

## Mech 4181

### Chapter 4181 Love And Obligation

Ves spent a few minutes on keeping Marvaine company before he set his son down.

For his part, the energetic little boy ran off to the nearby sandbox in order to start building a sandcastle with the help of the toy building blocks placed nearby.

After making sure that Marvaine was okay when playing by himself, he moved on and approached a garden table that was bedecked with tea and snacks.

Gloriana sat on her favorite garden chair as she watched her kids play about without a care in the galaxy.

"Hey, honey."

"Are you done throwing our clan into confusion, Ves?"

"I was just asking questions, Gloriana. That's not a crime."

"You are still the face of our clan! Do you know how many rumors have spread since you have started to ask all of your weird questions? People are beginning to fear that you have lost grip on reality."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "I don't think the situation is as bad as you make it sound. Once I go back to work and design my mechs as usual, everyone will realize that those stupid rumors have no leg to stand on. I have no intentions of leaving the mech industry if that is what you are afraid about."

It took quite a bit of time for Ves to reassure his wife. He may act foolish at times, but he had not lost a single measure of his love and passion for mech design.

"What's this all about, Ves?" Gloriana asked plainly. "Have you grown antsy because the five-year rebuilding period is almost over? Maybe this is your

brain telling you that it is better to stay in Davute. Look at everything we have built. Look at how nice it is to relax in our garden while letting our children play without worrying about getting ambushed by hostile alien fleets. Do we truly have to go on this silly Trailblazer Expedition of yours? Aurelia and Andraste will both grow sad once you rip them away from the friends they made in kindergarten!"

Ves briefly gazed at his two daughters and felt apologetic for a moment. "I am aware of that, Gloriana, but this is for the best. Davute is not our end station. There are many other planets and regions out there that will become a lot more prosperous in the future. In the future, we will sell our products to the entire dwarf galaxy. We need to detach ourselves from this tendency to develop an unreasonable attachment to a single location."

"I'm sure that Aurelia and Andraste will understand when you rip them away from the friends they made in the last few years."

Ves grew annoyed. "There are plenty of other kids in the Golden Skull Alliance that they can get along with! So many Larkinsons have started their own families that our kids will have all the friends they need!"

"I already told you that it is bad for their development that they can only get along with other Larkinsons most of the time! They need to spend more time with peers from other organizations! Not only will they learn to socialize with their equals, they can also forge new friendships with different groups! We'll throw all of this away if you take our children out of the planet that they have grown up on for all of their lives!"

This wasn't the first time they argued about this contentious topic. Each time, Ves allowed his wife to vent, but at the end of the day he did not budge from his stance.

His clan had invested too much in the upcoming expedition. All of the planning, buildup and reparation work had put the Golden Skull Alliance in the most optimal state to commence a grand expedition into dangerous territories. A single woman's opinion was far from enough to stop this enormous development from taking place.

Ever since Ves announced the Trailblazer Expedition, he and his clan had made sure to prep all of the Larkinsons for this dangerous but incredibly exciting venture.

A lot of older or more risk-averse clansmen had been allowed to transfer to the Davute Branch. Ves did not want to force anyone to go on this dangerous trip and he fully understood why plenty of clansmen wanted to live a calmer and more stable life.

Many young parents had voluntarily accepted the price of demoting from a main branch member to a side branch member in order to get away from all of the fighting that would undoubtedly commence.

Everyone knew that a lot of Larkinsons eventually sacrificed their lives in past campaigns and expeditions. Ves was not exactly the most careful leader and while his victories were great, the price that everyone paid to secure them was also significant!

Gloriana's attitude happened to align with all of the clansmen that had opted to transfer out of the main fleet. She, like everyone else with this mindset, wanted to sit back and enjoy the wealth and privileges that the Larkinson Clan had already attained through great effort.

Unfortunately, Gloriana was no ordinary Larkinson. She was the wife of the patriarch and the second-highest ranking mech designer of the Larkinson Clan.

There was no way she could transfer to the Davute Branch!

She was way too high profile and would make herself and her children incredibly vulnerable to attacks once the main fleet left the Davute System.

Even though the Larkinson Clan had built up a large and numerous garrison force at their Davute Branch, there was a distinct lack of expert pilots and elite troops that could fend off powerful enemies.

Aside from that, transferring away from the main fleet also meant that she would be moving away from the center of power of the Larkinson Clan.

There was no way she would be able to wield as much influence within the clan if she literally sidelined herself!

This was an unacceptable consequence to Gloriana!

The result of this was that Gloriana had no choice but to stay with Ves and take her children on an exceedingly dangerous expedition that was completely unnecessary in her eyes!

It was no surprise to Ves that she grew cranky because of that. As the time of departure grew closer, her complaints grew more frequent.

Once Gloriana was done with venting her feelings, Ves proceeded to bring up the topic that had truly been occupying his mind as of late.

His wife immediately grew suspicious.

"You don't normally think this deep, Ves."

"Hey! I'm not stupid, you know! I have formed plenty of long-term plans!"

"That's different and you know it." Gloriana retorted as she picked up her teacup and took a sip. "What you have just brought up sounds as if you have just reached a major turning point."

"I guess you know me too well." He sighed. "Can you just tell me what you think?"

Seeing that Ves was serious about this, Gloriana dropped her catty attitude and put serious thought in what she should say in response.

As much as Ves and Gloriana frequently argued and disagreed about many matters, they still trusted each other to a large extent. They were married to each other and already had three kids. There was no point in sabotaging each other.

"To be honest, I don't know why you are entertaining all of these alternate ideas." She eventually said. "I value you because you are the best and most promising mech designer I have ever met. Others value you for the same reason as well. There would have been no future for you and your clan if you did not invest so much in your unique approach to mech design. It is due to your innovations such as living mechs and glows that the Hexadric Hegemony and certain factions of the MTA have agreed to back you in the first place."

Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin as he sat down on another garden chair. "You're right, but that is already in the past. I am talking about how I should invest my time and effort in the future. Should I continue to focus on furthering my mech designs, or should I branch out in other areas in order to improve our strengths and capabilities in a more comprehensive manner?"

"I don't know, Ves. Your descriptions are too vague. Let's approach this issue from another direction. First, what is your objective? Who are you trying to benefit? Are you just out to better yourself or are you mainly trying to uplift our entire clan or humanity as a whole?"

Those were important questions, and ones that Ves struggled to answer.

A part of him leaned towards selfishness. He had never been particularly enthusiastic about working for the greater good. His various life experiences had beaten down a lot of his idealistic notions because he learned that the

cosmos was filled with selfish individuals, especially among the upper echelon of a society.

Everyone was out to further their own interests. No matter whether they were humans or aliens, mechers or space peasants, many leaders would gladly sacrifice the lives of their fellow comrades in order to come out on top!

Ves was tired of being naive. He understood the fundamental truth that if he did not look out for himself, he would have no capital to pursue larger goals.

For a long time, this mentality had served him well. He had lived through a lot of tricky situations by being willing to make decisions that others found distasteful.

Yet as Ves and his clan grew more powerful and capable, he felt less of a need to maintain such a despicable attitude towards life.

He had reached a degree of success and security that allowed him to think about achieving grander and more idealistic goals.

From transforming every mech in use into a living battle partner to giving many more mech pilots the chance to advance to the rank of expert pilot, he was in a position to enact great change on human society!

The question now was how important it was for him to pursue these causes.

If he was an expert pilot or an ace pilot, then he would definitely be committed to his ideals!

He was not, though. Unless he opted for Personal Piloting Cultivation, his willpower would always remain within normal boundaries.

This meant that he had much more room to choose his goals. What did he want to accomplish? How much did he want to give back to society? Was it important for him to realize any of his greater ideals?

Gloriana had her own opinion on this subject.

"Before you make up your mind, let's take a look at the Star Designers that stand at the top of the mech industry. Do you know of any who have not dedicated their lives and careers to a specific cause that is larger than themselves?"

Ves widened his eyes. "No. People like Apollo, the Polymath, the Armorer and the Crossbreeder are all known for pushing their grand ideals. They're much like god pilots in that regard."

His wife nodded. "The differences between Star Designers and god pilots aren't so great in my opinion. It takes an inhuman amount of effort to advance to the highest ranks. We all know that ace pilots and Master Mech Designers face the hardest hurdles at all. Talent and opportunity play a limited role at that stage. I think that one of the crucial factors that can make a difference in this situation is how driven you are in pursuing your own goal. If you do not have the heart and the will to succeed, then becoming a Star Designer is out of the question in my opinion."

"What are you trying to say with this message?"

"Can't you figure it out, Ves? Follow your passion. Listen to your heart. As much as I dislike your habit for basing your decisions off your gut feeling instead of rational arguments, I think that a matter as important as your future should align with your passion rather than your insecurity. Don't listen to people who think they know better. Make your own decision. Just be sure to choose based on what you love instead of what you feel obligated to do. The former always makes you feel excited while the latter only soothes your fears. Only one of them can take you all the way to Star Designer."

"...Thanks, Gloriana." Ves replied as he felt a lot more unburdened than before. "You have truly given me the best advice of all. I knew you would say the wisest words. That is why I saved you for last."

Gloriana arrogantly huffed. "I'm a woman, after all."

## Chapter 4182 The Ultimate Choice

Ves had gained the clarity that he had been looking for. After thinking about his choices from many different angles, Gloriana helped him find a way out of the maze that he had built up around himself.

In one sense, Calabast was right. He was lucky and privileged beyond any mech designer's wildest dreams. The possibilities teased by the System would have made countless people green with envy!

None of them were useless or invalid to his situation. No matter what he chose, he would always be able to make it work somehow.

What he truly needed to consider was how his choice affected his future work and motivations.

The more defensive choices that the System had presented such as the sixth and seventh upgrade track were not only selfish, but also limited in scope.

They solely existed because Ves frequently worried about his ability to defend himself if he was stripped of all of his guards.

While Ves acknowledged that these concerns were real and legitimate, he did not want to live out the rest of his life while gripped by his own fears.

Perhaps that was not the safest approach he could choose from, but Ves would rather take more risks and live a more fruitful life than to keep hiding away inside a fortress of his own making.

His decision to take his entire clan and alliance on the Trailblazer Expedition reflected his desire and conviction. He was not a person who prioritized safety and the reduction of risks over his more aspirational ambitions.

Ves would feel lost if he no longer did his best to pursue his goals!



Personally, he felt that he had always been at his best when he gave into his passion and put his whole being into his work!

He recognized that a large reason why he worked so hard was because he was trying to seek personal validation. There was nothing wrong with this because everyone craved recognition in one form or another.

He also recognized that he had an ambitious streak that dreamt of pushing his vision onto society. He wanted to convert as many people in the mech community to the wonders of living mechs!

Ves believed so much in the premise that living mechs could become the new standard in the future that he was willing to take many risks in order to make this dream come true.

This was the conviction that could push him all the way to Star Designer!

The last thing that Ves wanted to do was to add more distractions in his life. Anything that did not align with his core activities as a mech designer risked leading him astray.

Ultimately, Ves would be worse off than before in that situation. Realizing his design philosophy and becoming a Star Designer should remain as his highest priorities.

Before Ves headed off to a secure location in order to confirm his choice, he stayed in the garden in order to enjoy a bit of quality time with all of his children.

