

Mech 3741

Chapter 3741 - Fresh Mint

After they settled on a plan for their second designer baby, Gloriana soon paid another visit to the Dragon's Den to begin the lengthy process.

It just so happened that Ketis was undergoing the same ordeal, so the two had decided to travel together and talk about how they planned to raise their kids.

Gloriana had taken Aurelia and the cats with her. This left Ves by himself for half a day.

"Hm. I have rested long enough. I should ease back into my work."

There were a lot of items on the agenda. The ones he looked forward to the most was examining the results of the remaining mech design projects. He recalled that several of them had just completed the fabrication of the first production copies of their completed designs.

Before he was willing to check up on the final batch of mechs, he wanted to address a few other important developments.

He headed over to his office and sat down on his familiar comfy desk chair. He waited and studied the knick-knacks that he had put on display until his visitors finally arrived in person.

Chief Minister Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson and Chief Minister Novilon Purnesse both entered at the same time.

It was clear to see that they were ready to make an important presentation from their serious expressions and their slow gait.

Interestingly enough, Raymond carried a briefcase today. He had already brought props today in order to fill Ves in on a major development that had just reached its terminal phase.

"Welcome, gentlemen." Ves began as he gave the two older men a gracious smile.

"Before we begin, tell me how the clan is doing from your perspective. Is there anything that stands out that you think is worthwhile to mention here today?"

Both Raymond and Novilon looked at each other. As two of the three chief ministers of the Larkinson Clan, they essentially ran the civilian side of the fleet. There were plenty of problems they could bring up, but whether it was wise to bring them to the patriarch's attention was another matter.

Ves may carry the title of patriarch, but he was far too busy with his primary vocation to waste much time on governance. The office of the chief ministers emerged in the first place so that he could delegate much of his authority to others in order to run the clan better.

So far, this new governance system worked well enough. The Larkinsons continued to have their needs met while the clan administration continued to become more comprehensive.

The Larkinson Clan already possessed most of the elements of a state. There were just a few areas that still needed to be addressed, and this meeting centered around one of those essential building blocks.

Novilon Purnesse, the son of Foreign Minister Shederin Purnesse, decided to go first.

"We have noticed signs that you are willing to relax your insistence on keeping all of our clansmen and assets in the same fleet. Your investigation into building our own planetary manufacturing complex, your attempts to establish a so-called Expedition Hall and your inquiries into setting up an internment camp on a settled planet to house the bulk of our alien captives are all indicators that you are open to a change in policy."

Ves furrowed his brows. "That may be the case, but I have yet to make any solid decisions. For now, I still want to keep the bulk of our clansmen in the same place. No matter what, the core foundation of our clan should always be rooted in our fleet. This is nonnegotiable. If we ever create branches in numerous fixed locations, then they must only be manned by a small proportion of Larkinsons, preferably those that we can afford to lose if accidents occur."

He had thought about the Larkinson Clan's future situation and thought it was acceptable to become a little more flexible. In any case, his fleet was already overcrowded to an extent and could use the opportunity to dump the excess in other places.

Novilon looked happier. "I will not hide my thoughts and think it is better for us to spread our people and shift more of them to fixed locations such as Davute. There is much we can do to accelerate and improve the development of our clan by reversing our isolation from the local community. If we establish bases and station more Larkinsons in different major star systems, we can forge better business deals with material wholesalers, industrial manufacturers and specialist suppliers. We can also form our own distribution network that will help us reduce our reliance on other companies to ship our physical products."

"Aside from that, setting up branches on different planets will also give our clansmen the option to live outside a ship environment." Raymond added.

Ves did not have a good opinion on that. To him, the Larkinsons should always consider their fleet to be their home. It was the only way to stay safe in the long term. He looked down on all of the people and organizations willing to fight to the death to defend their fixed territory and assets.

Starships were much more convenient in comparison! Sure, the living space aboard them was limited, but who knew when their planetary outposts would get in the way of an enemy invasion one day? The clansmen who chose to settle on the surface could all die on the hills they chose to embrace!

The chief ministers heard enough from Ves. They were glad that the patriarch was truly willing to loosen the rules.

Raymond made a suggestion that was related to this topic.

"If you are willing to allow Larkinsons to leave the fleet and reside on different settlements, then I suggest we erect a new LMC branch headquarters in the Davute System."

"Why?"

"Given that you plan to design multiple commercial mech in your next design round, I think it is best that the LMC lays the groundwork to produce and sell the new models in-house. While I suggest that we can still outsource production to third-party manufacturers, we should limit this strategy to the zones surrounding Krakatoa."

Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin as he considered this rational strategy. "I have to admit that your proposal makes a lot of sense. Let's just say that I am open to the idea as long as we don't have to shift tens of thousands of clansmen to Davute. We do need to open up our own production and sales channels in at least one major market."

"Then we shall work on it. I shall give you an update in a few weeks. We have already laid some of the groundwork."

After chatting about a few lesser issues, Ves finally wanted to come to the main point for today.

"I have heard that our Financial Ministry is finally ready to set up our own 'central bank'."

Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson became more animated at that. This had been one of his primary preoccupations as chief minister.

"That is correct. Although it may sound absurd to establish a central bank and our own mint so soon, it is better to do this earlier than later. In five or ten years, our clan will hopefully reach a scale where we need to exert more control over our internal economy."

Controlling our own currency can play a great role in softening any eventual crises that might occur in the future."

"I understand the arguments. Please move on to the exciting part where you introduce our own currency."

"Very well."

Raymond steadily unlocked and opened his briefcase. He reached inside and withdrew a handful of metal coins before placing them on Ves' desk.

The chief minister presented four different coins. Each of them possessed several commonalities but also differed by size, color and markings.

"Since we have decided to transition away from using the hex credit, we have performed many studies and focus testing to determine the name of our own currency. It needs to be short and easy to spell in order to ease their use in our daily lives, but it also needs to be unique and iconic enough to be associated with our clan. After months of consideration, we have settled on calling our currency the 'lark'."

A few moments of silence passed as Ves took in this short and odd-sounding name.

"The... lark?"

"The lark." Raymond confirmed. "It makes sense if you think about it. First, it is simple and easily rolls off the tongue. Second, it is a highly uncommon word to describe a currency and will not lead to any confusion. Third, lark is strongly identifiable to the Larkinson Clan as it is literally a shortened version of our clan name."

"That is true, but... really?" Ves looked skeptical. "Lark doesn't exactly sound serious enough to my ears."

"You will get used to it, sir. It is a neutral word that sounds friendly and universal enough to gain everyone's acceptance. It is highly unlikely for the word to cause offense to our diverse members."

Ves decided to shrug past the odd-sounding name and turned his attention to the coins.

"I see you have taken the liberty to mint a few coins."

"That is correct. These are not purely commemorative in nature. While we expect most clansmen to transact directly from their bank accounts, in order to reinforce the existence of the lark, we also intend to circulate physical coins in the local communities. This will hasten everyone's acceptance of it while at the same time make their wealth more concrete. It is hard to understand how rich everyone has gotten when their money is only available in the form of abstract numbers on projected screens."

"You have a point." Ves said as he picked up the smallest coin of the bunch. It was smaller than the size of his fingertip. "Give me the rundown on these interesting coins."

"When it came to designing the coins, we considered many different coin designs and coin denominations. Ultimately, we decided to stick to a simple format and adopted the metric system to divide the different coins."

Raymond reached out and picked up the second-smallest copper-like coin. "This is the base coin, and it is relatively high in value. This is 1 lark, and it corresponds to a value of 0.001 MTA credits according to our initial valuation."

"How did you come to this exchange rate?"

"We plan to peg the lark to the MTA credits in the beginning, sir. That does not mean we intend to keep it that way, but our internal economy is too small at the moment to justify this move. In order to keep our economy consistent in the first decades, we believe it is best to value the lark at a level lower than the MTA credit, but not too low. Given our rising prosperity, in the near future, an average clansman should be able to spend several larks a day without problem."

"You have a highly optimistic view about our financial growth."

Raymond chuckled and put down the copper-like coin so that he could grab the smallest coin in black.

"If the lark is too valuable, then this 1 millilark coin should help out. They can be handed out to children in order to teach them the value of money."

"I see. What about the other two coins?"

They did indeed look like toys to Ves.

The old chief minister put down the millilark coin and held out the second-largest coin colored in silver. "This is a step up from the 1 lark coin and should not be common. This is the 1 kilolark coin and corresponds to 1 MTA credit."

This coin was already unaffordable to most Larkinsons!

Ves grabbed the silver coin and noted that it was as big as a medallion. He liked the weight and the head of the Golden Cat stamped on the front side of the coin.

"A kilolark, huh?" FREEWEBNOVEL.COM

"Yes, but that is not the most valuable coin we intend to mint. In order to truly establish the prestige of our currency, we intend to mint a limited quantity of 1 megalark coins. They are our most extravagant physical coins as they are supposed to represent a

value of 1000 MTA credits. Suffice to say, they will likely not be used for many years, and even then they will only be used for ceremonial purposes."

Raymond passed a coin that was bigger and heavier than all of the other three coins.

As Ves held the hefty piece of metal, he noted that it was the size of a drink coaster but substantially thicker.

The megalark was not meant to be stored and carried inside an old-fashioned wallet!

"The lark and the design of the coins before you is the result of many months of work. With this currency, we are ready to bring our Larkinson Clan one step closer to functioning as a complete state. What do you think, Ves?"

Ves stared deeply at the golden coin whose front side presented an empty cat head.

"This... is boring as hell." He pronounced in a flat tone. "This hunk of shaped alloy does not look and feel as if it is worth 1000 MTA credits at all. Its design is not only bland, but the coins themselves are all without any hint of life!"

Chapter 3742 - Legal Tender

Ves held up the big coaster-sized golden coin and acted as if he was appraising an antique artifact.

"This is a pleasant-looking design." He said in front of his two chief ministers. "The logo of the Larkinson Clan, the head of the Golden Cat, is properly depicted and looks identical to the medallion on the front cover of the Larkinson Mandate."

He flipped the megalark coin. There were a few decorative elements on it that Ves did not bother to linger. The words 'megalark' was spelled out in a bold embossed font. If that wasn't obvious enough for people to determine how much money it represented, it also presented a big fat '1000000' on its rear side.

He touched the surface of the large coin with his finger and let his skin and other senses gain a deeper impression of the object.

He waved the heavy coin around and looked at the two older men who undoubtedly supervised the planning and design of the Larkinson Clan's upcoming currency.

"Does this look like it is worth 1000 MTA credits to you?" Ves seriously asked. "I mean, how much does it cost to buy the materials and stamp them into a coin? It doesn't look nearly as expensive enough to buy an entire combat carrier's worth of mechs."

Raymond softly coughed. "The lark is a fiat currency. That means the coin is worth as much as we say it is worth. The materials used to make the coin is worth around a

dozen or so larks, but that is irrelevant as long as it does the job. The lark mostly exists as a virtual currency anyway and every coin is registered so that there is no point to forging it. The coins themselves should be seen as a marketing stunt more than anything else. For all intents and purposes, the lark is an administrative and economic tool that is designed to regulate our internal economy better."

"I know all of that." Ves replied with a frown. "I don't fault your solution to the demands that you have posed. What I do have a problem with is the goals that you have been working with. All of this talk about focus testing and trying to come up with the safest, most inoffensive and most universal currency for our clansmen sounds boring."

Neither of the two chief ministers knew what to say to that. It was clear that Ves had entirely different goals in mind!

