

Mech 4021

Chapter 4021 Shannon Maris

"What are you thinking about?"

"...Stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Creating a new spirit stuff."

Breakfast time was a fixed ritual for the couple. There were days when Ves and Gloriana hardly spent time with each other due to their diverging issues.

Though Ves wanted to get back to practicing his true profession and make a good start on the new design round, he still had a few major chores left to deal with. His upcoming creation session was probably the most important event of this week, even surpassing the effort required to rope in the Aduc Family into his network.

"Hihihi! Papa! I wanna see!" Their daughter giggled as Gloriana tried to feed her with a high-density nutrient solution.

"You're too young for that, little lady. Let your father work in peace."

"No! I wanna see! I wanna see!"

"Miaow!"

Even Clixie expressed her support for Aurelia's impulsive demand.

Ves looked uncertain as he weighed this decision. There was no point in bringing a normal kid who was just over a year old to work, but their daughter was different.

Her mental development was absolutely staggering even when compared to other designer babies. He felt that bringing her along a trip where she could witness her father create one of his grandest works might be helpful in expanding her vision during her most formative years of her life.

Another reason why he thought it might be good to bring her along was because he wanted to earn back his prestige in front of his daughter!

Aurelia had spent so much time with her mother that she probably learned a lot of nonsensical lessons and beliefs.

If he knew his wife well enough, then he was certain that Gloriana had spent plenty of time putting herself on top of Ves!

This clearly couldn't go on for too long. If Ves wanted to make sure that his baby daughter still respected him, he needed to perform an act that was so impressive that no amount of tales and exaggerations could sway Aurelia from holding a high opinion of her daddy!

"You don't need to babysit Aurelia this time. I'll bring her along and take care of her." Ves decided.

"Are you serious, Ves?" She frowned in concern. "You're about to head into the heart of a ship that belongs to a family that you just blackmailed into partnering with us. The Aducs must still be harboring hard feelings towards our clan. You'll put our daughter under great risk by bringing her into their den!"

"Your understanding of the relations between our clan and the Aduc Family is too shallow. The Aducs won't do anything to us. They need us to heal the Old Lady and they won't do that by pulling any shenanigans."

"What about after that, Ves? Once you are done with reviving their tree spirit, they are not beholden to us anymore."

"It's not as easy to ditch us as you think." Ves grinned. "First, I am sure that most of the Aducs will be so enthused about the powerful ancestral spirit that I've created that they won't even remember their hard feelings anymore. Second, the new spirit is of my own design. Although I can't go too far with this, who can stop me from programming a positive disposition towards our clan into my new spiritual product? Just the fact that I am her creator is enough to ensure that relations between our two organizations will always be cordial at worst. In short, as long as my new creation thinks favorably of me, the Aduc Family has no choice but to abide by her inclinations."

This was one of the reasons why he was so eager to make this move. Although Ves had to invest substantial spiritual ingredients to create the strong nature spirit that he desired to breathe into life, it was worth it as long as he secured the long-lasting loyalty of a family that possessed a couple of remarkable advantages!

Though his arguments did not manage to sway Gloriana's mind entirely, Aurelia kept insisting on going along this time!

"I wanna go with papa! I wanna goooooo!"

"Aurelia! Don't think you can get what you want by whining to me. No means no. I will not allow you to go with your excited father and risk getting caught up in an accident." Gloriana admonished.

Aurelia's eyes began to tear up. She soon started to cry when Gloriana remained unsympathetic!

"Whaaaaaaaaaaa!"

The mood in the dining room dropped from the moment Aurelia began to wail like a siren! Though Gloriana tried her best to maintain a firm stance, Ves couldn't stand the sight!

"Don't be so mean to our daughter, Gloriana! Let her come along! It'll be fine! I'll even bring along Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger for added protection!"

"Miaow miaow miaow!"

Clixie grew distressed as well as her favorite companion cried. The cat circled around before lifting her front paws in order to make a begging motion. It seems as if even she wanted Gloriana to relent!

Faced with all of this pressure, Gloriana reluctantly bowed to the current circumstances.

"Fine. Have it your way then. You can take our baby along, but I'm sending the nanny that I've hired along with her! Just promise me that you won't allow her to get too close to whatever it is you're doing and that she is accompanied by plenty of guards, do you understand?"

"Hey, I'm a professional when it comes to security. My daughter will enjoy the highest degree of protection."

Though his wife directed a skeptical glance towards him, it didn't matter. She had already relented.

Aurelia already stopped crying once she realized that as well. Soon enough, she was back to smiling and giggling as she finished the remainder of her specially-formulated meal.

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An hour later, Ves led his expanded entourage to his shuttle.

Before he entered the vehicle, he stopped for a moment and regarded it with a critical eye. He never paid too much attention to the vehicles utilized by his clan, and for a long time he didn't think there was anything wrong with that. Shuttles were purely functional assets that were constantly used to haul people and goods between different destinations.

The armored shuttle that was reserved for his own transportation was a beefed up model that sold for a generous amount of money at the time.

The Larkinsons did not settle for its stock configuration once it came into the clan's possession. The vehicle had undergone multiple rounds of upgrades in order to beef up its armor, install a shield generator, enhance its crash protection and other additions.

Even so, the base of the shuttle was far too shabby in his eyes. There were plenty of heartland-level shuttles on the market that offered superior performance, though admittedly at much higher prices.

"Not that price is any object to me these days." He muttered.

In one of his earlier adventures, he came across centuries-old CFA shuttles that were already FTL capable. Though he couldn't figure out whether the miniaturized FTL drives of these incredibly advanced vehicles relied on phasewater back then, their existence showed that he could do a lot better these days!

"We still retain a huge stash of phasewater. There is no excuse for me to get a new shuttle. Maybe I should design it myself."

He had no time to spare on an extra design project for the time being, but perhaps he could tackle it after he completed the current design round.

As Ves and his entourage settled into their seats, the familiar shuttle smoothly lifted off and transited towards the Aduc fleet under escort.

The Everchanger was a notable addition this time. Ves had already intended to bring Joshua and his expert mech along from the start.

The new spirit he had in mind not only had a strong connection to life, but would also become a potential new battle partner for his favorite expert pilot.

He felt it was best if Joshua and whatever the Old Lady turned into familiarize themselves with each other in advance.

This way, even if Ves had yet to design any mech based on his new spiritual product, Joshua would already be able to channel her glow through the Everchanger!

He was curious to learn what sort of influence his upcoming creation could exert through its glow. He made a lot of guesses, but he wasn't familiar enough with wood and earth-attributed spiritual energy to know for certain what effects they brought.

All Ves cared about was getting access to new possibilities. As long as he was able to enrich his collection with new and useful additions, he would have access to a greater variety of building blocks in the future!

"Papa hug!"

His daughter pulled him out of his reverie by climbing on his lap and calling for his attention.

Ves smiled indulgently at his little girl and gently returned the hug. As they basked in each other's warmth, he showered her with attention for a few minutes before he glanced towards one of the most recent additions to the Larkinson Clan.

An older woman had always been standing by the side. The way she stood at attention like Clixie suggested that the two had adopted similar roles.

That wasn't far from the truth. In the time Ves spent his time on dealing with the Aduc Family, Gloriana had taken the initiative to hire a more competent nanny from Davute!

"You are Mrs. Shannon Maris, correct?"

"That is correct, sir."

"What are your responsibilities, exactly?"

"I have recently been brought into your clan to serve as the chief caretaker for Aurelia and possibly your other children. In addition, I can protect her and carry her away from any danger zones if any outbreaks of violence have occurred. Lastly, I can also serve as her etiquette teacher."

"That is quite a varied skillset."

"I used to serve in a special forces branch of my former home state in the galactic heartland." Shannon stated in a factual but slightly proud tone of voice. "I retired from the service in my forties and took up employment at a large security company. It was there that I trained in the care and protection of VIPs, most specifically younger children such as your daughter."

Ves examined the woman a bit closer. Shannon Marie-Larkinson wore a typical Larkinson uniform with the addition of a toolbelt. Her short, auburn hair along with her matronly appearance did not give out the vibe that she used to be an elite soldier, but looks could be deceiving. He was certain that she benefited from a lot of combat-oriented augments!

"Can you fight when the situation calls for it, Mrs. Shannon?"

"I can." The chief nanny nodded and gestured to one of the armored honor guards. "Aurelia's guards will always carry around a spare case of folded combat armor in the event it is needed. They carry a smaller armored suit for your daughter as well."

He quizzed Shannon a bit more and generally felt satisfied with Gloriana's choice. Though he would have preferred to rely on a trueblood Larkinson to guide and protect his daughter, a heartlander like the new hire was much more competent and skilled in every aspect.

A good nanny and caretaker could easily keep Aurelia occupied in the times when her parents were too preoccupied with their responsibilities to play with their daughter.

Shannon's military background and training was also a nice bonus, though not entirely necessary. Aurelia already enjoyed the protection of her own exclusive bodyguard detail. At most, the new nanny wouldn't get in the way of the guards.

"Sir, we are approaching the Green Dream. We are scheduled to land in her hangar bay in three minutes."

"Understood. Proceed with the landing. Did the Aducs relay any special instructions regarding the Everchanger?"

"Not for the time being. Our hosts have already informed us that the Everchanger can proceed to the Green Sanctum from the hangar bay."

"That is good to hear."

Ves wasn't sure whether he wanted to involve Joshua and the Everchanger for his next creation job, but it was nice to have them around in case he ended up needing their services.

Chapter 4022 Green Investment

"Hihihi! So green!"

"Yes, the Aduc Family sure loves their green motifs."

Despite spending so much time in the Larkinson fleet, Ves and Gloriana rarely brought their daughter to other ships.

Aside from bringing her to a pleasant ship like the Vivacious Wal for a rare weekend break, they mostly kept Aurelia close at hand, especially when she was still too young to appreciate the new sights.

However, before they knew it, their baby who used to spend most of her time asleep had grown up into a curious and energetic toddler.

Introducing her to a planet like Davute VII was the greatest eye-opening experience for the young lady so far, but bringing her to the Green Dream was not that far behind.

The Aducs actually didn't like living and working on starships. They only did so by necessity and because their jobs often compelled them to serve aboard them for long stretches of time.

In order to make themselves feel less alienated in space, the Aducs invested great effort into vivifying the interior of their vessels. There were small parks and trees in practically every corridor and compartment. Plants sometimes grew out of the bulkheads and the smell of nature was so strong that those who closed their eyes would think that they were standing on a planet instead of a starship!

As a group that always believed in the supremacy of Old Earth, the flora all consisted of authentic Earth-based trees and plants.

Of all of the plants that the Aducs used to bring life to their ship, Aurelia adored the flowers the most.

"Look, papa! Big flower! So big!"

"That's a sunflower, honey. Out of all of the natural flowers from Earth, it is among the bigger ones. There are even genetically-modified variants that make them as big as your body or even greater!"

Aurelia's eyes turned wide as she imagined such a huge sight.

As the group of Larkinsons continued to make their way to the Green Sanctum, the bundle of joy soon became attracted by other classic flowers, even if Aurelia already encountered them in one of the parks within the Spirit of Bentheim.

From roses to peonies, every flower captivated her youthful imagination and desires.

There was something different about the way the Larkinsons and the Aducs arranged the greenery inside their ships.

Ves hadn't paid attention to this difference in his previous visits, but Aurelia's enthusiastic reaction to the interior of the Green Dream prompted him to pay more attention to this detail.

Despite their diverging biological makeup, there shouldn't be any obvious differences between the plants. However, the fact that the Aducs stick with authentic original Earth plants whose genomes weren't tampered with somehow made their own greenery feel closer in tune with nature.

The arrangements of the plants, the subtle patterns of their positioning and the emphasis on smell were just a couple of areas where the Aducs proved to be superior!

Ves felt tempted to commission the Aducs to decorate the interior of his ships as well, but he quickly rejected this notion.

Even if it made the ships more livable, they wouldn't be Larkinson vessels anymore. He should leave this job for his subordinates so that he could make sure that the ships still reflected the values and culture of his clan.