"Hihihi! Look, Papa! Wendy the Tiger says that I've been a good girl today!" Aurelia boasted.

She presented a plushie tiger towards her father. The fluffy toy in question wagged its tail and acted more like a housecat rather than the predator that it was supposed to represent.

"Good girls share their gifts with their friends~" The tiger toy uttered through its hidden speakers.

Ves lowered himself to the grass and accepted the plushie. The soft and exquisite materials befitted its handmade construction. He knew his wife's craftsmanship well enough to know that she had personally made it for her daughters.

Suddenly, the tiger plushie squirmed and tried to escape from Ves' grasp.

"Meow!"

Lucky, who had been lounging in the vicinity, quickly jumped in the air and tackled Wendy the Tiger!

"Naughty boy! Is this how you treat a lady? Boys are not allowed to touch girls like myself!"

"Meow meow meow!"

"Bad boy~! Bad boy~!"

Ves slowly frowned. What kind of nonsense lessons did his wife program into the interactive toys that she made for her kids?

Both Aurelia and Andraste tried to take Wendy the Tiger back from their father!

"Let go, papa! Wendy will cry if you make her upset!"

At this time, Ves wanted to do nothing more than to take the stupid toy apart and reprogram the stupid tiger's dynamic lesson plans!

Fortunately, Gloriana wasn't the only one that played this game.

He nonchalantly tossed Wendy the Tiger over his shoulder and picked up another interactive plushie.

"Tigers are boring. Play with this instead. Papa personally poured his love into making this toy."

He grabbed a pink miniature mech and placed it in Aurelia's hands.

Compared to the works of his wife, the toys he made for his girls were much more alive. The pink mech truly conveyed his love for his daughters!

Aurelia didn't look too excited by it, though. She passed the pink mech to her younger sister who eagerly embraced the cool miniature mech!

"Look at my future expert mech! Whoosh! Pew pew pew!"

After he finished checking up on his two daughters, he moved over to the sandbox where his son had made a decent attempt at building a fortification.

Marvaine stacked several colorful blocks on top of each other while adding further detail by molding the malleable material they were made out of. He also piled a lot of sand at the bottom in order to give the fortress more structure.

"What are you making, son?" Ves gently asked as he sat next to his industrious heir.

"I am building my new home!" The clever little Larkinson exclaimed. "Mama said that you will take us away from home and bring us all to your cold and dark ship."

"Don't listen to what your mother is telling you. Space isn't scary and ships aren't cold and dark. They are homes just like this little castle that you have built. The only differences are that they look a lot more cylindrical and that they can move around. Wouldn't it be cool to live in a home that can move from one place to the other? There is an entire cosmos out there, Marvaine. There are lots of cool aliens and even cooler tech that we can encounter once we begin our travels. It will be just like that cartoon about that funny captain that is gallivanting across unknown galaxies!"

"I don't want to go to space! I want to stay home!"

Ves looked even more annoyed than before. Gloriana certainly had done her work in instilling her ideas into the heads of their children!

He took his time to put some sense into his son's head before he left with Lucky.

As much as he wanted to spend the rest of his day with his kids, he had a System to attend to. He had already kept the damned thing waiting long enough. Now that he had made up his mind on which upgrade track he would take, there was no reason to delay the matter any further.

Besides, Ves was incredibly eager to receive the rich rewards that he had earned a long time ago. He would have already enjoyed the fruits of his labor if not for the fact that the System had been offline for such a long time!

After rubbing the head of his brown-haired son one last time, he rose up and headed inside the Royal Mansion.

He spared no attention to the tasteful and opulent interior that his wife had personally designed.

He instead walked right through and headed towards a secure section in his personal home that led to an underground entrance.

Fifteen minutes later, he entered a thick and secure chamber that was similar to the one that was built inside the Blinding Banshee.

Although the walls were a lot beefier due to the abundance of space on a planet, it was arguable whether it was more secure. There were a lot of people in Davute, some of whom devoted their entire time to spying on others.

However, Ves did not feel too bothered by that. The System had thoughtfully altered the method of interacting with it so that no one would know what he was truly doing.

It was best to take precautions, though.

"Lucky, go do your job."

"Meow?"

"Fine! I'll feed you an extra lump of high-grade exotic!"

"Meow!"

Lucky grew a lot more enthusiastic after that. The cat dutifully floated around while examining the completely empty chamber.

It was only after he returned while finding nothing suspicious that Ves concentrated his mind and reached out to the System.

His entire consciousness disappeared from the material realm and entered into the same dark and mysterious space.

A sense of weight and gravity overtook Ves despite the fact that he wasn't connected to his body anymore.

Ves took one last time to think over his options.

"Mental Projection can be incredibly powerful under the right circumstances, but it is not really what I am all about. I am not a manipulator behind the scenes who enjoys breaking into other people's heads in order to mess with their lives."

"Mech pilot Cultivation allows me to shore up the other side of the partnership between a mech and mech pilot. Being able to repair and improve genetic aptitudes is worth sacrificing everything else the System is able to offer."

"Spiritual Ascension strengthens my best specialty and allows me to create a lot more powerful spiritual applications. It also grants me a lot more personal power and can help me fight against more esoteric threats."

"Technological Supremacy is no doubt useful in almost every circumstance. Technology is both versatile and strong, and mastering it to a greater extent is always a great way to get ahead in today's society."

"Ultimate Craftsmanship may be a bit redundant due to having Vulcan, but choosing this practical upgrade track sounds like a surefire way to excel in an area that can allow me to make much more powerful mechs and products."

"Unparalleled Combat can be useful in some situations, but why should I do the job myself when there are so many others that excel in this aspect? Fighting by myself sounds like the stupidest idea in the galaxy."

"Personal Piloting Cultivation is similar to the last upgrade track. While it sounds nice to pilot my own mechs, there is no reason for me to compromise the purity of my path and let myself go astray."

Putting all of these options together caused him to settle on just two of them. He had narrowed down his choices to Mech Pilot Cultivation and Spiritual Ascension for a long time, but could not make up his mind on a single selection until recently.

His thoughts lingered on Mech Pilot Cultivation for a moment before he shook his head.

"I believe in the power of my mech pilots. I also believe in the power of my own solutions. What this upgrade track can do, I should be able to do as well. If I go for Spiritual Ascension, I will probably gain the tools and help needed to replicate many of the functions that the System can perform. I just need to build the mechanisms myself from scratch."

This approach fit much better to a mech designer, creator, engineer and service provider such as Ves.

He was already accustomed to solving problems that no one else could solve by developing his own solutions. Choosing Spiritual Ascension not only

allowed him to maintain his current approach and outlook towards his work, but also do it a lot better than before!

"Designing and creating new stuff is my true passion! If I want to develop lots of new and powerful innovations that no one else can come up with, then I need to master the field that has been the foundation to my rise in the mech industry!"

Ves had made the decisive choice to double down on his specialization and catch up to the Five Scrolls Compact in terms of spiritual engineering!

"I choose Spiritual Ascension!"

### **Chapter 4183 The New System Space**

[Upgrade Track #3: Spiritual Ascension.]

From the moment Ves locked in this choice, the Mech Designer System Version 2.0 thrummed with energy.

Ves could feel the metal energy in the background roiling and surging as if a floodgate had opened.

A whirlwind appeared around him that seemed to change and transform the space around him in a fundamental fashion!

The greater the energies being stirred, the more Ves recognized the horror of the Mech Designer System.

Did it always wield so much potent energy?!

Or did it regain its strength only recently after Ves completed a Supply Mission?

"What the hell is Timpala Steel?!"

When Ves had last come into contact with the valuable chunk of ore, he did not sense why it was so special.

Now he started to develop a few suspicions. For the System and the Mech Trade Association to react so strongly to its presence meant that it must be absolutely remarkable and useful!

"Damn, I shouldn't have fed the remaining crumbs to Lucky." He cursed. "If I retained a sample of it, I could have extracted whatever valuable substance or energy it contained."

In any case, the Mech Designer System presumably completed its upgrade process now that Ves had selected a specific improvement trajectory.

Though he was not certain at all what kind of benefits his chosen upgrade track introduced, the System's current activity level signified that it was probably renovating its entire systems!

Ves' disembodied self couldn't help but chuckle at this realization.

"The System is upgrading its systems!"

Due to the strange nature of this new interaction method, Ves felt as if he had developed a closer and more intimate connection with the System. Before, the System paraded itself as a software program stored inside a comm unit.

This time was different. Ves interfaced with it in a more direct fashion that reminded him of how mech pilots interfaced with their mechs.

It gave Ves the illusion that he had gained the System's approval and gained more access as a result.

Ves wasn't fooled. The warnings he received from Calabast along with his own inherent skepticism prevented him from looking at the System with rose-tinted glasses.

Everyone had a motive. Even an interactive object like the System had a purpose. Ves still didn't know what endgame it had in mind, and as long as



this was the case, he needed to do his best to remain sober in front of the temptations it was about to introduce.

The energy storm around him started to fade. Once the turbulence disappeared, the entire intangible landscape around him had changed.

"Is this... a mountain top?"

The environment changed drastically. Previously, he floated in dark and empty space that made him feel as if he was stuck in a boundless void.

Now, he felt as if he had ascended an ancient and holy mountain looming over a pristine, green earth-like landscape.

Puffy white clouds partially obscured his view of the surroundings and made everything look a little more mystical and detached from reality.

Though Ves was impressed by the visuals, a part of him felt a bit impatient at all of this showmanship.

Couldn't the System interact with him in a more straightmanner like before? What was wrong with projecting menus and message screens in front of his face?

"Whoa! What is happening?!"

Ves felt a bit weird. Before he knew it, he had manifested an exact replica of his body, complete with his uniform and all of his gear!

Of course, Ves was sensitive enough to know that the System hadn't pulled in his actual physical body in this illusionary space. It was just a close reproduction that was not fully accurate.

In order to test this assumption, he pulled out his Hammer of Brilliance from his toolbelt.

"Fake."

What was the point of doing this? Why replicate all of the possessions on his body only for them to end up useless?

Ves shrugged and put his hammer back in its place. The only way to find out what the System had in mind was to explore this mysterious mountain top.

He ascended the rocky and aged-looking stairs and soon spotted several stone structures up ahead.

Each of them looked ancient and worn. Some even looked like shrines or temples, which instantly caused Ves to frown.

"More superstition. Ugh."

Ves hated how everyone dressed up slightly powerful beings as gods. This was also one of the reasons why he had been reluctant to opt for Spiritual Ascension. The upgrade track's name and description clearly mentioned that it could turn him into a god.

"Hah! What a load of crap!"

Still, even if the System was a blowhard, Ves did not look down on its ability to facilitate his growth. He would already gain a lot if he obtained just a fraction of the power of an actual deity!

As Ves kept ascending the awfully lengthy and crooked stairway, he eventually reached the first plateau.

He stepped off the stairway and moved across an open plain until he reached a massive circular stone gate that was built into the side of a mountain cliff.

As he approached the tall and looming gate, it automatically unlocked and opened by itself.

"That's convenient."

The opening of the gate revealed a large cavern that was mostly empty at the moment. From the moment Ves stepped inside, the System provided a brief introduction of this distinct area.