Ves sighed. These older gentlemen were just doing what they thought was best for the Larkinson Clan. They did not deserve a reprimand for doing their jobs.

"I blame myself for this." He said as he tapped the side of the coin against his desktop. "I spent way too much time on designing mechs and other matters and did not check up on what you guys were doing with our new legal tender."

Raymond was more affected by this implicit rebuke than most considering he took charge of much of the financial affairs of the clan.

"Please tell us your intentions, Ves. We could all use more clarity."

Ves tossed the big coin in the air and let it fall onto his desk, causing it to clatter as if it was a fallen toy.

"Let me ask you this, Raymond. Is the Larkinson Clan a boring clan?"

His great-uncle frowned. "I suppose not. Compared to other clans and family organizations, our history, our culture and our structure is unorthodox to say the least."

"The Larkinson Clan is a young organization that is founded by a young and opinionated leader." Novilon Purnesse added as if he was describing a third-party group. "In cases where a charismatic and wealthy leader has erected much of the rules, customs and institutions, the organization will inevitably become a reflection of the aforementioned individual's personality. Over time, the rise of other executives and the drive to professionalize the organization will bring it more in line with prevailing standards depending on how deeply it is integrated in a regional community."

Ves was impressed with this explanation. "If you know this much, then you should have an inkling of what I think. I know that you have all been trying to convert our irregular, ad-hoc way of working into a more formal and professional structure, and I am largely fine with that. We are not savages and we can't keep making up the rules as we go.

Steps such as regularizing the bureaucracy of the clan and building up the staff of the Larkinson Army are necessities that will make our clan stronger."

He tapped the surface of the megalark coin with his finger.

"However, I don't want the Larkinson Clan to morph into a generic state or organization where everything we do comes straight out of the governance textbooks. We were originally a collection of misfits who split off from any existing state and organization so that we can pursue our own desires and ambitions without needing to conform to the rules of others. We are different, and we embrace that. From our living mechs to our various networks, we are strong exactly because we do things differently from the rest of human society."

His speech served as a reminder to the two chief ministers. He rectified their approach to their own duties and made sure they should not blindly pursue standardization.

Raymond looked at the coins that the Finance Ministry had invested a lot of effort in designing. The size of the coins, the material composition, the elements placed on the front and rear sides of the coin, the design on the edges were all the product of thousands of man-hours.

He had been quite proud of them before this meeting. Even if the coins weren't supposed to be used in daily transactions, their clean designs and dignified appearances could convey a great amount of legitimacy to the clan.

"We understand." The old man sighed. "Do you intend to intervene in this matter yourself?"

Ves nodded. "Yes. Not every idea sounds awful to me. I think I am already getting accustomed to the word 'lark' to describe our coin. It sounds unique enough to make sure that everyone else who comes across our currency will know it is a part of our identity. The notion of using the metric system to divide the different denominations is also a decent idea. We don't need to make it anymore complicated than necessary."

He turned his attention to the four different coins that Raymond had presented to him earlier.

"What I do have a problem with is the symbolism, meaning and value of the lark and more specifically the coins. I really can't stand them. They're so bland and uninspiring that they offend my designer sensibilities. For my entire career, I have worked to differentiate my mechs from the competition as much as possible. Generic designs are taboo in my book."

He quickly picked up the smallest black coin. "Just look at this so-called millilark coin. It's a small black token that depicts the logo of the Larkinson Clan on one side and a number on the other side. The small flourishes are boring and uninspired. Yet what

really gets to me is that these coins have no life! Can you imagine it? Our clan has pioneered living mechs and living products. Why the hell do we have to resort to boring coins that are no different from that of other states?"

"What do you have in mind, then?" Raymond tentatively asked.

"It's simple. First, I want to redesign these coins myself. They need to look more unique and reflective of our Larkinson style. There is no need for them to look too bland and dignified. Second, I want to make each and every coin alive. This is non-negotiable. I want every Larkinson to get in touch with them to feel how special it is for them to be a member of our clan. I want outsiders to envy us and learn by feeling the coins how special we are. In fact, I have an even better idea."

Novilon Purnesse looked wary at Ves. What kind of crazy idea did he come up with now?

"And what is that, sir?"

Ves grinned. "I just thought about it. Why can't we turn these coins into a valuable product? They can do more than represent a specific amount of fiat currency. By making them alive and instilling them with special properties, we can sell them to others and raise a lot of money this way! As long as the coins are valuable, useful or desirable enough, we can work towards reducing our clan's debt burden!"

"..."

"How can we do that?" Raymond puzzlingly frowned. "It sounds to me as if you want to make coins with the property of totems. As far as we know, each of your so-called totems require your personal input in order to be made. While it should not be a problem for you to make a couple of hundred coins, as our clan grows larger it is not tenable for you to keep producing coins in person. Your time is much more valuable than that and it is better that we shift responsibility over to our central bank or another specialized institution."

The old man was right. Ves liked his new idea, but that didn't mean it was practical. He did not want to get stuck with minting coins every other day!

Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin in thought. "I need to think about this. For now, leave these coins with me. Also, pass on the relevant documents related to this project. I want to read up more about our currency so I have a better idea of what I need to pay attention to and what requirements it needs to meet. I'll try to rush this as fast as possible since I have other projects on the agenda. I'll notify you of my results in a few days."

He quickly dismissed the two chief ministers shortly afterwards. He was in no mood to deal with other subjects when he was presented with such an interesting and important challenge.

Ves picked up the megalark coin again and flipped it around a few times.

He actually found it to be a bit decent, but there were numerous different aspects about it that he didn't like.

"Why would a coin be worth 1000 MTA credits? That's way too exaggerated. What if someone drops it in a garbage chute by accident?"

Even the mechers themselves did not spend that much money without blinking!

Although it was not an exaggerated sum of money by first-rate standards, it was not a sum of money that they would spend in order to buy a cup of coffee!

Another issue that he had a problem with was that the coin was not truly valuable. There was no reason to make use of coins at all when a cheap composite bill could do the job as well.

Pretty much every modern state utilized the fiat currency system to represent the value of their legal tender. It was a trust-based system that essentially encouraged the people that used it to pretend that it was actually valuable.

"Trust, huh?"

Although this was a successful system that had been used in many ages in humanity's history, it was also boring and standard to Ves. While there was nothing wrong with adopting a standard template, he felt this was a great opportunity for his clan to reinforce its unique identity and stand out further from the pack.

What state or organization minted coins that were not only alive, but also possessed intrinsic value on their own?

The ultimate goal that Ves had in mind was to design and mass produce coins that were genuinely worth as much money as their face value!

In other words, this project is partially a reversion to the ancient convention of using precious metals as legal tender. A coin that claimed that it was worth 1 lark must actually hold that value even if the Larkinson Clan abolished its currency!

"The question is... can I do this?" Ves wondered.

Chapter 3743 - Designing Coins

After reading many different reports, Ves understood the arguments and goals of the currency project to a greater degree.

The people who worked to design the lark and the coins were all earnest people who wanted their clan to become a more serious body.

Maintaining a currency and minting coins was one of the most influential ways to manipulate people's perception and behavior towards the clan.

"The lark is decent, but that is all. It checks the boxes without going any further."

It was too bad that Ves was never satisfied with doing an adequate job.

Maybe Gloriana had rubbed off on him more than he anticipated, but he truly could not tolerate an effort that only covered the basics without going any deeper.

When Ves looked back on the Larkinson Clan, he imagined the bonds of family that brought a highly diverse mix of human talents and individuals together.

He thought about all of the living mechs that protected the expeditionary fleet through thick and thin.

He thought about the unique and powerful expert mechs that possessed the greatest individual combat power of the Larkinson Army.

He thought about the diverse personalities of prominent members such as Calabast, Shederin, Jannzi and Joshua, which the clan did not try to suppress.

When he thought back on all of this, he noted that each of them had a few elements in common.

"Diversity and unity." Ves identified.

The Larkinson Clan was not an organization that demanded a high degree of conformity.

The best example that Ves could think of that pursued the opposite was the Hexadric Hegemony.

The former home state of his wife was large and filled with many different personalities. However, the overwhelming majority of them were rather similar to each other because that was what their culture and their fellow people demanded.

The Hexers had to follow a strict set of rules that governed how women needed to comport themselves, the way that 'boys' had to be treated and how much tolerance they should show towards deviations from these standards.

Suffice to say, life in the Hexadric Hegemony was strict towards rule breakers. Those that thought that boys deserved to be treated as equal would either get thrown in jail or be sent to special classes in order to 'correct' their mindsets.

Those that insisted on the 'barbaric' notion that men were equal to women despite all of the warnings would be branded as Fridaymen spies and sent to the execution chambers!

"Our clan isn't anything like that." Ves said with pride.

Although it was not easy keeping all of the different subgroups and subcultures together, he liked the fact that his clan was made up of different people that easily got along with each other.

Even the more distinct and abnormal groups such as the Swordmaidens and Penitent Sisters did not generate a significant amount of rejection from more ordinary clansmen.

It wasn't just the different subgroups that were allowed to maintain their unique customs. Every individual clansmen was allowed to develop their unique personalities. The clan didn't care how far they deviated from the norm as long as they were loyal and did their jobs.

This was how eccentrics such as Vincent Ricklin, Ketis, Gloriana and even Ves stayed so unique. The clan did not pressure them to conform to a more generic standard, which was exactly how Ves liked it. He detested regimes that imposed too many silly rules on people.

So what if people were different? As long as the deviances were harmless and not disruptive, it should be okay for Larkinsons to retain their unique identities.

Naturally, there were downsides to this approach. Even if the Larkinson Network did much to prevent different clansmen from splintering away from each other, it was still difficult to make every single Larkinson react the same way to different instructions.

"In any case, my clan celebrates individuality while at the same time binding them together in a common family."

As he came to this conclusion, he gained a solid direction on how he should shape the currency of the Larkinson Clan.

The name could stay. It sounded good and it was rather clever to refer to it as the lark.

What Ves truly wanted to change was the design of the coins. He had a lot of different ideas on how he should overhaul their properties. Too much, actually.

In order to sort out his thoughts and pick the most useful and relevant out of them, he opened up a document and listed out his own set of requirements.

"The lark coins have to be living products without any exceptions."

"The lark coins must be unique and traceable."

"The lark coins cannot be forged by unauthorized parties."

"The lark coins must be totems that not only possess a small form of life, but are also tied to different design spirits."

"The lark coins should all possess the capacity for growth, allowing them to change and evolve as they are being used or handled by different users."

"The lark coins must possess tangible value or utility that is worth money even if it is no longer used as a form of currency."

"The lark coins must possess all of the aforementioned properties while at the same time make it viable for them to be mass produced."

Ves paused and went over the list several times. These were the major demands that his coins absolutely had to meet in order to satisfy his own demands.

His overall aim was to turn the physical lark coins into products that could be treated as special commodities that were not only useful to his clansmen, but also outsiders.

This could become a potentially lucrative export product if Ves designed the coins well enough!

He could create a coin that cost 0.001 MTA credits to make but actually sold for 10 MTA credits because that was how much customers were willing to pay to obtain extraordinary benefits!

"It shouldn't be easy to fool people like that, though."

Maybe he should tone it down and adopt a more reasonable profit margin. He could do that by making use of more expensive materials in order to raise the physical value of the coins.

People would become a lot less reluctant to pay 10 MTA credits to buy a metal object that cost 1 MTA credit to make.

This was because the added value of the product more than made up the price difference.

Of course, the premise to this was that the coin truly offered benefits that were worth at least 9 MTA credits in people's eyes!