"This one smells better! Papa, what is this flower?"

Ves stopped in front of her daughter and bent down to take a whiff of the small but numerous flowers. Fond memories passed through his mind as he partook in the delicious scent.

"This is chamomile. Did you know that it is my mother's favorite flower? That's right, your grandmother used to drink fresh chamomile as tea?"

"You can drink flowers?"

"Not directly. You take these flowers and put them in hot water so that they infuse it with their delicious flavors. This will produce light and delicious tea. Your grandmother loved it so much that she even grew her own chamomile in the garden of the house we used to live in. It was a pity that we never continued that habit after she... disappeared for a time."

Aurelia grinned at her father. "Grandma is back now! Drink tea together!"

Ves knew that the Superior Mother had already introduced herself and kept Aurelia company a few times.

However, Aurelia almost certainly did not comprehend the true state of her 'grandmothers'!

"Your grandma can't drink tea. She isn't in the right state to do so anymore." He gently said as he pulled her away from the chamomile flowers. "We can do plenty of things with her, but drinking tea is not one of the activities we can do together."

"Why not?"

"Because she... isn't here. She stayed behind in the Milky Way, the home we left behind."

Aurelia looked confused. "Grandma is here!"

"Er... not exactly."

Ves tried and failed to explain that their mothers were not actually physically present in the Red Ocean, but there were limits to Aurelia's accelerated cognitive development, so he quickly ceased the attempt.

When their group eventually arrived at the Green Sanctum, Ves had to leave most of his guards behind, though his insistence was enough to allow Aurelia, Clixie and Shannon Maris to proceed past the security gates.

Ves did not particularly care about leaving behind his guards because he already had access to a stronger one inside the Green Sanctum.

As soon as he and his diminished group reached the low hill at the center of the reinforced biome, a resplendent green-coated expert mech stood before a pair of Aduc mechs!

The mechs utilized by the Aduc family never impressed Ves. The pair before him were getting on in years and weren't particularly impressive when they were in their prime.

Whether it was the knight mech or the swordsman mech, neither of them possessed any notable strengths other than their economy, their low and easy maintenance requirements and their ease of use. The only reason why their hard performance metrics did not fall behind the Bright Warrior too much was because they were heartland-level products.

Compared to these relatively ordinary mechs, the Everchanger completely stole the show!

Just as he expected, the Aducs who had gathered in the Green Sanctum became completely fascinated by this exceptional living mech.

Ves doubted that the Aducs had many people who could appreciate the exquisite craftsmanship of a masterwork mech, but its inherent spiritual foundation was probably a great drug to a group that never experienced the charm of living mechs before.

In order to achieve the greatest possible impact to the Aducs, he had instructed Venerable Joshua to turn off every glow and resonate with his expert mech to a modest degree, causing it to radiate its naked presence without any additional factors.

The small crowd that had gathered at a respectable distance from the expert mech showed that it indeed made a potent impression!

"Patriarch Ves, welcome back to the Green Dream." Kievenar Aduc greeted him before he glanced at the little girl that was already enjoying the scenery. "I see you have brought your daughter with you as well."

Ves smiled. "I felt it would be nice to bring my kid to work today. Don't worry. She's young and curious, but she won't get in the way."

Though the Aducs thought it wasn't wise to bring such a young girl to an occasion like this, they just chalked it up to another eccentricity of the Larkinsons.

They only exchanged pleasantries for a little bit until Matriarch Erexu Aduc arrived before him with an expectant expression.

"Let us not delay this matter any further, patriarch. We have been waiting for this moment for days. We cannot bear the sight of our Old Lady slowly dying before our eyes any longer. Relieve her of her suffering and bring forth the rebirth that you have promised."

Ves turned serious and nodded. "Understood. I am eager to get on with this as well. Please tell your men to back off and maintain a healthy distance from the Old Lady. Though I don't anticipate any danger, I am afraid they might disturb the process if they interfere with my work at an inopportune moment."

"We will make sure that you will have enough room to perform your procedure."

The Aducs moved quickly and without any fuss. They were all curious and eager to witness the revival of the Old Lady up close, but they could not disobey instructions from above.

Even the pair of Aduc mechs stepped backwards in order to give Ves more space.

Ves also made sure that his daughter kept her distance as well. Shannon held the little girl in her arms to make sure that Aurelia stayed in place.

"You be a good girl and keep your nanny company, okay?"

"Um!"

Naturally, the Everchanger remained rooted in place. Its strong vitality made for a convincing case that its presence was vital to the process.

"Joshua, please send over the packages."

"Will do, sir."

A small storage bay slid open before a couple of small crates floated out. The metal lockboxes quickly flew towards Ves before stopping in front of his body.

He inputted different codes that unlocked the crates. Several different P-stones became exposed, each of which exuded different glows that nonetheless felt as if they shared the same origins.

The truth was that Ves collected every source of life spiritual energy that he had access to! He had already harvested small spiritual fragments from Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger.

He also borrowed a spiritual fragment from the Superior Mother on top of that. Life only accounted for a sixth of her total domain, but it was still the real deal as long as this part of her spiritual makeup was isolated from the rest.

Naturally, he also prepared a large spiritual fragment produced by Blinky in order to account for his own share.

As an added bonus, he also prepared a full vial's worth of universal life-attributed spiritual energy.

His expression became extremely grave when he beheld the untouched vial of high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum.

He did not dare to draw out the rich and potent universal life energy in advance because he did not have a container in his possession that could possibly store that much rich and potent high-grade spiritual energy!

"Have I gone crazy?"

Originally, Ves didn't intend to squander any amount of universal life energy, much less an entire vial's worth!

He typically utilized just 5 to 10 percent of the energy of a vial when he created a number of his previous design spirits. This was more than enough to accelerate their growth, raise their potential and give them a head-start in life.

Wasting an entire vial of life-prolonging treatment serum to supercharge the birth of just a single spiritual product sounded extremely crazy! This was a clear loss-making transaction as the benefits of accelerating the growth of a new design spirit always had a limit!

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However, Ves had a hunch that it might be different this time.

Though the Old Lady looked awful at the moment, Ves felt as if it was just begging to get watered by a huge dose of life.

"Trees are the origin of life. If there is anything that can produce the gentlest and most compatible form of life, it has to be a plant organism!"

Though Ves would have preferred to perform this experiment on a fruit-bearing tree, an old and remarkable oak tree that originated from Old Earth was also an acceptable choice.

A grin slowly appeared on his face as he tried to imagine what would happen if he used up so much universal life energy.

"If this works out the way I envisioned..."

There were only a few possible instances where wasting one of the precious vials of serums that he originally looted from the Life Research Association would turn into a profitable transaction.

The goal he was aiming for was turning his new design spirit into a powerful producer of universal life energy!

If he could make a new spiritual product that inherently produced universal life energy, then Ves would no longer be dependent on buying or plundering serums from others in order to replenish his supply!

"This would be a complete revolution!"

Chapter 4023 The Origin of Life

Of all of his treasures, the five high-grade life-prolonging treatment serums definitely ranked close to the top!

Their monetary value alone was so high that he could readily buy several complete fleet carriers by exchanging just one of them to a large party!

Even first-raters such as the Terrans and the Rubarthans would be willing to pay a fortune to buy the vials off his hands!

Ves did not dare to flaunt them, though. That was way too ostentatious. Who knew if a secret commando group would swoop in and try to rob him blind the next day?

In order to make sure that no one present here was able to recognize what he brought, he had made sure to transfer the serum into a different and less obvious container.

Most serums were stored in classic thin, cylindrical test tubes. Ves didn't know why. Perhaps it was due to tradition.

Whatever the case, after pouring the contents of one of his original vials into an opaque container of a different shape, he wasn't concerned about anyone finding out the true worth of this ingredient.

Though he felt tempted to show it off to the Aducs in order to make it clear how much they should be in debt with him, he did not do anything foolish.

Ves already intended to subvert the new design spirit for his own use, so he figured that he did not owe the Aducs anything more.

What ultimately mattered to him was succeeding in his attempt in turning his new design spirit into a universal life energy generator!

Perhaps it might be way too premature for him to embark on such an ambitious experiment, but Ves thought that the circumstances right now were much more favorable than at any other time.

While neither the Old Lady nor his upcoming spiritual product were based on pure life energy, he believed that the combination of earth, life and wood-attributed energy might lead to remarkable results as long as they were strong and abundant enough!

Feeding an entity that consisted of these attributes with an enormous dose of pure life energy should lead to a huge amount of growth, far greater than that of any other spirits due to the extremely high compatibility between the different energies!

Ever since Ves recently discovered that death energy was able to overwhelm life energy but got hindered by earth energy, he thought a lot more about the compatibility between different attributes.

It should not be a coincidence that the Old Lady had developed a domain of wood, life and earth!

The three each stood for different concepts, but they all nurtured and reinforced each other.

Though his actual theories and assumptions regarding these bold experiments were a little shaky, Ves felt there was enough of a chance of producing an amazing result for him to go through with this costly gamble!

At worst, he would still end up with a powerful earth, life and wood-oriented design spirit! Such an entity could provide a lot of assistance to the Larkinson Clan's mech design projects, biotechnology products and spiritual engineering projects!

"Well, here is hoping that I can obtain more than that." He softly muttered to himself.

He carefully checked the ingredients he prepared due to his heavy commitment to this experiment. At no point did he want to get sloppy and make a mistake because he did not properly go through his checklist!

"Everything is fine."

He took a deep breath. After going through his plan one more time, he felt the time was right for him to proceed.

He took his floating lockboxes to the center of the low hill where a dying and drooping oak tree dominated the view.

Not a single sense of guilt dwelled in his mind as he examined the awful spiritual state of the Old Lady.

Killing her was not the only way he could accomplish his objective, but he figured it was the most expedient course of action.

"I'm sorry, Old Lady, but I need you to make a sacrifice in order to birth a life form with higher potential. You should take comfort in the fact that your successor will be far more powerful and grander than you could have ever imagined in your long years of existence."

This was true, but the main reason he wanted to kill off the Old Lady was to get rid of the baggage and start off with a clean slate!

There was no way that Ves wanted the new entity to retain a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to the Aduc Family!

The Old Lady was hardly in a state to respond to his declaration.

She was practically a fish on his chopping block as far as he was concerned!

"Let's bring out my knife. Blinky! It's showtime!"

Mrow!

His companion spirit had been waiting for this and readily emerged from his mind. Ves did not need to pass on any instructions to his animal half. The purple spiritual cat instantly went to work by approaching the P-stones and using his considerable strength to shatter the spiritual fragments in quick succession!

Each time Blinky did so, he inhaled the fractured shards of compacted spiritual energy, but took care not to digest any of it. The high concentration of different varieties of life energy quickly caused Blinky to exude a different vibe.

It was as if he had turned into an overstuffed bun filled with life!

Mrow!

Blinky felt increasingly more uncomfortable after harvesting so many shards of slightly different varieties of life energy. It was in his nature to digest them and convert them into energy with an attribute that conformed to Ves' domain.

He was never designed to serve as an intangible P-stone!

The Star Cat moved quickly after shattering the spiritual fragments. He zipped over to the Old Lady and dove into her trunk and moved down to where most of the roots emerged.

It was at this place where the spirituality of the Old Lady resided!

The cat did not spare any sympathy towards the wounded and dying spirit and easily killed her with a couple of attacks!

After that, the cat quickly tore apart the spiritual remains of the Old Lady before combining the pieces with the shards that it had gathered moments earlier.

Ves moved closer to the trunk of the tree and pressed his palms against the bark.

The oak tree exuded a significantly different sensation from before. Now that it had become spiritless, the physical body of the Old Lady had lost the essence of its life!

Ves could vaguely feel even now that the tree was deteriorating from the inside. The final source of support had disappeared, which caused this tree to worsen in many different ways.

He faintly heard a few calls of alarms from the rear. The Aducs who were studying the current state of the oak tree all saw how its health had worsened to a faster degree!

