

Mech 3981

Chapter 3981 Unexpected Ideas

"Let me just say that I am cautiously optimistic about the prospects of this Transporter Project of yours." Ves eventually said after Juliet answered a few more questions. "It doesn't sound like a mech that can take the market by storm, but I do recognize its potential to become a stable seller that will completely fade."

What he meant by that was that he did not expect the Transporter Project to spike in sales once it was released onto the market.

Instead, its sales would remain modest but relatively stable while it was in production.

The reason for that was because Ves estimated that only a limited number of customers were interested in grenadier mechs.

However, there were always situations where they could be useful, there should always be people who ordered a batch of Juliet's new light mech from time to time.

As long as the Transporter Project was able to stand out from the competition by offering a useful glow and performing decently enough in other aspects, it had the potential to earn a nice amount of revenue by capturing a substantial market share in its niche!

This could also be wishful thinking on his part. Ves truly couldn't tell whether the Transporter Project would ultimately be worth the time and effort that Juliet spent on its design.

It was fine even if it failed. Juliet would learn valuable lessons from this experience and stand a better chance to succeed in her next attempt.

"I'm curious, Juliet. Why did you opt to design a mech based on a more obscure mech type this time? Why did you forgo the opportunity to design a more popular machine such as a light skirmisher?"

"There are too many light skirmishers on the market." The Penitent Sister mech designer stoically replied. "I do not feel confident enough that my work can capture enough market share as of yet. I still need to make more breakthroughs in my research and design philosophy. I am more comfortable with working on a grenadier mech because there is less pressure."

"I understand."

He truly did. Her strategy was similar to the one he adopted at the start of his career.

While Ves felt confident enough to compete in the bigger leagues, Juliet was still a relative newcomer when it came to designing commercial mechs. It was safer and less stressful for her to start small and slowly work her way up, at least when it came to her own projects.

"We already have the Ferocious Piranha anyway." Gloriana commented. "If Juliet wants to introduce her own light skirmisher to the market, then her main competitor will be us! This will most certainly result in cannibalizing our existing product's market share. The only way this won't happen is if her own interpretation of this mech type is vastly different from ours."

Ves shook his head. "We don't need to worry about that for the time being. Even if it happens in the future, it is not a big deal. If one of our older mech models can't defend its market share against any alternative products, it doesn't deserve to sell as much anymore. I would rather want its replacement to come from the LMC instead of a rival mech company."

This was a rather broadminded perspective and one that he did not see issue with. It was normal for larger mech companies to release multiple different mech lines that had the potential to overlap with each other.

Even though this was rather inefficient, a mech company enjoyed more redundancy as a result. If one mech model fell off, the other one could still cover the same market and keep turning a profit.

However, the Living Mech Corporation had yet to reach the point where it could play this game. It still needed to build up a complete and coherent mech catalog!

After clearing up this matter, Ves turned to the pair of Janassa Pellier and Tifi Coslone.

"I've heard that both of you want to collaborate on a pair of commercial mech designs, is that right?"

Janassa nodded. "Yes. Both of us possess similar specializations and we are already used to collaborating on many different mech designs over the years. We would like to continue that for our next commercial mech designs as we are most comfortable with working this way."

"I have no problem with that." Ves shrugged. "While I would caution you not to become overly dependent on other mech designers, right now it is more important to make sure that we are able to design as many successful products as possible for this design round. In that sense, it doesn't matter whether the two of you work alone on your own products or if you choose to collaborate on both."

"Thank you for your understanding sir. As for the mechs we have in mind, let me introduce my idea first."

Just like the others, Janassa displayed her draft design on the central projection.

"This... is a bestial mech!"

Ves did not expect one of the mech designers working for him to come up with a bestial mech.

However, when he thought about Janassa Pellier's specialty, he understood that it made sense for her to dabble in non-humanoid mechs.

While humanoid mechs were more versatile in combat due to the ease in which they could carry and wield different weapons, bestial mechs often enjoyed greater advantages in leveraging their strengths due to their more natural combat forms.

Interestingly enough, Janassa opted to design an avian mech.

What stood out from the bird-like mech was that it featured a decent degree of articulation. It possessed a pair of large and sturdy wings that were more designed to attack than to provide thrust.

This was clearly evident due to its sharp edges!

The wings weren't the only weapons. The avian mech also featured a pair of claws that looked like they could pierce or even drill through armored surfaces.

On top of that, the avian mech also possessed a long and sharp beak that could be employed in modest charge attacks.

Overall, Ves could easily see that this avian mech was clearly oriented towards offense. It was not as light as other avian mechs and it looked as if it could be formidable when deployed in attack formations.

"So what is the idea behind this avian mech?"

"The Sharpwing Project is a bird mech that is good at charging and attacking." Janassa explained. "It is a difficult machine to fight at close range because it excels at performing repeated attack runs. Since it can choose from a variety of different weapon systems, it can always find a way to deal effective damage."

This looked like a risky mech to Ves. It did not appear to carry any ranged weapons, so it was entirely dependent on swooping in to strike an opponent with its sharp wings or tearing its claws through a vulnerable weak point.

This could work great if the Sharpwing Project was able to swoop out without encountering any hindrances.

If the way forward was blocked or if it encountered another mishap, then it was likely that the avian mech would fall!

"I can see how your Sharpwing Project can be useful, Janassa, but it doesn't seem to conform to your style." Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "A mech like this relies on momentum rather than pure mechanical might to inflict damage."

"Oh, the Sharpwing Project can still put up a fight even if it is stalled, sir. This alone makes it stand out from most comparable avian mechs on the market." Janassa confidently answered.

"At what cost, though? There are always tradeoffs. This Sharpwing Project of yours doesn't appear to be particularly light or cheap."

"That is true. I needed to make it large and robust enough in order to fulfill its second main function."

"And what is that, Janassa?"

The female Journeyman pointed at the large and frankly oversized flight system mounted on her Sharpwing Project.

"Avian mechs are known for their mobility, and this is no different for my Sharpwing Project. I deliberately chose to equip my work with a flight system that is more usually seen in heavy mechs."

"Doesn't that make this mech too unstable?"

"It is not that bad as it looks. As long as the mech pilot doesn't abuse the flight system, the Sharpwing Project will be able to hold together."

Ves scratched his head. There was something about this mech design that he was missing. The flight system was too large and powerful. He could not understand the full logic behind this choice.

Not only would the flight system exert a lot more stress on the mech frame, it would also expend a lot more fuel and energy when used.

It was also heavier than it needed to be and imposed higher demands on the rest of the mech in order to support its presence.

While Ves had to admit that it could get from A to B a lot faster than many other mechs, was it necessary to make so many compromises?

Janassa grinned and gestured towards Tifi. "The Sharpwing Project only makes sense when it is paired with my friend's Mauler Project."

Tifi Coslone waved her hand.

A new draft design appeared in the central projection, but different from the other times, the Sharpwing Project did not make way this time.

The latest mech design was another bestial mech. This one was a tiger mech, which briefly reminded Ves of his Devil Tiger.

However, it only took a short moment for Ves to realize that Tifi Coslone's approach towards a tiger mech was vastly different!

"This is not a normal tiger mech. It is a heavy tiger mech!"

The size and bulk of this new bestial mech was much more formidable than Ves expected out of a tiger mech. Its thick limbs exuded a lot of strength. They could probably threaten a defensive mech if they were allowed to come close and attack with impunity!

Aside from its powerful limbs, the tiger mech could also devastate any opponents caught within its grasp by utilizing its powerful teeth and maw to tear and bite through its prey!

"The Mauler Project is a tiger mech that I came up with after trying to find a solution against astral beasts and other large targets." Tifi explained. "I know that I am not the only one that is trying to solve this problem, but this is my specific answer. Every part about this tiger mech is designed to inflict massive damage onto any target in front of it, no matter if it is a kilometers-long starship or another mech."

In order to make sure that it was able to stay in a fight long enough to deal all of this damage, the heavy tiger mech was clad in plenty of armor. It was an assault-oriented mech that would not go down easy, that was for certain!

Gloriana frowned when she felt disturbed by its configuration. "There is one problem with the Mauler Project. It isn't fast enough. Compared to its strong limbs and its heavy armor system, its flight system is not powerful enough to catch up to other mechs. It will have to accelerate for an extended period of time in order to get close enough to a distant enemy position. The practicality of this Mauler Project is severely diminished as a result. Wait a second..."

"Did you realize it?" Ves grinned at his wife. "There's a reason why Janassa and Tifi's designs are displayed together. They are combination mechs!"

Combination mechs!

This wasn't the first time that Ves had seen them. He had seen multiple combinations in his life. In fact, he even designed a pair by making it so that the Amaranto could seamlessly mount onto the back of the Shield of Samar.

This was a different approach towards combination mechs!

The Sharpwing Project and the Mauler Project were two different bestial mechs that did not look like they were related to each other on the surface.

However, when Janassa activated a command that caused the image of the avian mech to mount onto the back of the tiger mech, the combination suddenly looked like an enormous tiger with wings!

"What the hell? Can this even work?"

Chapter 3982 The Might of Bestial Mechs

The Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project put Ves into a dilemma.

He could see the logic behind this pair of bestial mechs. Alone, they were powerful when they were in their element.

The avian mech of the pair excelled in battles where it had plenty of room to perform its attack runs. Just like lancer mechs, it excelled at building up momentum in order to deliver a strong impact on a less mobile target. While the Steelwing Project had to take care not to build up too much speed and crash itself against solid surfaces, it was an excellent mech for tearing apart lighter and weaker mechs, particularly those with ranged loadouts!

The tiger mech on the other hand was too slow to perform repeated charging attacks. Instead, it was much more suited to fight standing battles where it could take advantage of its superior mechanical bulk and strength.

The Mauler Project's powerful limbs were not only able to deliver powerful blunt impacts, but could also tear through layers of armor through its sharp and vicious claws!

Ves could easily envision the Mauler Project tearing through ranks of melee mechs. Compared to humanoid machines such as knight mechs or swordsman mechs, the Mauler Project could probably overpower all of them in frontal combat!

This was because the tiger project possessed four 'weapons' while a typical humanoid mech could only leverage two at most!

For example, in a duel between a tiger mech and a swordsman mech, the former only needed to utilize one or two front paws to block the latter's sword.

This allowed the tiger mech to bring forth its rear limbs to tear apart the exposed lower half of the swordsman mech!

A tiger mech with sufficient armor could also disregard the attacks of its opponents and pounce on an enemy humanoid mech!

Once a mech like the Mauler Project was able to grapple with a humanoid mech, it could use its claws to dig in and squeeze its captive prey.

If this wasn't enough to destroy its opponent, then it could use its powerful jaws to bite and tear through the defenseless torso of the trapped machine! Tiger mechs were notorious for chewing off many mechs like actual beasts. A lot of mech pilots died when the teeth of bestial mechs penetrated through the shell of their cockpits and tore apart their vulnerable bodies without mercy!

When it came to tiger mechs, the bigger and heavier they became, the more unreasonable it was to fight them in battle.

As mechs based on the form of a predator animal, tiger mechs possessed less flexibility than humanoid mechs but made up for it with greater force and power.

The Mauler Project was particularly large and heavy compared to ordinary tiger mechs! Tifi Coslone showed a lot of ambition and confidence in her draft design as she did not hesitate to pursue this mech concept to its extreme!

The result was a tiger mech with dimensions that were just below the limit where it could no longer occupy a standard mech slot aboard a carrier vessel.

This caused the tiger mech to become just as bulky as the Transcendent Punisher!

Of course, even if the two shared the same mass, their design directions were completely different.