"I don't need to mess with that yet. I should start with generating useful concepts."

He activated his desk terminal and called up a design program.

Usually, he used it to design his mechs and occasionally other technical products, but this time was different.

He imported the design of the current coins and began to alter them based on his intent and feelings.

He had to come up with viable concepts, and he thought about tying his coins to different design spirits at first.

In half an hour, Ves made over a dozen different sketches of coins. He left aside differences in size and denominations and focused mainly on their appearance and spiritual design.

The first coin he started with was arguably the most standard one. He created a simple golden coin that depicted the Golden Cat but in a more vivid and lively fashion.

"Hmmm."

Although it seemed obvious that a variation of this Golden Cat Coin should come into circulation, Ves had a different idea.

"This coin doesn't provide any tangible benefits to outsiders. The Golden Cat has nothing to do with them. It also isn't useful for my clansmen either. They are already connected to her and there are plenty of Bright Warriors and other sources where they can feel her presence. Obtaining this coin does not provide a lot of added benefit."

Nonetheless, he still felt it was worthwhile enough to use it as the smallest denomination of the lark currency.

"The millilark is the least valuable but also the easiest tender to proliferate within the clan. Every Larkinson should be able to own a few and keep them in their pockets. As for outsiders, it is doubtful that they would even bother with buying such a low-value coin. It is much more convenient and desirable to exchange their MTA credits for the bigger and more valuable coins."

Ves liked this idea enough to immediately mark it as the form of the new millilark coin.

He swiped the interface and moved on to the next coin.

This one made him feel a lot more doubtful. This was because the coin was a totem dedicated to Lufa.

"It's a good coin that should be powerful enough to reduce stress and cleanse one's mind." Ves guessed.

He wasn't sure of this as Ves was never able to impart a lot of spiritual capacity to small totems such as coins. The effect would probably be weak and fairly subtle, especially if he employed some form of mass production.

"Still, even if it is weak, the Lufa Coin should still make enough of a difference for certain people to buy them at a generous price."

There were lots of people suffering from stress and mental imbalances. The Red Ocean was filled with them due to the frequent disasters and crises that the immigrants from the old galaxy suffered from. If all of these people could gain a bit of help by carrying a Lufa Coin around them, then Ves anticipated that his clan would be able to sell a fair amount of them provided people did not get freaked out by unknown tech manipulating their moods.

However, Ves ultimately turned against the Lufa Coin.

"I shouldn't introduce a product that cannibalizes one of my other product offerings."

Although he hadn't made any progress on it as of late, he still intended to market his Sanctuary model to the Red Ocean. The sheer amount of utility of a Sanctuary mech was far greater than a simple coin.

Ves was also a mech designer by nature. If a problem could be solved through the use of a mech, then he would prefer to stick with that rather than go down the wrong path.

"If this is the case, I should also skip the Vulcan Coin."

He had recently erected the Creation Association which had slowly but steadily expanded its membership. There were still a lot of craftsmen in Davute that had experienced Vulcan's glow before and were willing to pay a generous amount of money to gain inspiration on demand.

"A Vulcan Coin will not only ruin the exclusivity of my Vulcan totems, but also devalue what my Creation Association is doing."

Although the coins weren't meant to bestow people with a false inspired state, just the Vulcan glow was enough for people to skip the Creation Association!

"Well, goodbye then. I don't need you anymore."

He manipulated the interface and deleted the drafts of both coins right away.

Ves shifted to the next design which was tied to the Illustrious One. Strangely enough, he made it as a luminar crystal instead of a random alloy formula.

"This is probably the prettiest coin by far. It's also one of the most useless ones."

Aside from its brilliant reflections and sparkling surfaces, the Illustrious Coins did not bring anything meaningful to the table.

They could be used as jewels, he supposed, but that would be a highly tacky use of legal tender.

"Useless."

He deleted the Illustrious Coin and switched to the next coin on the list.

This one made him pause for a time.

"Is it wise to make a totem based on a 6000-year old astral beast?"

The Titania Coin possessed a vibe that was a lot more abnormal than usual. It wasn't easy to describe the Titania's glow, but one of his impressions was that it made him feel as if he was a subject to a greater hive mind.

Chapter 3744 - Living Larks

"Why am I even thinking about this? This Titania Coin is too risky!"

There was no logical reason to turn a totem dedicated to a former alien astral beast into a coin!

Ves could not fully fathom how such a coin would influence its holders. Whatever the case, he did not think it would lead to anything good.

He resolutely scrapped this design without any further entanglement. As long as he identified a severe risk factor, there was no need to consider the coin any further. Ves had plenty of alternatives and had the luxury of choice.

The next coin in his consideration was a totem based on one of his earliest but also his most dependable design spirit.

As far as intelligence and sophistication went, the Solemn Guardian probably ranked at the bottom.

"That's not necessarily bad, though."

The Solemn Guardian only really had one job and that was to inspire loyalty and duty in other people.

It had done so brilliantly ever since Ves published the original Desolate Soldier design. It was such a useful design spirit that he had even turned to it again to serve as the design spirit of the recently-completed Rigid Spine model.

"Besides, it is not as simple as before."

There were perks to being his oldest design spirit. It had experienced more years of growth and influence from its mech pilots than any other entity.

With tens of millions of Desolate Soldiers in circulation back in the Yeina Star Cluster, Ves could not imagine how much spiritual feedback the Solemn Guardian received!

Now that Ves checked up on the Solemn Guardian, he became a bit intrigued at the fact that the Solemn Guardian had refined its form.

"The Solemn Guardian is a man now. He also looks more humanoid."

This must be the consequence of connecting with millions of mech pilots, many of which were human males.

As for why the Solemn Guardian chose to be a man rather than a woman, Ves was not interested in finding out the answer. He was already happy to see that one of his spirits and a living product no less had gained a life of his own. It would be too boring if the Solemn Guardian remained static and unchanging over time.

"This is a useful coin to have." Ves surmised. "It can be used as an extra badge for different organizations and it can reinforce the motivation and steadfastness of soldiers in battle."

The many use cases of the Desolate Soldier exemplified the utility of the Solemn Guardian.

However, there was one big issue about the Solemn Guardian Coin. It bumped into the same cannibalization problem as the Lufa Coin.

The problem was less severe in this case. The Desolate Soldier was an extremely cheap third-class mech that was a proven bestseller.

Once he got around to updating it as well as designing a second-class variant, Ves had little doubt that his new Desolate Soldier models could achieve high sales volumes in the Red Ocean.

"A Solemn Guardian Coin is useful to carry around but its effect is not that strong. Bringing Desolate Soldiers into the field is the best and most effective way to reinforce people's sense of duty!"

Although the Solemn Guardian Coin was one of the mildest and least exotic coins he designed, he felt it was good enough to use its concept as the basis of the 1 lark coin.

"A single lark is represented by duty. Simple. Clear. Valuable, but not excessively so. It is just right to price it at 1 lark."

He made a notation to turn the Solemn Guardian Coin into the third-most valuable coin denomination.

"I need to select at least two more coin concepts."

He immediately paused after he swiped to the next coin design.

It was the only one in the collection that wasn't shaped like a circle. Instead, Ves had designed it so that its sides were shaped like a hexagon.

Anyone in the expeditionary fleet would immediately be able to tell what this coin was all about by its contours alone!

Of all of the coins he designed, the Superior Mother Coin stood out because of multiple reasons.

First, the Superior Mother was one of his smartest, most powerful and most versatile design spirits. Since she was directly derived from Cynthia, she possessed more capabilities than most which meant that Ves could easily draw out different aspects depending on his needs.

For example, he could create a variation of the coin that was based on the woman phase of hexism. This turned the Superior Mother Coin into a hyperfeminine totem that would probably attract a lot of fans from Hexers!

He could also appeal to the Superior Mother's death phase to come up with a coin that would probably become a popular prop to use in burials.

"It can also be used as a token of bad luck."

The real question here was not whether it was possible to make these weird coins, but whether it was useful to make them in the first place.

Ves did not want to help the Hexers spread their odious culture. The fall of the Hexadric Hegemony might be a tragedy to its citizens, but it was a net positive outcome to the rest of human civilization!

He suddenly frowned. "On the other hand, I can't allow the Superior Mother to starve."

The design entity needed plenty of spiritual feedback to stay alive and healthy, and this was particularly the case when she expended her energy more often.

All of those battle formations the Penitent Sisters and the Glory Seekers pulled off did not come without a price.

The Superior Mother actually paid most of the bill!

This was because the battle formation only provided the Superior Mother with a channel to affect the material realm from the imaginary realm.

In other words, a battle formation was nothing more than a temporary pipe.

It was up to the Superior Mother to expend a huge amount of her energy and flood it into the material realm in the form of a massive, battle-changing attack!

Although the mech units employed this battle formation numerous times, Ves was quite aware that the Superior Mother was only able to sustain so many interventions by using a huge amount of Hexers as her unwitting donors.

What if the Hexadric Hegemony finally fell?

"There's still the Hexer diaspora."

A lot of Hexers had already fled the Komodo Star Sector in order to escape the reach of the Friday Coalition. They scattered into different fleets that traveled in many different directions.

The wealthiest and most powerful of them were already converging on the Hexer colonies founded in the Red Ocean.

Ves did not have much hope that the random Hexer refugees would be able to maintain their numbers and their culture in the long term. Without a state to support their biases and prejudices, it was extremely hard for them to remain obstinate in a foreign state!

For example, Gloriana would get smacked in the face if she voiced her more controversial notions!

She was quite lucky that the Larkinson Clan was tolerant and inclusive.

"Anyway, there is an argument to be made about this coin."

Turning totems of the Superior Mother into coins was a great way to introduce the design spirit to new sources of spiritual feedback!

Ves reached out his hand and tweaked the design a bit. He decided to modify the spiritual design of the six-sided coin so that it was slanted towards the phase of life.

This was not only the most 'boy-friendly' phase of hexism, it also held great value that made it valuable enough to be used as the denomination of his kilolark coin.

"This coin should be worth 1 MTA credit according to the pegged exchange rate proposed by Raymond."

The life phase was special for one major reason. Both Ves and Cynthia's domains were primarily based on life. The Superior Mother inherited both of their strengths and was able to exude a vibrant aura that could make anyone feel pleasant.

Ves closed his eyes as he tried to imagine this glow.

To him, this was a glow that he associated with motherhood and the birth and raising of children. The life phase represented a beginning and a start of an endeavor.

He could think of a lot of potential uses for this coin.

"It can be used to promote childbirth. Superstitious mothers can even use it to ask for the Superior Mother's blessing. Women who carry it will probably find it easier to build up relationships with their children."

It was a glow that reminded Ves of family. The Golden Cat was able to evoke the sense of family a lot better, but only Larkinsons benefited from this effect.

"Anyway, I'll add this one to the list as well."

There were plenty of reasons to put the Superior Mother Coin into circulation. Just the possibility that it would help his mother was enough to commit him to this choice despite all of the complications.

"Still, not everyone will appreciate this coin. What about men who don't want attention from their mothers?"

There was no way that they would be willing to exchange a Superior Mother Coin for a single MTA credit!

"What if... I introduce another kilolark coin?"

Ves swiped the projected interface a few times before he came across one that presented the boldest impression to him. The side of the coin depicted a muscular human physique that could inspire a lot of masculinity in men!

"Is the Bravo Coin a mistake or a useful product?"

Bravo was actually a more complicated design spirit. He just didn't want to acknowledge it most of the time.