If not for the fact that Ves had warned the Aducs beforehand, he was sure they would attempt to mob him or something. The Old Lady was their most precious living relic and one that played a large role in shaping their own philosophies and beliefs!

"C'mon, hurry up, Blinky!"

Mrow mrow mrow!

His companion spirit was already working as fast as possible in order to piece together his strongest and most ambitious living spiritual product to date!

Ves lent a hand to his own cat so that they could complete this important stage as fast as possible.

Using his own spiritual energy as the binding agent, he combined all sorts of shards filled with other varieties of life energy together in a concentrated nucleus or heart of life.

Not only that, he and Blinky shaped a shell in the form of a woman out of the shards that were largely derived out of earth and life energy.

At the same time, they also created a lot of different spiritual components that Ves hoped might play a role in the functioning of the new entity.

After Ves almost put together the form of their new creation, he readied his hidden vial and already began to draw out its potent universal life energy.

He took a deep breath before decisively channeling all of the rich universal life energy into the center of his incomplete creation!

"Take it all and master its essence!"

The flood of rich universal life energy also coincided with the process that granted his new spirit the spark of life!

A huge sense of weight suddenly overcame Ves and every other person in the Green Sanctum!

Though the Aducs were largely confused as to why they experienced a sense of oppression, they all quieted down and waited for the guest from the Larkinson Clan to produce results.

"Mama?" Aurelia questioned as she stopped petting Clixie for a moment.

A massive event was taking place, one that completely dominated the Green Sanctum!

The more sensitive and developed members of the Aduc Family sensed the outburst of life the clearest. Matriarch Erexia Aduc and many other leaders displayed more and more awe as they sensed the increasingly richer emissions of life from the base of the old tree!

Meanwhile, Ves and Blinky tried their best to maintain control over this extreme process.

Both of them came under a lot of strain in their attempts to channel so much universal life energy into their new creation!

They tried their best to transform the universal life energy into a more self-contained ingredient rather than allowing it to merge and feed the other attributes.

It turned out that it was extremely difficult to prevent this natural reaction from taking place!

"Ugh! It's... like trying to prevent sugar from dissolving into water!"

Right now, the new spiritual entity that was just beginning to come to life was so hungry for juice that she eagerly soaked up the rich and attractive universal life energy without any restraint!

"Damnit, I programmed you to leave it alone and save it up! Why are you disobeying my instructions?!" Ves complained.

It couldn't be helped. Telling a spiritual entity to not absorb universal life energy was like telling a man dying from thirst not to drink the refreshing glass of water in his hands!

Ves watched with distress as more and more universal life energy was converted into other forms of energy that were much less precious. Though his spiritual product rapidly increased in strength as a result, he still felt as if he was pouring a bucket filled with phasewater straight down the drain!

"C'mon! Enough is enough! You'll grow fat if you absorb any more!"

40 percent.

60 percent.

80 percent.

Just as the new ancestral spirit absorbed 96 percent, her rapidly-boosted spiritual form finally became saturated!

"Yes! My guess is right!"

Ves finally experienced a lot of relief as 4 percent of the universal life energy of an entire vial of serum remained intact and in a cohesive whole!

The reason why it hadn't disappeared was because his greedy spiritual product finally couldn't absorb any more of the friendly energy! She had literally stuffed herself to her breaking point!

It was as if Ves stuffed an excessive amount of sugar in a glass of water. At a certain point, the fixed quantity of liquid simply couldn't dissolve any additional sugar, causing the remainder to pool at the bottom while remaining intact!

"Hehehe, my gamble paid off, if only barely!"

Saving a fraction of the original universal life energy was better than seeing it disappear entirely!

After a few more seconds, he became relieved as he confirmed that his powerful new spirit no longer messed around with the remainder of precious energy. Instead, she did as he originally programmed and created a small pool in her body that concentrated and protected the remaining universal life energy!

With this remnant core of pure, concentrated life, the new spiritual entity rapidly matured even as she fully came to life!

"Our tree! Look at our tree! She's blooming to life!"

Even as Ves admired the rapid expansion of his most powerful spirit yet, he could feel the bark of the tree becoming moist, strong and filled with vitality!

"Wait, this tree..."

Ves took a few steps backwards while Blinky flew out of the trunk and returned to his side.

Both of them observed with increasing concern as the oak tree that used to be Old Lady not only returned to its prime, but also grew larger and taller before everyone's eyes!

The roots of the oak tree sucked out all of the nutrients in the rich and fertile soil and rapidly converted them into new but incredibly strong plant cells!

"What is happening?!"

"I don't know, but the Old Lady looks better than ever!"

Ves continually had to step back as the Old Lady continued to explode in size, reaching a state that caused the tree to match and exceed the height of a typical mech!

"This is insane!" Pesca Aduc stammered. "An unmodified Earth-based oak tree should never be able to grow in size so fast! How has the Old Lady not exploded yet? This process completely breaks all common sense in my field!"

Nobody had any doubts left about the Larkinson Patriarch's claim that he could 'revive' the Old Lady.

From what it looked like, he did far more than that! He not only brought her back to life, but also granted her such a huge upgrade that her body turned into a tree that seemed to represent an entire world!

As soon as the evocative creation process had reached its final stage, the spiritual product had fully come to life!

The new spiritual entity contained so much life and power that she spontaneously manifested behind the enlarged tree!

To many of the Aducs, it was as if a literal deity had appeared before their eyes!

Each of them couldn't help but sink to their knees in supplication.

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"Old Lady..."

"No. She's not the Old Lady." Matriarch Erexia Aduc whispered as she observed the motherly figure made out of earth, leaves and twigs with astonished eyes. "She is someone greater. She... is..."

"Behold, members of the Aduc Family!" Ves ecstatically addressed the gathering in the Green Sanctum! "Through the sacrifice of your Old Lady, I have brought forth Gaia, the Mother of Earth and the Origin of Life!"

Hardly any Aduc could believe what they were hearing.

Did this crazy mech designer truly claim to have created a literal goddess?!

What was even crazier was that Ves claimed to have created not just an ordinary goddess, but arguably one of the most powerful primordial deities of ancient human mythology!

Yet as every Aduc who had revered the Old Lady throughout their lives gazed upon this superior transcendent life form, they all felt in the depths of their soul that Gaia had the power and the identity to prove the Larkinson Patriarch's words true!

"Gaia!" Someone called out.

"Gaia!" A few more Aducs repeated the name.

"GAIA!" Everyone roared at once!

Chapter 4024 Nurturing Mother

On this day, the future of the Aduc Family changed forever, and so did the futures of many other people.

Matriarch Erexu Aduc and the crowd of Aduc family members who were fortunate enough to witness this event in person had forever seared the birth of a goddess in their minds.

Despite their secularist background and despite the high proportion of highly-educated scientists among their family, practically every single member completely and utterly submitted to the newborn goddess!

Their knees uniformly weakened as the pressure and presence of this ascended being graced her majesty over her first and most intimate flock of worshipers.

The new goddess didn't even do anything aside from manifesting the form that Ves had designed for her and already her appearance completely conquered the faith of the gathering of exogeologists, exobiologists, exoecologists, and other Aduc.

This was strange as the Aduc had encountered many amazing and impressive products of nature throughout the history of their family.

Their terraforming work occasionally brought them to untamed planets that presented them with dazzling new exofauna and exoflora. Different life-bearing planets produced different living organisms that each adapted to the strange circumstances of their strange environments.

They had come across gigantic lizards whose height approached that of a mountain.

They encountered a hyper-intelligent queen exoinsect whose cognitive capacity matched that of a supercomputer.

They had even stumbled upon one of the rarest wonders of the cosmos, a native life form evolved and that dwelled within the extremely inhospitable body of a red dwarf star!

Any of these creatures were so powerful and such unlikely products of natural evolution that a lot of people would have no problem regarding these supercreatures as gods!

Yet in the face of all of these biological wonders, the Aduc Family firmly rejected this approach and always maintained the stance that no alien or creature was more special than the ordinary organisms of Old Earth.

To the Aduc Family, life was a force that was fully understandable. They studied the mechanisms of DNA, RNA and genetics for many years and understood that almost every living being was based out of the same building blocks of life.

While there were a couple of unusual exceptions in the Milky Way Galaxy such as the sandman race, the existence of energy-based life forms was not unheard of in the scientific community.

However, compared to the weak and utterly negligible sandmen, the appearance of the giant intangible woman whose body appeared to be made out of soil and tree branches completely broke their cognition!

To them, no amount of learning could ever come close to explaining the existence of a deity that was far greater and more exceptional than a giant lizard or an enormous whale that could manipulate phasewater!

Although at first it looked as if this woman was nothing but an Avatar of the Old Lady, the members of the Aduc Family were extremely familiar with the vibe and feel of their living heirloom.

The powerful woman that appeared before them only vaguely possessed a glow that resembled that of the Old Lady.

The difference was that the new entity was far more powerful, far more majestic and far more directly connected to Old Earth than one of its trees!

It was as if they had been graced with the presence of the Old Lady's primordial ancestor, the woman who personified Terra and served as the origin of human life!

Every single person in the Green Sanctum became captivated by dazzling illusions. It was as the grand emergence of a goddess that was close to their hearts completely exploded the faith they had accumulated over the course of their lives.

Most of them saw visions that equated the goddess known as Gaia to Old Earth.

As one of the few people who received the privilege to travel to the Sol System and step foot on humanity's ancestral planet itself, Matriarch Erexia Aduc felt as if she had revisited this life-changing period.

She only experienced the same profound sensations as before, but also felt as if she had developed a greater understanding of the essence of Old Earth!

The matriarch and many Aduc's that had always looked up to humanity's home planet all became connected to Gaia in a way that was not an unfamiliar sight to the members of the Golden Skull Alliance!

Ves, who masterminded this extremely significant sequence of events, did not look surprised at the reactions of the Aduc's.

Though he detested religion and maintained the opinion that humanity should no longer be swayed by superstition, he recognized the benefits of wielding faith as a controlling force.

He already calculated that the best and most surefire way to obtain the loyalty of the Aduc Family was to bind them to the Larkinson Clan in the form of a new ancestral spirit that took on the guise of a goddess!

It did not matter that Ves had never fully disclosed the exact nature of his new spiritual product. He had obfuscated the fact that the birth of Gaia and her immediate insertion into the lives of the Aducs would have profound and permanent implications to the future of their family.

He did so for the selfish goal of winning over the Aducs and ensuring that this family with a notable heritage would never think about escaping from his clutches!

After all, he was the creator and effectively the controller of Gaia. The newborn design spirit and ancestral spirit may be vastly more powerful than any other entity he created thus far, but that did not change the fact that he was the reason she existed in the first place!

As Gaia slowly became familiar with her new existence, she slowly gained control over her powers.

The energies she released from her manifestation slowly toned down. This caused the atmosphere inside the Green Sanctum to lighten up as Gaia's presence no longer overwhelmed everyone as much as before.

Even so, her birth already marked every single person aboard the Green Dream.

Ves, noted with considerable surprise that the spiritualities of Matriarch Erexia Aduc and her other fellow Earth worshipers had been stimulated to varying degrees!

Each of their spiritualities became more active than before. Some had grown stronger while others evolved their spirits into a direction that allowed them to become more aligned with Gaia.

This was a remarkable reaction and one that directly proved that powerful spiritual entities could 'contaminate' the minds and spirits of weaker individuals.

If Ves was able to understand and reproduce this mechanism under more controlled conditions, he felt he could take advantage of it and gain the capability to mass-produce extraordinary individuals who all possessed uniform spiritualities!

In addition to swaying the Aducs to move their domains closer to that of Gaia, the powerful ancestral spirit also granted every witness of her birth a magnanimous gift!

Her design and creation was inseparable from universal life energy. The key ingredient that allowed aged and dying humans to rejuvenate in mind, spirit and body was a powerful tonic to pretty much any form of life!

For one reason or another, Gaia's saturated form began to leak out traces of universal life energy from her manifestation!