The Transcendent Punisher put a lot of emphasis on maximizing the firepower and the persistence of its heavy cannons.

The Mauler Project channeled much of its capacity to strengthening and reinforcing its powerful limbs.

This turned the heavy tiger mech into one of the most formidable second-class melee mechs that Ves had seen!

Not even other notable melee mechs such as the Rigid Spine or the Second Sword could defeat it in a head-on clash. The Mauler Project was so mighty and resilient that it could power through any exquisite technique or precise attack and batter its target with unrelenting physical blows.

Only a mech that was just as heavy and armored as the Mauler Project could endure the onslaught!

For example, the Iron Crusher model of the dwarven Forgehammer Mech Regiment could withstand the initial blows and strike back hard by swinging its heavy maul.

Yet even then, the Mauler Project would probably gain the upper hand. The Iron Crusher may be able to deliver even more powerful blows due to the advantages of leverage, but it was too easy for a heavy tiger mech to disarm the hammer-wielding machine or just grapple with it to trap its arms!

The more Ves imagined the Mauler Project's performance in different scenarios, the more he became amazed by this mech concept.

Although the Steelwing Project was also powerful in the right situation, the Mauler Project was definitely the bigger and better brother of the two bestial mech designs.

Ves gained a new appreciation for Janassa and Tifi. Previously, the two Journeymen did not make any prominent achievements. While their specialties were useful, they were less universal than Sara Voiken's defensive specialty.

Now, he realized that he had missed a crucial detail.

The pair were naturally predisposed towards designing bestial mechs, especially melee-oriented ones!

Tiger mechs, centaur mechs, spider mechs and many other forms of bestial mechs relied a lot on physical and mechanical strength to defeat their foes.

With Janassa and Tifi's design solutions, they could magnify this crucial property, thereby producing bestial mechs that could overpower their opponents by an even greater margin!

Of course, that didn't mean that other bestial mech designs were any worse. There were all kinds of mech designers in the industry, and those that chose to design bestial mechs all had their own reasons to be confident about the combat power of their products.

Still, as far as the Larkinson Clan was concerned, Janassa and Tifi were by far the best mech designers to tackle bestial mech design projects!

"How much experience do you have with designing tiger mechs and other bestial mechs?" Ves asked the pair.

The two women briefly exchanged glances with each other. "A third of our mech designs are bestial mechs. Back when we were studying under Master Corenay, we

had to explore diverging mech forms in order to study and comprehend how their mechanical structures are able to exert force. We learned a lot from designing those bestial mechs."

"Are you confident in your ability to design competitive bestial mechs?"

"Of course." Janassa replied with an unmistakable touch of pride in her tone. "We may not understand bestial mechs as best as those who dedicated their careers to them, but we are no slouches on this front. They are the best carriers of our design solutions."

"That doesn't mean we are weak at designing humanoid mechs either. Two-thirds of our mech designs are still humanoid." Tifi quickly added.

"Don't worry. I'm not forcing the two of you to design bestial mechs on an exclusive basis. There are many other melee mechs such as the upcoming C-Man that could use the strength boosts that only you can provide. I am just wondering whether we should make a more serious effort into expanding our mech roster with bestial mechs."

Gloriana whipped around her head. "Are you sure about that, Ves? The Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project look decent at first glance, but they possess serious flaws that heavily limit their effectiveness in battle. I do not have confidence that they can take the mech market by storm."

She was right. The Steelwing Project was fast but not flexible. Its defensive parameters were not great and their large silhouettes made it easier for ranged mechs to tear them apart from a distance.

The Mauler Project might be the king in melee combat, but it could only become a practice target when attacked from a distance! Its slow mobility and sluggish frame meant that it was impossible for it to catch up with ranged mechs that were faster and more agile!

While Ves understood that the Steelwing Project was supposed to compensate for the Mauler Project's flaws when they merged together, the resulting combination was still too wieldy and heavy to dogfight against agile rifleman mechs and harasser mechs!

The fast and agile Stingripper could slowly toy both of these formidable bestial mechs to death!

"We are aware of their vulnerabilities." Janassa said. "The Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project are not meant to excel in many different scenarios. They are quite simply designed to smash through powerful defenses and battle lines."

The combination of the two essentially formed an effective if somewhat rudimentary sieging system.

The Steelwing Project's purpose was to deliver the Mauler Project to a hard target in a timely manner. Once the combined mechs reached their destination, the avian mech would detach the tiger mech and guard the flanks against hostile threats.

Meanwhile, the tiger mechs could go to town. No matter whether they were facing mechs or starships, their undaunted power allowed them to crush through any barrier that stood in their way!

"The combination that you have come up with is powerful, but the requirements are a bit high." Ves said. "First, the thrust power of the Steelwing Project must be great enough in order to carry around a heavy mech fast enough. Second, the Mauler Project must be made out of lots of hardy materials in order to withstand a lot of attacks. Both mech models will definitely be expensive. Maybe too expensive. I'm afraid that their prices won't make them attractive enough to convince customers to adopt your two-mech system."

The art of designing a good commercial mech was not just about devising the most powerful mechs.

Their work also had to be as cost-effective as possible!

In this regard, Ves was afraid that Janassa and Tifi's mech proposals did not score well in the second criteria.

Ves continued to think about the possible market reaction while he decided what he should do with these suggestions.

A part of him wanted to convince Janassa and Tifi to set aside these mech concepts and come up with different ideas that had greater commercial potential.

However, it was not in his nature to deny his fellow mech designers the opportunity to explore their design philosophies and pursue less standard ideas.

Even though he didn't feel confident in the pair's ability to design profitable mechs, he was willing to give them a chance.

"Our clan doesn't have much experience with bestial mechs so far." Ves eventually said. "I think it will be helpful to its development if we start to make forays into designing them. The Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project might not be suitable for the market, but I think they could make for a good core of a new bestial mech legion."

Gloriana furrowed her brows. "There are major differences between mechs designed for the Larkinson Army and mechs designed for the market. You can't just decide to use these bestial mechs for a new mech legion if they fail to take off in the mech market."

"I know that. What I mean is that we can observe the performance of the two products once they are released. Once we figure out their strengths and weaknesses, we can design better versions for ourselves."

"That... sounds costly."

"It doesn't have to be. If the Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project become popular enough, they will surely be able to generate at least a modest amount of profit."

He did not expect too much from them, actually. They were bound to be luxury products due to their high price levels and limited usefulness.

Janassa and Tifi weren't stupid. They already took this into account. One of the reasons why they still went through with these proposals was because they were aware that the LMC's products always possessed additional advantages!

"Our mech designs need an extra edge in order to increase their popularity. They can become much more valuable if you pair them up with the right glows!"

"That's right." Ves nodded in agreement. "My specialty can't turn a bad mech into a great one in one go, but I can definitely turn a decent mech into a more attractive product!"

Chapter 3983 Roles Reversed

Ves eventually approved Janassa and Tifi's proposals despite his many doubts on their commercial viability.

The Design Department should not limit itself to developing humanoid mechs. Janassa and Tifi were the closest thing to bestial mech designers that the Larkinson Clan had at its disposal, so Ves was keen for them to develop this aspect further.

Most mechs utilized by people came in the form of humanoid mechs, but that did not mean that bestial mechs had no value. They were just a bit harder for mech pilots to master and weren't as versatile in different battle situations.

However, as long as they fought under ideal conditions, they could easily burst more power than humanoid mechs!

Ves felt that his clan should have at least one mech legion that fielded bestial mechs. How could the clan of the Golden Cat live up to its symbolism if it didn't field a single feline mech model?

He felt it was only right for his clan to deploy thousands of ferocious tiger mechs on the battlefield in the future!

"Wait a minute. Why do I feel like I have to make this happen at all costs?"

His eyes narrowed in suspicion. Was he being influenced by Goldie? Had he become irrationally obsessed about developing tiger mechs just so that his clan could overwhelm its enemies by unleashing a sea of cat-like mechs?

"Well, it's fine." Ves shrugged.

He felt that it wasn't so bad to raise a troop centered around tiger mechs in the future.

After he obtained enough information about Janassa and Tifi's plans, he turned to the final pair of Journeymen in the meeting room.

"Sara, Dulo, do you plan to work on this time?"

"I already have a busy schedule." Sara Voiken spoke up. "My expertise is needed in many different mech design projects, most notably the expert mech design projects. On top of that, I think it is extremely important for me to be extensively involved in the aforementioned Mauler Project. Since the heavy tiger mech is meant to withstand a lot of damage, I should make sure its armor system can handle all of the physical stresses of combat. This doesn't leave me with time to pursue any other projects."

Ves frowned a bit. He was a little disappointed. Sara Voiken would definitely be able to design a decent space knight if she wanted to. However, she was in the same position as him. Her specialty was just too useful to set aside. Every project could benefit from her specialty.

He increased his resolve to hire another defense-oriented Journeyman in the next recruitment wave. The Design Department shouldn't have to be dependent on just a single key mech designer to service all of the defense requirements of its mech design projects!

"I understand." He said. "The current wave of design projects are too important to us. Whether it is an expert mech such as the C-Man Project or a commercial mech with amazing sales potential such as my Tutor Project, it is extremely important to ensure that their defensive parameters do not fall behind. The more durable they become, the more we are able to persuade our customers to entrust the lives of their mech pilots to our dependable products."

"Those are my thoughts as well." Sara Voiken nodded.

"I don't want your ability to develop your own mechs to grow rusty, though. I hope you will be able to come up with a good mech concept for the next design round."

"It will depend on how busy I become." Sara Voiken stated. "If there are too many expert mech design projects, I will end up in the same position as now. Don't get me

wrong, sir. I enjoy working with expert mechs. They are much more powerful than the machines that I am accustomed to working with. It is a gift for me to be able to make so many contributions to high-end mech designs."

"That is understandable, but don't forget that standard mechs are the root of our profession. The majority of our customers and clients are still regular mech pilots. They need the protection that only mech designers can provide to them. In time, our Design Department will welcome more defensive specialists, so you won't be as short on time in the future."

Sara Voiken didn't have any comments regarding this. The Larkinson Clan was too big for only a single defense-oriented mech designer. She possessed enough confidence in her abilities and did not fear additional competition.

In fact, having a like-minded colleague in the Larkinson Clan would probably be helpful for her progression as she could hold frequent exchanges with her fellow defensive specialists!

"What about you, Dulo? Your schedule is not as busy as none of the mech design projects that we have discussed so far involve spear weapons."

"That is correct, sir. I have been working on several potential ideas. It is not that difficult to come up with decent mechs that perform adequately in different scenarios, but that is not enough to develop a product that can generate sufficient revenue. After I attempted to devise a spearman mech that can be of much greater value by combining it with one of your glows, I think I have ended up with a good idea."

The male Voiken sibling uploaded his draft design to the central projection.

It turned out that Dulo Voiken visualized a landbound spearman mech. It was a relatively simple design and did not appear to feature too many bells and whistles.

Its frame was solid but not too heavy. It was capable of wielding a variety of spears, but preferred to carry a longer one that allowed it to strike its target without getting too close.

"This looks like an ordinary spearman mech." Ves commented. "It doesn't have a flight system so it can't fight in space. What use does it have and what are its selling points?"

To Ves, the spearman mech looked generic. There was nothing that immediately stood out to him. Its spear looked normal and its frame did not look as if it could deliver a powerful blow outside of performing a charge attack. Its armor layers weren't too thick so the mech wasn't able to endure too much damage either.