Still, if Ves saw the masculine design spirit in a better light, then Bravo could play a useful role in stimulating competitiveness and encouraging both men and women to overcome difficult challenges.

"It's like a gym coach in the form of a design spirit."

Was it worth 1 kilolark? Ves wasn't sure about that. What he did know was that the Bravo Coin could serve as a counterbalance to the Superior Mother Coin.

"If I value them both at 1 kilolark and circulate them at the same time, then I won't offend any men or women. It's up to other people to choose which one they prefer more. In fact, they might even choose to carry both if they can afford the cost."

He frowned. He didn't know what would happen if anyone brought the two coins together. He didn't know how any combination of living coins would react for that matter.

"I should definitely investigate this further once I am ready to make a batch of coins."

For now, Ves needed to finish this selection process by determining the final choice for the megalark coin.

A coin that was worth 1,000,000 larks had to provide a huge amount of value!

This made it a lot more difficult for Ves to think how this could be accomplished.

"If I chose the Vulcan Coin or the Lufa Coin, I might be able to justify this valuation."

He had already scrapped them, though. He had a much harder time finding a good match with both of the obvious choices out of the way.

As Ves switched from coins based on different design spirits, he eventually halted on a single sketch.

"Qilanxo."

The coin based on the former sacred god exuded a sense of protection and safety.

All of this sounded good, but it didn't do anything else.

"Must that always be the case, though?"

What if he made it a little more special? What if he invested more in its design and creation and turned it into a totem that could provide actual protection, if only to a minor extent?

He frowned yet again. "This is too difficult! I can hardly do anything with a totem that is this small!"

It was a great idea to use the Qilanxo Coin as the basis of his megalark coin, but if Ves wasn't able to make anything happen, then it wasn't the right choice.

He didn't have many alternatives left, though. He only possessed so many design spirits and couldn't bring out more at the moment.

As Ves continued to think about his limited choices, he abruptly came up with another strange idea.

"What if... I base a coin out of other subjects? What if... I use one of our masterwork mechs as a totem?"

Chapter 3745 - Heads and Tails

Ves designed a few more coins.

He also reimagined the purpose, uses and definition of the lark coins.

"They have become more than straightforward methods of payment."

He readily admitted that he had gone overboard and turned the coins into a full-blown side project that didn't need to be this complicated.

In a modern society, almost all transactions were virtual. Coins and other forms of payment such as bills, jewels, raw ore and cattle were all cumbersome and outdated. They were rightfully phased out of daily use due to their inconveniences and inefficiencies.

Nonetheless, coins still played a symbolic and ceremonial role in modern societies. Not just humans, but also aliens tended to make use of physical tokens of payment.

They made money more real to people. Being able to touch them, carry them and pile them up evoked all kinds of emotions.

Without coins or bills, money was just a number to many people. It was far too easy for individuals who lacked financial literacy to squander all of their savings, go way too deep into debt or fall for all kinds of unrealistic investment scams.

Having a physical anchor to remind people of what money was truly worth could do wonders in grounding their monetary sensibilities.

What Ves came up with went beyond this purpose. The coin concepts he developed in an hour were all alive and vivid in a way that no other coin could match.

That was valuable enough alone.

Their connection to greater existences and the possibility that they could grow in the future all added a lot of mystique to the objects.

After puzzling over the concept and design of the most expensive tier of coins, he finally settled on using the masterwork mechs of the Larkinson Clan as their basis.

He developed a total of five coin concepts, each of which stood for a different masterwork mech.

The Quint Coin, the Amaranto Coin, the Shield of Samar Coin, the Everchanger Coin and the Minerva Coin were all exactly what their names suggested.

Each of the sketches that he had made depicted different large, palm-sized coins with different faces.

Their front sides all depicted the contours and outline of the five masterwork mechs that were currently in service in the clan.

He found that it was a bit too awkward to fit the entire mechs into a circle, so he had cut the images of the mechs down to show off their heads and torsos.

Fortunately, the upper half of the mechs each looked distinctive enough that people would easily be able to tell the difference.

Ves was briefly tempted to color the images in different shades, but he found that the coins became too tacky. To him, coins still needed to convey a sense of dignity and timelessness in order for them to earn people's appreciation over the long-term. Making them too colorful would just turn them into a fad that would inevitably fall out of fashion.

Still, despite being limited to using shapes and lines to differentiate his coins, he was proud of the draft designs he whipped up. They were sure to impress many people as long as he fleshed them out and infused them with more life.

After staring at his projected drafts for a while, he wanted to obtain a second opinion.

"Lucky? Oh, I just forgot. You went with my wife."

Fortunately, he could still call on two more cats.

"Bygul!"

[Mew!]

The personification of the Spirit of Bentheim's AI core physically projected into view. The blue electronic cat brushed his form against Ves' side before studying the coin designs.

"What do you think about my coin designs?"

[Mew mew.]

Ves didn't really expect a serious answer from Bygul. The AI was not sentient and was incapable of experiencing irrational feelings.

"Blinky!"

Mrow!

A second cat emerged from his head. The purple companion spirit briefly glanced at Bygul in disdain before looked up at the various coins under development.

As a spiritual cat, Blinky was able to sense the hint of life from the sketches.

Mrow mrow mrow.

"Yeah I know the masterwork mech coins aren't worth 1000 MTA credits. This is why I have planned to compress the coin denominations. Anyway, the lark currency is even out yet, so we can easily change its exchange rate without anyone losing money."

Blinky hovered close to the smallest Golden Cat Coin sketch and tried to lick the projection.

Mrow!

"Its value may be low, but that doesn't matter. It's only for internal use."

The companion spirit lingered in front of the Golden Cat Coin for a moment before he surveyed the other draft designs.

The masterwork mech coins particularly attracted his attention. It was quite odd to base the coins on machines all of a sudden, but Ves had already proved with the Enlightened Warrior that not only his masterwork mechs, but any living mech could be used in the same roles as a design spirit.

The issue was that most of his living mechs simply weren't powerful enough to make that worthwhile. Only his third-order living mechs that had gained an impressive level of

strength came close to matching the strength and capabilities of his traditional design spirits.

Mrow mrow mrow!

"Huh? That might actually be a good idea. Let me try and see whether it can work."

Blinky, despite being another part of himself, possessed an independent personality, so the cat occasionally noticed details or came up with ideas that were different from himself.

Ves took up his cat's suggestion and modified the Everchanger Coin in a special way.

Instead of using a more generic design on the other side of the coin, he instead placed a side profile of Venerable Joshua's head on its surface!

This gave the coin a substantially different meaning and appearance!

"The Everchanger on one side and its pilot on the other side. How fitting!"

The only problem that Ves faced was that an expert pilot couldn't be used as a design spirit directly.

Ves had dabbled in this in the past. When he came up with the idea of using mechs like the Quint as a design spirit for a derivative mech, he had also tried to substitute the Quint for an expert pilot such as Joshua.

It didn't work.

Expert pilots were beings that relied on their own willpower to gain strength. Their solid and tenacious wills were purely derived from their own mentalities. They did not rely on external influences to further their growth or spread their influence.

The only exception was their expert mechs. Their machines provided them with a battle steed and an object they could resonate from to generate even greater power.

"Hm, it's a pity that there is no point in putting expert pilots into coins."

Ves still decided to leave their heads on the coins regardless. They looked nice and the symbolism was a lot more powerful now that the expert mechs were joined by their respective pilots.

He liked the change so much that he even went back to his other coin sketches and altered them so that they gained a more human element.

"I suppose the sides with all of the heads are the front of the coin now. The sides with the mechs or design spirits constitute the rear of the coin."

Ves had to alter his designs and change the proportions so that it made sense. When someone wanted to flip a coin for whatever reason, there should be no ambiguity on which sides represented heads or tails.

He surveyed his collection of coin sketches once again.

Due to compressing the denominations of the coins, the highest value one was the 1 kilolark coin. This coin came in five different variations, of which four of them depicted the masterwork expert mechs and their respective expert pilots.

"Amaranto and Venerable Davia Stark. Shield of Samar and Venerable Jannzi Larkinson. Everchanger and Venerable Joshua Larkinson. Minerva and Commander Casella Ingvar."

The meaning and significance of the coins had changed after he made his latest revisions. They became almost sacred in how they could tempt people into worshipping the pairs of expert pilots and expert mechs.

The only kilolark coin that did not fit this pattern was the one that honored the Quint. The masterwork mech differed from the other ones in that it was not a machine that was locked into a specific mech pilot.

Ves briefly contemplated the option of putting the head of the Quint's current pilot on the front side of the coin, but he felt that would be silly. Isobel Larkinson had not yet acquired the strength and prestige to immortalize her into a coin.

"What if she breaks through a year or two later? I'll have to go back and design another coin."

He anticipated that the pilots assigned to the Quint would probably be swapped out on a frequent basis. Given this circumstance, it was a bit too much to update the design of the Quint Coin each time a new pilot came along.

In order to make sure the design of the Quint Coin became more timeless, he used a different head as the front side of the coin.

His own.

"This looks nice, doesn't it, Blinky?"

Mrow.

Blinky rolled his eyes. Of course Ves would put himself in the coins he planned to make.

"Hey, this is standard convention, you know! A lot of states put their heads of state onto their own physical coins. The head of the Star Emperor graces the coins minted in the Rubarth Empire while the Terran ancient clans all put their own leaders and legendary figures on their own coins."

Although the Larkinson Clan wasn't a formal state, now that it was ready to mint its own coins, Ves might as well abide by this custom.

The other coins also graced his own head as well.

For example, the 1 lark coins featured his head and the Superior Mother or Bravo on the reverse side.

The odd combinations altered the symbolism of the coins.

He liked the only hexagon-shaped coin in the series. The Superior Mother Coin depicted both mother and son, although only a few other people were able to recognize it as such.

The Bravo Coin on the other hand made him feel more masculine and grown-up. This was the true alpha male badge!

"Maybe I should carry one myself." Ves murmured.

The remaining coins were not as big or dramatic, but they conveyed plenty of meaning as well.

Ves had upgraded the Solemn Guardian coin to a 1 centilark coin denomination. This made it more convenient to use in daily transactions in the future as the Larkinson Clan steadily grew its prosperity closer to first-class standards.

The Golden Cat Coin held the same face value as before. With a value of 1 millilark, it should be possible for every Larkinson to have them in their pockets.

All of the drafts he surveyed so far would constitute the first series of coins he intended to mint.

He planned to release additional varieties of coins in the future whenever it was convenient.

For example, he might decide to release a coin dedicated to other design spirits that missed the initial cut. He also had to make a 1 kilolark coin based on Venerable Imon Ingvar and his future expert mech.

"It will take a while before I can make that coin. For now, I should convert these drafts into full designs and figure out how I can mint them en masse."

He soon dived into his design work and tuned out everything else. He had become so interested in this project that he had become passionate about turning it into a reality.

The coins he envisioned during this session transcended the common meaning of legal tender.

They became tribute coins to Ves. Each of them honored the entities that were depicted on the coins and extended a portion of their majesty outward.

"The only challenge that remains is to figure out a way to mass produce these coins!" Ves reminded himself.

Chapter 3746 - Coin Press

Mass producing totems had always been a persistent shortcoming of Ves.

His work in extending his design philosophy in areas outside of mech design were severely hampered by his continued reliance on personal intervention to make his products.

He wasn't alone in this. Every other mech designer suffered from this problem as well.

Perhaps only Master Mech Designers or Star Designers were able to rise above this limitation.

Journeyman such as Ves could forget about overcoming this issue!