The surrounding organisms eagerly captured and absorbed this precious high-grade energy into their own essence, causing them to rejoice as they grew in ways that could not be explained!

Every tree, every bush and every single stalk of grass grew a tiny bit greener and more lush by the second.

The bees, worms and other small creatures that the Aducs had cultivated in order to maintain the biome each absorbed minute quantities of universal life energy as well, causing them to grow and evolve in ways that modern biotechnology could not explain.

Each of them buzzed and moved as if they were having the time of their lives. Some of them were even smart enough to bow or lower themselves in front of the majestic appearance of the goddess that had given them a grace of her power.

The people gathered in the Green Sanctum were not left out from this party either. Each of their bodies soaked in varying amounts of universal life energy, causing them to undergo a second round of subtle growth and evolution!

Though the effects weren't as great and obvious as the first time, Ves guessed that everyone's lifespans and potential may have grown by another small measure!

Even he benefited from this exposure! His dense body cells and his powerful Spirituality all changed in ways that he couldn't describe but instinctively felt was beneficial for his future growth!

His Spirituality, which had never grown that much after he created his incarnations, started to churn as it absorbed the good fortune that Gaia released into the environment!

One one hand, Ves was happy that one of his most important aspects as a mech designer and a spiritual engineer had grown stronger.

On the other hand, he was incredibly peeved that the universal life energy that Gaia was handing out like candy originally belonged to him! She was giving away precious energy that she should have kept in reserve!

Ves felt a bit helpless but not too distressed. Gaia's domain somehow made it easy for him and many others to directly absorb universal life energy in a safe and efficient way.

He already understood that if he attempted to directly absorb the energy of a high-grade life-prolonging treatment serum in its rawest form, it would never be as easy as it would feed every aspect of his Spirituality, including the junk energy that was related to

attributes that were either irrelevant or directly detrimental towards his personality and future development!

There were parts about him that were impulsive, greedy and outright dangerous. If he indiscriminately absorbed universal life energy, those elements would definitely grow stronger, causing him to become increasingly more irrational and less able to control his more destructive urges!

Ves even speculated that this form of indiscriminate growth may have been the root cause of the dark days of the Age of Conquest.

Whatever the case, Ves valued stable and controllable development on his terms over quick fixes that ultimately forced him to pay a far greater price.

"This... is different."

He did not call Gaia the Origin of life without reason. Part of the programming that he had added to his spiritual product was related to mastering and controlling life energy and other related energies.

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Ves could clearly see that this part about Gaia's ability had successfully manifested as he felt her gentle but powerful influence subtly guiding the universal life energy to directly feed design seed and therefore his domain!

"This... is amazing!" His eyes lit up!

If Gaia could repeat this process to himself and other people, he could use her to safely accelerate people's spiritual development without generating too much sequelae!

Of course, it remained to be seen whether it was safe and desirable to rely too much on her powers. Ves knew more than others that true growth had to be rounded and comprehensive. It was not enough to strengthen his raw Spirituality. He needed to pay attention to other forms of accumulation as well.

For mech designers, it was impossible for them to advance to Senior and higher without spending a huge amount of time practicing their actual craft!

Ves still had to design a lot more mechs before he could even be eligible to advance to Senior!

Even if he had discovered his growth direction and had a clear path ahead of him, the distance was still so great that he had to go forward by relying on his power!

He knew that no amount of artificial boosting from Gaia could help him get closer to his next destination.

Ves calmed down after he made this realization. Gaia's ability to harness universal life energy to efficiently boost other people's growth may be extremely precious to those who lacked talent in the spiritual arena, but her ability to nurture still possessed limits.

One of them was the fact that she just used up a decent amount of universal life energy, an extremely rare and precious resource that Gaia might or might not be able to renew!

Chapter 4025 Green Baptism

The show eventually came to an end. Gaia no longer continued to spread her gifts to the witnesses of her birth and slowly retracted her presence.

Her majestic energy manifestation gradually faded until it was no longer visible.

A lot of kneeling and prostrating Aducs groaned as their goddess and the icon of their faith no longer graced them with her appearance.

Drunk by all of the events, everyone still needed time to process all of the changes. The baptism that they had experienced a moment ago also produced follow-up changes that continually caused them to feel more energetic and invigorated than ever before!

It was as if they had just become a few years younger!

Not just the Aducs, but plenty of others benefited from Gaia's baptism.

Ves and Blinky grew stronger and more confident in their ability to harness spiritual energy and create amazing new products.

The Everchanger's spiritual foundation enjoyed a minor quantitative and qualitative boost that advanced its unique development trajectory and strengthened its affinity towards life.

Venerable Joshua developed an immediate intimacy and understanding of Gaia's personality and nature. While he hadn't been involved in the actual creation process, the expert pilot still possessed an undeniable connection to the Mother of Earth as he was one of the sources of her spiritual ingredients!

"Amazing..." Venerable Joshua uttered as she still felt a faint connection to the new spiritual entity that had settled in the body of the former Old Lady. "Life is such a miracle."

Further away from the center of the hill, a group of people also benefited from this unexpected baptism of life.

Shannon Maris felt younger, stronger and more active than she had years.

The onset of aging had already affected her physical condition in many ways. Though she was still 'young' enough to maintain her effectiveness on the battlefield, she was no longer as quick and spry as before.

At least she thought that was the case.

As a former special forces soldier, her body and foundation was much stronger than that of the surrounding scientists and administrators. Her body soaked up a proportionally larger share of universal life energy, causing her to feel as if she had just completed the most satisfying and rejuvenating workout in years!

She bent her limbs and moved her body to test her rejuvenated form. Her bones felt firmer and her muscles became more supple again. Her genetic enhancements returned to harmony and her implants no longer generated that subtle feeling that they were weighing her down.

"Joining the Larkinson Clan may have been the best decision of my life..."

Another member of the clan also harvested a lot of gains. Unlike the newly-hired nanny, Clixie did not receive as many enhancements in her body.

Other than rejuvenating her cells and extending their lifespans to a minor degree, the Rubarthan Sentinel Cat did not notice too many differences to her body. Her health and physical state had already reached the peak of her species, so any further growth and improvement was nearly impossible to accomplish without resorting to drastic measures.

Perhaps Gaia understood Clixie's circumstances, because much of the baptism that entered the cat's body flowed into her mind and spirit!

As a sentient cat, Clixie was not stupid by any means, but now she felt she could actually keep up with the more complex thoughts of the humans she was surrounded by every day!

Not only that, but her spirituality received so much targeted nurturing that it had reached a critical point!

A silent explosion occurred in her mind as her previously unimpressive spirituality not only bloomed with potential, but also became activated on the spot!

With the help of the accumulation that she had received from bonding with Aurelia, Clixie fully managed to convert all of that latent power into activated power!

"Miaow!" Clixie cried out as the cat felt stronger and more alive than ever!

She finally managed to take a critical step closer into catching up with the likes of Lucky and Goldie!

She was no longer the weakest cat of the first family of the Larkinson Clan!

Even the prominent gem set in her golden collar grew a bit more lustrous!

A bit further away, one other individual had obtained a lot of advantages from Gaia's birth.

Aurelia's condition was different from Clixie and many other people. Her mind and spirit was exceptionally strong for her age but her body was still in a fragile and growing state.

Even if her designer body had already received a baptism from the Superior Mother, much of that only strengthened its future potential.

The energies that Gaia channeled into the little girl's body not only strengthened it to a degree, but also deepened its potential to a higher degree!

Compared to the Superior Mother, Gaia was considerably more skilled and adept at nurturing and improving human physiques.

Life played a much greater role in Gaia's domain and formed one of the pillars that made up her existence!

Even though she had only come alive a short time ago, the insane amount of high-grade life-prolonging energy that Ves had pumped into her existence had accelerated her growth beyond belief, thereby granting her immediate access to a wealth of abilities and techniques!

"Mama!" Aurelia happily cried out as her body practically sang with joy at the remarkable substance they received.

The remote consultants working for Witshaw & Yeneca would definitely become astonished once again as the designer baby's growth pattern deviated even further from its original trajectory!

As Aurelia and many other people silently came to grips with the life-changing gains of this remarkable event, the mood in the Green Sanctum slowly shifted back to a semblance of normality.

It was only a semblance, though. The earlier baptism permanently altered every organism in this massive compartment, causing the biome to turn into a space akin to a blessed land!

The Aducs that recovered the soonest all became wondrous at the changes. To them, it was as if none of the planets they had terraformed in their careers could come close to the Green Sanctum in terms of fidelity towards nature and Old Earth!

"Everyone." Matriarch Erexia Aduc spoke up as she rose to her feet and stood with a straight and proud back. "Each of you are probably feeling excited, but this is not the time to loosen our inhibitions. Control yourself, maintain a sober mind and watch your health. While I have no reason to believe that... Gaia... has meant us ill, it is dangerous to make assumptions. Every single member of our family must undergo mandatory medical examinations within 72 hours. Even if you feel you have grown stronger and healthier, we must understand exactly what has changed."

The Aducs all pulled their thoughts away from the high they experienced after absorbing Gaia's nurturing energies. The fact that their matriarch did not speak too much about Gaia's emergence but instead emphasized the health risks of all of the changes had rapidly sobered them all up. Since the majority of them were scientists and experts in different fields, they were well aware that even the most benign actions might produce adverse consequences!

The crowd of Aducs reluctantly turned around and left the site. The further they moved away from the massive oak tree, the more their surroundings turned normal again.

Only the center of the Green Sanctum maintained the atmosphere of a holy land. Gaia's powerful glow still radiated from the rejuvenated and magnified body of the Old Lady, causing every nearby life form to continue to benefit from her presence, if not as strong as before.

Ves took one last look at the giant tree that looked as if it could encompass an entire world and descended down the hill.

He approached his daughter and checked whether she was still okay. From the moment he lifted her up in his arms, he already felt she had grown stronger and more active.

"Mama!" The little girl called as she stretched her tiny arms towards the big tree. "Green mama!"

"Gaia isn't your mother, Aurelia." Ves gently corrected his adorable baby. "She's a new spirit, though she is already a mother in a way. Every organism whose roots trace back to Old Earth is her child, at least conceptually. Besides, daddy gave birth to Gaia. How can she possibly be your mother? She should be your sister at best!"

Aurelia looked completely confused. Despite the baptism that she just received, she was still too young to understand all of the complicated words and sentences that Ves had just voiced!

"...Mama?"

Ves wanted to palm his face. "Just call her auntie. Gaia is your new auntie. She's just like Helena!"

Though there was no clear basis behind this classification, Ves had long figured out that it was completely pointless to follow an accurate and literal family tree for his spiritual products.

If he made a new design spirit in the guise of his grandmother, then Ves would just treat her as his grandma without any further fuss!

If he created a grandson, then he would sincerely treat him as a grandson even if the identities of the new spirit's parents were a little vague.

Ves could even create his own spiritual wife if he ever built up the desire!

Of course, there was no way he would break this taboo. Gloriana was already a good wife to him and he had no desire to replace her, much less with a figment of his imagination that he breathed into life!

His actual wife would definitely grow livid if she found out about his act!

He shook his head and rid himself from this silly train of thought.

"Be a good girl and don't call every spiritual mother figure your mother. You only have a single mother, and that is Gloriana, understand?"

"Um!"

After he became satisfied that Gaia hadn't affected his daughter in a detrimental manner, he turned and addressed the leader of the Aduc Family.

"Matriarch, a lot has happened today."

"...Correct. You... did not exaggerate when you claimed you could help our Old Lady. We did not expect her rebirth to be so... great. This changes everything. Our family will need time to process the changes and understand our new normal."

"Take your time." Ves casually waved his hand. "You are not the only ones who need to take stock. That said, I do not want to wait too long to visit you again. I want to have another try at your second heirloom."

Matriarch Erexia responded with a welcoming smile that showed none of the reluctance that she displayed in the past.

"You are welcome to visit us at any time. As the person responsible for bringing Gaia into our lives, we will gladly share our unique specialties to you, though we do not have that much to offer."