Perhaps the only clear positive point of this mech was that its mobility should be higher than normal. Its legs looked as if they could support a faster running speed. The mech

was also equipped with compact boosters that could give the spearman mech a short-term speed boost.

Before Dulo could unveil its role, Ketis spoke up first. Freewebnovel.com.

"This is a hunting mech." She declared with certainty as her eyes shone with appreciation. "Its configuration is similar to my Monster Slayer, except it is even better geared towards operating in hunting zones and untamed planets. This spearman mech is mobile enough to trek through rough terrain. It is also maneuverable enough to dance around large exobeasts. By relying on the reach of its main weapon, this mech can poke holes into its target without needing to step too close to a dangerous beast!"

Dulo and everyone else looked surprised at Ketis. Not even Ves had been able to figure out the draft design's purpose!

"Why are you looking at me like that?" She frowned. "Don't you know that hunting exobeasts used to be a hobby for Swordmaidens such as myself? We preferred to hunt dangerous beasts by relying on our bodies and our swords alone, but some prey are just too big. We could only hunt them down by relying on our mechs."

This was a dangerous pastime and one that the Swordmaidens no longer engaged in due to lack of access to hunting grounds.

"You're right, Ketis. This is indeed a mech designed to hunt beasts." Dulo admitted. "The Huntmaster Project is an idea that I created with the hunting industry in mind. You might not have heard about it, but hunting is a booming business in the Red Ocean. There are many more untamed planets in the new frontier that are filled with lots of alien flora and fauna. The most valuable planets with life often contain large and powerful exobeasts that are formidable existences within their habitats."

Ves scratched his head. "I understand the enthusiasm around hunting, but how do you intend to persuade those engaged in this activity to opt for your Huntmaster Project? Isn't it easier to bring a bunch of ranged mechs and just shoot them from a safe distance?"

"It's not as thrilling to shoot these majestic beasts with rifles or cannons." Ketis replied with clear disapproval on her face. "Ranged weapons also make a lot of noise and can completely disturb a hunting ground. However, the biggest disadvantage of using them is that they will ultimately inflict heavy and extensive damage to the body of the target. If you return from a hunting trip with a carcass that is beyond recognition, then good luck getting a decent trophy out of it. You can't brag about your hunt if you can't bring back a whole head!"

Dulo's choices made more sense in this context.

"Spearman mechs are ideal hunters." He claimed. "There are two main reasons for people to hunt exobeasts. The first one is to build up their reputation and prestige. Retrieving a body that is intact as possible is essential. Ideally, enough of it is undamaged to turn it into a whole display piece. The second reason is to harvest them for rare and valuable resources. It is the same reason why we harvested the organs from the Phaser fish-whales during the Purgatory Campaign. There are many more amazing alien species that can offer new possibilities to humanity. A spearman mech can better control its damage output and can utilize its precision to make sure it does not damage any essential organs or tissue."

All of this made sense. As Ves imagined the Huntmaster Project in the field, he thought of a spearman mech that operated alongside a dozen other identical machines.

Just like the primitive humans of the past, the Huntmaster Project mechs could easily combine forces and hunt down their prey by relying on the convenience provided by their spears!

"All of this sounds good." Ves said. "However, I don't think its value proposition is high enough to defeat the competition. I am sure that there are plenty of spearman mech models on the market that perform no differently from this balanced spearman mech."

Dulo grinned. "That's because I haven't explained its killer function yet. You see, one of the most persistent problems that hunting teams face is making their prey stay long enough to get killed."

"What do you mean by that?" Ves asked.

"He means that many exobeast species aren't stupid enough to fight a bunch of strange and odd mechs to the death." Ketis explained. "Exobeasts may be powerful, but the planets they live on are usually occupied by other massive species. Each of them needs to be able to pick their battles to some extent in order to survive in a dangerous environment. When exobeasts are confronted by metal machines that look completely different from the rivals they are accustomed to, they will get spooked much faster than usual. It is hard to prevent an exobeast from escaping if it truly wants to leave."

Dulo nodded again. "This is why I want my spearman mech to carry an aggressive and provocative glow. As long as the Huntmaster Project can anger an exobeast, the chances of completing a successful hunt should be much higher! The hunting teams that bring at least one of my mechs will also be able to save more time as their prey is less likely to run repeatedly when confronted with mechs."

Ves understood the premise behind this mech now. The Huntmaster Project was supposed to provoke hostile exobeasts by aggravating their bestial emotions with Zeigra's glow!

What a fitting combination. Zeigra used to be a Crown Cat that perished after getting hunted.

Now, the design spirit was about to side with the hunters by empowering their mechs!

Chapter 3984 Booming Business

Ves clapped. "This is quite a creative idea, Dulo. It not only makes sense to design a spearman mech to hunt exobeasts while inflicting as little unnecessary damage as possible, but you also found a way to make your product more indispensable to your target by relying on a useful glow. If Zeigra's glow can truly lower the occurrences where exobeasts have chosen flight over fight, the Huntmaster Project should be able to become an indispensable addition to any hunting team!"

This was great value! Dulo Voiken found a good use case for a mech with a glow. The best part about the Huntmaster Project was that it did not need to be too powerful and expensive in order to fulfill its role!

As long as the exobeasts weren't too powerful or difficult to fight against, the Huntmaster Project should be able to put up a decent fight against different hunting targets.

Even though Ves participated in a hunt in the past, he was not too well-versed in the issues that hunters had to deal with. He never knew that a lot of exobeasts would run away when confronted by mechs.

Given this phenomenon, a mech that could influence a beast to stand its ground was incredibly useful! The efficiency of hunting runs would skyrocket, which would not only save a lot of time, but also enable hunting teams to retrieve more prey and increase their revenue.

However, in order for all of this to work, the Huntmaster Project must truly be able to live up to Dulo's claims!

"Will Zeigra's glow truly be able to override the survival instincts of different beasts?" Ves skeptically asked.

"I think so." Ketis issued her judgment. As the resident hunting expert in the room, her input carried a lot of weight on this issue. "There are many different planets and many different environments in space. The variety of exobeasts is endless, and they all look and act in different ways. However, as long as a hunting team doesn't deploy on a life-bearing planet with too many abnormalities, the exobeasts they will find tend to possess a lot of similarities."

As huge life forms that occupied the top of the food chain, these apex creatures possessed a lot of combat power and the arrogance to match their dominance.

When confronted by another top predator, their instinct was not to run away, but to fight the challenger!

This was because the arrival of another powerful rival usually represented an attempt to take over the creature's territory!

Therefore, it was a good idea to exploit the instinct to defend one's territory by making use of the glow of a former top predator.

Even though Zeigra had undergone many changes since he had become a design spirit, the Crown Cat still retained its aggressive personality and glow!

"I think Dulo's proposal has good potential." Ketis remarked. "The hunting industry in the Red Ocean is bigger and more important than in the Milky Way. A lot of planets have already been explored by humanity back in the old galaxy. It is much different over here. There are so many planets that have never been visited by people that there are many habitats that offer new biodiversity and unique organic products. Harvesting them all is a profitable business since there are many biotech companies that are willing to pay a fortune for all of these goods."

That was interesting. Perhaps the Larkinson Clan might consider going into the hunting business as well.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute's demand for exobeasts and organic materials was quite high. Rather than buying organic goods on the market, it was better for the Larkinsons to go to the alien planets and retrieve the desired organic samples through their own efforts!

This was probably the only way for the Larkinson Clan to obtain the best of what a habitat could offer. After all, hunting teams were more likely to keep the good stuff for themselves.

"There are also many powerful and amazing exobeast species that have never been hunted before. There are a lot of crazy hunting enthusiasts that have entered the Red Ocean for the sole reason to be the first hunter of a newly-discovered species." Dulo explained.

This was probably one of the dumbest reasons to enter the Red Ocean. There were better and safer ways to build up prestige than going on hunting trips in a chaotic frontier where hostile alien warships and phase whales could demolish their fleets with ease!

That did not stop Ves from attempting to take advantage of their stupidity. If these hunters disregarded their safety and common sense to such a degree to go on risky hunting expeditions, then the LMC would be happy to sell its useful hunting mechs to these well-heeled customers!

Ves ultimately made his judgment. "Since hunting mechs are becoming increasingly more popular, then it is not a good idea for our mech company to miss this trend. If your assumptions are accurate, then this can become a popular and perhaps an indispensable mech in the hunting industry."

Even if the market for hunting mechs wasn't as big as he hoped, the utility of the Huntmaster Project was so great that it was bound to become another enduring seller in the LMC's mech catalog!

After accepting Dulo's idea, Ves looked at him to see whether he had any good ideas.

"Do you have any other proposals that you wish to pursue?"

The man shook his head. "No. The Huntmaster Project is enough for the time being. I still need to spend a lot of time on studying the knowledge on offensive phasewater technology that you have made available for me. I also intend to assist my sister Sara as her workload is a bit too much for this design round."

"You can do that?"

"We have worked together enough times to become familiar with each other's design philosophies. I can't solve the more difficult problems, but it is no problem for me to take over lighter responsibilities and save my sister a lot of time."

That was actually a good arrangement.

In fact, Ves and Gloriana could also do this to an extent. The married couple not only worked together for years but also carried each other's spiritual fragments in their minds.

If Ves truly wanted to, he could emulate his wife to such a degree that he could probably design a convincing imitation of her work!

The same applied to Gloriana!

Of course, these pale imitations were far from matching the authentic versions. The fakes were only good enough to fool those that didn't know any better.

As Ves thought about asking for Gloriana's help to lighten his workload, Dulo made an unexpected offer..

"Sir, we have one more idea that we think you should consider."

"Tell me more."

"It doesn't actually come from us, sir."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Our... former family got in touch with us. One of our Seniors has heard about your glows and is interested in collaborating with you on a line of mechs that has the potential to capture a lot of market share."

"You will need to elaborate on that. Isn't the Voiken Family led by a Master Mech Designer? Why would one of their own turn to me instead of their impressive patriarch?"

As far as Ves learned, the Voiken Family and its patriarch sided with the Preserving Order Faction of the MTA. That meant that they were arch-conservatives who would rather bury their heads in the sand than to keep up with the times!

However, Ves soon had to adjust his opinion of the Voikens after Dulo quickly explained the changes that had taken place.

"Master Barnard Solas Voiken is a better leader than I thought." Ves remarked. "He bowed down to the inevitable and allowed his Voikens to spread to the Red Ocean. However, what does that have to do with a potential collaboration between one of your Seniors and myself?"

"Let me introduce you to what one of my uncles wishes to design with you. It is one where a different glow can help with fulfilling its role."

A surprisingly detailed draft design appeared on the central projection. It turned out that one of Dulo and Sara's relatives had become a Senior Mech Designer who earned a decent amount of renown by specializing in law enforcement mechs.

"Professor Taigen Harman Voiken used to be a respected name in the Uplifting Note Star Sector." Dulo claimed. "He has been involved in the design of many unique law enforcement mechs that are precisely configured and adapted to the circumstances of different planets and cities. Many of them have gone on to become the staple models of many different Planetary Guard units."

It had been a long time since Ves last came in touch with a law enforcement mech. He remembered a time where he needed to be rescued by them early on in his career.

His most favorite cousin in the old family used to serve as an officer in the Planetary Guard of Bentheim.

All of this gave Ves a special connection to this non-lethal variety of mechs.

"Okay, I get it. Professor Taigen is not only good at designing law enforcement mechs, but also established a reputation around them." He said. "Why reach out to me? What does he want to add to his next line of law enforcement mechs that requires my input?"