At least that was the conventional wisdom.

Ves was anything but conventional.

Throughout his long career of designing mechs and solving problems, he learned that many problems could be solved as long as the solution was ingenious enough.

He did not let this mass production issue hinder him. All of the work he put in his coin designs stoked his passion and put him into a particularly creative mindset!

He didn't even need to whack his head with his hammer to gain new inspiration!

"This is an engineering problem." Ves stated. "That means that it is possible to find a solution through engineering."

It was not as simple as it sounded, though. He could just pass on a work order to the Spirit of Bentheim's production halls if he wanted his crew to produce a large batch of coins.

The complication was that the coins had to contain life and function similar to his handmade totems.

His mechs did not suffer from this problem as Ves was a mech designer.

To be more precise, he hypothesized that the design seed in his mind acted as a transmitter that enabled mechs based on his designs to carry his unique specialties without being physically involved.

The design seed only worked for mechs because that was what it was based upon! It did not provide any boost to the production of his other products!

"If this is the case, why don't I create another 'design seed'?"

Ves fell silent as he contemplated this possible solution. Whenever he studied his design seed, he understood extremely little about it. It was a naturally-formed spiritual phenomenon that somehow performed a large amount of complex functions.

What impressed Ves about the design seed was that a huge amount of Journeymen were able to generate one when they broke through!

Each of them might be centered around different design philosophies, but each of them followed a common programming and design!

There was something extremely profound and suspicious about this realization. How come people gained the huge amount of instructions needed to formulate such a specialist product?

He doubted that it came from human DNA! Every single gene in the human genome had been deciphered long ago. He was pretty sure that none of them governed such an impressive intangible organ.

The second mystery was why it worked for mech design and not for other professions.

There were brilliant and talented professionals in many different sectors, yet none of them produced the kind of exaggerated breakthroughs that defined the mech industry.

"Do design seeds only work in mech design-related pursuits?"

This was not a question that Ves was qualified to answer. He needed to become a Master and have access to much more exclusive repositories of knowledge before he could figure out the secret behind design seeds and possibly the mech design profession as a whole.

He shook his head. "This direction is too profound for me. I need to come up with a more simple and practical solution!"

Even if he had become more passionate about it, Ves still needed to maintain a sense of proportion. This was just a side project. He had to finish his business quickly before he could go back to managing his mech design projects.

"Let's reduce the problem, then. What I truly need is a minting machine that can produce living coins on autopilot."

If that was the case, then wasn't there an obvious solution in front of him? It was obvious now that he was thinking in the right direction.

"What better to make a living product than another living product!"

As a mech designer who excelled in living mechs, he could also moonlight as a normal engineer. While he had never made an industrial coin press in his life, its function was simple enough that he could easily design a functional version of it in a few hours.

He was also a spiritual engineer. He excelled at making products alive and manipulating their spiritual designs to his advantage.

He bet that he could somehow develop a coin press that could do the work that he required.

"Let's start small. I need to obtain a working proof of concept before I go big."

A large industrial-grade coin minter was a big device. It would take a lot of effort to design such a machine. If he somehow botched the job, much of the time he spent on its design would effectively be wasted!

He manipulated his interface and started to design a small-scale coin minter from scratch.

Half an hour went by as he designed a basic device that did nothing more than take a piece of alloy as its input before spitting out a coin as its output.

There was nothing complicated about the device. It only came with a single fixed Golden Cat Coin template and could not be used to mint any of the other tribute coins he designs.

What was truly interesting about the basic automatic coin press was that he had spent a lot of attention on its spiritual design. He not only wanted to make it alive, but also impart life in the coins it minted.

"Let's hope it works."

The significance of this proof of concept was great. If Ves somehow managed to build a device that could produce living coins without his active involvement, then he could make other devices that could produce other living products!

He would no longer be constrained by the rules that constrained every mech designer and could begin with producing special products early.

As far as he knew, only Star Designers were able to match this capability!

"Hahahaha! It's already impressive enough to be able to make masterwork mechs at the Journeyman-level. How will the public react when they learn I can mass produce other kinds of living products as well?"

The Creation Association would definitely take off if that happened!

One of the biggest reasons why he told Director Samandra Avikon to take it slow and limit her recruitment to craftsmen was because Ves couldn't be bothered with making so many Vulcan totems in person.

If he could make a machine that could at least pump out the small and medium totems in batches, then he would be set for life!

Once he finished the design, he exited his office and headed straight to his personal workshop.

A short time later, he ended up with a minting machine the size of a dog. It was so small and basic that Ves did not encounter any difficulties during the fabrication process.

Since he had made it himself, the coin minter was alive, if only modestly. He could have done better in this regard if he spent more time on it and if he scaled it up, but he was satisfied with what he managed to accomplish in a few hours.

"Let's hope it is strong enough to work." He whispered.

He retrieved a small bar of Breyer alloy and put it inside the input tray of the coin press.

After switching on the device, he waited while the device drew power and hummed for a while. The sound of clattering metal objects soon emanated from the output tray as the machine just pressed its first coins!

Ves immediately grabbed the freshly-made coins and studied both sides.

The obverse of the coin displayed a pretty accurate representation of his own head.

As he flipped the coin around, the head of the Golden Cat proudly looked forward in a ferocious but cute manner!

His mood quickly sank as he extended his spiritual senses towards the coin.

"It's... not alive."

He already took this possibility into account, so it was not completely outside of his expectations that his first experimental product failed.

It was more difficult to accept this result than usual because he enjoyed a string of successes as of late. Turning the Minerva into a masterwork mech probably swelled his head a bit too much.

"Ah, I need to temper my expectations. It's only natural that I can't succeed in the first try. If this problem was so easy to solve, then it wouldn't have hindered me for so long!"

He did not admit defeat because of this initial failure. Instead, he became more determined to overcome this engineering challenge and produce a workable version of a production machine that was able to make totems on demand!

"Let's see what isn't working with my coin press."

He began to feed more materials into the device while he employed a large scanner to track what it was doing inside.

There was nothing wrong about the mechanical process it performed. The coin minter handled the input materials correctly and transformed them into coins that were all accurate enough to pass muster.

Yet no matter what it did, the coin minter simply did not impart any life to the materials it was working with. It was as if its spiritual design was completely ineffective!

When Ves employed his spiritual vision to observe the production process on a spiritual level, he could tell that despite being programmed to perform an action, the coin minter truly wasn't able to turn the coins into totems.

"There is at least one missing link!"

Although his first attempt was definitely a failure, he was happy enough that he was able to learn what wasn't working.

Ves leaned back in his chair and rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "Hmmm. The spiritual design isn't working because of several possible reasons. First, it is not driven by a strong enough spirit that is comparable enough to my own. Second, the process requires input in the form of spiritual energy in order to fuel this process."

These were the two likeliest explanations that he could come up with to explain this failure.

He returned to his coin minting machine design and adjusted his work in order to address the perceived shortcomings.

Once he was finished, he made a second coin press. This one was intended to utilize spiritual energy as additional input.

When Ves let his second coin press do its job, he held the side and channeled steady portions of his spiritual energy inside the machine.

The coins it made were just as lifeless as the first batch.

"Damn!"

To be honest, he could already tell that it wouldn't work. His spiritual energy didn't do anything inside. It just passed through everything before fading off into the imaginary realm.

"Then what about addressing the other problem?"

For his third coin press design, he decided to make it a bit more special. He used Vulcan as its design spirit in the hopes that this would lead to a breakthrough!

The logic of utilizing Vulcan was sound. It not only excelled in craftsmanship, but also happened to be his own incarnation!

If Vulcan was another side of Ves, could it borrow the powers of Ves as well?

This was an interesting puzzle to solve. He hoped that his third coin minter would be able to present him with a satisfactory answer.

"Failed!"

Not even a coin press that obtained the support of Vulcan was able to do any better! The Golden Cat Coins it produced were just as devoid of life as the darkest reaches of the cosmos!

Ves had already wasted several hours on these experiments. Although he was determined to solve this frustrating puzzle, he could not obsess over it for too long without affecting his other duties.

"What am I missing?"

He felt that similar solutions wouldn't work. He needed to work from a different tangent and come up with an approach that introduced a different factor.

"Let me think... how can I create new life?"

Chapter 3747 - Ginger

Ves leaned his head against his fist as he tried to figure out what he was missing.

After creating five different coin presses, he failed to make any progress. Why was it so hard to nail down a device that could produce living coins by itself?

"Conventional solutions won't cut it. I have tried all of the fairly obvious solutions, to no avail. There are rules in play that prevent my work from fulfilling its purpose."

He wouldn't be suffering from this problem as much if he stuck to producing mechs. While they also required a human element in order to make them alive, he could at least leave this job to mech technicians.

"Is that what I'm missing? The human element?"

Working off this premise, he designed a sixth iteration of his coin minter before he called in a random mech technician who was on shift in the production hall.

"You called, patriarch?"

"Yes. Please head over there and operate this new coin producer of mine. Don't worry. I will pass on everything you need to do your job."

The mech technician was bright and eager, but unfortunately that was not enough to make a difference. The Cat Coins that the technician produced suffered from the same absence of life as the ones that came before!

"Thank you for your services. You can return to your regular duties."

Ves grew a bit more depressed now that he had failed again. Although he understood that this was a normal process whenever he tried to innovate a new solution to a difficult problem, what frustrated him was that he did not obtain any information that could nudge him in the right direction.

Even if he made a hundred different coin presses, as long as he did not come up with a radical new approach, he wouldn't be able to make any meaningful progress towards his goal!

As Ves racked his brain for a tangent that was different and promising enough to make this project succeed, his comm suddenly chimed.

He accepted the hail. A projection of his wife as well as the baby in arms appeared in front.

Gloriana curiously her husband and his surroundings. The different variations of failed coin presses were highly distinctive.

"What are you doing, Ves?"

"I'm just working on a little engineering project." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "Why are you calling? Shouldn't you be preparing to bear your next designer baby?"

"About that. I have just started the process with the Larkinson Biotech Institute and the geneticists from Witshaw & Yeneca. They just asked me to decide on how our baby should appear, and I was thinking about introducing a little more variety in our family."

"Like what?" Ves curiously asked.

"Hair color, for a start. Aurelia here has inherited the same dark hair as us, and I am happy for that." Gloriana preened as she planted a kiss on their daughter's head. "I originally thought it was fine for our second daughter to inherit the same trait as well, but then I thought that it would be great if we can introduce more variety."

"You called me just for this? Gloriana, changing hair color can be done at any point in someone's life. If I want to become a blond, I can drop by the Dragon's Den and put myself under a machine that replaces all of my hair follicles in less than an hour."

"That's not the point, Ves. This is our child's natural appearance we are talking about. How she is born into our reality and how she looks as she grows up will define her self-image for times to come. I want Aurelia and our second daughter to treat each other as close as sisters. I don't want them to think that they are too alike to each other."

This was a decent argument. Ves seriously contemplated it for a moment and thought it was fine if his family gained a little variety.

It didn't have to be permanent anyway. If his second daughter didn't like her hair color, she could get a quick fix that would allow her to possess the same dark hair as her parents.

"Okay, suppose I am okay with this. What do you have in mind?"

"Blond is too extreme and brown is too subtle of a change. What do you think about red or ginger?"

"Red?"

That was an interesting hair color. It also came in many subtle varieties, ranging from orange to a shade closer to maroon.

He liked this choice. "Okay. Do it then. Do you have any other changes in mind?"