[The Vault of Eternity is the storehouse of all of the rewards and items acquired or altered by the Mech Designer System. It has an infinite capacity and can dynamically add more storage space if required.]

Ves already spotted a couple of familiar items in the middle of the enormous space! He quickened his pace until he reached a set of racks and shelves.

He reached out and picked up the copy of the Amastendira.

Previously, he always wondered where it was being stored when it was not in use. Though he didn't gain an answer to this question, the appearance of the Vault of Eternity let him know that it would probably hold all of his Inventorized gadgets from today onwards.

"That's handy."

Ves immediately noticed the difference between the powerful first-class laser pistol and the Hammer of Brilliance.

Unlike the latter, he intuitively felt as if the Amastendira existed in this space as a real object!

This meant that if Ves took the Amastendira apart, it would appear in a mess of different components if he tried to summon it in reality!

"Why is this the case?"

Ves did not think this was a random change. There had to be a purpose behind this move.

For now, Ves put the Amstendira back into the shelf where it was stored and picked up a different object.

The System comm was another object that he had decided to Inventorize. At the time, Ves thought it was a clever way to hide the System from the MTA and anyone else that possessed incredibly powerful scanning and investigation capabilities.

Now that the Mech Designer System Version 2.0 implemented a more secure and private means of interaction, the System comm suddenly turned into a redundant object.

"Ugh. Is there a way for me to recycle the chance to Inventorize another object?"

[...]

"It was worth a try."

Even though the recent changes had made the System comm obsolete, Ves saw no harm in letting it rest inside this vault. Perhaps he might have a need for it in the future.

He directed his attention to the third object that was laying on another shelf. When Ves picked it up, he bloomed into a smile when he noticed that it was a ticket.

An Inventorize Ticket!

Ves concentrated on it, allowing him to read its description.

[Inventorize Ticket]

Enables you to designate any discreet and physical object to be Inventorized, thereby allowing you to store the Inventorized item in the Vault of Eternity or materialize it into physical form if needed. There are certain restrictions to the usage of this ticket.

"Yes! I finally got my hands on one of the rewards of completing one of my Supply Missions!"

The System was supposed to give him a use of the Inventorize ability a long time ago when Ves supplied it with Timpala Steel.

Unfortunately for him, it went offline for several years, denying him the use of this precious power!

The Inventorize ability could be insanely powerful depending on the object he chose to apply it to. He wouldn't gain much if he Inventorized an ordinary nutrient pack, but he could hide a life-saving measure in front of everyone's eyes if he applied it to a more useful object such as his Unending Regalia!

Ves had already spent many years on thinking of what he should apply this ability to. He came up with many different possible choices, but he wasn't sure whether the more extravagant of them could be Inventorized.

"I'll look into this later."

There was no hurry for Ves to use up this precious Inventorize Ticket. He put it back on the shelf and swept the largely empty vault one last time before he exited the chamber.

He stepped back onto the stone steps and continued to make his way upwards.

It only took a short time for him to reach his next stop. This time, he approached a magnificent looking stone fountain.

[The Wishing Fountain is the site where lottery tickets can be bought and used. Any lottery tickets acquired through other means can also be accessed at this site.]

Ves completely ignored the ornate design of the so-called Wishing Fountain and directed all of his attention to a table that was situated in front.

He approached it and saw that it not only contained a stack of lottery tickets that he had earned through previous rewards, but also offered him the option to buy new lottery tickets!

"Wait a minute, what are Ascension Points?"

[Ascension Points are the new form of currency that you can earn from the Mech Designer System Version 2.0. Their value is different from Design points and can be earned through multiple means such as designing mechs. You can earn 1 Ascension Point by completing a mech design that you are largely responsible for designing.]

Ves grew confused. Why did the System impose such a drastic change?

"What about Design Points?"

[Design Points have been phased out. All of the Design Points that you have earned up to this point have automatically been converted into Ascension Points.]

"How many Ascension Points do I have?!"

[You have earned 34 Ascension Points.]

"34?! So little?! I don't know how many Design Points is equivalent to a single Ascension Point, but I'm pretty sure I designed way more mechs over the years!"

[Completing a variant design or a collaborative mech design where you have only made minor personal contributions will not award you with Ascension Points.]

"I... see..."

Of course, the System would never make it easy for Ves to earn points. It had already screwed him over in the past when the LMC's sales started to skyrocket.

"What is the purchasing power of an Ascension Point? What can I actually do with this new currency?"

He looked around until he saw where he could redeem his Ascension Point for lottery tickets.

[1 golden lottery ticket: 5 Ascension Points]

"What?! I have to design five original mechs in order to buy a single stinking golden lottery ticket?! What a scam!"

Fortunately, there were more ways for Ves to obtain lottery tickets than to give up his hard-earned Ascension Points.

He started to grin when his eyes rested on a pile of lottery tickets.

Completing the last Supply Missions awarded him with 10 golden lottery tickets, which was enough to guarantee at least 1 or 2 good prizes!

That wasn't all. Next to the pile of golden tickets was a smaller stack of 4 iridescent rainbow-like tickets.

Ves had produced four different masterwork expert mechs since he had last accessed the System!

Several of them had all reached their present heights with the help of his undeniable contributions!

Apparently, the System recognized that as well, because it had awarded him with the most valuable prize he could earn for making a masterwork mech!

"I've waited so long to use up these lottery tickets!"

### **Chapter 4184 Wonderful New Products**

Normally, Ves would think about whether he was in the right state or whether his luck was sufficiently good on the day he used his lottery tickets.

He couldn't care less about that at this time. All of the lottery tickets he had earned up to this point had remained accessible for several agonizing years as the System took its sweet time to complete its upgrade.

Though Ves increasingly had the suspicion that the renewed System was more than worth the wait, that did not stop him from feeling frustrated at his inability to use up the lottery tickets that he had earned through completing a Mission and creating several masterwork mechs.

"You're not going to deny me any longer!"

Ves reached out and grabbed the stack of lottery tickets as if he was afraid the System could go offline at any moment.

"How do I use up a lottery ticket, System?!"

[Merely throw the ticket into the Wishing Fountain.]

Though Ves was tempted to toss a ticket into the water right away, he forcibly reined in his impatience and started to think about how to best make use of this opportunity.

"What's the deal with the Wishing Fountain? Can I influence the prizes that I can win in any way?"

[The Wishing Fountain is sensitive to your needs and desires. You may partially affect the prize pool that it can draw from by concentrating on a wish you would like to fulfill.]

Ves' eyes gleamed when he heard that. He was already familiar with this mechanism in past cases, but this time he could apply it to every lottery ticket.

This wishing mechanism was extremely helpful in controlling the rewards he could obtain. Before, the System could always draw all kinds of random and useful prizes that weren't particularly interesting to him. He had no need for component licenses, for example.



As Ves held a golden lottery ticket, he tried to 'wish' for a specific reward.

After fumbling around for a minute, he vaguely sensed different responses from the Wishing Fountain. It radiated faint approval when Ves held a valid thought and conveyed clear rejection when he thought about something unacceptable.

It was through cycling different thoughts that Ves developed a vague idea on what was acceptable.

Ves sensed that he could restrict the prize pool for a golden lottery ticket to different categories.

The prize categories included technological objects, spiritually reactive materials, spiritual plants, design skills and more.

He was not surprised with some of the categories, but there were plenty of other ones that sounded as if they were only recent additions to the Mech Designer System.

"Is this because of the Spiritual Ascension upgrade track?"

This was a good change in his opinion. The System was able to offer a lot more relevant rewards and benefits to Ves now that it had oriented itself towards spiritual engineering. The possibilities opened up by the Wishing Fountain was just one of many adjustments.

As Ves looked at his stash of lottery tickets once more, he felt incredibly tempted to toss them all into the pool of water all at once!

However, after learning that he could influence the prize draw by making specific wishes, his common sense took over again.

"I shouldn't recklessly use up all of my lottery tickets without knowing what I can or cannot obtain with the newly-updated System!"

What if he spent all of his golden lottery tickets on acquiring rare and valuable spiritually-reactive materials, only to learn that the revised version of the System's Shop readily sold P-stones and Unending alloy for Ascension Points?

The true value of the new Wishing Fountain was that it granted Ves a chance of obtaining objects that he could not obtain through other channels!

The Grand Dynamo was a good example of that. Ves did not forget that he had managed to draw it after he used up his first radiant lottery ticket.

Now he had four of these colorful tickets in his grasp, he did not want to squander them by trying to fish for prizes that he could easily obtain by designing a lot of mechs!

The most prudent course of action that he could take would be to leave the tickets behind and explore the new System Space in its entirety before going back.

He planned to do just that, but he still couldn't get rid of his desire to see the Wishing Fountain at work.

"I have thirteen tickets in total. What's the harm in using up one of them for a start?"

Ves put back all of the lottery tickets aside from a single golden one. He wanted to test the wishing mechanism by concentrating on a single valid category of prizes.

"What I need the most are spiritually-reactive materials. I don't care what I can get. I'll be happy if I can get a chunk of P-stone, B-stone, F-stone, Unending alloy or even an exobeast bone that can be charged with spiritual energy!"

Once he set his mind on his wish, he tossed the golden lottery ticket into the fountain and waited for his prize.

As soon as the ticket touched the water, it melted into the liquid, causing it to become golden and glittering with power!

The golden fountain water began to swirl in the fountain pool. Several seconds passed by as a hidden selection mechanism finally settled on a prize.

The fountain suddenly spouted a jet of water from its pool! The prize that Ves had won floated right above this liquid jet!

[Congratulations! You have won 2.5 kilograms of pure Black Demon Steel!]

The Wishing Fountain had produced a single bar of dark and gloomy looking metal. As Ves examined it with his eyes and his spiritual senses, he noticed that it was anything but normal.

"This... reminds me of Helena or Nyxie..."

He didn't know who had originally named this material, but he found that it was aptly named.

The Black Demon Steel exuded a sense of danger and gloominess that was quite strange since it was just a hunk of metal.

It did not contain any energy as far as Ves could tell, but it was probably able to absorb certain forms of spiritual energy, specifically those that were aligned with darkness.

Ves' eyes already lit up. Though he had yet to decipher its full properties and uses, he already came up with a couple of ideas on how to make good use of this precious spiritually-reactive material!

"It's a shame I haven't received more of it! 2.5 kilograms of Black Demon Steel isn't enough to augment a mech!"

Whether it was worth the use of a golden lottery ticket remained to be seen. This was not the time for him to study and tinker with the brand-new material that he had never encountered before.

Ves eventually left the Wishing Fountain with a smile. It might just be luck, but the prize that he had obtained after using up a single golden lottery ticket had raised his expectations of what he could obtain in the future.

"I'll definitely come back and use up my radiant lottery tickets after I have fully figured out all of the changes to the System!"

The next stop looked like an ancient marketplace. Different stalls and shops were set up in what looked like a small mountain village.

When Ves entered the new area, the System briefly explained this new area.

[The Divine Bazaar provides a rotating selection of goods that you can purchase by exchanging Ascension Points. The goods available for sale change periodically over time.]

Ves soon frowned as he explored the so-called Divine Bazaar. The changes were drastic compared to the old version of the Shop!