"I am sure that will change as your family rises with the help of Gaia. Your big tree is an incomparable treasure to you now. It houses and anchors the Mother of Earth, giving you and your fellow Aducs easy access to her. Don't take this lightly and make sure you protect it. It would be inconvenient for Gaia to lose such an excellent vessel."

The oak tree was bound to mutate into a different life form that was anything but natural.

Ves didn't think the Aducs would object to that development. Gaia was far more important to them than a tree from Old Earth!

The two chatted a bit more but it was clear that they both had many other issues on their mind.

They soon bid farewell to each other and parted ways.

The successful creation of Gaia had big implications for his plans. The powers that she had demonstrated were extremely valuable and Ves did not intend to let them go to waste!

"I still need to unlock those letters, though"

Ves felt it was important to get to the bottom of the Aduc Family's mysterious Annals of Terra Vita.

"This may be the real prize!"

Chapter 4026 Greater Sincerity

The birth of Gaia completely upended the Aduc Family!

When Ves returned to the Spirit of Bentheim, he found that numerous Larkinsons had also heard about the birth of a new design spirit.

The reason why his clansmen already knew so much was because there were third order mechs that had already spilled the beans!

Pretty much every mech and design spirit had felt Gaia's birth.

Despite the distance between the Larkinson fleet and the Aduc fleet, Gaia was so powerful and released so much energy in the first moments of her existence that she was like an explosion in the night!

Everyone who possessed a bit of sensitivity towards spirituality had definitely sensed that something extraordinary took place!

Not just the Larkinsons, but also certain individuals among the Glory Seekers, the Crossers and other groups in the vicinity of the Aduc fleet's orbit must have sensed the wave of power propagated by Gaia's emergence!

Fortunately, aside from making dozens of expert pilots and high-ranking mech designers suspicious, none of the third parties followed up and made any pressing inquiries. Ves became relieved when he found out that Gaia's unexpectedly powerful birth did not attract too much unwelcome attention.

He had no way of determining how long that would last. Ves already had a hunch that a spirit as powerful as Gaia would never remain unnoticed, especially when she possessed such a strong relation to Old Earth and universal life energy!

As Ves wanted to give the Aducs time to process their changes and come to grips with Gaia, he decided to spend his time on other matters.

His assistant Gavin just happened to provide him with a helpful distraction.

"Do you remember our negotiations with the Voiken Family, boss?"

"Hmm? Oh, I remember. I recall there is a significant disagreement between us and the Voiken Family about the division of earnings for a potential collaboration project centered around a line of law enforcement mechs."

Ves had not forgotten about the Pacifier Project. It was probably one of the most commercially lucrative ventures of this design round. Part of the reason why he thought it was so promising was because the Voiken Family would be laying all of the groundwork for the introduction of this revolutionary new law enforcement solution.

It was a pity that the Voikens attempted to scam him by limiting their collaboration and the proceeds from it to a single mech model. While that wasn't unusual in most cooperative ventures between different mech designers, this was a different situation!

When Ves figured out that Professor Taigen Herman Voiken intended to publish an entire mech ecosystem targeted towards law enforcement agencies, he did not get fooled.

He was not unaccustomed to situations where others exploited him for his own gains. This was merely the way that human society and many other societies worked.

If he somehow got scammed, then there was little he could do about it aside from accepting his losses.

However, now that he became aware of it in advance, there was no way Ves would make it easy for the Voiken Family to profit from his unique design solutions!

"Well, I am happy to announce that our negotiation team has managed to achieve a lot of progress in the past week."

"Oh?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "That sounds curious, Benny. There is a lot of money and interests at stake here. Shouldn't the Voikens be standing their ground and making it difficult for us to secure any concessions?"

Gavin smirked. "Ordinarily, you are right, but the situation of the Voikens is not as optimistic as ours. Time is not on their side. While our clan is set to establish itself in Davute and rise to greater heights, the detachment of Voikens sent to the Red Ocean are still strangers in a strange land. According to Minister Shederin, they have already missed the first and most crucial phase of the opening of the new frontier. If the newcomers delay any further, they will completely get suppressed by their competitors."

"Is their situation bad?"

"Don't forget what faction they are aligned to." His assistant reminded Ves. "To those who are in the know, it is not difficult to find out the MTA factions that are favoring specific pioneers. This is not too relevant for us as we are tied to factions that are able to get along with many other groups and factions."

That wasn't entirely true. The Survivalists and the Transhumanists may both be relatively harmless to other powers, but the latter had a serious conflict with the first-rate superstates!

Whether that would have any consequences to Ves and his clan remained to be seen, but for now Gavin's statement mostly held true.

The Voiken Family was apparently in a different position. Ves quickly thought about it. The Preserving Order Faction probably held the greatest sway in the more developed and stable regions of human space back in the Milky Way Galaxy.

These were the areas where humanity was at its most prosperous! A lot more people were happy with their lives and their place in society. The last thing they wanted was for chaos and disorder to disrupt their sweet arrangement!

Unfortunately for the Voikens, the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy was a completely different environment. This was a frontier that was filled with people who sought change!

A bit of chaos and disorder did not sound that bad to them. If every zone in the Red Ocean had completely stabilized, then there was no room for other pioneers to rise to power!

Even if the pioneers aligned to the Preservers did not intend to do anything of note in the Red Ocean, their ideological leanings already made it impossible for them to receive a warm welcome from other groups!

After Ves derived all of this from the brief amount of information provided by Gavin, he grinned and leaned back in his chair.

"I see. If this is true, then the Voikens need us even more than I thought. If they can't come up with a killer product that can establish their mech designers in the regional market, then they will not have the capital to do anything of note in this dwarf galaxy."

"Exactly, boss. While we have shown our willingness to take our time, the Voikens have no choice but to crack and give up the high ground in order to bring our talks closer to conclusion. We have already settled the most important terms."

Gavin passed on a secure data pad to Ves.

When Ves perused the incomplete treaty document, he skipped through all of the complicated lawyer speak and focused on the key phrases that he truly cared about.

He quickly began to frown.

"Is this real, Benny?"

"What is the problem?"

"According to this term, the split in earnings is heavily favored towards the Voikens. It clearly says here that the Living Mech Corporation only gets 20 percent of the earnings while Voiken Industries is entitled to the remaining 80 percent! This is too far apart from the 50 percent target that I set at the beginning!"

His assistant coughed. "You should read the text more closely. While Minister Shederin found it possible to convince the Voikens that we should earn half of the proceeds from selling the completed Pacifier Project, this will almost certainly mean that we cannot demand a satisfactory share of the earnings of the rest of the Voiken mech ecosystem. In order to make sure our contributions to its success are fully accounted for, Minister Shederin took the liberty of altering your original demand and insisted on a different one that better satisfies our commercial interests."

Ves slowly widened his eyes. "Do you mean..."

Gavin grinned. "That's right, boss. Our negotiating team has convinced the Voikens that we are entitled to a fifth of the proceeds of each sale that is related to their ambitious law enforcement mech ecosystem! While Professor Taigen Voiken has not told us how

many mech models and auxiliary equipment and supplies that entail, a conservative estimate already puts us at a dozen unique mech models, of which hundreds of derivative variants can be spawned. In other words, if everything goes right, we would pretty much earn 20 percent of the money that Voiken Industries is earning from their complete catalog of law enforcement mech lines and related products!"

This was a massive concession!

If Voiken Industries completely focused on servicing the law enforcement sector, then this was hardly any different from owning 20 percent of the company and earning a proportionate amount of money in the form of dividends!

"Hahahaha!" Ves exploded in laughter! "Shederin has struck once again! I knew it was the right choice to pick up a family of professional diplomats. Power is the foundation of our strength, but relationships are the key to our future development. Having good talkers in our clan can make a huge difference!"

The more Ves engaged in matters at this level, the more he discovered the importance of diplomacy. No one was strong enough to defeat every opponent and overcome any challenge by themselves. Being able to make friends and convincing others into giving up more concessions could easily yield powerful advantages!

Of course, Ves did not forget that the root of this success lay in the desirability of his own services.

The fact that the Voikens agreed to surrender 20 percent of the earnings of their entire mech ecosystem showed that they fully understood the value of his glows, most particularly that of Lufa!

When Ves thought about how Professor Taigen Voiken would be able to generate huge advantages by relying on the killer function of Lufa's glow, it did not sound too excessive to pay a high amount of 'royalty fees' to the Larkinsons.

Gavin wasn't finished, though. "There's more, boss."

"You mean the Voikens agreed to give away more than this generous share?"

"That is correct. In order to express their friendship towards us, the Voiken Family has even agreed to gift us a large combat carrier."

"...Say what?"

"I wasn't misspeaking, sir. You should scroll to the end of the current draft. It mentions the ship right at the bottom!"

Ves did so and saw that the Voikens seriously offered to transfer possession of one of the combat carriers they brought over from the old galaxy to the Larkinsons!

While the ship was not as impressive as the Wild Torch that the Wild Fighter Association gave away as a prize, Ves did not look down on this generous gift.

The Voiken gift was not an ordinary combat carrier!

According to the brief details provided by the document, the ship was able to carry up to 100 mechs!

"We didn't give up anything important to compel the Voikens to gift this combat carrier to us, right? I don't want to find out later that we accepted this gift in exchange for lowering our share by 1 percent or something. This would definitely be a loss for us in the long run!"

"Don't worry. Minister Shederin never let up on his Voiken counterparts. He already guessed that this gift is an attempt from their patriarch to deepen his family's relationship with our clan."

"Well, it's working. I already feel a lot closer to the Voiken Family in my heart! If Master Barnard Solas Voiken can gift us a capital ship on top of that, then I will make sure to put in additional effort to watch out for his descendents who have relocated the Red Ocean!"

"Err... I am afraid that their generosity can only go so far. They still need the bulk of their fleet to protect and anchor their own presence in the new frontier."

That was right. Ves was being way too greedy. No pioneer in his right mind would give away a strategic asset as essential as a capital ship in exchange for favors and illusory promises!

In any case, Ves already became satisfied with this gesture. The Voikens of today were different from the Voikens more than a week ago. They had lowered their demands and showed a lot more sincerity towards him and his clan.

"If this is how the deal will look like, then I have no problem with it." Ves relaxed and smiled. "Tell Minister Shederin that he has done a good job and that he should proceed according to his own judgment."

Shederin had fully earned his trust this time!

Chapter 4027 Restrictive Clauses

Was Ves dreaming?

The breakthrough in the negotiations between the Larkinson Clan and the Voiken Family sounded like music to his ears.

In exchange for contributing to the Pacifier Project, Ves would essentially receive 20 percent of the proceeds of the entire ecosystem of mechs, auxiliary products, replacement parts and other related goods!

Though Ves felt extremely happy to earn a lot of money for a large amount of products that he didn't even require his input, as soon as he sobered up a bit, he grew a bit suspicious why the deal was so heavily favored towards the Larkinson Clan.

Even if it became evident that the Voikens developed a clear intention of befriending the Larkinsons, why give away such a large share when they were doing almost all of the work?

While it was understandable for the Voikens to pay a lot of 'royalty fees' to earn the right to utilize Lufa's glow in one of their key designs, a 20 percent share on the entire range sounded a bit excessive!

There were dozens of other mech models that Ves had not committed to contributing!

Were the Voikens truly willing for Ves to freeload off the income generated by the products of their labor?

If the Voiken Family wanted to show enough sincerity, then gifting the Larkinsons with a one-time gift like the large-capacity combat carrier was already sufficient.

As precious as a starship in the Red Ocean might be, giving away such a precious vessel only affected the early development of the Voiken Family.

On the other hand, a deal that continually forced Voiken Industries to pass on 20 percent of the money it made from selling every single mech and good from their law enforcement mech ecosystem would continue to drag on their heels for many years!

It was extremely unlikely for the Voikens to be able to break off this chain once they shackled it onto their ankles.

Ves distinctly recalled that Professor Taigen Herman Voiken, the Senior in charge of the Voiken Family's operations in the Red Ocean, specialized in designing law enforcement mechs!

