of his children chose to become a mech designer, Ves could not give them access to one of his greatest tools. Providing them with a companion spirit that they gained from birth and grew up with them was his way of making up for that. He was certain that no other parent was able to provide their children with such an extravagant gift!

Working on this project caused him to gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of his parents. It was only when he was faced with the prospect of becoming an actual father and having to worry about the safety and happiness of his first child that he fully appreciated the sacrifices that his mother and father had made.

Even now, they were still holed up in the Nyxian Gap so that they could take shelter in the natural geography of the anomalous region. Both of them did not hesitate to give up their original ambitions and forsake every other cause just so that their son could enjoy a fruitful life without too many burdens.

"Will I have to make the same decision one day?" He wondered.

If he had to make a choice between sacrificing ambitions and sacrificing his child, he genuinely didn't know which one he was willing to drop.

This was an agonizing dilemma that every working parent had to face!

Mech design was such an integral part of his life that he could never completely give up on it. He could not turn his back on his children either.

Raising a child was one of the greatest joys of life. Ves did not want to miss out on it and neither did Gloriana.

Both of them had to do their best to juggle their priorities and make sure not to neglect either of them. Considering how long they could live, Ves did not find it unacceptable to slow down his mech design career in order to allocate sufficient time for his children.

"Well, I can consider that later when Gloriana's pregnancy is over."

A few days passed by as Ves waited for the right opportunity to form a companion spirit seed for his daughter.

At this point, his unborn child was way too young and fragile to bear any spiritual load. Ves expected that it would take at least a couple of months. In fact, there was a considerable chance that she might never reach the minimum level of strength before she was born!

If that was the case, then he needed to slim down the spiritual design, which was bad because it would definitely impair the companion spirit's strength and versatility.

"I need to strengthen her as best I can!"

He found out that the most optimal way to do that was to regularly pump a small portion of his spiritual energy into the embryo.

Even though his growing child was extremely weak in spiritual terms, when Ves took a stroll in Dorum on the 8th deck of the Spirit of Bentheim, he paid close attention to other women who were in their early pregnancies.

The happy spouses who gathered together in parks and cafes were completely oblivious that Ves swept their bellies with his spiritual senses.

Anytime he detected the minute presence of another life in their bodies, Ves tried his best to measure and quantify the spiritual strength of the fetuses.

"All of them are weaker than my child." He observed.

This was rather peculiar because the women he scanned were at least several months into their pregnancies.

What Ves was able to conclude from this observation was that his first daughter was already significantly ahead in this area!

The only uncertainty was that Ves wasn't sure if his active intervention was the main cause of his daughter's accelerated spiritual development.

Since he didn't appear to be doing any harm, he decided to continue this treatment.

With each day that passed, Ves would always place his hand on Gloriana's belly. He had become so practiced with this procedure that it only took a second to give his growing offspring a small spurt of purified spiritual energy that Blinky had prepared beforehand.

"Ves..." Gloriana smiled at him as she placed her own hand on top of his. "You don't have to rub my belly so many times, you know. Our baby is growing well at the moment. I make sure to visit the infirmary every day to confirm that. So far, the specialists see no need to adjust her genes at this time."

"I'm not worried about that. I just want to strengthen my bond with her. You know what life means to me. Being able to feel the beginnings of a brand-new life is magical."

To be honest, he was still worried. All of his active intervention definitely affected his daughter's growth. Whether this would lead to physical mutations, he couldn't tell. All he could do on his end was to monitor her spiritual development and make sure it wasn't moving in an undesirable direction.

For now, his daughter was growing stronger on this front. This was the result he desired, but Ves could not fully map out all of the consequences for supercharging the spiritual development of an unborn child.

All of this was completely new and foreign to Ves. The outcome of his experiments related to his daughter was so open-ended that he already had a suspicion that his daughter's mental development would be anything but normal.

"Let's go back to refining the design of the Sentry Project. We've been making fantastic progress lately."

The mood in the design lab had reached a high tide. Gloriana's pregnancy had transformed his wife into an exceptionally motivated mech designer.

This was significant because Ves discovered that Blinky was capable of passing on a portion of her enthusiasm!

Her optimism and willingness to work hard were so high that all of the connections that Blinky established passed these sentiments on in a dilution fashion!

This caused Gloriana to single-handedly lift up the morale and productivity of the design teams.

Along with Ves who also felt driven about becoming a parent, the Sentry Project was rapidly approaching completion.

It was a pity that they could not sustain such a rapid pace.

"Damnit! We're doing so well now! Why must we be bottle-necked by the lack of processing power?!"

Even with the addition of four new capital ships that have all lent a portion of their processing capabilities to the Design Department, the design teams still had to wait for minutes, hours and even days to complete their data-intensive assignments!

Though the lack of faster calculations interrupted Gloriana's flow, Ves took advantage of the freed-up time to attend to several stalled responsibilities.

"Let's see what our prospective chief ministers are like. I've been meaning to meet them for a while."

Upon the next available opportunity, Ves boarded a shuttle and decided to visit the Mother's Wrap, a second-class combat carrier that served as their current flagship.