Previously, the System presented an enormous selection of high-quality goods. Most of them were far too expensive for him to exchange with the Design Points that he earned, but it was always nice to have the option to buy an emergency medicine or gadget that could help him survive a sticky situation.

All of that is gone now with the Divine Bazaar. Though there were plenty of shops and stalls, most of them were empty and devoid of any items.

The few that did only offered a handful of precious items each. The selection of goods was pretty random. This meant that if Ves wanted to buy a specific object such as a P-stone, he would have to pray for luck that the next rotation of goods included it in one of the shops!

Perhaps the only consolation to Ves was that many of the products on sale were both useful and relatively affordable.

What was also interesting was that over half of them were directly related to spirituality and spiritual engineering!

[Universal Star Manual - Volume I]

Price: 3 Ascension Points

An introduction on how to study the patterns and movements of any star in the current universe. Although this manual contains few practical techniques, the theory contained within its pages will allow its students to master more advanced theories and techniques related to predicting future trends.

[Circlet of Clarity]

Price: 19 Ascension Points

An automatically adjustable circlet that can provide formidable protection to the mind of its bearer. The Circlet of Clarity can also endow its bearer with vastly greater concentration and calm, allowing for clear thinking under great pressure or difficulties.

[Mystery Wood]

Price: 66 Ascension Points

This piece of purple wood is taken from an unknown exoplanet. It is a rare organic material and can be utilized for many specific purposes as long as it is processed and handled in a specific manner. The exact properties of this wood is highly dependent on how it is processed.

[A bottle of Strength Candies]

Price: 1 Ascension Point

This bottle holds 20 Improved Strength Candies. Each Improved Strength Candy can upgrade an individual's Strength attribute by 0.2 to a maximum of 2.0 at any point.

The range of purchasable goods was similar to the categories of items that Ves could obtain from the Wishing Fountain.

Much of the items were directly related to the new Spiritual Ascension upgrade track that Ves had chosen.

"If I opted for Technological Supremacy, then I probably would have probably been presented with a lot of high-tech products and manuals." He guessed.

After touring the entire Divine Bazaar thrice, Ves gained a good idea of what he could obtain from this useful place.

Although he didn't like the fact that the System heavily limited the amount of products that it put up for sale, Ves still valued the Divine Bazaar because it allowed him to purchase all kinds of useful products related to spiritual engineering!

"This is the real use of the Divine Bazaar!" Ves grinned.

Ves did not really miss the opportunity to buy advanced technological objects. While it was nice to be able to buy the Vulcaneye and Odineye, these days he could easily invest a lot of MTA credits, MTA merits or phasewater in order to purchase high-tech goods.

Yet no matter how many kilograms of phasewater he dangled in front of everyone's faces, he seriously doubted that he could purchase anything related to spirituality or spiritual engineering!

"The Five Scrolls Compact will never sell its own specialty goods to a mech designer!"

This was where the Divine Bazaar came in. Just as its name suggested, it offered Ves a direct way to purchase goods that were most likely related to the Five Scrolls Compact in one way or another.

As Ves was ready to move on to the next area of the System Space, he briefly lingered in front of a stall that put up various books for sale.

There were no people manning any of the stalls and shops, which made the entire bazaar feel rather empty and lifeless.

However, Ves knew that as soon as he picked up any of the books, the System would automatically deduct the price from his account.

He felt quite curious about the first volume of the so-called Universal Star Manual. He faintly guessed that studying it might allow him to understand Ylvaine's nature and allow him to make better use of the humanoid design spirit's predictive capabilities.

In fact, Ves could even pass the contents of this book to Ylvaine directly, allowing the Great Prophet to improve his abilities by himself!

"Hm, I don't need to hurry with making this purchase. I should wait until I see what else I can spend my Ascension Points on. I haven't encountered the latest version of the Skill Tree up to this point."

### **Chapter 4185 Tree Of Possibilities**

Though Ves had mixed feelings about the changes to the Mech Designer System, he recognized that most of them were for the better.

During the previous period where he had access to the System, he stopped taking many of its functions seriously. He rarely used the Store unless he wanted to buy Attribute Candies.

The only truly useful functions of the Systems was the Skill Tree, the Superpublish ability and the occasional surprises from winning prizes through the Lottery.

This time, every function of the updated System had become more useful and relevant to him. It did not matter that he couldn't gain access to any

knowledge, tech or materials related to spiritual engineering from his mother or the Five Scrolls Compact.

With the new version of the Mech Designer System, Ves gained his own channel to obtain all of these interesting and fascinating products, most of which could not be found for sale in any corner of human space!

"Is it even appropriate to call it the Mech Designer System anymore?"

Now that he thought about it, Ves had become so dazzled by all of the new spirituality-related functions that he had yet to see anything that was still related to mech design!

Had the System deemphasized this aspect now that Ves could obtain most of what he wanted from his normal channels?

Ves actually hoped that this was not the case. He still valued the Skill Tree quite a lot. He would cry if it stopped with providing him with instant upgrades to all of his design-related Skills and sub-Skills!

The next stop on his journey to reach the top of the mountain was a literal tree.

It did not take much time for Ves to guess that this tree was related to the old Skill Tree function of the System!

The enormous tree did not look like it belonged to any alien species, but it exuded a strong sense of power that felt a bit familiar to Ves.

He frowned and tried to figure out why the large and lush green tree gave him the impression of meeting a familiar acquaintance.

"Wait a second. This tree is giving me the same vibe as the Polymath!"

Although it sounded absurd, Ves could easily mistake the tree for an inanimate version of the Polymath!



Both of them exuded the same high-level energy that was intrinsically tied to knowledge and truth.

As Ves slowly approached the tree, the System finally explained what it was all about.

[The Tree of Possibilities is a font of information, knowledge and wisdom. It regularly grows new enlightenment fruits that will ripen after the passage of time. Once the enlightenment fruits have ripened, they can be exchanged for Ascension Points as long as you meet the requirements.]

"Enlightenment fruits...?"

[You can choose to eat the enlightenment fruit that you have exchanged on the spot or transfer it to the Vault of Eternity. If you have chosen to do the latter, you can choose to materialize the enlightenment fruit in reality. This will allow you to impart the enlightenment fruit to others as long as they meet the requirements to absorb the information and knowledge contained within. If the fruit is ingested by an unqualified recipient, then that individual will only obtain a fraction of the benefits.]

"What?!"

This was one of the biggest changes that the System had enacted!

Whereas previously Ves was only limited to boosting his own Skills and Sub-Skills as long as he retained sole access to the System, now he could easily give others one-off boosts by passing them the enlightenment fruits that he had exchanged!

Compared to the old Skill Tree, the Tree of Possibilities was much more useful!

He could help all kinds of other people master new and useful Skills by bringing out the enlightenment fruits that he could obtain from the Tree of Possibilities.

Of course, he did not really think it was meaningful to spend his valuable Ascension Points on making his wife smarter and more knowledgeable.

She was already doing fine on her own. Gloriana had spent much of her life studying by herself. She was a clever designer baby and was already accustomed to this routine.

What Ves was truly thinking about was handing over a few of these enlightenment fruits to Marvaine and potentially other relatives he cared about.

Depending on what the enlightenment fruits imparted to people, they could easily give his son a powerful head-start should he choose to go into mech design!

As Ves looked up at the Tree of Possibilities, he soon noticed a potential problem.

He quickly attempted to estimate the amount of fruits hanging from the branches and came up with a figure that was around 400.

"Is that it, System? Will the Tree of Possibilities grow more enlightenment fruits in the future?"

[If the ripened enlightenment fruits remain untouched for too long, they will drop and decompose in order to make way for different enlightenment fruits.]

"What?! It's not enough for you to create artificial scarcity once. Now you're doing it again! Do you have no shame?!"

[...]

Ves silently cursed the devious System. If the Tree of Possibilities could only sustain a couple of hundred enlightenment fruits at once, then it would be a lot more difficult to obtain a specific Skill depending on the distribution of their contents!

He recognized what the bastard of a System was doing. By limiting the variety of goods that Ves could obtain with Ascension Points, he would be forced to come back again and again in order to obtain the items or enlightenment fruits that he needed.

Due to this, Ves would not only have to interact with the System on a more regular basis, but also build up a form of dependence on it as he hoped that each time he would be met with particularly valuable goods on offer!

As much as he hated this annoying method of producing artificial scarcity, he felt that the benefits outweighed the downsides.

Although Ves no longer had the convenience of absorbing every Skill or Sub-Skill at his choosing, being able to obtain an actual physical fruit that he could take out of the System Space more than compensated for this shortcoming!

The actual worth of this amazing new benefit depended on what kind of knowledge the enlightenment fruits imparted.

He strode forward and patiently scanned a couple of dozen different enlightenment fruits.

It turned out that they were quite varied in what they had to offer.

[Random Mechanical Engineering Sub-Skill]

Price: 1 Ascension Point

Provides a Sub-Skill or increase in knowledge and proficiency in a Sub-Skill related to Mechanical Engineering.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 1.2 or higher.

### [Autari Emsis High Momentum Maneuvering Systems]

Price: 185 Ascension Points

Imparts theories and applications derived from the signature technology of the auteri emsis race. The maneuvering systems developed by the auteri emsis race utilizes non-standard principles to enable vehicles to move and change direction faster when their mass is higher, but only at the cost of extreme energy consumption.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 1.8 or higher. Physics Skill must be Master-level or higher. Propulsion must be Master-level or higher. Metallurgy must be Senior-level or higher. Mathematics must be...

### [Master Ainos Kadivi's Plasma Lance Principles]

Price: 32 Ascension Points

Imparts specific theoretical principles related to the plasma lance system developed by Master Ainos Kadivi. Plasma lances designed according to Master Kadivi's principles are highly compact and considerably powerful, but can only be built by using a narrow range of exotics.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 2.5 or higher. Physics Skill must be Senior-level or higher. Mathematics must be Senior-level or higher. Materials Science must be...

Much to his relief, the Tree of Possibilities still offered plenty of Skills and Sub-Skills related to mech design. The System had not phased them out after its latest upgrade but retained them in the form of enlightenment fruits.

"There is even alien knowledge!"

This was new! Previously, the Skill Tree only offered knowledge related to mech design that humanity had mastered and converted into its own theoretical frameworks.

Now, enlightenment fruits such as the one related to the autari emsis race could drastically increase his versatility and range of capabilities in mech design.

Just like how mastering luminar crystal technology allowed Ves to design considerably stronger ranged mechs, other elements of alien technology could provide a significant boost to his other products!

The only painful part about these 'alien' fruits was that they cost a lot of Ascension Points in order to redeem!

While Ves was able to surmise from their descriptions that all of these expensive alien fruits allowed him to instantly understand all kinds of powerful signature technologies of other races, it took a lot of labor in order to earn so many Ascension Points!

"I need to design 185 mechs in order to redeem that alien fruit related to high momentum maneuvering systems!"

There was no way that he could do this in a reasonable time frame, especially since the System had always maintained strict standards on what was valid.

Ves became increasingly more convinced that the System actually prepared other, more faster methods to earn Ascension Points.

"I hope I will be able to get in touch with these new methods soon."