She shook her head. "No. Our genes are already perfect enough that our children will become beautiful regardless of how they grow. I will fill you in on all of the planned specifications of our second baby once I return to the Spirit of Bentheim. Her design will be absolutely stellar!"

"I hope so as well. Is Aurelia looking forward to getting a little sister?"

The young lady cradled in Gloriana's arms curiously tilted her head. "Sister? Want!"

Ves and Gloriana chatted for another minute before they ended the call.

"Hopefully, the doctors will be ready to implant a fetus in my belly within a month. I am looking forward to bearing another life in my belly. Aurelia will soon be able to take charge over her future sister!"

"Sister!"

The call ended, leaving Ves alone in his workshop.

He looked thoughtful as he mulled over Gloriana's last words. There was something about them that made him think about a different solution.

"Instead of producing the coins... how about growing them?" He proposed.

It sounded weird. Why would anyone want to go through the cumbersome process of growing coins as if they were bioproducts when it was a lot more inefficient than using a normal minting machine?

Yet... if it worked for biomechs, it should work for coins as well!

"Maybe... this is the breakthrough that I have been looking for. Conventional technology is great in many areas, but it falls short when it comes to creating life!"

Biotechnology offered a viable alternative. Unlike the normal methods, the biotech approach to production entertained creating biological seeds before dropping them in nutrient pools where they could slowly grow into their programmed forms.

His previous visit to the Life Research Association became incredibly handy now. Even though he was not a biotech expert himself, he had spent enough time in a state that was filled with biotechnology to know what was possible and how it worked in general terms!

He was sure that the Lifers could develop an organic coin minter that could create biological coin seeds that could eventually grow into real coins.

The consistency of the coins might not be as even. The designs and material composition of the coins need to be changed as well in order to accommodate the organic growth process.

However, as long as Ves made the changes, he could end up with a biological machine that could finally solve his problem!

"I can't do this alone. I need a biotech expert to do the heavy lifting on the design of the organic coin press."

Ves turned around and stared at the three dormant Aspects of Lufa that he had set to the side.

Each of them were successful examples of how he was able to combine his design philosophy with organic components.

The outer layers of cloned human tissue that covered their surfaces should have rotted a long time ago. Yet due to being sustained by an unknown interaction between their organic forms and their spiritual foundations, the organic statues were still as healthy as ever!

This was proof that combining biotechnology and spiritual engineering could produce remarkable results that defied common sense!

Although he felt a bit squeamish about messing with biotechnology again, the prospect of solving one of his long-standing problems was too tempting for him to resist!

Before he was ready to give the Larkinson Biotech Institute a call, he paused and formulated a new plan.

"What kind of organic machine should I make?"

It was best if it could be a self-contained organic production machine that created coins by growing them inside its body before ejecting them after they had reached their mature forms.

"It's no different from human reproduction." Ves remarked. "Just like how Gloriana is planning to grow and eventually give birth to our second daughter, my organic minting machine will also be able to grow and give birth to its little treasures!"

He was well aware of the absurdity of equating his wife to a coin making machine.

"The difference between my wife and a coin press is that one of them is more profitable than the other."

While an outsider might think this comparison was nonsense, it made complete sense to Ves. The more he imagined the organic coin press as a pregnancy machine, the more he thought this idea was viable!

Once he settled on his new plan, he quickly contacted Director Ranya. Though the head of the Larkinson Biotech Institute was currently in the process of helping Gloriana and Ketis design their next babies, she had enough time to offer her feedback.

"If you need to make an organic machine perform the work of a conventional machine, then you have come to the right place. My agenda is full so I cannot help you in person, but Dr. Avalon Perris should be able to provide assistance. She would love to be involved in a new bioengineering project."

"Dr. Perris? Ah, I remember. She's fine. Please notify her of my intentions and tell her to prepare. I want to get started right away once I arrive on your ship."

Once Ves made the arrangements, he grabbed a few failed products and left his workshop.

As he boarded a shuttle that headed to the bioresearch vessel of the Larkinson fleet, he quickly called up Dr. Perris' record.

As the only biomech designer in the Larkinson Clan, she didn't quite fit in with the rest. She had no place in the Design Department considering that everyone exclusively worked with mechanical mechs.

After wasting a few weeks in a department where she wasn't able to pursue her passion, she decided to transfer to the Dragon's Den where she was able to work alongside her fellow Lifers and biotech researchers.

The records didn't mention much about her subsequent work, but it did mention that she had never stopped designing biomechs since she became a part of the Larkinson Clan.

She also worked on another important project that Ves had not paid much attention to despite its importance. He should really rectify that during his upcoming visit.

"I should give her an opportunity to design commercial biomechs if she has done well enough. Our clan shouldn't neglect biomechs entirely."

There was no need to make a grand effort, though. Dr. Perris was still an Apprentice Mech Designer and needed to do a lot more before she found her way.

As the shuttle landed in a familiar hangar bay, Ves and his bodyguards headed deeper into the massive half-organic capital ship.

He visited the bioresearch vessel enough times to know where the labs were located. Once there, he sniffed out the lab that Dr. Perris had reserved and entered a white and clean chamber.

Numerous conventional and organic lab devices were laying dormant to each other. None of them showed any signs that they conflicted with each other.

"Patriarch Ves. It has been months." Dr. Perris greeted. "When I was informed that you are ready to collaborate with me on a biotechnological project, I did not expect that you would want to make a coin press of all of the possible choices you could make."

"It's important. This is no ordinary coin press. I already filled you in on our goals, right?"

The female biomech designer nodded. "You wish to make a living coin press that can grow living coins. If you wish to do that, then we need to go over the designs of both. You cannot straightforwardly convert a mechanical design into an organical design. The rules are different and it will take time to complete a successful conversion."

"I understand. Before we start on this project, I'd like to check up on another important project. How close are you to completing the meat suit?" Ves asked with a grin.

Chapter 3748 - Titan-3 Project

After the completion of the Everchanger, the new masterwork mech performed above everyone's expectations.

The expert hero mech was both powerful and versatile. It could fit in any role and it could even adopt any glow of its pilot's choosing.

Although it did not perform better in any given role than the specialized mechs of the Larkinson Clan, Ves did not ask it to do so. The Everchanger's entire concept revolved around applying its versatility to always take advantage of an adversary's weaknesses.

However, there were opponents where this strategy reached its limits.

The last two battles served as good examples. Against singular, powerful opponents such as giant astral beasts and alien warships, pure firepower was much more useful than adaptation.

This was because the enemy's strengths were so pronounced that their weaknesses weren't actually exploitable!

In situations where the Larkinsons had no choice but to fight against the enemy at its strongest, the Everchanger's Vitalus rifle wouldn't be able to contribute as much as the Amaranto's Instrument of Vengeance or the Minerva's Irvan luminar crystal rifles.

This was the nature of the Everchanger as a mech that traded raw power for more balanced performance.

The lack of overwhelming power in a specific role was why Ves devised the Everchanger to serve as a base platform for larger mech-sized add-ons.

Just like how humans powered themselves up by equipping themselves with combat armor, the Everchanger was supposed to gain an immense amount of power by deploying into battle while armed with mounted wargear!

Unfortunately, the side projects related to them did not make as much progress as Ves would have liked.

The technical challenges were considerable and Ves already had his hands full with designing the more important Minerva Project and other important mech designs.

In any case, it was not as if Venerable Joshua was suffering at the moment. The Everchanger was still a strong mech in most circumstances and would never become irrelevant.

This was why the projects relating to the mounted wargear took a backseat in the past few months. There was no particular hurry in completing them and Ves wanted to make them right.

The wargear projects all underwent a lot of changes when the Larkinson fleet entered the Red Ocean.

Ves originally conceived of the Everchanger and its associated side projects when he was back in the old galaxy. Back then, he could not get a clear idea on the superior tech and materials he could gain access to when his fleet could shop around in places like Chance Bay, Pellysa III and Davute VII.

It was different now. The Golden Skull Alliance not only committed to staying in the Krakatoa Middle Zone for the time being, but also founded the Open Consortium which was slowly integrating into the regional economy.

Now that the participants in the projects knew what they had to work with, they could finally make real progress in integrating a lot of attractive Red Ocean goodies into the mounted wargear designs.

Ves paid more attention to the artillery wargear loadout than the other ones due to its immense value in the battles of today. The project related to this loadout had to overhaul its progress multiple times as the requirements changed.

Although Ves understood how damaging it could be to change the goalposts so often, he did not want the artillery wargear loadout to become marginally relevant as soon as it was finished.

Anyway, he did not come here to review the artillery wargear loadout that was under development.

He was much more interested in observing the progress that Dr. Perris and her staff had made in the so-called meat suit project.

In response to his request, Dr. Perris led him out of her personal lab and brought him to a different section of the deck. After undergoing a serious security check, they entered a restricted laboratory where a number of Lifer biotech researchers were quietly working on the many problems related to the secret project.

"Welcome to the Scarlet Garden." The female apprentice biomech designer introduced for the benefit of Ves. "The Scarlet Garden Biocombat Department is a new research group within the Larkinson Biotech Institute that is mainly focused on the direct combat applications of biotechnology. Director Ranya Wodin has appointed me as its head and this is where the 'meat suit' is being developed."

The section certainly deserved its name. The interior was predominantly coated in red in order to emphasize the theme and the inherent danger of the research being performed in these labs.

After Dr. Perris spent a bit of time introducing Ves to the researchers assigned to the Scarlet Garden, they moved on to a massive storage hall where literal mountains of frozen flesh were being stored inside specialized transparent storage compartments.

The pale white and gray flesh evoked a lot of familiarity in Ves.

"That's... astral beast flesh!"

Dr. Perris nodded. "Correct. Although our clan has sold the overwhelming majority of organic tissue taken from the enormous carcass of the Titania, we still preserve many tons of the flesh for various reasons. The Titania's flesh not only provides us with great research material, but can also serve as the ingredients for other combat-oriented biotech applications. Although it has properties that are not ideal, it is extremely resilient and fairly easy to regenerate compared to the prevailing alternatives."

The thought of using the flesh of a dead astral beast to make other products sounded disgusting to Ves. It was little different from using the leather derived from the hide of a sentient alien being to make a handbag.

Ves briefly wondered whether aliens would barbecue his own flesh and use his skin to make their own version of a handbag in the future.

He shook his head. What a silly thought!

"Have you done anything useful with the Titania's tissue samples as of yet?" Ves asked.

"We researched ways to turn it into the principal material for the Titan-3 Project ever since we obtained all of this flesh and discovered its superior properties. Although we had to get back to the drawing board once again, our expectations are much higher due to the availability of higher-quality organic materials."

The Titan-3 Project was the more formal name of the meat suit research project. It was the first of its kind in the Larkinson Clan and had gone through many twists and turns.

After Ves had his fill of observing the piles of macabre astral beast flesh, Dr. Perris led Ves out of the storage hall and led him over to a design compartment where she had prepared several miniature models.

Each of them depicted the numerous different iterations of the meat suit. The earlier ones looked fairly conventional. They simply made the Everchanger look as if he was a giant human.

Dr. Perris picked up the first organic mech figurine. "Our initial progress was decent but not spectacular. While we are able to design a basic meat suit, it failed to meet our requirements. Its tissue is too weak and we could not make the samples resonate with Venerable Joshua."

She put down the figurine and picked one in the middle. This one looked substantially deadlier and incorporated numerous different organic weapon modules.