"Your glow, of course. To be more precise, Professor Taigen wishes for you to impart a glow on his next products that can play an effective role in cooling tempers and deescalating any mounting conflicts. Ideally, a mech designed for peacekeeping isn't supposed to win a battle. It should prevent a fight from breaking out in the first place. We can think of nothing that can help the Planetary Guard units in calming down unstable actors than to subject them to the same glow as your Sanctuary mechs."

Ves widened his eyes, and so did several other people.

This was a good idea! In fact, this might even be a great idea!

Lufa's base glow had a powerful effect on people. It was capable of suppressing strong emotions, no matter whether they were negative or positive.

Since most criminals and troublemakers on different planets tended to lose control after experiencing a wild mood swing, subjecting them to Lufa's glow was a great way to take the wind out of their sails!

Without their anger, indignation or other strong emotions egging them on, any rogue mech pilot was much likely to regain their rationality and stop their self-destructive acts.

Even if mech pilots had good reasons to go on a rampage, the tranquility imposed by Lufa could still play a useful role in lowering the intensity of a battle!

All in all, there were few reasons why a law enforcement mech should forgo Lufa's glow.

In fact, in light of one of his recent discussions with Master Dervidian, it was even more essential to propagate mechs with this particular glow in every settlement!

This was because Lufa probably offered the best form of spiritual protection that Ves could provide to the masses!

Even if law enforcement agencies did not originally purchase these mechs with the intention of protecting them against spiritual threats, they would definitely be able to play a crucial role and protect a lot of humans if the worst had happened!

"I'm intrigued." Ves told the Voikens. "I can see plenty of potential in this collaboration, but..."

"What is the problem, sir?"

"Why should I cooperate with your uncle to begin with? Why don't we design our own law enforcement mech from scratch? Even if the technical performance of our product isn't as good, its glow will more than make up for its various shortcomings! At least we will be able to collect all of the earnings generated by my product instead of a portion of it. What do you think, Dulo?"

"I think... that law enforcement mechs are much more careful about their procurement decisions than other customers." The man carefully replied. "Working together with an established industry figure like Professor Taigen will lend a lot more credibility to your work. You should talk to him, sir. I am sure that the two of you can come to an agreement on this collaboration."

"We'll see. Give me his contact details, then. I'll talk to this professor myself."

Chapter 3985 More Demanding Clients

The Voiken siblings presented an interesting offer to Ves. It was one that he did not see coming.

He directed a deep look at Sara and Dulo. The pair of Journeymen he picked up recently had performed well enough since they joined the Larkinson Clan.

This was exactly as he expected as he initially met the pair in one of the design tournaments back in Chance Bay. No one took part in these spectacles if they weren't confident in their design abilities!

Even though Sara and Dulo possessed a lot of entanglement with the family they originally came from, Ves did not seriously worry about the possibility of them acting as spies or traitors.

The Larkinson Network's ability to influence spiritually powerful individuals such as Journeymen may be limited, but it at least served as an adequate early warning network. If Goldie never saw a problem with them, then the Voiken siblings were probably alright.

In fact, Ves felt he did not need to rely on a crutch like the Larkinson Network these days. The inclusive, open and welcoming culture of the Larkinson Clan did an excellent job at integrating different newcomers who came from every corner of human space.

Ever since the Voiken siblings entered the Larkinson Clan, they became completely immersed in its culture and its people. Ves entrusted them with a lot of responsibilities and they embraced the challenges they needed to overcome and the rewards that they had earned through their efforts.

Hardly any other organization was willing to grant a newly-joined Journeyman the position of lead designer!

It was almost unheard of for a design studio to allow Journeymen, especially younger and less experienced ones, to contribute or even lead an expert mech design project!

These conditions could only be found in a young organization like the Larkinson Clan that happened to be led by a Journeyman himself.

The Voiken siblings had long thanked themselves for making the risky decision to join a young but fast-growing clan!

Given how well the Larkinsons had treated Sara and Dulo Voiken, Ves believed that they should know well enough to remember their current allegiances.

However, humans were still humans. Ves did not assume that Sara and Dulo had forgotten all of the love and affection they held towards their relatives. The Voiken Family would always have a place in their heart, and that meant that their judgment was compromised on this matter.

This was why Ves did not even bother to quiz Sara or Dulo any further about their old family.

Rather than develop a tainted impression of the Voiken Family by listening to biased opinions, he preferred to make his own judgment. This was also why he immediately wanted to talk to the Voiken who wanted to collaborate with him all of a sudden.

He briefly considered whether he should hold this conversation in private, one look at Gloriana told him that he wouldn't be able to get out. She wanted to listen in and make sure that he did not botch the negotiation.

After a few more seconds of thinking, he shrugged and made the call.

A few minutes passed as Ves first had to go through a secretary before he could reach the Senior in question. People at this level had busy schedules and generally didn't want to be disturbed by random calls from random strangers.

Ves and the other mech designers patiently waited in the meeting room until the central projection finally displayed a new figure.

Professor Taigen Herman Voiken was a dignified Senior Mech Designer who looked more at home in a boardroom than a design lab at first glance.

With his austere blue suit, his neatly-groomed brown beard and a pair of eyes that looked deceptively gentle, the leader of the Voiken Family in the Red Ocean truly did look like he had just come out of an important business meeting.

The man peered at the eight Journeymen who were gathered around the table. He briefly nodded at Sara and Dulo before settling his gaze at the leader of the Larkinson Clan.

"Patriarch Ves Larkinson. I have read and heard much about you. I believe you know who I am, so I think we can skip the introductions and get straight to business. Voiken Industries is interested in cooperating with your Living Mech Corporation on a line of law enforcement mechs."

"Not a single mech design, but an entire line of them? How many variants are we talking about here?" Ves curiously asked.

"I cannot give you an exact figure, patriarch, but you can expect us to develop at least dozens of them. All but one are merely variations of a single base model. It is this original design that we truly need to work on. Once it is complete, I will design the remaining variants myself as I understand the market for law enforcement mechs the best."

This was the strategy adopted by mech designers and mech companies who were highly optimistic about the potential of their mech models. The bigger companies who captured most of the market share always released a lot of variants in order to milk as much sales as possible!

Though Ves had yet to adopt this strategy himself, he had reached the point where he was ready to compete against market leaders who adopted the same approach.

"Your ambitions aren't small." Ves commented. "I think you have made the right decision to seek a partnership with me. Since you have studied me and my work, you should already know how much my glows can affect people in different ways. I can definitely see how a combination of my glows and your law enforcement mechs can become a hot market in the market. However... there is only one mech designer available who can impart a glow onto a mech design, but there are thousands of mech designers that are just as good at designing law enforcement in the Red Ocean. Please convince me why I must collaborate with you in particular?"

From the moment Dulo Voiken introduced this potential collaboration opportunity to him, Ves immediately recognized that he had the upper hand in this deal.

Between the Larkinsons and the Voikens, only the former possessed an unique advantage!

This meant that Ves was in control of a seller's market. Those who desired his design solutions had no choice but to appeal to him and no one else! This was the benefit of holding a monopoly on a good or service!

It was just that Ves and his clan previously weren't large and accomplished enough to attract figures like Professor Taigen Voiken.

However, after designing and releasing dozens of mechs, Ves had amply proven the value and utility of his design philosophy!

Other mech designers with good vision should definitely be able to see the great potential of combining forces with Ves!

There was little concern that collaborations wouldn't yield the desired results. Ves already had a history of collaborating with both Larkinson and third party mech designers.

Most notably, Ves and his fellow Larkinsons had successfully worked together to develop a bunch of powerful expert mechs with highly competent professionals such as Professor Benedict Cortez and Master Moira Willix!

The designs of those fantastic expert mechs might not be publicly available, but the MTA always maintained records of many different mechs where they registered basic information on all of the different works.

This was why Ves was not afraid that others would doubt his competence. There was no opportunity for someone like Professor Taigen to devalue the worth of living mechs and glows, not when there was so much proof that his products were so effective!

This also put the Voiken Senior in a difficult negotiating position. The man initially wanted to take advantage of his superior rank in the profession in order to raise his negotiating position, but Ves straightforwardly popped that bubble when he described his accurate analysis of their respective positions.

However, it would take a lot more than that to faze a 140-year old Senior. Professor Taigen was not only an experienced mech designer, he also conducted a lot of business deals with all kinds of parties over his career.

"It is true that Voiken Industries is not the only seller of law enforcement mechs. However, there are multiple reasons why it is more favorable to partner with us rather than another competitor. We are new to this market and are able to start fresh. Our offerings are not yet fixed, which means that you can offer a generous amount of input on the design of our collaborative mech designs. If you partner with a more established partner, they will not be able to give you so much leeway."

This was not the strongest argument that Ves had heard, but he could see how this could be favorable to him. It was far from enough to convince him, though.

"I assume you are not acquainted with other mech designers who are active in the market for law enforcement mechs. It will be much more difficult for you to approach them for business opportunities. We are different because we know from Sara and Dulo that you are a competent and trustworthy collaboration partner. Their presence also gives us much greater reassurance that you will cooperate sincerely with us and vice versa. This is a great advantage, Patriarch Larkinson. In the distant past, the only method to build this bond of trust was to arrange a marriage."

The Senior from the Voiken Family had a point. The presence of Sara and Dulo in the Larkinson Clan served as a natural bridge between the Larkinsons and the Voikens.

Neither groups were total strangers to each other, so the chances that either of them would screw each other over were much lower!

"Furthermore, do not underestimate how well we can operate in this special market. There are many clients that have specific demands for their machines. Some must be able to endure greater gravity than normal. Others must be equipped with additional ranged weapons. There must also be swifter variants that must be fast enough to chase after light mechs. The requirements for law enforcement mechs are even more specific because they bear heavy responsibilities. It is customary for clients to make additional requests which require specific adjustments."

"I have heard about that." Ves replied.

"Then you must know that partnering up with us can save you a great amount of convenience." Professor Taigen steadily replied. "We have been working in this market for many decades. We know how to build relationships with law enforcement agencies. We also have a mature structure in place where experienced design teams are ready to make the necessary modifications to our mech designs to satisfy our clients."

This was a different layer of the mech market. The buyers of law enforcement mechs were always official institutions. They always bought mechs in large amounts, but their requirements were always a lot higher as well.

Mech companies that wanted to cater to their needs not only had to offer a good variety of off-the-rack models, but also had design teams on hand to modify their existing mech designs on the spot in order to fulfill additional requests!

While Ves was confident that the LMC could conduct business like this in the future, the Design Department was not ready to operate like this! The need to respond to specific client requests on a frequent basis would impose a lot of burdens on every lead designer and design team.

Rather than letting his mech company take on a burden that it was not ready for, Ves might as well leave this troublesome chore to Voiken Industries.

Still, Ves remained unconvinced.

"Your last reasoning sounds nice, but we could probably contact a hundred other mech companies that could offer the same services. I'm sorry, professor, but you haven't given me any compelling reasons to cooperate with you. My time is valuable and I don't lend out my unique design solutions to anyone. I believe that even if my fellow Larkinson and I design just a single law enforcement mech, it can instantly capture a lot of market share by virtue of its ability to pacify people with its glow. If you want to maintain my interest, then you better step up your game."

Even though Professor Taigen maintained a polite smile throughout the conversation, inwardly his thoughts towards Ves must be a lot less pleasant!

Chapter 3986 Mech Ecosystem

Ves and Professor Taigen talked over the comm for half an hour. Neither of the two raised their voices or said anything offensive to each other.

Instead, they conducted a polite but increasingly less productive talk on the merits of collaborating with each other.