As he studied the fruits, Ves noticed that most of the fruits related to mech design were silver in color. They dominated at least half of the branches of the Tree of Possibilities.

The other enlightenment fruits came in various different colors. Many of them were green but Ves also spotted other random colors such as blue or black.

[Modu Cult Maiden Scripture]

Price: 2 Ascension Points

Imparts the complete scripture of the Modu Cult that purportedly allows humans to become immortal. No practitioner has ever succeeded in becoming immortal, but females have been able to maintain bodies at a smooth and supple state for many years, hence the formula became known as the Maiden Scripture.

Requirements: Female. Spirituality must be 0.1 or higher. Endurance must be 0.6 or higher. Must have affinity for water-related attributes.

[Atmer Guardian Mantra]

Price: 299 Ascension Points

Imparts the complete mantra that enables talented individuals to cultivate their physical, mental and spiritual attributes. The mantra mainly centers around increasing the defenses of its practitioner, allowing them to withstand many attacks the more they practice its contents. Those who practice this mantra to the fullest will turn into gods that cannot be moved and are nearly impossible to break. The Atmer Guardian Mantra can only be fully practiced by humans that possess specific genes as well as biological modifications and have not practiced any other cultivation techniques. This enlightenment fruit allows an individual to ignore these conditions.

Requirements: Spirituality must be 0.4 or higher. Strength must be 1.4 or higher. Endurance must be 1.4 or higher. Must have affinity for earth, defense or mass.

[Staff of Wipstitch Design]

Price: 7 Ascension Points

Imparts the complete design of the Staff of Wipstitch. This ceremonial weapon allows its wielder to channel nature-attributed spiritual energy in a more concentrated form, enhancing the effectiveness of any related techniques by

as much as 65 percent. The design of the Staff of Wipstitch is flawed and slowly causes its wielder to accumulate harmful poison.

Requirements: Spirituality must be 1.2 or higher. Must have affinity for nature or poison.

"Now that is more like it!" Ves grinned!

Though the knowledge imparted by these enlightenment fruits was awfully random, they presented him with a whole new range of possibilities!

"This is one of the main reasons why I went for Spiritual Ascension!"

Ves had the impression that he had secretly managed to slip inside one of the hidden libraries of the Five Scrolls Compact!

Although he could only sneak in periodically to steal a handful of books at a time, this was already a massive improvement compared to before!

"I will definitely make good use of the Tree of Possibilities!"

Ves had long grown frustrated by the lack of progress in developing new and useful spiritual applications.

Though his T Institute did good work, he and Director Pesca Aduc were amateurs compared to the core members and leaders of the Five Scrolls Compact.

Now that Ves was essentially able to obtain much of the secrets in the hands of the Compact through the Tree of Possibilities, he and his fellow spiritual engineers would be able to make much more progress than before!

"This is truly a Tree of Possibilities!"

### **Chapter 4186 Origin Of Fruits**

Ves examined the enlightenment fruits closely. He not only paid attention to their benefits, but also noted their requirements, their origins and how they might augment his development.

A lot of the more expensive enlightenment fruits truly aroused his desires. Although he never heard of any of these powers or the groups that apparently created them, he did not doubt the System's accuracy when it came to supplying information.

"There are actually a lot of hidden cults in human space! From the looks of it, these cults are more than scam operations."

He had already noticed these details back at the Divine Bazaar, but now that he encountered similar mentions of organizations that developed the capability to harness metaphysical power, he became convinced that there was a large hidden community in human space!

"The big question is how these cults are related to the biggest of them all? Are they formal subsidiaries of the Five Scrolls Compact or are they completely independent from the outlaws?"

Ves did not think that most of these weird-sounding cults could escape the reach of the Five Scrolls Compact.

The big daddy was simply too dominant in this arena!

The enormous storm unleashed by the Crown Uprising was a clear indication that the Compact influence was able to reach every corner of human civilization.

As such, Ves assumed that these cults were either formal splinter organizations of the Five Scrolls Compact or founded by former members who escaped the deranged organization and went into exile.

Either of these possibilities could be true. A former behemoth like the Five Scrolls Compact was so big and expansive that managing its entire organization across hundreds of thousands of light-years was extremely complicated.



It became a lot simpler to keep everything organized by splitting off the bottom level and allowing the underlings to take care of themselves.

Ves had already encountered plenty of these splinter organizations in the past. He noted that while their connection to the Compact was rather faint, they often managed to master at least one weird method.

Exiles and fugitives probably comprised another group of hidden spiritual practitioners in human space. Ves had figured out that his mother likely originated from one, which technically meant that he himself fell into this category as well!

The problem was that unlike the members of formal splinter organizations, those that had either fled or been kicked out of the Compact had no chance of gaining access to the grand cult's library!

This was a serious flaw and one that should have limited Ves' ability to develop his spiritual engineering.

"That is no longer the case." He grinned.

As he looked up at the Tree of Possibilities, he could essentially pluck any of the fruits that all of those different cults had developed or obtained at great cost.

Many of these methods, techniques, manuals and so on were most likely extremely rare and only accessible to a small gathering of people located in a hidden corner of human space.

It would have been impossible for Ves to seek out any of these obscure cults. They were so well-hidden and so entrenched in their local regions that perhaps not even the MTA was able to sniff out their presence!

The only comparable scripture that Ves had managed to get in touch with was the strange Annals of Terra Vita that the Aduc Family held for many centuries.

Aside from that, Ves had no chance of getting in touch with any other ancient scrolls or books unless he invested a disproportionate amount of manpower and resources into hunting down each and every cult or group of exiles!

"This is too impractical!"

Ves only managed to come across the Aducs because the Transhumanist Faction literally shoved them onto his lap. Where was he supposed to get into contact with other cults and remnants?

The evolution of the System solved all of his concerns. Even though it limited itself by growing just a couple of hundred of enlightenment fruits at a time, the secrets locked inside of them could easily be obtained as long as Ves was willing to fork over his Ascension Points!

"Of course, it's not so easy to earn these Ascension Points."

As the System had leveled up, so had its standards. Ves could not mindlessly order the Design Department to start a hundred design projects at once and only briefly spend his time on each of them in order to make them alive.

No. The System clearly stated that Ves had to put real effort into their design. At the very least, the mech had to embody his vision and design choices in order to earn him an Ascension Point, and that meant he had to invest a lot of time in the design lab.

"I can't earn Ascension Points quickly enough!"

The enlightenment fruits that cost a couple of points to a dozen or so points were all reasonably priced in his eyes. Though the knowledge and benefits they provided did not sound too extravagant, Ves did not truly mind that at this point.

He had been fumbling around in ignorance for his entire career. If he wanted to make his work more structured and systematic, then he needed to strengthen his foundation by learning the basics.

Ves already had his eye on the enlightenment fruits that contained the essence of different foundational manuals and scriptures. Each of them possessed a ton of introductory and foundational reading material that would doubtlessly be able to fill up all of his holes in his theories related to spiritual engineering!

He momentarily frowned as he recalled a warning.

"My mother told me that it's best not to come into contact with existing knowledge about spirituality."

She had always refused to teach him anything and that had always frustrated him. Now that he gained a better channel to obtain these secrets, he wondered whether he would be making a mistake by partaking in these enlightenment fruits.

"...Nah."

Ves did not think there was any problem in gathering information. To him, spiritual engineering was similar to mech design. They were both creative as well as scientific disciplines with similar approaches.

Ves had managed to develop his own distinct design philosophy when he rose up as a mech designer. He studied many textbooks and acquired even more knowledge through the System's Skill Tree, but he had never been at serious risk of losing his way due to getting exposed to other shiny tech or theories.

"I'm already a Journeyman Mech Designer. I know how to manage my learning. I already developed a philosophy for my spiritual engineering work as well. There shouldn't be any harm in coming into contact with other philosophies or theoretical frameworks. Even if they are more advanced than I

have ever come into contact with before, I will just use that to supplement my own spiritual engineering style."

He believed that there were two reasons why his mother didn't want to teach him anything.

First, she had probably pledged an oath or signed a pact that prohibited her from divulging the secret knowledge that she had learned.

Second, she was probably afraid that Ves would learn a powerful cult or group's exclusive secret method. If he started to sell mechs across human space that blatantly contained elements that originated from an old but dangerous organization, then he would definitely attract a lot of trouble!

While the first possible reason did not really concern him in the slightest, the second one still sounded worrisome to his current situation.

Ves had interacted with the System long enough to know that it never bothered with any nonsense. If it mentioned the name of a creator or organization that developed a specific method, then it was surely relevant to his own decision-making!

He took another glance at one of the most expensive and presumably the most powerful enlightenment fruits that the Tree of Possibilities had to offer.

[Atmer Guardian Mantra]

Price: 299 Ascension Points

This so-called mantra was so powerful that only a select few people were able to make use of it to begin with! As long as the individuals in question met all of the hefty requirements, they could supposedly practice it until they became as powerful as a 'god'!

There were a lot of frightening implications to the Atmer Guardian Mantra. Ves was certain that there were definitely people who practiced it to the fullest, and each of them were probably as powerful as ace pilots at the very least!

If any of these powerhouses noticed that a random mech designer in the Red Ocean had started making use of their precious heritage, then they would definitely come and demolish the thief!

"Damn it!"

While there was a chance that the organization behind a specific method had already fallen, Ves could not take the risk to make blatant use of other people's work in his own products.

He needed to be more careful and make sure to retain his own style and methods while absorbing foreign study materials.

Did this mean that Ves would have to refrain from absorbing any of the new enlightenment fruits?

"Hell no!"

If he wanted to speed up his progress in developing his spiritual engineering capabilities, then learning from others was unavoidable.

"I just need to be more sneaky about it." Ves rubbed his imaginary smooth-shaven chin. "It's a good thing that I happen to have a lot of practice in corrupting and bastardizing other people's work!"

His spiritual networks and his luminar crystal weapons stood out as two prominent examples.

Before he left this site and continued his journey to the top of the mountain, he took one last look at the different fruits.

One of the complications that Ves felt bothered by was how most of them were actually incompatible with his domain.

His Spirituality mainly centered around life and mechs. This meant that he was unable to make full use of the enlightenment fruits that were aligned to different attributes or elements!

"Does this mean that most of these fruits are useless to me?" Ves frowned in puzzlement.

However, he soon recalled the instance where Gaia came into contact with the Annals of Terra Vita.

Whereas Ves was unable to derive anything useful out of this secret scroll, Gaia whose spiritual attributes matched extremely well with the contents had completely devoured the Annals to the point where it had crumbled into dust!

This incident showed Ves that it was still possible for him to make good use of all of the enlightenment fruits!

"Perhaps this is also the reason why I can bring these fruits into reality!"

The System already anticipated this need and made it possible for him to share his bounty with others!

For example, Ves could easily exchange the enlightenment fruit that contained Modu Cult Maiden Scripture by exchanging just 2 Ascension Points.

All he needed to do after that was find a spiritually active woman within his clan that developed an affinity for water. Such a person would be able to make full use of this cultivation technique to develop her water domain even further!

"That isn't my only option."

Ves could also feed the enlightenment fruit to a design spirit. Whether he fed it to an existing one like the Phase King or made a brand-new one with an aquatic theme, as long as the spiritual attributes, compatibility shouldn't be a major problem!