This meant that this important Senior had no alternative! He wasn't like Ves who could easily decide to work on a different mech type whenever he wished.

If Professor Taigen wished to push his design philosophy to the next level, then he could only continue to surrender 20 percent of the money made from selling much of his own work.

Of course, if Taigen and the Voikens truly wanted to renege on this onerous restriction in the future, they had plenty of ways to break the chain by force.

They could convince the MTA to intervene and forcibly alter a contract that it was responsible for enforcing.

Voiken Industries could go bankrupt and close its doors, thereby invalidating every agreement made to it while the Voikens could just start a new company.

Taigen could officially leave Voiken Industries and start a new mech company that was not related to the Voiken Family.

When Ves voiced all of these possible concerns to Gavin, his personal assistant smiled back and shook his head.

"If you study the contract more closely, you will realize that the contents already address a part of the scenarios that you have brought up. For example, the agreement doesn't just cover Voiken Industries alone, but also mentions Professor Taigen Voiken by name. This way, it doesn't matter if he leaves his current company and starts a new one. He will still be bound by the terms of our contract! Not even passing through the greater beyonder gate and returning to the Milky Way will allow him to escape our agreement so easily!"

Ves brought the data pad closer to his head and studied the text more seriously. Even though it was filled with a mix of dense legalese jargon and constant references to other clauses, he could see that many of the terms were only there to close up every conceivable loophole that the Larkinson negotiators could come up with. They had not been holding back!

"Besides, as a mech designer, you should know the temperament of high-ranking mech designers. Their credibility and reputation is more valuable than mere profits. It is not difficult for Seniors and Masters to earn money. Giving away 20 percent of the money earned from their law enforcement mech ecosystem in exchange for a substantial amount of long-term benefits is not necessarily a bad deal from their perspective."

"Oh?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "I get the feeling that I am missing a few details. What is in it for the Voikens, exactly?"

"First, you should know that the contract includes a non-compete clause. It essentially states that as long as the contract holds true, we cannot compete against the Voikens in the product category of law enforcement mechs by selling our own versions of this mech type."

Ves immediately frowned. "This is a serious restriction!"

He hated being limited, but he understood why the Voikens wanted to add this reassurance to the agreement. If the Larkinsons did not make this promise, then what would stop the Larkinsons from studying how to design law enforcement mechs and poach their clients while they were nominally cooperating?

The Voikens did not want to spell their own doom in this market by raising their own competitor!

"I don't think it is good to enter into these kinds of agreements either, but right now it is too difficult for our business operations to take off by relying on our own efforts." Gavin laid out his thoughts. "The Voiken Family is a good collaborative partner for us, and our cooperation only covers a single area of the total mech market. Sure, we will be passing on the opportunity to come out with our own line of law enforcement mechs, but it is not a bad deal for us to collect our 20 percent rent from Voiken Industries while concentrating our efforts onto our core product lines. Maybe we can consider entering this market by ourselves in the future, but for now our mech company is too small and limited to compete in too many markets."

He was right. The Larkinsons might have a powerful design solution that was extremely relevant for law enforcement mechs, but none of them possessed a notable background or specialty in those kinds of mechs.

Ves didn't care too much about conquering the market for peacekeeping mechs either. Acquiescing to a deal where he could earn easy money while doing almost nothing was still a win-win transaction even if he was prohibited from competing against the Voikens on their own turf.

Of course, Gavin was also right that he and his clan should be careful not to make too many of these restrictive agreements. If Ves kept collaborating like this with mech companies left and right, then soon he would be bound by so many shackles that there were hardly any product categories left that the Larkinsons could engage by themselves!

That reminded Ves of an important consideration.

"The non-compete clause shouldn't cover mechs developed for private use, right?"

"Correct. It only concerns commissioned mechs and commercial mechs. The Voikens don't care too much if we want to develop a law enforcement mech for our own use. That is rarely prohibited."

Ves relaxed a bit. "That sounds good. Are there any other notable concessions that I should be informed about?"

"Hmm, the Voikens have also requested to obtain the possibility of requesting your contributions for a limited number of other mech designs in the same ecosystem. They won't let you do it for free. The share of earnings made from selling the copies of those designs will bump from 20 percent to 30 percent."

That didn't sound like much, but it was quite a heavy concession if the model turned out to be a key machine that could easily be sold in large batches!

In any case, this was not a particularly onerous request as Ves only needed to add his specialty and nothing else to an existing Voiken mech design.

"I will agree to his term as long as I have the right to refuse it for any reason." Ves stated. "There are times when I am too busy to divert my attention to other projects. There are also times where I don't think a particular mech design aligns with my vision and preferences."

"I shall pass that on." Gavin nodded while not looking too surprised.

"Anything else, Benny?"

"Well, there are a few minor issues of contention that I am not sure that I should mention to you. They range from allowing Voiken Industries from borrowing the LMC's branding to market their mech ecosystem to setting a penalty fee in case either party wishes to unilaterally end the contract."

"A penalty fee?"

"Neither side thinks we should be forever bound by this partnership agreement. No one knows how our clan or their family will look like a century later. Perhaps by that time Taigen Voiken would have already advanced to Master and be able to support his entire mech ecosystem by relying on his own advantages. Our clan and mech company may have also grown up to the extent where there is no value to allying with the Voiken Family anymore. Currently, the negotiators from both sides agree that there should be a mechanism in the contract that allows one of them to pull out of the deal, but only after paying a substantial penalty fee."

This sounded reasonable enough. If one party decided to call it quits, then the other party would always suffer a loss. The former had to pay compensation to the latter in order to cover for the damage.

The question was how high the penalty should be set.

If the penalty was too light, then the foundation of the partnership would be far too weak. When either side could easily pull out at any time if they wanted, there was no way for them to cooperate with each other with sincerity!

On the other hand, a penalty that was overly harsh would forcibly bind two partners together that might not be able to get along with each other anymore.

If one of them wanted a divorce but could not pay the exorbitant penalty fees at all, then that would lead to a lot of one-sided resentment, which was not good for their cooperation in the long-term!

"What is the current range?"

"From what I have learned, the negotiators are thinking about setting the penalty free at 20 to 30 times of what the disadvantaged side makes in a year from this cooperative agreement."

Ves winced. That was a huge sum of money, enough to make both sides extremely reluctant to unilaterally break the deal!

However, he liked it quite a bit. If the Voikens no longer wanted to play ball with him, then his clan would at least get what they were owed for the following two decades.

That was plenty of time for the Larkinsons to compensate for the loss of an income stream by developing another lucrative channel!

"This term sounds a bit weird." Ves pointed out. "It's much more favored towards the Voiken Family. After all, their share of the annual profits are much greater than ours. That means that we have to pay four times more than the Voikens if we are the ones to break this deal!"

"That is correct. It can't be helped. The Voikens invest the most effort and resources into building up their mech ecosystem around the Pacifier Project. This interconnected group of products will lose its most important selling point if we decide to pull out all of a sudden. The Voiken Family must put far greater effort into developing alternatives of the Pacifier Project that does not have the benefit of glows to attract lots of clients."

Though Ves felt uncomfortable with this clause, it wasn't that big of a deal as long as the Larkinsons had no thoughts about competing against the Voikens in this sector.

Even if Ves ever changed his mind, the price was not an insurmountable obstacle. He fully believed that his mech company would expand and compete in many different markets and product categories, thereby building up an income base that was so broad that the money earned from the Voiken mech ecosystem was not an insurmountable obstacle!

Chapter 4028 Another Old Fogey

"It turns out that Seniors and Masters aren't so stupid and gullible after all." Ves remarked as he finally understood the most important intricacies of the draft agreement.

The short version of the story was that the Voikens were willing to pass on 20 percent of the earnings of their law enforcement mech ecosystem in exchange for a lot of guarantees.

Just as the Larkinson Clan did not want to get taken advantage of by the Voiken Family, the Voikens also did not want to partner up with the Larkinsons only to raise their future competitor in the same market space!

Every negotiation was an intricate dance. This was especially the case concerning a big deal with major, long-term economic interests.

Ves found that both sides of the negotiation table prioritized different demands. The Larkinsons were more concerned about maximizing their advantages while the Voikens aimed to minimize any negative consequences as much as possible.

Their goals weren't necessarily incompatible, so their negotiators did not have a hard time finding common ground on many issues.

Even so, Ves still felt that his side managed to get the upper hand in the negotiations. A lot of the clauses that the Larkinsons conceded were merely conditional. If the clan had no intentions to screw around and obediently abided by the rules imposed by the contract, then many of those clauses would never take effect.

On the other hand, the Voikens were continually obliged to pass on the share of earnings owed to the Larkinsons regardless of the circumstances. This was a much more constant commitment and one that could not be given up without paying a hefty price.

Ves was fairly satisfied with this arrangement. As he followed up on this matter, he eventually heard that the patriarch of the Voiken Family wanted to speak with him in person!

"Are you sure about that?" He asked Minister Shederin.

"It is important for both sides to be on the same page for cooperation at this level, sir. As the two principal mech designers and decision makers of your respective family organizations, it is vital for the both of you to talk to each other at least once to find out whether you can stomach the idea of working together for decades on end."

"I understand."

A deal of this nature was more than just about business. Once they truly started to collaborate with each other, they would put out a range of mechs that represented both of their brands.

If either side harbored too many second thoughts about their partnership, then that would severely impact the long-term health of their collaborative venture.

It was better to find out whether both sides were able to click with each other early. It would already be too late if they found out the truth after they signed their names on the contract.

For this reason, Ves was about to make contact with the latest Master Mech Designer that had managed to enter his orbit.

Ordinary Journeymen would feel both honored and suppressed whenever they got to speak to a Master in person, but Ves did not feel nervous at all for the impending talk.

Even the fact that Master Barnard Solas Voiken devoted over three centuries to his vocation and earned a huge amount of recognition from the mech industry did not faze Ves too much.

After meeting a living legend in the industry in the form of the Polymath herself had long numbed Ves to the identities of lesser mech designers!

Besides, despite his relative youth and short track record, his dazzling accomplishments already exceeded that of Seniors and Masters who were at least a century old!

While other mech designers invested many years to develop mediocre solutions, Ves had already created a potential new way to mass-produce high-ranking mech pilots!

There was no reason for Ves to put up an old veteran in the industry up a pedestal.

Of course, refusing to look up to Masters was not equivalent to looking down on them. They still contributed a lot to the technological development of mechs and deserved at least a measure of respect from everyone.

Ves stood quietly in his flagship's smaller conference rooms and waited for the connection to go through.

Due to the existence of the galactic net, there was no problem at all in forming a seamless real-time communication channel between the Milky Way and the Red Ocean.

He still felt a psychological sense of distance, but that did not have any measurable influence on the quality of the connection.

He quietly sighed. Much of the tech that he took for granted was actually incredibly amazing. The fact that he could easily talk to any resident of the Milky Way Galaxy with near-zero delays and without the need to pay exorbitant costs was a huge benefit!

The Comm Consortium was pretty customer friendly in that regard. Of course, everyone also conveniently ignored the fact that the same consortium was in control of humanity's main form of interstellar and intergalactic communications.

Soon enough, a physical projection came into view. Master Barnard Solas Voiken finally 'met' Ves in a more direct fashion.

While they weren't exactly holding this meeting in person, this was the first time they spoke to each other without relying on intermediaries.

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At first glance, Ves could immediately tell that Master Barnard was not the stereotypical decrepit old monster who only cared about extending his longevity and was willing to sacrifice everything to live a century more.

Ves couldn't exactly describe it, but the vibe that the Voiken Patriarch conveyed through the communication link was one that was filled with a restrained form of energy and curiosity.

The man was clearly engaged in his incredibly deep research projects and probably found social calls like this to be a distraction from his true passion.

That wasn't so bad to Ves. He immediately felt a sense of kinship with the Master as he held a similar attitude towards his work and life.

Both of them smiled a bit at each other. They hadn't even spoken to each other but already confirmed that they shared at least some command ground.