Part of their discussion was informative. Ves revealed in greater detail how he could enhance the value of a law enforcement mech while Professor Taigen explained his side of the business from an insider's perspective.

Unfortunately, neither of them came close to forming an agreement during this time. Both of them stood on opposite ends and neither were willing to give up too much ground.

Ves maintained a tough stance throughout the negotiations because he was confident in his own value.

Unless the Voikens could point out a competing mech designer who was able to impart the same kinds of glows to mech designs as the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, there was no way that Professor Taigen could undermine Ves' superior negotiating position!

This meant that if the Voikens wanted to secure a potentially lucrative business deal, they needed to make a lot more concessions in order to persuade Ves to work together.

However, Professor Taigen had an obligation to uphold the interests of his mech company.

There was no way he wanted to sell his services cheaply to the Larkinsons! That would make the partnership too uneven for the Voiken Family!

Both sides understood that while Ves held the upper hand in the negotiations, the Voiken Family would not accept a deal where they had to work like slaves only to earn a fraction of the earnings of their collaborative efforts.

The talks had not yet reached this point, but the lack of progress was not a great sign. It was clear to both sides that they would not be able to come to an agreement so easily.

Ves tiredly waved his hand. "I suggest we let our negotiation teams hash out the terms of any possible agreement. We are mech designers, not snake oil salesmen. I would rather spend time on exploring how we can approach the base model of the line of law

enforcement mechs that you wish to develop with me. Can you show me a draft or concept of your work?"

This was a rather delicate request. A draft design revealed much about the plans and intentions of its creator.

If Ves learned what Professor Taigen wanted to develop in advance, the Larkinsons could design a similar mech with all of the typical traits of Larkinson products!

The Senior did not hesitate at all, though. He believed in the credibility of Ves and the Larkinsons. Their talks so far may not have advanced their negotiations as much as he wanted to, but it served as an excellent way for them to grow more familiar with each other.

A new projection appeared that displayed a typical law enforcement mech.

Just like every second-class mech built for peacekeeping duties, the machine possessed a flight system optimized for moving in the air under standard terrestrial conditions.

Ves noted that the draft design looked a little lighter and smaller than the law enforcement mechs he usually encountered. It did not look as if the machine was sturdy and massive enough to withstand serious and repeated hits.

However, a mech with this configuration undoubtedly possessed superior mobility compared to many other medium mechs. It was a good mech for chasing and reaching distant crisis zones in a timely manner.

"What I am showing to you is what we call a first responder mech in our sector." Professor Taigen explained. "It is a subcategory of law enforcement mechs that is meant to arrive first onto a scene. Their purpose is to address any ongoing incidents as quickly as possible. Oftentimes, the arrival of a pair of Planetary Guard mechs is enough to deter any rogue mechs from continuing to fight and inflict damage to the environment."

It was hard for criminals to go about their business when policing units arrived in front of them! The presence of any Planetary Guard mech was a powerful deterrent that could stop incidents from escalating and stop people from continuing to endanger nearby inhabitants.

However, not every troublemaker could be subdued by the arrival of a couple of mechs.

"There are times when first responder mechs cannot suppress an unfolding conflict. Their light construction and loadouts enable them to arrive first onto the scene, but their deterrence is not as great as the more well-equipped law enforcement mech models. This is where I believe your glows can be of use. By pairing the Pacifier concept with

your design solution, it can influence those who are endangering themselves and others to regain control over themselves. Even if the glows are only partially effective, they can still lower the temperature of an ongoing fight and buy more time for reinforcements."

Ves understood the logic of this mech concept. It was indeed a good combination. What mattered the most was to spread Lufa's glow at a dangerous location as quickly as possible.

Whether the incident involved a firefight between mobs on foot or a dangerous duel between two reckless mechs, these were all situations where Lufa's influence could play a useful role!

"Why not pair my glow with a heavier law enforcement mech?" Ves asked.

"It is not necessary. The Pacifier Project can already cover this need. If the situation has devolved to a point where the Planetary Guard must display a more forceful response, then the reinforcements must consist of mechs that are designed to end fights instead of preventing them from happening in the first place. This is a crucial difference. Regardless, the Pacifier Project can still be of use in any incident where forceful intervention is required. Only one is enough to make a difference."

"That makes sense." Ves responded even as he suspected there was more to the story than Professor Taigen was willing to reveal.

Planetary Guard organizations usually bought into an interconnected mech ecosystem when they chose to purchase the products of a specific mech company.

They did not just buy a batch of mechs based on a single model. Instead, they bought a bunch of different variants and also other mechs based on different but related models.

Such mech ecosystems granted a lot of convenience for their owners because it was a lot cheaper and more convenient to service, maintain and replace the different mechs.

This was where Voiken Industries could earn a lot of extra revenue!

Ves figured it all out. The Pacifier Project was the only product that the Voikens needed in their catalog to lure law enforcement agencies to buy into their system.

Once the different peacekeeping organizations had ordered large batches of this living mech, then they would plunge into a situation where they were incentivized to follow up on their initial orders by buying other Voiken offerings!

This was where Voiken Industries earned the big bucks. Unlike the Pacifier Project which only needed to be fairly light and fast in order to respond to unfolding incidents quickly, the bigger and heavier law enforcement mech models had to be powerful enough to subdue rampaging mech or protect a lot of vulnerable civilians.

The latter kinds of mechs were bound to be more expensive, which also meant that their profit margins should be much higher!

Ves became even less inclined to conclude a business deal right away.

If he recklessly negotiated a deal, then he would essentially fall into a scam where the LMC would only earn a meager amount of profit from the sales of a cheap and low-margin product.

Meanwhile, Voiken Industries which offered a wide variety of different law enforcement solutions could easily persuade its existing customers to make follow-up orders!

In short, the biggest players on the mech market were no longer in the business of selling individual mech models.

They focused on passing on their entire mech ecosystems onto their customers in order to ensure they remained locked on a long-term basis!

It was much harder to switch from an entire ecosystem of interconnected products than to replace a single isolated mech model!

As Professor Taigen continued to explain the outline of his Pacifier concept, Ves eventually held up his hand.

"This collaboration proposal is a promising start, but I don't hear enough sincerity from you." He said. "You have said nothing about expanding our partnership to the rest of your mech ecosystem that you offer to your clients. Do you think I am ignorant about all of the extra business the Pacifier Project can bring to Voiken Industries?"

The Senior of the Voiken Family finally frowned for the first time during this meeting.

"It is not impossible for us to collaborate again in the future, but we need to see whether our initial attempt is successful enough to prove that further cooperation is worthwhile enough. Despite your reassurances, we must always be careful before we make further commitments. It is impossible for us to agree to a collaboration involving multiple different mech designs."

Ves grimaced. "I don't want my clan to get taken advantage of. Either you agree to expand our business partnership to encompass an entire mech ecosystem or I will turn to another, more willing mech company to develop an innovative new mech ecosystem for the law enforcement sector."

This was a heavy demand! Ves did not expect Professor Taigen to concede right away. It was enough to show a sufficiently strong and demanding stance for today. The negotiators could do the rest.

"A cooperation to this degree exceeds the scope of my authority." Professor Taigen steadily replied. "I will have to discuss this matter with Master Barnard Voiken."

"You do that, then." Ves smirked. "Our clan can wait for his response. However, I cannot guarantee you that we may enter into a more favorable agreement with one of your competitors in the Red Ocean."

He did not actually intend to reach out to other mech companies. Professor Taigen was right in that it was probably difficult to form a deep and extensive business partnership with a competitor with no prior relationships or connections.

Still, Ves could instruct Minister Shederin Purnesse to go through the motions and reach out to a couple of companies. This would show that the Larkinsons might actually be looking for an alternative collaboration partner.

If Professor Taigen Voiken wanted to achieve his goal of quickly establishing Voiken Industries in the Red Ocean's mech market, then it was up to him and his fellow Voikens to entice the Larkinsons with an attractive offer!

The call ended quickly after that. Neither of them had anything more to talk about if they weren't willing to make any further concessions at this time.

Ves let out a deep breath as the projections disappeared. He turned towards his wife.

"What do you think?"

"You represented our clan and mech company well this time." Gloriana said with genuine respect in her eyes. "You did not allow the Voiken Family to take advantage of us. It was quite astute of you to recognize that the actual business lies in the mech ecosystems rather than individual mech models. Always remember that it is the Voikens who want our cooperation, not the other way around. I am sure that Professor Taigen will call you once again."

"Those are my thoughts as well." He said before turning to Sara and Dulo Voiken. "What do you think? Do you think it is right to demand more sincerity from your former family?"

Both of them looked awkward. Neither Sara nor Dulo looked eager to get involved in this negotiation.

However, they had recently pledged their loyalty to the Larkinson Clan, so they had an obligation to take Ves' side.

Dulo Voiken eventually voiced his opinion.

"I believe that you are not wrong for asking for a fairer share of all of the earnings of this business opportunity, but... Master Barnard and Professor Taigen are not known to concede that easily. They are even less reluctant to accept huge business deals that involve many related mech lines. It is too risky to build up a dependence of an entire mech ecosystem to the contributions of a single external mech designer. Your leverage over Voiken Industries would become monstrous if you control the most valuable selling points of all of those law enforcement mech models!"

Chapter 3987 Estimated Sales Potential

The proposed collaboration between the LMC and Voiken Industries affected a lot of interests. Profits involving hundreds of thousands if not millions of MTA credits were at stake!

The potential business deal also had the power to define Voiken Industries entry into the mech market.

It didn't matter whether Professor Taigen Herman Voiken achieved a lot of success in the Uplifting Note Star Sector where the Voikens were based.

Hardly few if any of his reputation and brand awareness carried over to the Red Ocean!

The vast majority of mech designers and mech companies had to start from scratch once they passed through the greater beyonder gate.

The level of competition in the new frontier was vastly greater due to the high density of people active in the small slice of the dwarf galaxy that human civilization succeeded in occupying.

Unless the Big Two managed to push back the alien opposition and opened up a lot of new colonial zones, the level of competition in the existing occupied regions would only grow worse over time!

Under these difficult situations, the first mech companies to capture the early mech markets enjoyed an incomparable advantage!

They had already established their brands the earliest and built up enough ties in the industry to control much of the supply of raw materials.

Voiken Industries only recently entered the Red Ocean, which meant it was in the same difficult position as the Living Mech Corporation!

Both mech companies possessed plenty of differences that determined their chances to establish themselves in the new environment.

Voiken Industries possessed a lot of experience and expertise in the law enforcement sector. Professor Taigen's ability to design different law enforcement mechs was actually pretty good, but it was a pity that there was no shortage of talented and capable competitors in the Red Ocean!

The Living Mech Corporation happened to be in the opposite position. Ves and his lead designers had never designed a proper peacekeeping mech in their lives! They had no experience in this specific sub-market and were not familiar with the intricate rules of the complicated business sector.

Yet despite all of these shortcomings, Ves was confident that he could single-handedly force his way into this lucrative market if he designed a single law enforcement mech that was paired with Lufa's glow!

This was his source of confidence as well as his implicit threat towards the Voiken Family.

If the Voikens weren't willing to offer a more equitable and honest business offer, then Ves might just decide to upend the law enforcement sector on his own or in partnership with a competing mech company!

"Negotiations will drag on for months if we adopt such a tough and uncompromising stance." Gloriana noted. "There is a large chance that our high demands will disgust the Voikens to the point where they deem it is more profitable for them to chart their own course than to pursue cooperation with us. If this happens, we will miss out on obtaining a lucrative new source of revenue for our clan."