"I can also take this even further!"

Why feed his enlightenment fruits to others when he could keep them for himself? Ves still had a way of absorbing ones that centered around different attributes.

The only thing Ves needed to do was create more incarnations of himself that possessed different domains!

"I already have Blinky and Vulcan. Both of their domains are significantly different from mine. The Spiritual Ascension upgrade track already mentioned that it is able to help me create more incarnations. I wonder how many different versions of myself I can make if that's the case?"

This was definitely a crazy idea!

#### **Chapter 4187 Spending Strategy**

Just as Ves imagined himself building up an entire collective of spiritual incarnations that were aligned to every major spiritual attribute in existence, he quickly reassured his common sense.

"It costs way too much Ascension Points to feed them all with enlightenment fruits and develop them all! More incarnations is not always better!"

There was always a price, and incarnations required a lot of support in order to further their development.

In his case, Blinky was alright since the cat was a companion spirit that grew at the same pace as Ves himself.

Vulcan on the other hand was more detached and needed the support of the entire Creation Association to develop itself up to its present state!

If Ves created a dozen more incarnations of himself, did he truly have to create a dozen different 'associations' in order to supply them with the sustenance they needed in order to grow?

"That's way too exaggerated!"

Ves was quite familiar with the problem of trying to spread himself too much. He had to budget his time carefully when he engaged in mech design. He wanted to be good at everything, but the reality was that he could not do so unless he was willing to become mediocre in all fields.

That was why he had chosen to major in spiritual engineering and minor in luminar crystal technology.

Though he always had the option to add another specialty to his repertoire, he simply did not have the time and energy to do so. He already struggled to make time in order to learn a few basic principles about phasewater technology.

Given all of these constraints, it sounded extremely unwise for him to overreach in terms of mastering every single major spiritual domain.

If it was difficult for Ves to earn more Ascension Points, then he shouldn't be too eager to supply too many enlightenment fruits to other people or entities.

While there were plenty of design spirits that could make good use of the knowledge imparted by these precious fruits, Ves would have to work himself to death to maximize their development!

"This isn't necessary." Ves shook his head.

Every design spirit was doing fine in their own way. Some might not be growing as fast as others, but each of them naturally grew more capable over time.

Their main use to Ves was to provide additional support to his mech designs. Design spirits such as the Solemn Guardian and Bravo didn't need to be too competent in order for them to do their jobs. Lending their domains was already enough to make them useful!



If Ves wanted to accelerate the development of his design spirits, then he needed to be more purposeful and selective about his moves.

"I need to formulate a specific strategy that will help me obtain the maximum possible results while spending as little as possible."

Certain design spirits were more important than others. The Golden Cat was a good example. She served as the spiritual heart of the Larkinson Clan. Making her stronger was equivalent to making every Larkinson stronger!

"What about Helena?"

Helena was his sister and also deserved attention. However, Ves distinctly remembered her mentioning that she was taking lessons from their mother.

Each time she showed up in his presence, she appeared stronger and more in control of her abilities than before. She hardly needed any further help, especially considering that he had already gifted her with the Death Lotus!

"Lufa is a more interesting candidate."

The Angel of Tranquility was a strategically important design spirit for multiple reasons. Not only was Ves able to leverage his domain to facilitate breakthroughs, the design spirit also provided powerful protection against all kinds of scary spiritual threats!

Seeing how many different cults existed throughout human civilization and how many whacky powers they developed over the years, it became a lot more important to develop a specific counter to all of them. Lufa's glow perfectly neutralized most of these weird effects!

"Aside from that, the Illustrious One is also a good candidate."

The Illustrious One played a vital role in helping Ves harness luminar crystal technology to a greater degree. There were a lot of secrets and untapped potential in this tech, but his progress in deciphering it had been slow despite

the fact that he had access to the MTA's complete research related to this subject.

The Illustrious One was fairly powerful as a design spirit but his inherited knowledge and his abilities weren't particularly sophisticated.

Ves could remedy much of this by supplying the alien spiritual entity with enlightenment fruits that provided valuable comprehension on concepts such as light and energy.

Doing all of this would help Ves develop better and stronger luminar crystal weapons. This would not only help his troops fight against ordinary opponents, but also give them an edge against spiritual threats!

As Ves continued to go over his other design spirits, he concluded that helping them was not an urgent matter.

It was still a good idea to reward loyal and helpful design spirits with an enlightenment fruit every now and then. Entities such as Qilanxo had always been good to him, so it was only natural to reciprocate their dedication with gifts.

"I can't be too extravagant, though. I need to budget my spending carefully."

The tentative new development strategy he came up with sounded like a good idea. By focusing his limited resources on cultivating Goldie, Lufa and the Illustrious One, he could quickly strengthen his forces and become more secure in his own position.

Ves already eyed a couple of enlightenment fruits that fit this strategy.

"I only have 34 Ascension Points, though..." He winced.

It would take a long time to supply each of those design spirits with enough enlightenment fruits to supercharge their development.

What was even more troublesome was that Ves also had to take care of his own needs. It was impossible for him to give up on investing in himself because he wanted to strengthen his design spirits.

He still understood that he needed to be strong first before he could take care of others!

"Oh, I also can't forget about my kids as well!"

Marvaine was still an innocent little kid, but Ves hoped that his oldest son would take up the family tradition and become a mech designer.

His other children were also spiritually potent. Each of them possessed the potential to practice any of the special methods provided that they met the requirements.

Ves grew more and more burdened at the thought of how many people he needed to support in the coming decades.

"Ugh. Maybe the Tree of Possibilities is not such a great thing at all. At least it was a lot harder for me to share the benefits of the Systems with the old version of the Skill Tree."

He suddenly felt it was pointless to think further about all of the ways he could make good use of the enlightenment fruits. With only 34 Ascension Points in his possession, he could only afford a couple of basic fruits!

"The prices are too high!"

When he resumed his journey, he climbed up until he reached a different area that was dominated by a stone hall.

When Ves passed through the main gate, the System provided an explanation as usual.

[The Mission Hall is the central location where you can accept new Missions or review current Missions. You can earn Ascension Points and other rewards

depending on their nature. You can accept as many Missions as you wish, but make certain that you can complete them within their time limits. The available Missions refresh periodically if they remain untouched for an extended period of time.]

"I see."

Ves approached a large old-fashioned notice board. Only a dozen different pieces of paper had been pinned on the surface. He surmised that each of them conveyed a different mission.

"Let's see what this is all about."

[Design Duel Champion]

Mission: Design Duel Champion

Difficulty: A-Rank

Prerequisites: Journeyman Mech Designer

Description

A formidable and resilient mech designer must prove his ability to work under pressure and overcome the competition.

Defeat 5 different unfamiliar but competent Journeyman Mech Designers in fair and equal mech duels. Each competing Journeyman must be older than you and be able to design the same class of mechs.

The stronger the opposing Journeymen, the greater your evaluation. You will fail this Mission if you lose a single design duel.

Reward: 30 Ascension Points.

Time limit: 1 standard year.

Penalty for failure: Remove a random Sub-Skill.

[Blood Baptism]

Mission: Blood Baptism

Difficulty: B-Rank

Prerequisites: Spirituality must be 2.1 or higher.

Description

Struggle is inevitable in your journey to ascend to godhood. If you wish to become a war god, then shedding blood must become second nature.

Seek out and slaughter 100 sentient alien beings of different species with your own power. Shed their blood and bathe in it to baptize yourself with the life essence of the defeated.

The stronger the aliens and the more they are able to fight back when you duel against them, the greater your evaluation.

Reward: 50 Ascension Points.

Time limit: 2 standard years.

Penalty for failure: Lower your Spirituality by 5.

"What the hell?"

A few of the missions looked normal enough. Ves was pretty certain that he could manage to engage in a design duel against 5 Journeyman Mech Designers within a year.

It was a shame that the time to commence the Trailblazer Expedition had drawn close. Ves would have to move extremely quickly if he wanted to complete this Design Duel Champion Mission!

Ves was tempted to accept it right regardless of his lack of time. It was easy enough to find five random suckers in the mech industry and duel against them in return for remuneration.

However, random duels against mediocre Journeymen might not satisfy the System. It would go against the spirit of the Mission if he dueled against the weakest and most boring Journeymen!

"I'll think about this later."

Compared to this design-related mission, the ones that were clearly related to his chosen upgrade track were much weirder!

This Blood Baptism Mission was a typical example of that! Ves could not imagine why he would ever want to hunt down a hundred different sentient aliens in order to bathe in their blood!

The System was crazy for encouraging him to engage in barbarism!

That said, the Mission Board also offered other ways to earn Ascension Points.

[Patience is a Virtue]

Mission: Patience is a Virtue

Difficulty: D-Rank

Prerequisites: Spirituality must be 1 or higher.

Description

Spiritual ascension can be attained through many means.

Meditate for 4 standard hours every day. You will fail this Mission if you do not satisfy this requirement even once.

Reward: 10,000 Ascension Points.

Time limit: 50 standard years.

Penalty for failure: None.

"What kind of ridiculous Mission is this?! Throw away four precious hours every day for 50 years straight? I would rather butcher a hundred different aliens and drench myself in their blood! At least I'll be able to complete that Mission in a reasonable timeframe!"

While the Mission Board was fairly praiseworthy for providing Ves with different means to earn Ascension Points, not every Mission was viable or practical in his eyes!

It was impossible for Ves to accept this latest Mission even though the risks were virtually zero. Not only did he have the patience to wait half a century to receive his reward, the price of losing four hours which he could have spent on productive activity was too great!

Ves could easily devote four hours of every day into designing mechs, allowing him to complete his design projects faster and thereby earn more Ascension Points as a result!

While earning a single Ascension Point at a time was not as satisfying as earning 10,000 Ascension Points at a time, he at least did not need to wait until his kids had reached middle age in order to spend his rewards!

"This Mission Hall is too demanding!"

### **Chapter 4188 Manipulation Of Time**

The Mission Hall was ultimately a great addition to the System.

Before, Ves had no ability to accept Missions on his own accord. He had to wait for the System to serve him with one. As a result, years could go by before he could gain another Mission.

Now, if Ves wanted to earn Ascension Points and possibly other rewards, he merely had to enter this new hall and browse from a dozen available Missions.

Just like with the Divine Bazaar and the Tree of Possibilities, the Missions offered by the Mission Hall periodically refreshed if Ves had left them alone for too long.

This meant that Ves had to make sure to visit this place on a regular basis in order to keep his eye out on any easy or exceptionally lucrative Missions.

Ves had a feeling that the System was unlikely to give him an easy way to earn buckets of Ascension Points.

Each AP was precious. The purchasing power of an Ascension Point was much higher than a Design point, but they were also a lot harder to earn as a result.

While Ves appreciated the fact that he did not necessarily have to spend all of his time on designing mechs to earn Ascension Points, he did not like the way these Missions forced him to engage in weird and maybe dangerous activities!

"It's as if the System is pushing me onto a specific path!"

Clearly, the System took Spiritual Ascension a lot more seriously than Ves thought. Many of the Missions looked as if they solely existed to direct him into developing into different gods!

"This is all nonsense!"