"Once we entered the Red Ocean, we gained access to heartland-level tech and materials, which we quickly used to our advantage. The anticipated performance of this meat suit is much higher and can turn the Everchanger into a powerhouse as long as the organic mounted wargear remains operational. It still has its shortcomings, though. Its durability still remains a concern and we were still encountering hindrances in making it resonate with Venerable Joshua. We were close to requesting your permission to contact the Lifer biomech designers to solve this problem."

"I would have given it if you asked." Ves said.

Although it was not wise to work together with outsiders on a project that had real significance in the defense of the clan, the Titan-3 Project was not that critical compared to the Everchanger itself.

So what if the specifications of the meat suit leaked? The finished product would wield so much power that it could resist a lot of attacks head-on. Its most obvious weakness, its lack of ranged weapons, was such an obvious element that Ves did not mind if everyone in the new frontier learned about this fact!

"I'm not interested in the work that we have phased out." Ves said. "Please move on to the latest iteration of the Titan-3 Project. I want to know where we stand."

Dr. Perris put down the figurine she was holding and moved to the end of the table where the mockup of the latest version of the meat suit design was resting.

"This is the version that corresponds to the latest conditions. It not only makes full use of the Titania's powerful flesh, but also incorporates all of the solutions we have developed in the earlier versions and more."

She handed the hefty figurine over to Ves who accepted it with pleasure. He could immediately tell it was made out of actual astral beast flesh which made it a lot heavier and weirder than normal.

"Given the density of the Titania's flesh and how much of it will be used to make the meat suit, the final product will be substantially more heavy." Ves stated. "The Everchanger's flight system will not be able to cope with all of the extra mass. How do you intend to solve the mobility problem?"

"I have consulted with Miss Juliet Stameris and requested her help in designing additional organic mobility systems." Perris replied as she pointed out various organic modules embedded in the rear of the meat suit. "We have included an enlarged and more powerful organic flight system that provides substantially greater thrust power. The Everchanger equipped with the meat suit will not be as sluggish as the Shield of Samar with this upgrade."

"What about these nozzles? Are they boosters? They look awfully large and vulnerable."

"Correct, sir. To be more precise, they are single-use boosters that can only burn at full power for a certain interval of time before completely running out of high-density mech-grade fuel. Their purpose is to help the Everchanger close the gap between our expeditionary fleet and a distant enemy position as quickly as possible. Under ideal circumstances, the Everchanger equipped with this meat suit can come close to matching the acceleration of the Dark Zephyr."

That was quite impressive!

The price may be a bit much, but as long as the Everchanger equipped with the meat suit got close to an enemy fleet, it could definitely wreak a lot of havoc by relying on its overwhelming power at close range!

There was only one detail that Ves was concerned about. "These oversized boosters only work with high-density fuel?"

Perris briefly grimaced. "Correct, and it is not an average formula either. The specific fuel we have chosen to work with is particularly high in quality even among other high-density fuel formulations. Only specialized refineries can synthesize this fuel in usable quantities. For now, we have stocked a modest amount of this fuel in our stores, but we should look towards expanding our fuel reserves once we complete the meat suit."

"I will pass that on to the chief ministers. It would be ideal if we can obtain a refinery ship so that we can produce all of the fuel varieties that many of our assets are burning on a frequent basis. We can become a lot less dependent on third parties if we obtain such a useful vessel."

That was not relevant to the Titan-3 Project so Ves quickly turned his attention back to the specifications of the meat suit.

They talked a bit more about the mobility of the meat suit. A big issue was that once the one-time boosters burnt all of its high-density fuel, the Everchanger's speed and acceleration became a lot more mediocre.

Dr. Perris succinctly described the challenge of using the meat seat in battle. "If you send in the Everchanger in this loadout, then you better hope it can defeat the opposition on the other side. Otherwise, the expert mech must purge the meat suit from its frame in order to lighten its burden and flee more quickly from a precarious situation."

That did not sound good.

Chapter 3749 - Natural Ingredient

The gap-closing capabilities of the Titan-3 Project did not have to be so extreme.

There were organic and mechanical booster modules that possessed much more temperate characteristics.

For example, there was a variation of the organic booster model that could be activated two separate times before they ran out of fuel.

This was particularly popular for melee mechs specialized in raiding and sabotage actions. They could get close to an enemy position quickly, perform their missions, and boost away from the danger zone when they were done.

Aside from that, there were many other variants that could be activated and deactivated upon command were the most conventional ones available.

However, Ves fully understood why Dr. Perris made the design choice to opt for a single-use organic booster model.

It was incredibly powerful.

All of the organic parts related to modulating the thrust output and fuel expenditure were left out. Instead, the boosters were solely designed to deliver the maximum thrust power that a component of such a size could deliver!

By adhering to such an extreme and singular goal, the single-use boosters were much more powerful and efficient than the more complicated alternatives.

Was it the right choice to equip the Everchanger with a meat suit that could only go on a one-way trip to the enemy position while it was encumbered by so much repurposed astral beast flesh?

It depended on the situation.

"We can cope with this shortcoming." Ves said as he continued to study the scale model of the latest iteration of the Titan-3 Project. "The meat suit is an optional piece of equipment. We don't have to make use of it in every battle. We should only reserve it for battles where we have a need to send a powerhouse mech all the way to our opponents. If the enemy does not have any powerful defenses against the Everchanger equipped with the meat suit, then the risk that Venerable Joshua must call a retreat is small. It won't have to rely on boosters to get away if that is the case."

If the Larkinsons miscalculated the situation, then Venerable Joshua always had the option to purge the meat suit and free up the regular version of the Everchanger.

The expert hero mech was a lot faster and more mobile in its base form!

This was not a scenario that Ves liked, though. The meat suit was expensive and it would be a shame if it got tossed away only for the enemy to annihilate it in spite!

After Ves knew everything he needed to know about its mobility, he turned its attention to its more direct combat capabilities.

"The Titan-3 Project is designed to perform as an overwhelming melee powerhouse. Before, I wanted it to turn into a humanoid monster that can bull through enemy mech formations and wreak havoc among them, but that is less of a priority as of late."

Ves almost forgot the last time the Larkinsons fought against a conventional mech force. The MTA protection period was still valid for a period of time so there was not an acute need to strengthen his clan's ability to fight against human forces.

"What we truly need is a more powerful weapon against warships like the ones utilized by the pakklaton race." Ves continued. "I hope our Titan-3 Project can fulfill this role."

Dr. Perris responded with a confident smile. "The meat suit will definitely satisfy you. Do you recall how difficult it was for our weapons to pierce through the outer layers of the Titania? There are two different reasons why that was the case. First, the Titania's flesh

is dense and enhanced by a myriad of different exotic materials that the ancient creature has ingested over the years. Second, its organic nature makes it easy for it to heal and regenerate. When applied to a form that is the size of an enlarged mech, it is tough enough to withstand a lot of firepower but also mobile enough to evade some attacks."

"Can you give me the numbers?"

"Why certainly."

The biomech designer presented a few documents that summarized the projected defensive parameters of the Titan-3 Project.

Ves quickly learned that the Titania's flesh wasn't as exaggeratingly tough as he expected.

The reason why the original astral beast was so hard to take down was because the creature was so immense. She was 5 kilometers long and 3 kilometers wide. On top of that, much of her internal structure was made out of solid flesh and matter. That provided the creature with such an immense buffer that ordinary weapons would have put in an extreme amount of effort in order to reach the core of the massive beast!

The Titan-3 Project, while making use of the same flesh of the ancient astral beast, was not nearly as thick and massive. It only used a speck of the flesh that protected the Titania.

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So how could it possibly resist enough damage to turn the meat suit viable as a fleet destroying machine?

"The documents that you are perusing right now are not the complete picture." Dr. Perris said and used her comm to flick over another virtual document. "These are the test results that we have obtained after working together with Venerable Joshua. His unique talents have completely changed the game."

She did not exaggerate. While the document stated that Venerable Joshua's attempts to resonate with regular cloned organic tissue did not yield any success due to lacking resonating materials, the Titania's tissue samples were a different story.

"What?!" Ves leaned forward as if he wanted to make sure he was interpreting the explanations and data correctly. Joshua has actually succeeded in resonating with the Titania's dead flesh?"

"Yes. This is a pleasant surprise. While the effect is not as strong as we would wish, I believe the finished version of the Titan-3 Project will be able to yield a pleasant surprise. If you wish, I can show you the log footage."

"Please do. I need to see this for myself."

The footage was not exciting. It merely showed Venerable Joshua cooperating with a series of lab tests by employing his unique life domain in different experiments.

Although his life domain was extremely rare in regular mech circles, the biomech community actually possessed a greater familiarity with expert pilots who possessed similar inclinations.

This was why Dr. Perris and her staff performed a series of standard experiments to learn how Venerable Joshua was able to interact with different forms of biotechnology.

The bad news was that Joshua actually didn't perform well in most of the tests. Other expert pilots with a focus on life almost always piloted biomechs and possessed a deeper understanding and connection with them. It was logical for them to evolve their strengths in a way that allowed them to make better use of organic matter.

Joshua on the other hand piloted 'living mechs' rather than 'biomechs' throughout his career. The former had always been regular metallic mechs that did not contain a hint of organic components.

Therefore, it shouldn't have been a surprise that Joshua's compatibility with biotechnology wasn't the best.

This made the unexpected outcome of the test involving the Titania's biomatter so surprising. What made it different from other forms of tissue? Why could Joshua resonate with it when it didn't even contain any of the rare resonating materials known to humanity? Did it contain a secret ingredient? Or was another factor at play?

"I think... I have a possible answer to this result." Ves slowly said. "What do you think?"

Dr. Perris was not stupid. She might just be an Apprentice, but she was a qualified biomech designer who had already spent a lot of time in the Larkinson Clan.

"I believe it has to do with your specialization. From what I understand of your design philosophy and Venerable Joshua's specialization, the distinction here is that the previous experiments failed because we were making use of artificially-cloned tissue samples. In other words, they are lab-grown pieces of meat that have never played a part in any organism's life."

The Dragon's Den regularly produced artificial biomatter for various purposes. It was standard practice and it was a much more convenient and humane way of performing biological experiments and procedures than harvesting flesh from other organisms.

However, this method of creating biomatter had a major flaw. It had no ties to any living entities so it was lacking a crucial element.

"The Titania is the opposite of artificial tissue." Dr. Perris stated. "It is completely natural. Not only that, but it is grown by an ancient creature that has lived an extremely long and relatively rich life. While the exact ages of the harvest flesh varies by hundreds if not thousands of years, they are all intricately connected to a living astral beast. We believe that has imparted all of its flesh with an invisible quality that makes them a lot more compatible to Venerable Joshua."

This was incredibly interesting to Ves. The Titania's flesh was a natural resonating material. No one knew the exact factors that made this possible, but the point was that the Titan-3 Project had obtained the breakthrough it needed to make real progress!

"So tell me how this discovery ties into the Titan-3 Project." Ves asked.

The biomech designer activated another projection that displayed a simulated scenario where Venerable Joshua resonated with the Everchanger while it was equipped with a version of the meat suit.

The expert pilot not only succeeded in resonating with the mounted wargear as a whole, but could also take advantage of this property!

By empowering the meat suit with true resonance, it became a lot more resilient against damage. Any non-expert mech sources of damage would become drastically less effective because they were unable to overcome the reality-distorting effect that made resonating expert mechs so tough to eliminate!

Even if a powerful enemy came along and damaged portions of the meat suit, Venerable Joshua was able to correct it by activating its Active Regeneration resonating ability!

With the power of Fixer Iron, the Everchanger was able to extend its powerful regeneration effect to its meat suit, thereby repairing any damaged tissue and possibly even growing additional tissue to fill in any gaps in the organic structure!