"It doesn't matter too much. We are not the ones who are under pressure to act quickly or enter this specific market. We can afford to take a gamble. We don't actually lose anything if our bet has failed since we didn't have any plans to sell law enforcement mechs to begin with. If the Voikens don't want to get in bed with us, then we will just look for a different partner."

With this matter done for the time being, Ves finally wrapped up this important meeting.

"Alright. I've heard a lot of interesting mech proposals for today. Overall, I'm happy with the diversity and quantity of mech design projects that we will be working on for this design round. My only regret is that we are still short on manpower and that our workloads are vastly different. If you have time, consider lending a hand to the busier mech designers. We will have to organize our time better in the future, but there is no need for too much formality for the time being."

There were mech designers who were involved in over half-a-dozen different design projects like Ves and Sara Voiken.

There were also mech designers that only committed to working on one or two design projects like Dulo Voiken.

All of this was terribly unbalanced, but Ves couldn't help it for the time being. He hoped that hiring another batch of Journeyman would alleviate the worst of this issue. It was a pity that the desired changes would only fully come into effect in the next design round.

"How would you rank the different projects in terms of sales potential, Ves?" Gloriana asked.

"That's an interesting question. I think that each of us will have different opinions on the profitability of each potential end product. In my opinion, the Buzzy Bee Project probably ranks at the top. It is a unique market product that offers unbeatable communication features that cannot be found in other mechs. The Pacifier Project should also be a highly promising offer if we are able to establish a deal with the Voiken Family. Other than that, I am also optimistic about the Voribug Nemesis Project and the Huntmaster Project."

Gloriana expected Ves to voice a lot of confidence in his own projects, but she was sharp enough to notice that he conspicuously left one out of his response.

"What about your Tutor Project?"

"That's a more complicated story." Ves replied. "The market for training mechs is just as difficult and complicated as the market for law enforcement mechs. The main customers are big and established institutions who never make any radical spending decisions. It will be difficult for us to make the Tutor Project successful right away, especially if we do not collaborate with a mech company that is already involved in this sub-market."

"You don't sound eager to collaborate with a third party when it comes to the Tutor Project." Ketis observed.

"The circumstances sound similar, but they are not. I think it is easier for us to enter the market for training mechs as the barriers of entry are considerably lower. We also have prior experience in designing a successful training mech in the form of the Chiron. We have already gathered plenty of feedback on its strengths and weaknesses which we can use to develop a more polished training mech this time. Furthermore, the amount of effort I intend to put into the Tutor Project goes beyond slapping a glow onto the mech design. I will attempt to introduce a lot of new innovations that will hopefully be able to reinvent the public's cognition of training machines."

He did not elaborate any further about the Tutor Project after that. It was pointless for him to explain his ambition to develop a more active training mech that was able to pull its mech pilots into spiritual simulations that offered an unprecedented degree of realism and substitution!

If Ves was able to get any of this to work, then he was a hundred percent confident that the Tutor Project would be able to build up a commanding market share without additional support!

"What about our bestial mechs, sir?" Janassa Pellier inquired. "The Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project may not have as much immediate appeal as your projects, but I am hopeful they can generate enough profit when they are both paired with useful glows."

"I am not familiar with the market environment for beast mechs, so I can't make any predictions. If I have to make a guess, then I would say that it will probably be a bit slower for your pair of bestial mech models to build up a modest amount of momentum. Whether they can go any further is still questionable."

"...That's fair. We will do our best to make them popular regardless of what you think. We both believe that the combination that we have come up with will find a good use in the Red Ocean."

Ves was not pessimistic about the two bestial mech design projects. He merely thought that their value propositions were inferior compared to the other projects they had discussed today.

No mech design was set in stone. There was still a lot of time for Janassa and Tifi to expand on their original concepts and introduce new and innovative features that boosted the appeal of their products.

Before Ves concluded this meeting, he decided to make one more remark.

"My recent talk with Professor Taigen Voiken has reminded me of an element that our mech company is still lacking in. We have yet to develop our own synergistic mech ecosystem for the market. All of the commercial mechs we have designed in the past along with the ones we will be working on in this design round are mostly one-off machines that have few inherent relations with each other. Aside from the obvious synergy between the Steelwing Project and the Mauler Project, there are no obvious intersections between our other projects."

Gloriana, Ketis, Juliet and several other mech designers frowned when they heard that. This was indeed a major shortcoming.

"We are still young and our mech company hasn't been operating for many years either." Sara Voiken said. "There are much higher requirements for mech ecosystems than standalone mech designs. Many mech designers usually wait until they have advanced to Senior before they embark on this massive design challenge. It usually isn't worth it for Journeymen such as us to develop a brand new mech ecosystem from scratch as we are still experimenting and improving on our design solutions at a rapid pace."

Ves could see why this was the case. A mech ecosystem had to consist of multiple mech lines that were internally consistent with each other. It was not always a good idea to introduce a new mech model in the ecosystem that introduced a lot of radical changes compared to the established lineup.

"I am not saying we need to change our current design concepts or introduce a mech ecosystem right away. I just want each of you to think about how to best set it up in the future. While we are known for our living mechs and our glows, this is not enough. We need to figure out how we can best leverage our advantages in a mech ecosystem that is good enough to truly propel the LMC into prominence."

If his mech company was truly able to reach this point, then it had truly settled into the Red Ocean's mech market!

The meeting finally ended after he gave them this reminder. Numerous Journeymen eagerly left the office in order to get started on their respective projects right away.

Juliet did not leave immediately, though.

"Ves?"

"Yes, Juliet?"

"When we discussed our expert mech design projects, you did not say much about the miniaturized warp drives that we could equip on them. Are you still willing to go through with granting warp capabilities to our next batch of expert mechs?"

"This is not an easy matter for us to handle." Ves frowned. "I'm aware that you are about to begin your studies on them, but there is no way you can design minidrives for our expert mech design projects in time. We will have to approach an external company that specializes in the development and production of these expensive devices. That is something that we should explore later. The cost will not be light, but this is the only way for us to get our hands on minidrives without developing them ourselves."

Juliet slowly nodded. "I am glad to hear that you are still open to equipping our next expert mechs with them. What of our existing roster of expert mechs? Do you want to equip mechs such as the Dark Zephyr and Shield of Samar with minidrives as well?"

"There is no need to hurry on that. We still have to make a lot of targeted changes to our existing expert mechs in order to support the inclusion of a back-mounted minidrive module. I want to wait for a few years and gain more familiarity with this tech before applying the upgrades."

"I see. It is probably a better idea to observe how minidrives interact with the C-Man Project and the Blade Chaser Mark II before attempting to do the same for our older expert mechs."

Chapter 3988 Arranged Friendship

Another day had arrived.

After going through an ordinary morning routine, he made sure he dressed in a classy outfit before awaiting the arrival of an important delegation.

"Tell me about what you have learned about the Aduc Family." Ves asked his assistant as he strode towards the hangar bay of the Spirit of Bentheim.

"Meow..."

Lucky yawned while he perched on top of Ves' left shoulder.

To be honest, the cat would rather roam around the factory ship by himself or keep Aurelia and Clixie company, but Ves requested his presence for this important introduction.

The Aduc's obviously weren't normal people. They had been the group that the Transhumanist Faction had pushed forward when Ves requested individuals who could lead and staff his new T Institute.

The implication of this recommendation was that the Aduc Family was involved in the more metaphysical side of human civilization!

That had unfortunate if not dangerous implications. Aside from the mech community and obscure gatherings like the Heavensword Association, the vast majority of groups dabbling in psionics or other metaphysical phenomena ultimately had ties to the Five Scrolls Compact!

It was hard for Ves to keep his imagination in check when he was confronted by a brand new group like the Aduc Family. Their main source of income came from terraforming planets, which initially did not sound like it had anything to do with the T Institute.

There was no obvious relation between turning lifeless planets into environments suitable for human habitations and creating ways to activate people's spirituality!

Ves would have never given the Aduc's his attention if not for the fact that they came with the blessing of the Transhumanists!

Professor Dervidian and his ilk might be deficient when it came to their professional ethics, but Ves never thought they were stupid when it came to pursuing their core research goals!

Ves had made a good case for his spiritual applications. Whether it was his transcendence glow or his spiritual companions, he had no doubt that the Transhumanists wanted what he could provide to humanity!

Therefore, the Aduc Family was undoubtedly a serious entity that likely possessed a lot more depth than was apparent on the surface. Appearances were deceiving and what was known to the public likely only scratched the surface of this mysterious family!

That did not mean it was useless for Ves to go in blind. He already read reports about the Aduc Family that summarized their basic information. It was unfortunate that all of this bland reading material hardly yielded any interesting clues.

This was why he ordered his analysts to dig for more.

"We found a few interesting details about the Aduc." Gavin Neumann replied as he accompanied his boss. "Their family is remarkably united. Usually, a family organization that has grown to around 15,000 members is never completely cohesive. There are always bad apples and rebels who chafe at the restricting rules of their family and want to leave at all costs. As far as our research has shown, that has never happened to the Aduc Family."

Ves raised his eyebrow. He wouldn't be surprised if Gavin was talking about the Larkinson Family, the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan. All three partners of the Golden Skull Alliance possessed their own spiritual networks, which massively improved internal cohesion.

However, he did not think that other groups were capable of creating anything comparable to one of his most useful spiritual innovations. The Aduc Family's history went all the way back to the Age of Conquest. How could have remained so united for so long?

"Does the Aduc Family have a history of repressing or killing off its dissidents?"

"Our investigation hasn't shown any sign that such activities have taken place, but please keep in mind that we don't have enough trustworthy sources. The Aduc Family has done a good job at keeping its internal affairs out of the public. For what it's worth, Calabast has told me that she doesn't think the Aduc Family is a repressive organization."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "Has she explained why she feels this way?"

"The Aduc share the same philosophy and ideology. You'll be able to observe this for yourself when you meet with them, but the members of this family are not highly driven by personal ambition."

That was the opposite of the Larkinson Family. Ves wanted to raise a group of ambitious people that would be willing to tackle many challenges in order to get ahead.

He understood why many other groups chose to chart a more conservative approach. It was safer for organizations to maintain their existences over time.

Still, those who prioritized survival over ambition could not escape threats that arrived at their doorsteps.

Whether it was economic upheaval, technological progression, internal stagnation, competition from rivals or aggression from foreign states, simply trying to survive without making any efforts to grow stronger was not necessarily that much safer!

Still, the fact that the Aduc Family managed to survive and gradually return to prosperity over the centuries showed that its leaders had decent vision at the very least.

"Have you found any reasons why the Aducs have relations to the MTA and more specifically the Transhumanist Faction?"

"We haven't found any direct clues." Gavin replied. "A moderate-sized second-class family normally isn't worth the Association's attention. The family's exogeologists and other scientific talents are good at what they do, but it doesn't look as if their solutions are associated with anything that is obviously weird. Perhaps the Association took a fancy of their ability to terraform some of the most hostile and unfavorable planets, or their ability to set up complete and flourishing ecosystems."

That didn't reveal anything new to Ves. He eventually shook his head. "If that is all you have, Benny, then there's no point in saying anything further. I'm quite disappointed by the amount of intelligence that you have managed to gather. I told you to investigate the Aduc Family several weeks ago. Is there truly so little information on a platform as open as the galactic net?"

"The galactic net is not as open and unrestricted as it is known for, boss. The Comm Consortium controls the vast majority of interstellar communication channels. It is still possible for the controllers of these networks to scrub data and information they don't like from the servers."

He had a point. The galactic net often gave everyone the illusion that it was a wild west, but they never put much thought on whether the people and organizations that maintained all of the communication systems would take advantage of their power to advance their own interests!