Ves was Ves! He did not aspire to become a war god, a patience god, a flower god or a comedy god. He just wanted to become a Star Designer!

He felt increasingly more repulsed at what these Missions might lead him to. The last thing he wanted to do was to go astray and lose his passion for designing mechs.

He didn't even know why the System offered him all of these different ways of developing and growing different domains when he had already set his own path.



"Wait... what if I don't have to complete these Missions in person? What if... I can let my incarnations complete them in my stead?"

His eyes lit up! The Mission Hall made a lot more sense after he made this realization!

Certainly, there was no way that Ves would dedicate 4 scarce and valuable hours to sitting around doing nothing in the name of meditation, but so what?

Ves could just create a more peaceful and boring version of himself as an incarnation to work on the Patience is a Virtue Mission for 50 straight years!

Of course, he also reminded himself that he needed to be able to make the incarnations in order for him to adopt his approach.

If the cost or difficulty of making new incarnations was too great, then Ves would probably have to complete the Missions himself. The burden on himself would be much higher if that was the case.

"It's too bad that there aren't that many Missions in this Mission Hall?"

The large board only presented a dozen different Missions, which made it difficult for Ves to pick an optimal one that he could easily complete.

Nonetheless, Ves was relatively happy that he gained this possibility in the first place. He became a lot more confident in his ability to earn a lot more Ascension Points.

While it might not be possible for him to earn more than half-a-dozen Ascension Points per design round, he could earn 20 or 30 AP at a time by completing a single mission in the same time period!

Ves also noticed that the more difficult Missions rewarded him with more AP. This meant that if he became stronger and more capable in the future, it was not impossible for him to earn hundreds of AP per year.

"Well, it will take a long time before I can reach that point."

Overall, Ves was quite happy with the Mission Hall aside from the limited pool of missions available at any time.

The Mission Hall did not offer anything else to him aside from a chance to review his current Missions. He quickly checked out the list to confirm he still had to complete the ones that he accepted in the past.

"Four Supply Missions and one Upgrade Mission. Damn, I should really find an opportunity to design an amphibian mech."

He exited the Mission Hall a moment later and continued his journey to the top.

There weren't a lot of places left for him to visit. His next stop was a large but ancient-looking workshop structure.

[The Workshop of Creation is where you can design and make different mechs and items. You are only allowed to produce with objects and materials that are stored in the Vault of Eternity. Currently, the Workshop of Creation has granted you access to a set of second-class production equipment. You can upgrade this equipment by spending Ascension Points. You will need to pay 1 Ascension Point to make use of the Workshop of Creation for 24 standard hours.]

This was the System's replacement of the old Designer module that Ves had never really utilized.

Initially, Ves did not look impressed by what he learned. Though the workshop looked impressive and allowed him to produce a useful item even if he did not have access to a production site in reality, the cost of working in this place was far too high!

"1 Ascension Point just to use the Workshop of Creation for 24 hours is too much!"

It took months of design work to complete a decent mech design project! Why should Ves invest all of that hard work to spend a single day in this imaginary workshop?

He couldn't even work with all of the materials he had on hand!

Ves was only limited to working with the stuff he was able to store in the Vault of Eternity. Right now, that included his useless System comm, his outdated Amastendira and his newly-gained Black Demon Steel.

Perhaps he might want to experiment with integrating a chunk of Black Demon Steel into the Amstendira, but he might as well do that in reality where he could access his own workshop for free!

"It only makes sense to pay for the right to use the Workshop of Creation if I'm stuck in a prison cell or a primitive planet!"

He truly did not see why he should value the Workshop of Creation except if he ended up in an emergency.

Even then, he was heavily limited to what he could make since he could not import any materials from the material realm unless he Inventorized an entire object.

"Wait... how much time passes while I am working in the Workshop of Creation?"

The answer was nothing!

The System had already told him that time would no longer pass in reality while he was interacting with it in this fashion.

He would have to confirm this later after he exited the System Space and looked up the time logs, but he was pretty certain that this was truly the case!

"If time truly freezes for me in reality, then the Workshop of Creation is actually worth a lot more than I thought!"

His eyes lit up as he imagined the possibilities. He didn't realize it until now, but allowing him to spend a lot of time in this System Space without worrying about time passing by in reality was an amazing benefit!

Time had always been his scarcest resource!

Even as he grew wealthier and more powerful over time, he was still subject to the same time constraints as any other mech designer.

The opportunity to spend just 1 single Ascension Point to gain 24 hours of time was incredibly precious if he could spend it well!

One potential way to take advantage of the Workshop of Creation was to use it to buy additional design time when he was competing in a mech design contest!

Of course, Ves would never do something so dishonorable. He was a mech designer who loved and respected his profession. If he competed in a design contest under fair conditions, then it would be incredibly despicable for him to enjoy days worth of extra design time.

"In any case, there are many more ways I can make good use of the Workshop of Creation." Ves smirked. "This is especially the case when my ability to earn Ascension Points has skyrocketed."

Not even Master Mech Designers or Star Designers could buy more time for their work! Ves was different, and that granted him an incomparable advantage over the rest!

He spent a bit more time exploring the Workshop of Creation.

He found out that this was the place where he could manage his Superpublish option. He also discovered that he could call up nearly any second-class production equipment. Their conditions were perfect and flawless and would

not get worn out through use. This meant that the production circumstances in this area were much more controllable than in reality!

"My chances of fabricating a masterwork mech should be a lot higher if this is the case!"

One of the most important determinants of reaching exceptional levels of quality was the ability to produce exquisite parts with as few flaws as possible.

Better production machines that were able to maintain consistent output allowed people like Ves to worry less about their equipment growing wobbly over time. This enabled him to focus more attention on what truly mattered, thereby allowing him to improve the quality of his output.

Overall, the Workshop of Creation definitely had its uses, but Ves could only make selective use of its facilities. There weren't many instances where he was able to justify the expense of paying 1 Ascension Point for 24 hours of access.

He could spend his AP on many other useful benefits from the System!

"This workshop is a playground for the rich!"

Once he finished exploring the Workshop of Creation, he left and resumed his journey once again.

At this point, he saw that the top was not far away. There was only one additional stop left before he reached his final destination.

He encountered another gate as he climbed up. This gate was different from the one that led into the Vault of Eternity because it was just resting on open terrain!

"What is this?"

[The Time Gate is the portal which you can enter in order to start a new Mastery session by temporarily occupying the mind of a mech pilot in the past.

You may pay 20 Ascension Points in order to start a completely random Mastery session. You may pay 5 additional Ascension Points each time you wish to lock in a specific parameter such as time period, location and mech type. The Time Gate can only be used once per standard year.]

"Whoa."

On one hand, Ves was happy that the System added the Time Gate. Compared to before, he had much more control over the Mastery experiences he wanted to start.

On the other hand, the price to start a single session was much higher than before. A completely random Mastery session cost him 20 whopping Ascension Points, and the chances were great that he wouldn't gain anything useful because he ended up in the mind of a low-level mech pilot!

"Still, it's worth it if time is still frozen for me in reality."

The Time Gate reminded him of the first upgrade track that the System had presented to him. He had no doubt that the Time Gate would have been a lot more generous and elaborate if he chose to focus the System's improvements on this aspect!

Unfortunately, his choices were limited and he opted for a more controllable and fitting upgrade track for the System. Ves did not regret his decision at all even though he felt it was a shame that he was left with a more barebones version of the Time Gate.

"Oh well. It's not as if it is important for me to mess about with history. I already have plenty to do in the present."

#### **Chapter 4189 The Summit Of The Mountain**

So far, the Mech Designer System 2.0 truly did not disappoint.

Ves became increasingly convinced that the long and excruciating wait for the System to reappear was more than worth it. All the changes and additions that

the fragment of the Metal Scroll had enacted during this period comprehensively upgraded each and every function that he had utilized before.

It made him feel as if the System had been listening to his feedback all the time and completely addressed all of the points of critique in a massive update.

"This is good customer service!"

A part of Ves found that to be strange as he was not accustomed to seeing the System as an existence that was attentive to the needs of its users.

His impression of the System had always been that it was an aloof, rigid program that strictly executed its instructions without leaving any room for flexibility.

In a way, Ves found that to be reassuring.

The more inflexible the System, the less initiative it possessed.

The less initiative it possessed, the lower the chance that it could actively hatch its own schemes.

Now that Ves could see that the System was not only adept at marketing, but could make far-reaching changes in order to meet his needs, he became quite scared at what else it may be able to do within its power!

The System was already attached to him. Ves had no idea how he could even get rid of it other than asking nicely.

That was bad. He was always aware that the System most likely had the power to kill him or deprive him of power whenever it wished.

Ves just didn't think about it most of the time. In order to preserve his sanity, his mood and his sense of security, he simply pretended that the System was merely a tool that only existed to serve its users.

Holding this attitude was better than the alternative!

However, Ves found it difficult to maintain this sentiment when he saw that every part about the new version of the System became so much more useful to him. While the cost of utilizing the new functions had also grown, all of it looked fair as he could obtain way more value with his Ascension Points.

The new and powerful possibilities opened up by the System directly wiped out his earlier determination to no longer become dependent on its features.

Ves would be a fool to neglect all of the fantastic goodies that he could obtain from the Divine Bazaar and the Tree of Possibilities!

It didn't even matter to him that most of the items and knowledge provided by the new channels either came from or were derived from the Five Scrolls Compact.

Just like how Ves accepted goodies from the MTA in order to progress his mech design capabilities, he was willing to treat the Compact in the same fashion in order to advance his spiritual engineering!

He completely disregarded any taboos and prohibitions attached to the new spirituality-related goods. It did not matter to him whether any of the stuff were the treasured heirlooms or sacred traditions of any cults.

To him, they were just materials that could finally allow him to expand his spiritual engineering into a proper discipline. As long as he worked sneakily enough, he doubted that any of these hidden cults and fringe organizations would realize that he had taken advantage of their hard work!

"The only painful part is that I don't have enough Ascension Points to satisfy all of my needs!"

He took one last look at the Time Gate. It could have been so much greater if Ves selected a different upgrade track, and probably cheaper as well.



Whether it was worth it to pay a minimum of 20 Ascension Points to go on a trip that used to cost him only tens of thousands of Design points in the past was still a question.

"Maybe I'll make use of you again once I have the Ascension Points to spare."

He left the site and returned to the steps that continued to lead upwards.

At this point, Ves could clearly see that he had almost reached the summit. As he took one step at a time, he could feel that the air became charged with energy.

Familiar energy.

The atmosphere became more pure and sacred as he neared the final step. The strangest part about all of this was that he did not feel as if he was approaching a brand-new place.

He felt as if he was returning to a familiar home.

From the moment he could climb no higher, he beheld an expansive temple ground.

Several massive white stone structures completely dominated the plateau. They were large and possessed an ancient aesthetic, which strongly contrasted against the modern metal architecture that people like Ves were accustomed to seeing.

The sense of sacredness grew stronger as he looked at the largest and grandest temple structure.

What was strange was that instead of feeling repulsed by the sight, Ves became drawn to it. He grew disturbed by this impulse. What had the System done to make him develop the compulsion to embrace this temple?

He had a suspicion that he had finally come face to face with the primary addition of the new upgrade track.