He was curious of what he might encounter aboard this Hexer vessel. It had been a long time since he last inspected the Penitent Sisters. A lot of aspects of his clan had changed by then, and the former Hexer cultists were no different.

Had they truly moved away from their Hexer route? That was what he was about to find out once he left his shuttle.

Chapter 3150: The Two Saviors

His honor guard stepped out of the shuttle first. Even though the chance that anyone aboard the Mother's Wrath would threaten him was low, Nitaa and her team never let down their guard.

The moment Ves stepped out the vehicle, he could already tell that his guards likely wouldn't have to take action at all. A whole array of Penitent Sisters stood in the hangar bay. As soon as he appeared, the female uniformed soldiers all raised their fists at an angle.

"HAIL TO THE CLAN PATRIARCH!"

"HAIL TO THE SAVIOR OF OUR ORDER!"

"HAIL TO THE SON OF THE SUPERIOR MOTHER!"

"...That's quite a greeting."

Ves had a feeling that the Penitent Sisters poured their greatest emotions when they roared the last phrase. He wasn't sure whether he liked that. He wanted them to respect him for his own status and accomplishments.

Fortunately, the show didn't last for long. The Penitent Sisters still had a lot of work to do and soon dispersed to go back to their normal duties.

Commander Valerie Chancy and Commodore Abigail Evern both approached Ves and saluted.

"We are honored by your visit, Patriarch." The leader of the Penitent Sister greeted. She appeared to be much more enthused to be in his presence than before for some reason. "We have prepared a brief tour for you. The Mother's Wrath may not be an impressive combat carrier, but we have tried to make the best out of her after we have lost the Surly Cockatrice."

The original flagship of the Penitent Sisters had perished long ago during the Battle against the Abyss. The Cockatrice was one of the few sturdy second-class combat carriers that Ves and the Larkinson Clan had at their disposal. The ship did not go down without absorbing a lot of enemy firepower.

"Let's begin."

They first toured the hangar bay itself. There were several mechs on standby or in the process of being worked on. Naturally, only two different mech models dominated the space.

He first directed his attention towards a couple of Valkyrie Redeemers. The model that started a line of Valkyrie variants was one of his great successes.

Compared to a brand-new living mech, the Valkyrie Redeemers that the Penitent Sisters were already using for a while had grown by quite a significant margin.

There was still a lot more room for growth, though. They were only months or years old, so their unique personalities did not make much of a difference at this stage.

"I can see that you are taking good care of these mechs." He remarked.

"We do our best to honor your work, which honors your mother in turn." Commander Chancy replied. "Mishandling one of our mechs is one of the greatest blasphemies that you can commit!"

Ves blinked. He was glad the Penitent Sisters took their mechs seriously, but he wasn't sure whether they held this attitude for the right reasons.

"Do you have any feedback about the Valkyrie mechs?" He asked instead. "Your people have been using them for a while now. Have you discovered any quirks or made any observations that aren't obvious from the surface? Anything you say will help me design a better revision when it comes time to update this model."

Hearing that their feedback would potentially lead to an improvement in a possible Valkyrie Redeemer Mark II, both women looked at each other for a moment.

"The Valkyrie Redeemers are excellent performers." Commander Chancy began. "We are completely satisfied with them. However, if there is one aspect that we would like to see an improvement, it is the ranged armament of our marauder mechs."

"Hmm?"

The mech commander gestured at the giant mech-grade submachine guns placed to the side of the dormant mechs.

"Your Valkyrie Redeemer model is armed with pulse submachine guns that are light and portable. This is a great choice as our nimble mechs can remain fast while easily adjusting their aim in close to mid-ranged firefights. It's just that the firepower is a bit lacking..."

He could see what she meant. Pulse guns were hybrid energy weapons that spat out energetic particles. They were more efficient but also weaker than laser beams. They were also easy to implement in smaller and more compact forms. That made them very suitable for mechs that couldn't afford to carry anything bigger, heavier and more power hungry.

Since Ves designed the Valkyrie Redeemer with an eye towards performing on large and extensive battlefields, their efficiency and energy consumption had to meet a minimum standard. This was why he did not arm the female Hexer mechs with more powerful weapons.

"We heard that you recently came up with a powerful new crystal gun that packs a lot more punch." Commodore Abigail Evern said. "We would like to request that you provide us with submachine gun or carbine-sized weapons so that we can give our Valkyrie Redeemers some actual teeth at range."

Ves could easily imagine what would happen if the Valkyrie Redeemers were armed with crystal weapons. The marauder mechs would no longer be forced to perform a charge in order to deal serious damage. Their tactical flexibility along with their effective battle contribution would certainly rise as a result!

"You can say that about any mech armed with an energy weapon." He responded. "There are many mechs in our fleet that could benefit from such an upgrade. Right now, our production capacity is fully taken up by the need to fabricate more mechs. The Spirit of Bentheim and other production-capable vessels are all busy with churning out as many quality mechs as possible in order to make sure that we make use of all of our available mech pilots."

The Bright Warrior's rifleman mech configuration could also benefit from a luminar crystal weapon update, and so did the Transcendent Punisher. There were already thousands of eligible mechs in service. Ves wasn't even sure if his fleet had enough infrastructure to pump out so many luminar crystal weapons! The production of luminar crystals required different processes and different machines.