Ves narrowed his eyes. "If the Aducs are valued associates of the Transhumanist Faction, then the mechers may intervene to clean up their history."

This was not a spurious guess. The records of the Aduc Family were a bit too plain in his eyes.

Additionally, the factions aligned to Ves had already taken efforts to suppress news about his more radical innovations and accomplishments.

Not a word had leaked about the transcendence glow as far as he was concerned. No powerful mechers or fleters had arrived to coerce him into giving up his trade secrets.

The protection extended by a faction was not trivial!

When Ves arrived in the hangar bay of his flagship, he learned that the shuttle bearing the delegation from the Aduc Family was already on its way.

He passed the time by playing with Lucky. The gem cat batted aside his hand and floated from his reach.

"Meow!"

"Hey, why are you acting so pissed? Have I not been good to you lately? I gave you access to many of the minerals that we have excavated from the Garimel System!"

"Meow meow!"

"Of course I prohibited you from eating any of the resonating exotics. Even though they are not as valuable as phasewater, they are still rare materials that have strategic value to our clan. They're better put to use by adding them to our future expert mechs than throwing them into your bottomless pit of a stomach! At least I can get an actual benefit from it. What have you been doing with all of the stuff you have been eating as of late? Why haven't you visited the toilet all this time?!"

"MEOW!"

Lucky's response was the same as always. Ves grew increasingly more frustrated at his cat. It was fine if his pet ate valuable minerals as long as the glutton paid the corresponding price, but the problem was that nothing of the sort had happened for over a year!

Would Ves have to wait until Aurelia grew into an adult before his freeloading cat finally visited the bathroom?!

As Ves wondered whether he should give Lucky another dose of indigestion medicine, Gavin abruptly perked up and stood up straighter.

"The shuttle is on final approach. The Aducs are coming."

Ves shoved his thoughts about his gem cat aside and quickly went over his plan for this crucial meeting.

On one hand, it was important for Ves and the Aducs to develop a close and intimate relationship. The Transhumanists wanted for them to get along with each other and it was also crucial for the two parties to extend a lot of trust towards each other. There was no way that they could operate the T Institute if neither of them were willing to share their more meaningful trade secrets!

On the other hand, Ves did not want the Aducs to gain the upper hand in their relationship with him. The T Institute primarily served to advance his own research interests. Its ability to contribute to the Transhumanist cause and humanity as a whole was secondary to his own goals!

Ves therefore needed to make sure he presented a strong but amiable image. It was easy for anyone to channel one of these traits, but it was a lot harder to embody both of them at once!

He wondered whether he should employ any spiritual tricks before deciding that it was reckless to do so in front of unknowns.

The shuttle that passed through the energy shield that maintained air pressure inside the hangar bay looked different from the vehicles used by the Larkinson Clan.

It was of a different make and model that was built to the standards of the galactic heartland. Its muted green and beige coating gave off a peaceful and natural impression.

The emblem of the Aduc Family also looked interesting. It depicted the upper body of a woman enveloping a globe in her hands. The planet she was holding was obviously a life-bearing one as a large plant prominently rose from its top.

All in all, it was clear that the Aducs were big into planets.

A minute passed by as the shuttle slowly followed instructions and landed on a platform that had been cleared of other vehicles and loose equipment.

Ves and his guards waited until the shuttle fully powered down before they made their approach.

Meanwhile, the main hatch of the passenger shuttle slowly slid open. Several different figures floated out of the vehicle and lowered themselves until their sandals touched the deck.

Each of the figures were garbed in formal green-and-beige robes that would not look out of place in a culture that prized tradition.

As Ves slowly stopped a stone's throw away from the foreign delegation, he carefully studied the leading figure with his eyes and his other senses.

The woman at the lead was only one or two generations older than Ves, but clearly exuded the stature of a leader. Her plain face and her knotted brown hair gave her a look that was only slightly more distinctive than normal.

This was a woman who could blend or stand out whenever she wished. That showed a degree of flexibility and caution that Ves could appreciate.

However, the most interesting part about the leading figure wasn't her appearance.

It was her active spirituality.

Ves became a bit sharper and more guarded as his spiritual senses cautiously probed the delegation.

He confirmed his observations. Much to his surprise, the woman who led the delegation had managed to develop her spirituality in a different manner from the professions he was familiar with. Her mind did not resemble that of a mech designer, mech pilot or swordmaster.

Instead, she was something different!

Not only that, but her domain and spiritual attributes were extremely noteworthy to Ves.

If he was reading the Aduc leader correctly, then she had actually developed a domain that encompassed both life and earth attributes!

Chapter 3989 Matriarch Erexia Aduc

As much as Ves wanted to keep deciphering the new and fascinating spiritual traits of the Aduc leader and her fellow delegates, it was not polite for him to neglect his duties.

He eventually took a step forward while extending a welcoming hand.

"Welcome aboard the Spirit of Bentheim. I am Patriarch Ves Larkinson, and I will be your host for today."

The older woman only briefly gazed at Ves before studying the surrounding environment. "It is a pleasure to meet with you. I have heard much about you over the weeks. I am Matriarch Erexia Aduc, head of the Aduc Family and CEO of Gaia Worldcrafting Services. I did not expect that we would receive a call that has led us to abandon our original plans for the Red Ocean and prompt us to relocate to Davute on short notice."

Ves looked a little awkward. "Did we inconvenience your family in any way?"

Matriarch Erexu Aduc gently shook her head. "It is not important. On the contrary, it is of great benefit for us to move to the center of the Krakatoa Middle Zone and settle closer to your Larkinson Clan. I believe that we may have much more in common with each other than we initially realized."

He knew what she was referring to. If Ves was capable of reading her active spirituality, Matriarch Erexu was probably able to make her own observations!

Ves deliberately chose to receive the Aduc delegation within the hangar bay of the Spirit of Bentheim. The ship was filled with many extraordinary products, many of which stood out in a spiritual capacity.

He immediately gathered a lot of clues from the way that Matriarch Erexu and her fellow Aduc gave in to their curiosity and studied the mechs that he had deliberately parked in the back and sides of this large compartment.

"I must say that your famous mechs are much more fascinating than we initially thought. We assumed that the most optimistic praise of your mechs were gross exaggerations. Now, it appears we must revise our prior conclusions. Can you give us a tour of these noteworthy machines?"

Ves responded with a brilliant smile. "I would be glad to do so, madame. Let me start by taking you to a mech that best embodies our clan."

So far, the meeting started on a good note. Both of them showed respect towards each other.

While it was too early to tell whether they could become friends, Ves had a good feeling about this meeting.

Matriarch Erexu Aduc showed plenty of goodwill so far and her attitude suggested that she saw value in building up a genuine relationship with the Larkinsons.

Whether the Aduc did so on their own initiative or because they were directed to by the Transhumanists, there was at least a basis of cooperation!

The delegation stopped before a gold-coated mech.

"This is a Bright Warrior. It is our foundational mech and one that stands out for its versatility and semi-modular configuration. The technical performance of this mech may not be impressive for heartlanders such as you, but it is a mech that has served us well in the battles that our clan has fought until now. While we have developed many mechs since the release of its latest iteration, the Bright Warrior is still an irreplaceable model to our clan."

Ves studied the Aducs to see whether any of them were knowledgeable about mechs. He already knew that the Aduc Matriarch was an exogeologist by profession. She had to be in order to understand her terraforming company's most important operations.

There were numerous other men and women accompanying her. Many of them looked like they belonged to the same generation as him. Perhaps they were the matriarch's children.

It was a pity that none of them showed any awareness of the technical intricacies of the Bright Warrior. Ves had already confirmed that none of the Aducs who visited his ship were mech designers or mech pilots of significance.

That was a shame. If the Aducs did not bother to bring any mech pilots or mech designers to a meeting with a clan that centered its business around mechs, then they probably did not care much about them in the first place!

Ves carefully tried to spot if Matriarch Erexu or her fellow Aducs were able to observe or interact with the more spiritual elements of the Bright Warrior mech.

Unfortunately, he did not pick up any obvious signs. Their active spiritualities did not fluctuate or react in any special way. This was despite the fact that they had strayed close enough to be affected by the Bright Warrior's glow!

This was just the beginning, through. Ves led the delegation to another iconic mech model.

"This is a copy of the Valkyrie Redeemer. We originally developed it after receiving a large commission from a second-rate state. Due to that state's unique policies and religious philosophy, we designed a mech that carries a powerful and unique glow."

The Aducs showed a bit more reaction this time. As soon as they came well within the range of the Valkyrie Redeemer's glow, they regarded it with greater vigilance and respect.

"What are glows? How can they make us feel so differently?" One of the Aducs following their matriarch asked.

"You are?"

"Pesca Aduc, daughter of Matriarch Erexu. I also work in the Exobiology Department of our company."

Terraforming was a highly complicated activity that involved multiple disciplines. It was not enough to transform a planet. Those tasked with transforming it also had to make it livable for human populations. This was why a terraforming company like Gaia Worldcrafting Services also invested a lot of resources into its biotech capabilities!

"I don't think I can adequately explain glows to an uninitiated audience." Ves tentatively replied. "It may sound strange to you, but I only possess a minor understanding of them myself even though my work heavily relies upon them to perform more effectively in battle."

"What Patriarch Ves Larkinson refers to as a glow is actually the aura of a life form that is vastly greater and more powerful than us. We are weaker than her. It is only natural for us to bow in front of a greater power." Matriarch Erexu succinctly explained to her children even as she showed increasingly more respect towards the Valkyrie Redeemer. "What a fascinating combination. I have never come across a life form as rare and great as this one. It is especially remarkable that she chooses to anchor herself to something as mundane as mechs."

Ves was surprised by the Aduc Matriarch's observations! She not only recognized the truth of glows, but also appeared to be able to observe the Valkyrie Redeemer's design spirit!

"Since you understand this much, then I don't need to withhold as much details as I thought. The Superior Mother is one of our many design spirits. Each of them have formed a cooperative relationship with me and my work. Each of them brings various benefits to the mech designs they are associated with in exchange for intangible rewards. I am sure that you will be able to find this out yourselves if you get a hand on one of my products. Don't mess around with them if you can interact with them in any way. I am not responsible for any accidents that might occur."

He had no idea what the Aducs were capable of, but he really did not want them to poke his design spirits. He pretty much regarded them as his property and did not want others to play with his assets.

The problem was that he had no idea whether the Aducs would maintain a respectful distance. The only consolation was that every Aduc in the delegation aside from Matriarch Erexu weren't that impressive to Ves.

Their spiritualities were all active, which was quite a surprise, but they were merely at the level of an Apprentice Mech Designer.

In contrast, Matriarch Erexu quietly possessed strength comparable to an older and more experienced Journeyman.

This caused Ves to harbor a lot of vigilance towards the female leader. Someone who developed so much spiritual strength was likely able to harness it in a specific fashion!

Hopefully, he would be able to figure this out before the end of this initial meeting. There had to be a compelling reason why the Transhumanists thought it was a good idea to bring the Larkinsons and the Aducs together.

After Ves thought that his guests spent enough time in front of the Valkyrie Redeemer, he brought them to one of the most precious and appreciated individual mechs in the clan.

Kievenar Aduc, the firstborn son and heir of the family, frowned as he studied the familiar-looking mech.

"You already brought us to a Bright Warrior, mister."

Matriarch Erexu made a quick gesture. "Quiet. This is not an ordinary mech."

She slowed her pace and conveyed a lot more respect towards the powerful machine as they neared its unmoving form.