"How sure are you that the Active Regeneration resonating ability will even work?" Ves inquired. "After all, the meat suit is not technically a part of the Everchanger. It's an add-on that is outside of the scope of the base model."

"We do not know for certain whether our theories are correct and whether this simulation is accurate enough." Dr. Perris frankly admitted. "We can only truly find out

when we actually grow the meat suit and test it out in reality. This is also why we have not yet completed this project as of yet. We still need to gather enough data as possible in order to strengthen or disprove our many assumptions about the Titan-3 Project. For what it is worth, I have a high confidence that the current iteration of the meat suit will succeed, but we cannot be 100 percent certain."

Ves understood the dilemma that the Scarlet Garden was in and did not begrudge Dr. Perris for taking her time.

"That's fine, but I hope that the time for making guesses will soon come to an end."

"We only need a few more weeks to formally complete the Titan-3 Project, sir. The only issue is that it will take a month, maybe two, to reshape the Titania's biomatter into the actual meat suit. This is a slow and cumbersome process that cannot be rushed."

"That's acceptable. I don't think we will enter into battle anytime soon. Once it is complete, how well do you think its defenses will fare against strong opponents?"

"The combination of superior defenses and high-speed cellular regeneration will turn the meat suit into a resilient combat monster that cannot be put down unless an enemy is able to destroy it with a single powerful blow. As long as the meat suit remains intact enough, Venerable Joshua will always be able to restore its condition and resist more damage as a result. This will especially become more prominent over time as his resonance strength grows. If he lives long enough to become a high-tier expert pilot, then..."

"The meat suit will become as unkillable as a zombie!"

Chapter 3750 - Unorthodox Attack Method

The Titan-3 Project was unkillable under the right circumstances.

Derived from the matter harvested from the Titania's carcass, the meat suit was unexpectedly compatible with Venerable Joshua.

Ves believed this was not only related to his life domain, but also his passing familiarity with Titania the design spirit.

Although Ves had only tied the Titania to the Minerva, an expert mech that was exclusive to Commander Casella, that did not mean that Joshua had no ways of contacting the new design spirit.

Joshua only needed to approach the Minerva and experience its glow to come into contact with the Titania.

As long as Joshua managed to develop a friendship with the remnant consciousness of the ancient astral beast, he could definitely increase his affinity with her former flesh!

This was why Ves had high hopes for the amazing resilience of the meat suit. Only a mech pilot like Joshua could draw out its full potential!

The hope was that the meat suit would therefore turn the Everchanger into a miniature juggernaut! Even if its size did not even come close to matching the enormous dimensions of the Uranus, the meat suit was still large and tough enough to withstand a lot of punishment!

"The Titan-3 Project is quite powerful, but its properties allow it to excel in battles of attrition." Dr. Perris explained. "Since that is the case, we decided to add additional energy cells and biological power reactors to enhance the meat suit's staying power. As long as the meat suit does not incur critical damage to its biosystems, it will always be able to keep fighting."

Ves liked this aspect. "That's good. The Everchanger is not a mech that scores high on endurance. If it can drastically increase the time it can remain active on the battlefield by donning this meat suit, then that is worthwhile enough to invest in its development."

This turned the meat suit into a combat engine that just kept fighting under difficult circumstances!

As long as the enemy could not overcome the meat suit's defenses straight away, it was impossible to take it down as it continued to regenerate its damage while relying on its vast power reserves to keep on fighting!

After Ves studied the numbers and verified that the meat suit should theoretically be able to stay in a fight for several hours as long as Venerable Joshua wasn't pushing it too hard, he moved on to its offensive capabilities.

"I see that you have failed to integrate any ranged weapons in the meat suit. In fact, you also removed the spear that was present in the earlier iterations of its design."

Dr. Perris looked apologetic. "From the moment we chose to make the meat suit out of the Titania's biomatter, we were bound by its constraints. Given that the Titania was originally a massive but highly inflexible astral beast, the harvested tissue also possesses these traits. In order for the flesh to remain so dense, strong and resilient, we cannot treat it too much in order to make it more flexible or adaptable. Any changes we have made to the tissue has drastically weakened its structure, thereby turning them into weak points that can easily be exploited by our enemies. Without understanding the Titania's biomatter on a deeper level, we can only work with what we have."

The consequence was that the Titania's flesh could not be repurposed into sophisticated bioweapons such as organic laser cannons and so on. The dense flesh

was also lacking in flexibility and fine-grained movements, so the meat suit would not be able to wield any melee weapons with adequate proficiency.

"The flesh we are employing are akin to alloy bricks that cannot easily be bent or shaped." Perris stated. "Since that is the case, we have eschewed sophisticated weaponry and resorted to embedding the arms of the mechs with sharp and thick claws."

The reinforced claws were large, thick and made of strong alloy.

Their purpose was fairly clear at first glance. They were meant to tear through the thick hull plating that protected ships from outside factors!

Even if the claws became chipped or damaged during a battle, it was no big deal to replace them after a battle had ended. There was even hope that Venerable Joshua would be able to regenerate easily enough since they were made out of biometals!

"These claws can be retracted, right?" Ves asked.

Dr. Perris nodded. "Correct. If the claws are not suitable and if applying blunt force trauma is more preferable, then the meat suit can retract its claws and fight with its fists. With the help of Tifi Coslone, we have designed the arms to be able to deliver a huge amount of physical force. This is also what the Titania's flesh excels at. The meat suit fights like a heavyweight brawler that relies on simple, winding attacks that can crush mechs with a single strike or punch holes through multiple layers of hull plating. There is no mech in the Larkinson Clan that can come close to dealing so much physical damage!"

It was tough for Ves to determine the best trait of the meat suit. Its high resilience and fast regeneration made it into an unkillable zombie machine. Its large size combined with its enormous physical might turned it into a close-ranged brawler that could tear entire ships apart if unopposed!

As Ves imagined the meat suit's performance in close-ranged combat, he did not think that few melee mechs would even dare to confront the machine directly.

Every other mech would just get crushed by the meat suit's vastly superior physical strength!

Not all was well, though.

As Ves continued to learn about the meat suit's exact specifications, he identified a number of shortcomings and vulnerabilities that could potentially hamper its effectiveness.

Ves put down the organic mech figurine. "I am impressed by what you and your team have accomplished, especially with minimal output from myself, but I still have a couple of concerns. I won't mention anything about the meat suit's obvious lack of ranged weapons. It is not a big deal if it cannot retaliate against ranged opponents as there will be other friendly mechs that can provide covering fire. What I need is a mech that can employ brute force to rip apart enemy forces that are not set up to defend against such a direct approach."

"About that, sir..."

"What is it, Perris?"

The biomech designer had presented her case with pride and confidence so far. It was odd for her to show so much hesitation all of a sudden.

"When we researched potential ways to integrate ranged weapon systems in the meat suit, we have found that all of the conventional options are not viable due to their inherent incompatibility with the Titania's flesh. However, one of the researchers assigned to the Scarlet Garden has come up with a rather novel idea."

"And what is that?"

"Before I say anything further, do you recall how the Titania originally fought against our fleet when we encountered the astral beast in space?"

Ves frowned and revisited his memories of the short battle. The Titania, despite being an ancient astral beast that was the size of a medium-sized battleship, was remarkably lacking in firepower.

Part of that was because the Larkinson fleet engaged the creature at longer ranges most of the time.

The Titania would have been able to bite and crush the expeditionary fleet's starships if it ever got close, but the Golden Skull Alliance wasn't stupid enough to let that happen!

Another part why the Titania's offense was so lackluster was that it had barely survived a fight against a mysterious phase whale. With so many scars and missing tissue, the creature was not able to put up a good enough fight against the Golden Skull Alliance.

However, Ves would be lying if he claimed the Titania easily succumbed. Even in a heavily-damaged state, she was still able to pose a lot of threat to the expeditionary fleet by employing a strange means of attack.

The Titania literally launched her own offspring towards her enemies!

Due to her immense size and biomass, she could comfortably launch meat torpedoes that were the size of mechs or larger at an enemy fleet!

Even though the tough missiles could eventually be intercepted as long as they received enough attacks, the expeditionary fleet still fell into a precarious situation if it wasn't able to defeat the Titania quickly.

Ves still had a decent impression of this unorthodox attack method. There had to be a reason why Dr. Perris brought it up in a discussion about the meat suit.

His eyes widened.

"Wait a minute... are you saying... the meat suit can attack at range by giving birth to children?"

The female biomech designer awkwardly coughed. "I wouldn't put it in those terms, sir. The meat suit is not the Titania and it doesn't have the reserves of biomass to launch those large flesh torpedoes. What we have managed to do is reverse engineer some of the mechanics behind the Titania's attack method and bioprogram a small-scale biological attack method that is derived from this research."

In order to illustrate her point, Dr. Perris projected the footage of another simulated battle.

This time, it showed the meat suit confronting an enemy fleet. While the target vessels did not possess enough defenses to repel the Everchanger when it was equipped with its organic wargear, the problem was that there were hundreds of vessels!

Even if the enemy ships weren't particularly large or important, the meat suit did not possess the ability to inflict mass destruction at a scale that could effectively destroy the entire fleet in a timely manner.

This was where its alternate attack method came into play.

The meat suit did not approach any of the enemy vessels but instead flew through their formation.

During this flight, the surface of the meat suit bubbled before they spat out small balls of flesh that launched towards the surrounding ships.

The clip then centered around one of the balls that impacted against the surface of an enemy ship shortly afterwards.

Once the flesh ball made contact, it began to search for weak points before trying to drill through the hull of the vessel.

If the autonomous flesh ball succeeded in entering the enemy vessel, it could subsequently absorb a lot of suitable matter so that it could rapidly expand in size and power!

What happened next was difficult to watch for Ves. The tiny flesh ball grew into a creature that was akin to a tiny astral beast. It began to wreak havoc inside the flesh and the crew were simply incapable of defending against a powerful enemy that had moved past all of the ship's exterior defenses!

If multiple flesh balls happened to land on the same ship, then the quantity of rapidly-growing offspring could easily destroy an entire starship from the inside!

Even though the simulated scenario was not entirely realistic, it still showcased the huge amount of destructive potential the meat suit possessed if it employed this unorthodox attack method!

What Ves managed to observe was hardly different from purposefully infecting enemy vessels with voribugs!

The difference between the 'astral beast offspring' and the voribugs was that the latter were better at this job.

Even so, this was a horrifying attack method that was sure to disgust a lot of people if exposed!

Ves frowned at Perris. "I cannot deny the impressive combat effectiveness of this organic attack method. I would be highly impressed if you can add this feature to the actual meat seat. There's a big issue that prevents me from approving it. I am pretty sure that this organic weapon system is illegal. It is a self-replicating bioweapon that can not only depopulate entire ships, but also planets if it runs out of control."

There was a very big taboo against employing biological monstrosities that could easily snowball to the point where they consumed everything alive on a planet!

Despite the admonishment, Dr. Perris did not look defeated. AL L NOVEL full.com

"It doesn't have to be a self-replicating bioweapon, sir. As long as we program the 'offspring' so that they cannot reproduce any further, they can be contained. Their effectiveness against ships will drop if this is the case, but this is not a fatal setback. This is not an unheard-of attack method back in the Life Research Association. It is hardly different from using mechanical bots to sabotage enemy ships from within. They are just organic in this instance."

In other words, it might technically be legal for the meat suit to make use of this insidious attack method!