Ves intended to go over this issue when he returned to the Spirit of Bentheim. The fleet had to expand its crystal production capabilities because it was already a certainty that his clan would depend heavily on luminar crystals in the future.

After completing their brief inspection on the Valkyrie Redeemer, they moved over to the Eternal Redemption. The larger and heavier cannoneer mech was close to the limit of the medium weight class.

It was a pity that it had yet to participate in any major battles since its introduction. The mechs and their mech pilots were only able to show their chops in practice sessions.

"Is it possible to arm the Eternal Redemptions with heavier crystal weapons?" Commander Chancy asked.

Ves shook his head. "It's out of the question. The design of this cannoneer mech is entirely slanted towards physical weapons. It is configured in a way that it can carry a fair amount of rounds while also supplying enough energy to propel them forward. One of the reasons why this mech is so big and fat is that it needs to possess enough

physical bulk to carry enough ammunition while at the same time resist all of the physical stresses that are associated with this mech type."

"What does that mean for the Eternal Redemption?"

"It's not worth it to arm this model with a crystal weapon." Ves spoke. "We'll have to wait until we design the next revision before we can make such a major swap."

"I see." The Penitent Sister Commander looked disappointed.

"It's not that big of a deal." Ves said. "The gauss cannon it is armed with is already powerful. Its projectile is also purely physical which means it is not as affected by strong energy interference like energy beams. We need to maintain at least some redundancy so that our enemies can't employ a single trick to neutralize all of our ranged capabilities."

The Eternal Redemption was still useful despite the advancement of technology. Ves was sure it would be able to show its usefulness in the next major battle.

After Ves finished inspecting the Eternal Redemptions, he quickly toured the rest of the Mother's Wrath.

All in all, the combat carrier did not hide its Hexer heritage. The hexagon-shaped hatches and corridors were depressingly familiar sights.

What Ves found a bit novel was how the Penitent Sisters added a touch of personality to their vessel by erecting statues and images of the Superior Mother.

Many Penitent Sisters walking by would briefly bow and press their hands in front of a significant depiction of the Supreme.

Sure enough, the Penitent Sisters were still cultists. That hadn't changed at all. Commander Chancy did nothing to stop this behavior.

In fact, she performed this ritual as well!

"You don't have to do that all the time." Ves couldn't help but speak out after Commander Chancy paid her respects for the fifth time already. "The best way to honor the Superior Mother is to bear a child and raise your offspring according to her tenets. She cares a lot more about whether you are all living according to her ideals rather than bowing mindlessly in front of her. She is an example that you should be working towards, not an unreachable god that demands your worship."

The two female leaders fell silent for a while.

"We... understand, sir." Evren said, though her eyes were still filled with devotion. "We will endeavor to do our best to live by the Superior Mother's standards rather than contemplating on them. Thank you for your guidance. You are truly her son!"

Ugh. Ves resisted the urge to palm his face. He couldn't blame the Penitent Sisters for worshipping his mother to an extreme degree.

As he continued his tour, he briefly viewed several spaces where the Penitent Sisters were quietly going about their own duties.

He paid particular attention to how the original Penitent Sisters treated their new recruits.

"Alright, you ladies. Just because you have decided to become our trainee doesn't mean you're one of us yet." A stern-faced officer spoke to a row of younger women. "The first lesson you need to learn is that we are all guilty. If the clan patriarch hadn't saved us, we would have likely died while failing to redeem ourselves. Now, I'm sure you're wondering what that has to do with you. No matter if you have not committed a sin against womanhood yourselves, know that you will bear the same guilt as long as you truly become a part of our sisterhood."

The recruits did not appear enthused about this news, but the officer was not done with her story.

"Do not consider this guilt to be a burden! The Superior Mother is watching over us all. We bear her blessing. The mechs that we pilot are made in her image and as long as we pray for her mercy in battle, she will descend on the battlefield in person and offer her salvation to those who have done their best to atone! Do you not see? The Superior Mother is both our jailor and our savior. Through her son, we have become an extension of her will! It is an honor to channel her will!"

Ves twitched his mouth as he listened to what was clearly an indoctrination session. The Penitent Sisters hadn't changed at all when it came to their fanaticism.

As he observed the women further, the only good thing he could say about their attitudes and behavior was that they had cut off all ties with the Hexers and the Hexadric Hegemony.

"We are Larkinsons, not Hexers." Commander Chancy elaborated. "We have committed a great sin against the Hegemony. We do not dispute that. The Hexers do not want our atonement. If not for the fact that we can earn our redemption through you and your mother, we wouldn't know what to do. We will forever be grateful for that, patriarch."

The more he had to deal with their fanaticism, the faster Ves wanted to leave this ship. He couldn't take this nonsense any longer!

"Let's cut this tour short. I don't have all day." He said. "Let's move to a conference room so that we can discuss Commodore Evern's future."

As he threw a glance at the naval officer, Ves wasn't as certain as before whether it was a good idea to turn her into a chief minister. Was it a really good idea to put a religious nut in charge of the clan?