The further they approached, the more they became affected by the dense and powerful spiritual presence of the mech in question!

The expressions of Matriarch Erexu's children changed. They all showed evident strain as they became exposed to a powerful pressure that they were not accustomed to enduring.

If they were expert candidates, then they should have been able to withstand the pressure a lot better, but each of them appeared to be thinkers rather than warriors, so they lacked the tempering to withstand hundreds of Ves of spiritual accumulation!

"This... is the Quint. It is the first and greatest version of the Bright Warrior in existence. It is not only a masterwork mech, but also a machine that has helped three separate mech pilots achieve their breakthroughs."

Even though the Aducs weren't mech designers, they were all educated professionals. They possessed at least a basic ability to recognize and appreciate masterworks.

It was a pity that everyone in the delegation was too stressed to admire the Quint's exquisite construction.

The only exception was Matriarch Erexu. She was the only one among the guests who managed to retain her full composure. She didn't even look like she was under any sort of strain!

The Aducs did not stick around the Quint for long. The living mech did not bother to reach out to the foreign guests, though Erexu looked quite thoughtful while she resisted the powerful mech's presence.

Ves brought the delegation to one more noteworthy mech. From the moment he guided them to the green-coated mech, the Aducs began to show more enthusiasm.

Each of them had kept their eye on this machine from the start!

As a prime mech as well as an expert mech, the Everchanger also possessed a powerful presence.

However, the expert mech possessed a lot more control over its power manifestations. Its spiritual aura was also a lot gentler.

In fact, none of the Aducs showed any signs that they were under strain this time!

Instead, they looked as if they enjoyed getting close to the Everchanger!

Ves did not expect them to react this way!

Was it because of their life domains? Each of them showed faint signs of stimulation as they stopped at a respectful distance before the powerful expert mech.

"The Everchanger is one of my proudest works." Ves explained. "It is not only an expert mech, but a machine that best embodies my design philosophy. It is an adaptable machine that is able to fight in multiple ways. What do you think, matriarch?"

The head of the Aduc Family controlled her expressions a lot better than her children, but Ves could clearly sense from her spiritual activity that she was a bit more emotional than she showed on the surface.

The only problem was that Ves was unable to interpret her hidden mood swings.

"This is a wonder of creation." She eventually said. "Your mastery in mechs is a sight to behold. We have met many mech designers over the years who are able to develop other powerful machines, but none of them have transcended their existences quite like yours. The vitality of this expert mech defies everything I have learned. How old is this Everchanger of yours?"

"I completed it just before our clan entered the Red Ocean." Ves replied.

"So young!"

Chapter 3990 The Value of Earth

In the end, the short tour had served its purpose.

It not only granted the Aducs a close and personal look at several iconic Larkinson mechs, but also allowed Ves to observe their distinctive reactions towards different spiritual phenomena!

Ves already learned a lot about the Aducs. He discovered that Matriarch Erexia Aduc was not only aware and knowledgeable about spiritual phenomena, but also possessed a formidable amount of spiritual strength.

In fact, if he compared her to himself, her growth was quite admirable in this aspect!

If Ves hadn't boosted his own Spirituality by creating Blinky, he would probably be a lot further behind in this aspect!

Perhaps Matriarch Erexia Aduc was caught off-guard by the strength and capabilities that Ves had displayed. He had shown in multiple different ways that he was far from an ordinary Journeyman!

Ves did not bother to show the Aducs around the remainder of his flagship this time. The Spirit of Bentheim was a sizable capital ship that featured a lot of noteworthy sights.

However, the Aducs already had enough of a taste of the Larkinson Clan for the time being. Ves wanted to move on to more substantive discussions. He became more eager than ever to learn more about his new partners and what they were capable of. He had a feeling that they possessed their own bag of tricks, especially since they developed a rare combination of domains that Ves had never encountered before this point!

He steadily led them to the upper decks where he eventually brought them into the fanciest and most formal conference rooms.

The clansmen had spiced up the place over the years. The additional decorations, totems and panoramas subtly showed off the prosperity and strength of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves sat down at the head of the table while the group of Aducs took their seats around their matriarch.

The more he observed the newcomers, the more he became intrigued by how they managed to develop their spiritualities.

All of Matriarch Erexia's children developed their spiritualities. This was an extremely unlikely occurrence as most humans never activated their spiritualities in the first place.

It was normal for humans to be born weak and deficient in this aspect. Only a fraction of the population developed spiritual potential, but even that did not mean anything if they never activated this property in their lives!

So far, Ves only came across three systematic methods to activate a person's spirituality. Each of them was based on practicing a profession beyond a normal level, which was not easy to do at all. The proportion of people who succeeded in breaking through the extraordinary threshold was simply too low!

This was why Ves found it suspicious that all three of Matriarch Erexi's children had passed every test.

There were way too many coincidences!

First, all three of them developed significant spiritual potential.

Second, the three Aduc scions happened to activate them without fail.

Third, they developed their activated spiritual potential in a targeted direction that caused them to acquire domains that encompassed both life and earth!

If this sequence of events happened to just one or two of the members of the delegation, then Ves wouldn't find it too suspicious.

Yet there was no way that all of Erexi Aduc's offspring were born with amazing talent.

The fact that they developed the exact same domain with remarkably few differences between each other was the most suspicious point by far. People who pursued different passions and professions never developed identical domains!

All of these oddities and patterns indicated that the Aducs definitely possessed their own secrets when it came to spiritual phenomena!

Before Ves was ready to speak up, he spent a bit more time on examining the spiritualities of his guests in greater detail.

He did not detect the presence of a spiritual network comparable to his own. As far as he was aware, all members of the Aduc Family were completely separate from each other. Their nearly identical domains did not produce any spontaneous connections or strange forms of resonance, though they might simply be hiding this capability.

Their spiritual attributes attracted most of his attention. He simply couldn't figure out how they were able to develop these rare attributes.

The life component of their domains was different from his own. Ves focused on the creation of life, which completely complemented his mech designer profession.

As for the Aducs, he did not get the impression that they oriented towards creation.

Their interpretation of life was also different from that of his mother, who focused on the predation of life.

They weren't similar to Joshua either, who excelled at understanding and developing closer relationships with different forms of life.

Instead, Ves had the impression that they saw themselves as regulators and arbiters of life. The best way for Ves to describe his read on their orientation was that they pursued the balance and stability of life!

This certainly fit their occupations. Terraforming was all about generating brand-new cycles of life on planets that previously lacked this quality.

It was easy enough to transform a planet, but it was a lot harder to make the changes stick! A stable ecosystem and cycle of life were needed to turn a globe into a self-sustainable habitat!

While Ves held considerable interest towards their new and interesting interpretation of life, their earth spiritual attribute also played an important role in their spiritual development.

It was quite clear from the start that their interpretation of earth was not comparable to the high-end earth spiritual attribute that Ves had once been exposed to when he last confronted Cassandra Breyer.

Just referring to them both with the same word was a flaw in his own terminology.

Rather than calling it an earth spiritual attribute, it felt more like a more specific orientation towards the transformation of earth!

The more Ves explored their earth domains, the more he gained the feeling that they were obsessed over vast projects that involved the large-scale transformation of large terrestrial planets!

This was their true passion! The Aducs were so dedicated to their jobs that they derived a huge amount of satisfaction with each completed terraforming project!

Ves figured that this was how the Aducs were able to develop their own spiritualities. It was almost identical to how mech designers gained spiritual sustenance for completing meaningful mech design projects.

"Have you seen enough?" Matriarch Erexia Aduc abruptly broke the silence.

Oops. Busted.

Ves responded with his version of an awkward and genial smile. "My apologies. It is not every day that I come into contact with remarkable individuals such as yourselves. I have just shown you what I can do, but you have yet to reveal anything about your own capabilities. Can you blame me for being curious?"

"I think we are all lacking in understanding towards each other. This is why we must communicate with each other. Exchanges lead to greater mutual understanding."

"Well said, madam. Since I just showed off my mechs, let me start by asking a question. Do you have any special inheritance or method that has allowed you to develop your psionic power in a systematic fashion?"

His question immediately provoked a subtle reaction from the matriarch's children.

Even though they had received enough training and had been specifically reminded by their mother to maintain their composure, their spiritual fluctuations couldn't be hidden.

Matriarch Erexu was smart enough to realize that Ves likely picked up on this activity. She did not bother to issue a denial.

"I will share this much with you since the MTA holds you in high regard. Your guess is correct. We are one of the few human groups in the galaxy that hold an ancient inheritance. We will not divulge any further details on it as we have an obligation to guard this secret. It is the reason why we have survived for so long. I would not have admitted this if you were not as observant. I hope you understand."

"I do. I have my own secrets which are inconvenient for me to share. This kind of makes it a lot harder for us to hold a meaningful exchange."

The meeting had taken an awkward turn. Neither Ves nor the Aducs wanted to share too many details about themselves. Exposing their core strengths made it possible for others to exploit their vulnerabilities. Neither of them wanted to expose any possible weak points.

The two leaders passed the time by chatting about minor details. Ves inquired about the Aduc Family's rise in the galactic heartland while Matriarch Erexu asked about the Larkinson Clan's rapid rise.

"I admire your work, patriarch. You have taken a brutish, destructive machine of war and turned it into an evolving work of art. There is much about your mechs that deserve greater recognition. I believe it will not take long for the wider public to develop a greater appreciation of your products."

"Thank you, madame. I am afraid that I am not as familiar with your work. I do not possess a thorough understanding of the terraforming business."

"That is not a surprise. Few people in human space know anything about the intricacies and challenges of converting hostile rocks into livable planets. We would love to show you our best and most successful terraforming results, but we would have to accompany you back to the Milky Way Galaxy in order to accomplish this. Showing you the planets that we have brought to life through our efforts in the form of projections and descriptions simply cannot do them justice."

That was helpful. Not.

"Can you describe your philosophy towards terraforming? As professionals, find it useful to understand the underlying thoughts behind someone's approach towards their work and passion."

"Planets are life." Matriarch Erexii stated. "The globes where many different forms of life have emerged are natural incubators of life and existence. Without planets, there would be no stable, protected habitats where large and complex forms of eukaryotes have evolved throughout the history of every galaxy. Humanity has emerged from Old Earth, which I once had the pleasure of touring on the most defining pilgrimage of my life. Stepping foot on the ancestral planet of our species is an unforgettable experience. I pity you for entering the Red Ocean so soon. The introduction of beyonder gate technology has made traveling to our ancestral Sol System faster and more convenient than ever, but the cost of traveling there from our current location is too prohibitive."

Ves casually shrugged. "I don't particularly feel I am missing out. The vast majority of humans today never have the opportunity to visit Old Earth, and they are not any worse for it. To them, humanity's origin is too far away from their lives. They are much more attached to their own home planets."

"That is one of our purposes, actually." Matriarch Erexii smiled. "From the moment I visited Old Earth and felt at home in a manner that I have never experienced anywhere else, I vowed to give others the opportunity to enjoy similar experiences. Humanity may have expanded to our stars, but cold metal coffins like your starships offer no true warmth to our species. Only the warm and motherly embrace of a planet filled with life can give our race the invisible sustenance that we need. Though we are not a religious family, we aspire to spread life to any planet, much as the mythological god known as Gaia has brought life to Old Earth."

"That... is an interesting philosophy. I cannot say I agree with everything that you say, but I can respect your passion and your motivations. I am sure that a lot of people in the Red Ocean will be happy to live on the planets that you will terraform in the future."

The Aducs all looked proud at this remark. It was their greatest pleasure to allow planets and human populations to flourish in places that were previously hostile towards life!