"Mr. Larkinson." The dignified old man with a white goatee spoke up first. "I have witnessed the rise of many talents in humanity's mech industry. It is not an exaggeration for me to state that you are among the best that I have encountered among second-raters."

"What about the first-raters? Do you know any that are more impressive than me?" Ves casually asked.

He deliberately adopted a casual tone while not paying too much attention to the rules of formality.

He didn't feel a need to conform his attitude to the expectations of the old man. If Master Barnard was the sort of person who couldn't stand that sort of behavior, then Ves would rather not cooperate with such an ornery person.

Master Barnard did not exhibit any irritation. Ves found that to be unusual.

The old man's strong posture along with his rich, red-and-brown embellished lab coat signified that he was a person who paid a lot of attention to appearances and behavior.

While Master Barnard did not let down his airs, he did not speak any admonishments either.

He just... kept his mouth shut and let the silence dominate the conversation for a dozen or so seconds before he finally offered his reply.

"There are always better and more superior peers in our expansive industry. Your rapid climb is impressive in that you have emerged from a humble third-rate state, but those who cannot match your ingenuity are nonetheless able to exceed your work by relying on access to far greater resources, knowledge and networks. Let alone the scions of major Terran and Rubarthan influences, the heirs of major figures within the MTA such as Master Mech Designers and Star Designers are formidable in every conceivable aspect."

Ves tamped down on his outward arrogance as he agreed with Master Barnard's words. "I do admit that there are many impressive mech designers in the vast reaches of human space that I have never met. Our mech industry is simply too big."

The Master folded his arms behind his back and let out an expressive breath. "An enormous mech community is both a boon and a benefit. The greatest advantage is that the variety of mechs is endless. The disadvantage is that there is a lack of order and stability in many markets."

That was a curious remark.

"A market that has gone stale and stagnant is not conducive to innovation." Ves plainly stated his thoughts. "If the same market leaders continue to hold onto their market share without change, then they will grow complacent and no longer work as hard to push their mechs to the next level."

"I am not stating that a free and fair market is a blight that needs to be removed. Competition is essential to keep markets healthy, but not every market participant presents a vision for mechs that are sufficiently viable, proper, practical and effective. There are many dubious mech designs on the market that mainly serve to fracture the market, skew customer expectations and waste the time and energy of many mech designers on dead end pursuits."

Ves started to feel weird. Weren't they supposed to talk about the upcoming business partnership between their respective organizations? Why was this old fogey talking about the general state of the mech industry?

These old fellows were far too addicted to giving lessons to juniors!

"With all due respect, Master, the incredible diversity and freedom of choice in the mech markets is of great benefit to our customer base." Ves retorted. "Each buyer has different demands, and not all of them have the time or money to commission the mechs they need. Sure, a lot of new products end up flopping or barely breaking even, but this is the price of opening up enough room for new and innovative alternatives. My own commercial products would have never been able to capture so much market share so easily if the competitive environment was too stagnant."

Both of them were voicing opinions based on their respective positions in the mech industry.

Though Ves had risen to the middle layer of the mech industry, it was not too long ago that he still tried to eke out an existence at the bottom. He was highly sympathetic towards conditions that granted newcomers and developing mech designers enough room to develop in the ultra-competitive mech industry.

Master Barnard was far too old and successful to understand or hold much sympathy for the plight of humble mech designers. His standing in the mech industry was so high that he looked down like a god towards the struggles of those at the bottom!

This seriously irked Ves because it was arrogant attitudes like this that made life for starting mech designers more difficult!

"I have not agreed to speak to you in order to hold a philosophical debate." Master Barnard steadily said. "We can agree to disagree on such matters, but it is important for you to understand a part of our purpose and our goals in order for us to agree to a partnership."

Ves grew suspicious and fell into thought at the moment. "Are you saying... you want our Pacifier Project and the law enforcement mechs designed around it to become the dominant leader in the market for these kinds of machines?"

"That is indeed our overarching purpose for this collaboration." The Voiken Patriarch curled his lips. "I do not expect our range of mech models to dominate the sector shortly after they are released. It is not realistic for the works of a Senior and a Journeyman to overcome much of the competition. However, our partnership will be a long-lasting one that can span many decades. If there comes a time where you have advanced to Senior while my most enterprising descendant has advanced to Master and consolidated his new state, I expect the two of you to leverage your powerful advantages and set a new standard in the market for law enforcement mechs."

Though Master Barnard remained soft-spoken throughout his speech, Ves could sense the burning ambition and expectation in his tone!

For some reason or another, the leader of the Voiken Family was highly optimistic of the future potential of their collaborative venture!

Chapter 4029 Mechs and Society

As Ves continued to hold a strange discussion with one of the stalwarts of the mech industry, he started to get a sense of Master Barnard's perspective and attitude towards the upcoming partnership.

The old man talked like he was an angel investor who was taking a huge bet on Ves' future accomplishments as a mech designer.

Though the Voiken Patriarch had missed out the earliest and best period to invest in the unorthodox mech designer, he could still use the current collaboration opportunity to form a solid chain of interests and profits between the Larkinson Clan and the Voiken Family!

This was quite a gutsy choice to make for any investor, much less a Master Mech Designer who could put his money and resources in many other promising business ventures.

Someone who had lived for over three centuries must have come across a huge amount of mech designers!

Why did Master Barnard choose to put his money on Ves instead of other candidates that were more ideologically aligned to him? It was too absurd to believe that such an impressive and well-connected figure was lacking in choices!

Perhaps Ves had been a bit too obvious in revealing his puzzlement, because the old man eventually chose to address this topic.

"Times are changing, young man." He voiced an opinion that Ves heard from an increasing number of people. "No matter how hard we try to maintain stability, there are too many internal and external factors that seek to push human civilization in a new direction. As our society changes, so must we, or else we will be swept in the dustbin of history. In light of these changes, I have a responsibility to guide my family and my descendants through the chaos and uncertainty that will sweep throughout our society."

Ves frowned yet again. He felt as if Master Barnard was teasing at something that only the upper echelon of human society were aware of. What kind of dangers were they anticipating?

"All of that sounds nice, but what does that have to do with our collaboration?"

"The changing trends of human civilization and its surroundings are highly relevant to the work that you and Professor Taigen Voiken are about to produce." Barnard steadily replied. "The greater the turmoil, the greater the need for tools that can restore order in our society. A single product such as the Pacifier Project has the potential to be one of the best and most efficient peacekeeping tools to the states that must keep a restless population in check. I have studied your work and your design approach extensively. Your glow applications have great potential, but up until now you have spent too much time, resources and effort on showering your own men with your designs instead of utilizing them to better our society."

"I... see."

Though Ves had vague aspirations to develop commercial solutions that could make a positive contribution to society, he felt it was way too premature for a Journeyman like him to entertain such grand thoughts.

He first needed to make sure that his products could get off the ground and capture a sufficient amount of market share before he could chase after other priorities!

Ves had to admit that he had only been looking at the profit potential and networking opportunities of his potential partnership with the Voiken Family. These were primarily selfish priorities, but he could see how the Pacifier Project could play an extremely helpful role in stabilizing many human settlements during more turbulent periods of time.

In fact, he bet that Master Barnard was underestimating the value of the Pacifier Project. Lufa's glow was a powerful force that could not only calm people, but also negate a lot of spiritual shenanigans!

If the Pacifier Project was able to meet the Master's high expectations and become the dominant model in the market for law enforcement mechs, then many human planets would invisibly gain a lot of protection against the more unfathomable enemies of mankind!

However, as much as he was optimistic about the Pacifier Project's future prospects, he did not think it could reach this level of ubiquity in the short term!

"I am not comfortable with planning this far in the future." Ves plainly told the Master. "While I am honored that you think my work is promising, I am not confident my work is ready to take on so much social responsibility. I am already happy enough to service the needs of individual customers. Thinking about accomplishing anything more than that is a bit too premature."

Master Barnard shook his head. "It is never too premature for mech designers such as ourselves to consider the impact of our work on the society that we live in. As a developer and seller of war weapons, you have assuredly thought about their negative

impact on the lives of many people. Does it not bother you that we are actively perpetuating a cycle of continuous violence and destruction?"

Not really.

"Uhhh... I am just trying to earn a living. As long as there is a demand for mechs, I will do my best to meet it." Ves lamely replied. "I apologize, Master, but I am of the opinion that I am not a suitable target for your philosophical sermons. As a fellow mech designer, you must surely understand that our time is precious and valuable. I have many projects on my plate that I need to be working on, sir."

Master Barnard did not look amused. He directed a judgmental gaze at Ves.

"You can always make time for a valuable lesson. You may be of the opinion that you do not need to consider the social impact of your work, but it is never too soon to think about the influence of your work on people's lives. By the time you have become a Master and achieved the success that you have tried to attain, it is already far too late."

"Errr..."

If the Voiken Family hadn't been generous enough to offer a readily available large-capacity combat carrier to the Larkinson Clan as a gift, Ves would never be so patient and tolerant of Master Barnard's annoying subjects!

Why couldn't they talk about the more relevant and interesting parts about their collaboration?

He chose to pursue a career in mech design because he loved making cool war machines!

Never in his youth did he ever think about the potentially negative impact of his work on human society.

Though he did dwell on the subject at times after he started to practice his craft, he never made a fuss about it because he already concluded that whatever his customers did his products was not his responsibility!

As far as he was concerned, that was enough to settle his moral and ethical responsibilities!

Master Barnard clearly thought that this was insufficient. This wasn't necessarily a big deal as people always had disagreements with each other.

The problem was that this old fogey simply couldn't shut up about trying to do what was right!

No wonder a lot of people thought that the Preserving Order Faction and those who aligned with it were annoying, sanctimonious bastards.

Which Journeyman had the luxury to think about the profound social consequences of their work when they should all be trying their best to realize their design philosophies?

Perhaps it was natural for an old Master like Barnard Voiken to entertain these thoughts, but he should at least wait until Ves advanced to Master as well before holding a proper discussion about this heavy topic!

"...Your work has great potential, Mr. Larkinson. As long as you do not suffer an accident, I am confident that it is only a matter of time before we can speak to each other on a more equal level." Master Barnard steadily rambled like a teacher who was way past the point of retirement. "Attaining more money and power should no longer be your primary goals. As you approach a state where you start to question the purpose of your work and the nature of your place in our great but flawed society, you must think about the legacy you wish to leave behind as you mark your passage through this period of human history..."

Ves was less than 40 years old. He was way too young and early in his career trajectory to think about a topic as weighty as his legacy!

Had Master Barnard gone senile? Did he mistakenly assume that Ves was over 300 years old?

The gift that Ves already considered as his possession constantly weighed on his mind as he allowed the 'respectable' Master to indulge in his desire to pass on his wisdom to a member of the younger generation.

This was not the first time that Ves got cornered by an older mech designer who wanted to teach him a lesson.

Unfortunately, this was definitely one of the worst instances!

Ves had to bottle up his impatience and frustration in order to maintain a polite facade. He was done with trying to show that he was patient, but he should at least show at least a basic level of decorum in order to ensure the cooperation between their two organizations would go without a hitch.

He was quite clear that Professor Taigen Voiken wasn't calling the shots in this matter!

Only Barnard had the power to approve or deny this lucrative collaboration opportunity!

After fifteen minutes of moralistic rambling, Ves suddenly became a lot more interested when Barnard shifted to a much more relevant topic!

"You may not notice it yet, but the MTA factions that we have chosen to associate with will play an increasingly more important role as you continue to develop and expand your business network. For example, cooperating with us will provide you with a friendly point of contact to the Preserving Order Faction, but that does not mean you can blindly reach out to it. Both the Survivalists and the Transhumanists have opposed the Preservers many times. This is the main reason that no matter how much we develop our relationship, we can never exceed a boundary in our cooperation."

Ves furrowed his brows. "Do factions truly play that big of a role in determining the extent of relationships like ours?"

"You have no idea." Master Barnard smiled and shook his head. "The Mech Trade Association has long lost the unity and sense of common purpose in the past. I would not say this to anyone, but the MTA has grown too large and too powerful to maintain a united front."

"How much better was the MTA in the past?" Ves curiously asked.

"Back in the first century of my life, the Association had not deteriorated to this extent. We were still united by the common goal of rebuilding human civilization from its near-extinction crisis and building a better future for our children. Now, there are less and less mech designers left who are content to pursue such a basic but precious goal. Only greed and ambition has overtaken their common sense. How else did the Expansionists succeed in their attempts to persuade so many decision makers to invade the Red Ocean? To the like-minded people in our generation, we only see the same hubris that had once overtaken our admirals and heads of state in the past. As humanity continues to drive deeper into alien and foreign territory, our internal divisions will continue to worsen."

Unlike the Master's earlier ramblings, Ves took these words a lot more seriously. Not only was it relevant to his own future and development in the Red Ocean, he also suspected that Master Barnard was in the possession of a lot of insider news that could help him navigate the coming years!

"What major fault lines are you worried about the most?"

"There are too many to count, which is a problem in itself." Barnard helplessly sighed. "Some of us have tried our best to solve these divisions, but our voices have grown smaller over time. In my personal judgment, there are two notable fault lines that you must pay attention to. The first is the growing tension between the Big Two and the first-rate superstates."

"Do the latter really think they can topple the former?"

"They do, Mr. Larkinson. I will not say more about this as this is a sensitive topic. The second fault line that you should pay note to is the escalating rivalry between the MTA

and CFA. Though the two have long existed alongside each other in peace, there are an increasing number of mechers and fleeters who are no longer satisfied with that. Have you heard rumors about the possibility of granting pioneers the right to field warships?"

"I did." Ves confirmed. "It doesn't look like it's going anywhere, though. It is too drastic of a step to take. Pioneers don't even need all of the firepower. The only serious alien threats we need to watch out for are scattered alien fleet remnants."

Master Barnard chuckled. "Hehehe. Even at this end of human space, I have already received word that the MTA and CFA's discussion on this controversial proposal has advanced much further than you thought. In my personal judgment, there is a 30 percent chance that pioneers will soon be the first humans outside of the Big Two that have regained the right to field armed warships. This may even happen within the current generation."

"What?!"

If Master Barnard's predication actually came true, that would lead to a massive and chaotic change in human society!

"In the event this drastic policy change takes place, the Big Two will not open the floodgates at once." Barnard stated. "The new rules will only apply to the Red Ocean. There is no need for privately-owned warships in the Milky Way. Also, the warships that pioneers will be allowed to obtain and field must be subject to heavy restrictions concerning their size, tonnage and maximum firepower. Even the fleeters understand the need to take baby steps to reintroduce humanity to greater war weapons."

Ves became increasingly more dismayed. Though this still sounded a bit too uncertain at the moment, he had a hunch that the CFA was truly serious about pushing for this proposal!

Since multiple different sources had already brought up this topic, Ves believed that the Big Two deliberately spread the news to certain people in order to prime them to this drastic change ahead of time!

What Master Barnard talked about earlier also made more sense at this time. What he was also trying to say to Ves was that he needed to pay more attention to whether his mechs would still remain relevant in an age where privately-owned warships had made a resurgence in human society!

Chapter 4030 Popularity Contest

Was it a coincidence that multiple old and well-connected people always brought up concerns about changing times?

How come they all predicted that humanity would soon go through a period of considerable turmoil?

Ves increasingly suspected that all of these powerful leaders and dignitaries were connected to a high-level network where they gained access to exclusive news and rumors that were completely inaccessible to average space peasants.

This old boy's network did not even have to be an official gathering or institution. It could just be an invisible, unregistered club that spontaneously connected different power players together through social interactions.

The wealthy sought out the wealthy. The old sought out the old. The powerful sought out the powerful.

These were natural patterns that many humans and other sentient alien races exhibited. Part of it was due to the need to befriend those that best understood their own conditions. Another part of it was the assumption that only those at the same level or higher were able to satisfy their interests.

Ves had always known that a society as immense as human civilization was fractured and divided into many different groups, factions, states, locations, classes and other social divisions.

Due to his rapid rise and his lack of intimate connections to those who stood at the upper layers, Ves did not receive the insider news that someone as old and established as Master Barnard Voiken took for granted.

Right now, Ves saw an even greater reason for him to develop a relationship with Master Barnard Voiken.

Perhaps the man was not that exceptional of a mech designer as he had remained stuck as a Master for over three centuries. Nonetheless, someone who had been a fixture in the industry for a long time had to possess his own advantages.

Ves currently thought about the possibility that humanity would soon welcome a return of warships to the wider human society.

Ever since the Age of Conquest came to an end, the Big Two strictly monopolized the use of powerful and destructive warships. No one else was allowed to field them because the fear of the people in charge of them going crazy and ordering indiscriminate orbital bombardment on a highly populated planet was too great.

Those fears may have faded a bit after four centuries of relative calm, but the fear and rejection of warships was still rooted in the psyche of many ordinary people.

Ves could not predict how society would react if warships became more ubiquitous again. Even if this new development only applied in a wilder and less developed region like the Red Ocean, it still represented a clear break from a taboo that everyone had inscribed in their hearts!

He turned to the projection of the slightly emotional-looking Master Mech Designer.

The aged and dignified figure had not spoken his previous words lightly. Ves did not think that someone as reputable as Barnard Voiken would joke around about these matters.

That said, someone like him always had a purpose in mind. The topics he brought up and the 'rumors' he shared just a moment earlier were part of a subtle but concerted strategy to manipulate Ves' views.

Ves did not mind this little game. As long as he was aware that he was being manipulated and as long as there wasn't any deception involved, he would welcome any source of critical and relevant information no matter whether it came in a biased form.

Few information sources were free from distortion to begin with. It took skill and awareness to detect how they were distorted and what people gained from framing an issue in a specific light.

Right now, Ves was applying the lessons he learned from Minister Shederin and Director Calabast on Master Barnard Voiken.

The old mech designer was known as a prominent ideological ally of the Preserving Order Faction. He was a child of the early period of the Age of Mechs and valued peace to a greater degree than the following generations of people.

Someone who had grown up in an environment where many people were still not done with picking up the pieces of the ravages of the Age of Conquest should abhor the thought of reintroducing warships to the masses!

Just the thought of letting petty states and spoiled brats gain control of massive vessels armed with mech-sized cannons probably sent shudders through Master Barnard's body!

Now that Ves recalled the background and ideology of Master Barnard, it became fairly easy for him to deduce the Master Mech Designer's motivation.

For some reason or another, Master Barnard thought that Ves could be a potential agent of order!

To put it in a different way, Barnard held an expectation that Ves might be able to produce works one day that could prevent warships from becoming too destructive towards society!

This was the social responsibility that Barnard hoped that Ves would be able to fulfill in the future.

For a moment, Ves didn't know what to think. Master Barnard was an extremely capable mech designer and probably knew a lot of talented and amazing colleagues.

Why did Barnard pin so much hope on a Journeyman like Ves in particular?

"You may be young, but you have a bright future ahead of yourself." Barnard cleared up Ves' confusion. "I have faith in my own analysis of you. I also believe in the judgment of the MTA. Two separate factions have found you worthy of their attention and support. The fact that they have elevated you to tier 6 galactic citizenship is a strong sign of confidence. Many of my peers have never reached this tier even after they have devoted ten times as many years in the industry as you. The higher the tier, the greater the power. Correspondingly, the responsibility they must bear has also grown."

"My recent promotion in tier is largely based on my future potential." Ves cautiously replied. "I can see where you are getting at, but it will take many decades before I can live up to everyone's expectations. Who knows what will happen in the meantime. Maybe the scenario that you have painted about warships making a return to our general society has already taken place."

Ves was incredibly confident that he could dominate the mech industry in the future. However, it would take at least a hundred years or so before he could realize his greatest ambitions. The lengthy amount of time needed for him to develop up to this point was his greatest flaw and vulnerability as a mech designer!

Without the necessary power, there was no way for Ves to discharge his supposed responsibilities!

Naturally, Master Barnard Voiken was not unaware of this flaw either.

"The Common Fleet Alliance is a complicated organization. Initially, it was formed after many rebel warfleets decided to join forces and counter the increasing number of tyrants that have emerged among mankind. Afterwards, the fleeters have long maintained a policy that only they are mature and responsible enough to wield humanity's greatest and most powerful war platforms. The only reason why the mechers are also allowed to field warships is because they are also powerful in their own right. Besides, the fact that the MTA must also rely on warships to maintain its hegemony is also a great irony to the fleeters."

"What changed, then?" Ves asked. "I mean, from what I have learned from various sources, the fleeters have become increasingly more isolated from ordinary human society. Why would they care so much about reintroducing warships back to the same group that initially caused a lot of tragedies during the latter half of the Age of Conquest?"

Barnard grimaced. "That... is related to a deep and contentious ideological struggle within the CFA. Let me just say that in the past, the majority of fleet admirals believed that the general population should always be treated as children. It is only recently that another stance has risen to popularity that states that the CFA must not let the MTA maintain its dominant influence over the population and allow mechs to completely overshadow warships. After all, no matter how much the Big Two look down on the masses, space peasants still form the most dominant source of resources and manpower in human society."

Ves rubbed his chin. "Interesting. So the CFA basically wants to start a popularity contest, is that it? The fleeters are starting four centuries too late. If you ask any random person on the street on which of the Big Two they respect more, they will always point towards the MTA."

"That may change as the ongoing invasion of the Red Ocean encounters more setbacks." Barnard said. "Do not be fooled by all of the victories that the Big Two have achieved up to this point. The indigenous alien races of the dwarf galaxy were still divided and unaware of the great threat that we present. It is different now. In addition to other factors, the MTA and CFA's warfleets are less and less capable of controlling the opposition."

"What does that mean for the rest of us, sir?" NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON FREE WEB NOVEL. COM

"There are analysts and strategists who predict that more and more organized alien raiding and saboteur fleets will bypass the Big Two's defensive lines and seek to ravage the colonies built on top of their former territories."

What?!

Though Ves had heard vague stories and predictions about alien warships coming to humanity's territory in order to mess everything up, everyone thought that these would just be the last acts of revenge by isolated units of vengeful alien forces.

It would be a completely different story if the surviving alien civilizations deliberately enacted a strategy of burning humanity's new hinterland!

Not even the Golden Skull Alliance could resist such powerful fleets in a head-on clash!

This was because before most of the Larkinson Clan's mechs could even close, the superior armaments of warships could already shower the expeditionary fleet with a huge volleys of destructive firepower!

This was a disparity in firepower that was too vast for mechs to overcome!

"A lot of pioneering organizations will have a hard time defending against raids from organized alien fleets." Ves furrowed his brows. "None of them will like it if all of their efforts to found new colonies and states will come to nothing because they are stuck in an unfair fight against their alien foes. After all, the aliens have never set any taboos against warships."

"Do you see now why there is a rationale for allowing pioneers to field their own warships? It is not controversial to state that only warships can fight against warships."

Both mech designers grimaced at this statement. They were both of the same mind regarding this issue.

As professionals who dedicated themselves to developing better and stronger mechs, they both hoped that their work would truly be able to replace warships as more powerful and effective war machines!

That day was still too far away, though. Ves realized that he had grown a lot more sympathetic towards Master Barnard's concerns.

Though Ves had many differences in opinions and allegiances with the Master Mech Designer, when it came to the CFA's possible initiative to water down the taboo against warships, both of them were on the same side!

"I don't think I can develop a mech that can fight effectively against either alien or human warships." Ves plainly stated to the Voiken Patriarch. "At least, I don't think I will be able to put a solution together during the current mech generation. There is just too little time for me to make so much progress."

Barnard sighed. "I do not seriously expect you to shoulder this burden so soon. There will be other mech designers who will do their best to devise their own solutions against this problem. What you can do for us is to show humanity that mechs still have a place in human society after warships have made a reappearance in people's lives. The Pacifier Project is just one of the contributions that you can make."

"I see."