"The System was truly being serious about Spiritual Ascension..."

As Ves stepped closer, he finally received a description of the new area.

[The Sacred Temple is your personal sanctum. It plays an indispensable role in your ascension to godhood. It is divided into three subsections. The Pantheon is where you can manage your divine incarnations. The Courtyard of Envoys is where your Chosen Envoys will reside until they are called. The Sacred Hearth houses and nourishes your Divine Cores.]

"..."

The System had dumped so much new and unexpected information on his lap that he didn't know where to begin.

Sacred Temple? Pantheon? Courtyard of Envoys? Sacred Hearth?

None of this sounded like it had anything to do with the original Mech Designer System!

He seriously doubted that any mech designer had to work with similar structures in order to advance up the ranks. The new additions were solely related to the upgraded System's effort to help Ves ascend to godhood!

It was at this moment that Ves recalled that the Mech Designer System was a shell built around a fragment of the Metal Scroll.

Ves had long treated it as an aid to designing mechs, but the truth was that anything related to one of the five Sacred Scrolls definitely had more in store!

"It could be that helping its users ascend to godhood is its primary purpose and that designing mechs is just a sideshow."

This was a disturbing thought if this was the case. The System had presented seven different upgrade tracks to him, and only one or two of them explicitly claimed to help him transcend to a divine existence.

How could the System be certain that he would have chosen Spiritual Ascension or Personal Piloting Cultivation?

Ves could have opted for Mech Pilot Cultivation instead. He had actually set his mind on it due to how much it complemented his existing work.

It wasn't until he talked to Gloriana that he changed his mind and decided to double down on spiritual engineering.

Had the System schemed to give Ves the illusion of choice only for him to pick the option that he was meant to select in the end?

A chill ran through his false body.

"Am I being set up to become a Holy Son?"

The more he looked at the sacred temples and their ancient architecture, the more he developed the impression that he was pulled into the orbit of the Five Scrolls Compact against his will.

The reason why he chose Spiritual Ascension was to supercharge his spiritual engineering capabilities. He did not sign up for the other crap that came with this choice.

Ascending to godhood might cause other people to leap with joy, but Ves remained completely unimpressed by the possibility.

He had already seen plenty of self-proclaimed gods to know that they were pretenders at best and complete farces at worst.

Every god was merely a spiritual entity with delusions of grandeur. Their extensive detachment from mortality and reality caused them to develop false and distorted ideas. The extremely skewed nature of their spiritualities did not help either. They became overly biased towards their spiritual attributes and lost the ability to keep an open mind.

This was concerning because Ves worried whether this progression track conflicted with his attempt to become a Star Designer.

From what Ves had witnessed during his remarkable meeting with the Polymath, a Star Designer shared many resemblances to powerful spiritual entities, but possessed a lot of distinctive traits that set them apart.

"Well, I won't be able to figure anything out by milling about. Let's see what this Sacred Temple has in store."

He strode forward and entered the boundaries of the Chosen Courtyard. It was pretty much laid out like a town that surrounded the grander and more proper temple structures.

Ves had the impression that he had entered an empty holiday resort. Though the entire place was empty and lifeless, he could easily imagine a crowd of tourists taking up residence in the bungalow-like houses.

"So what am I looking at, System?"

[The Chosen Courtyard is the site where you can host and manage your Chosen Envoys.]

"...What is a Chosen Envoy?"

[A Chosen Envoy is a powerful incorporeal existence that has completely and utterly submitted to you in exchange for longevity and the opportunity to serve you. When a Chosen Envoy is in your service, he or she can fight against your enemies or engage in productive activities depending on their capabilities. Each Chosen Envoy can supply you with a fixed income of Ascension Points depending on their strength and devotion towards you. They will remain attached to you unless you have chosen to dismiss them or you have met your downfall. Chosen Envoys cannot survive after their bonds to their gods have been dissolved.]

"What?!"

This was completely new to Ves! It made the meaning of godhood more literal now that he actually gained the option to build up a collection of powerful supplicants!

The entire setup of the new System Space made a lot more sense all of a sudden.

Ves realized that the reason why the System created this elaborate mountain top was not to dress up its functions, but to provide an environment that multiple people could live in. This was why the space was so large and expensive.

As Ves thought about the many implications of Chosen Envoys, he wondered what it would take to add one to his Chosen Courtyard.

"So how will I be able to recruit Chosen Envoys? Do I have to pay Ascension Points to pull someone to this place?"

[The relationship between a divinity and a Chosen Envoy is sacred. Viable candidates must not only be spiritually powerful, but also willing and able to give up everything they have in life to serve you after death. They must sincerely be willing to commit the remainder of their existence to your cause.]

Ves frowned. This did not sound easy! He knew quite well how rare it was for people to be completely willing to become another person's slave or subordinate.

However, the higher the requirements, the higher the benefits to retaining a Chosen Envoy. He was completely convinced that all of the trouble was worth the effort.

After all, what was a god if he did not even have any angels or divine warriors at his side?

"What do you mean by viable candidates? Are expert pilots and ace pilots eligible to become Chosen Envoys?"

[Expert pilots and ace pilots both meet the requirements to become Chosen Envoys.]

That was just what Ves wanted to hear!

Of all of the spiritually powerful people that he was familiar with, he had the most interactions with expert pilots. His chances of converting one of them into his Chosen Envoys was the greatest if he kept his eye out for an opportunity to recruit the expert pilots under his command!

"Wait... Chosen Envoys have to be dead, right?"

#### **Chapter 4190 Divinity**

One of the most important details about Chosen Envoys was that they could only be recruited from the dead.

It was impossible for Ves to invite someone like Venerable Joshua to take up residence within his Chosen Courtyard.

The expert pilot would have to die in order to assume his new position!

This instantly made it a lot more difficult for Ves to fill up his Chosen Courtyard. The requirements for candidates to become viable were already extremely harsh.

If Ves had to wait until they were on the verge of death or already deceased but not entirely gone, then he might have to wait for many years until he could recruit his first Chosen Envoy!

The only way for him to increase the likelihood of recruiting Chosen Envoys was to repeatedly send them into battle and hope that they would perish!

That was a completely unconscionable act!

"Ugh, I guess I won't be able to recruit too many Chosen Envoys if that is the case."

Though Ves was curious to learn how gaining a Chosen Envoy would benefit him and how many Ascension Points he stood to gain, it might take many years for the Chosen Courtyard to become occupied.

This was fine for Ves. He already had plenty of other System functions to busy himself with. He never asked for this in the first place and did not see the need to change any of his plans to accommodate this new function.

Perhaps the Chosen Courtyard might become a powerful weapon in his arsenal over time, but for now it seemed way too premature for him to put any emphasis on it. A lot of powerful people that he cared about had to die in order for Ves to start filling up the place, and that was not acceptable.

Compared to the ephemeral benefits provided by Chosen Envoys, Ves would rather surround himself with living and breathing expert pilots!

"Alright, let's move on. This is probably the least important part of the Sacred Temple."

If the Chosen Courtyard was the periphery, then the temple structures situated in the middle were undoubtedly the center they revolved around!

From the moment Ves neared the first large structure, he became swept by several different sensations that tugged at his Spirituality.

That wasn't all.

He not only experienced an attraction force that targeted him directly, but also became affected by two other attraction forces.

The strange part was that these additional attraction forces did not affect him directly, but still disturbed him to a degree.

It wasn't until he entered a space that was structured in a remarkably similar fashion to the Ascension Gallery of the Cat Nest that he understood the reason for these attraction forces.

Only three large and tall statues were situated in the ornate and spacious hall. Each of the enormous figures exuded both power and sacredness that made Ves feel extremely weird.

"Is that... me?" Ves uttered in a bewildered tone.

All of the statues were different versions of himself!

The first marble-like statue depicted Ves wearing his Unending Alloy with a cape. This was his proudest guise.

While he looked quite dashing in this form, the statue had all of the hallmarks of a religious icon!

What was also special was that Ves felt an immediate connection and bond to it. The statue was like a totem but also more.

Seeing a statue of himself was already weird enough. What was even more unusual was that the temple also hosted a representation of Blinky and Vulcan!

He half-expected Vulcan to show up since it was a formal incarnation that had the potential to become powerful on its own merits.

What irked Ves quite a bit was that the System had chosen to present Vulcan in the guise of a dwarf rather than a standard human!

"At least I look manlier with a stockier build and a bushy dark beard."

Vulcan was anything but a wimp in this form!

The third statue depicted Blinky.



Ves did not expect his companion spirit to earn a separate place in this temple. After all, compared to Vulcan who was much more detached from him, Blinky was literally a different personality in his own mind!

Nonetheless, Blinky's spiritual makeup was different from that of Ves, and that might be the reason why the System treated them separately.

"So what am I looking at this time, System?"

[The Pantheon is the central hall where you can manage the development of the divinities of yourself, your incarnations and subordinate gods. This location is also where your Chosen Envoys can supply you with Ascension Points through earnest worship.]

"Oh."

The Pantheon did not just look like a temple, but also functioned like one! This made this place a lot more important, especially if he managed to gather a few loyal Chosen Envoys.

Ves spent a bit of time exploring the large structure. He found out that he couldn't do much for the moment.

Aside from reviewing the basic properties of himself and his incarnations, his management authority only allowed him to perform a few actions such as cutting off his bond with his incarnations.

The most important function of the Pantheon was that it clarified how Ves was able to add more incarnations to his collection.

[The Pantheon allows you to exchange a varying amount of Ascension Points to receive extensive assistance in creating a new incarnation of yourself. This process is subject to numerous limitations but will not produce any negative consequences. The cost of creating an incarnation with the help of the Pantheon is 1000 Ascension Points, multiplied by 10 for each subsequent

incarnation you wish to obtain. In order to successfully form an incarnation, you must be able to understand the essence of a different and distinct element or domain.]

Ves immediately winced when he heard that he would have to pay a whopping 1000 AP at once in order to obtain a new incarnation!

The price was actually quite reasonable considering what he could gain out of it. Though he could attempt to create a new incarnation of himself without relying on the System, he intuitively suspected that this may not be as simple as before!

If the System charged so much Ascension Points to lend its assistance, then it was definitely not a ripoff.

Since Ves was woefully short of Ascension Points right now, he did not put much further thought behind this benefit.

He was not in a hurry to create any additional incarnations for the time being. Vulcan was already useful enough to him and he could rely on other people and design spirits to cover the responsibilities that he could not handle himself.

As Ves continued to poke around in the Pantheon, he discovered that he couldn't do much else with it for the time being. The entire place was one of the grandest and most high-class sites in the System Space, but it still looked awfully hollow to him due to the lack of people and development.

However, he had a hunch that he had yet to approach the true core of the Sacred Temple.

He needed to move even deeper in order to reach the hall that was arguably the most central location of the mountain summit.

As he entered the final destination of his initial exploration, he came face to face with a faint ball of light that was calmly burning in the center.

Ves didn't notice it too much when he was further away, but now that he had entered this sacred hall, he could clearly feel that this ball was of especially great significance to himself!

[The Sacred Hearth is the most important sanctum of the Sacred Temple. It is here where you will be able to prepare and condense your Divine Cores, the powerful essence that defines and shapes your godhood or godhoods.]

Ves looked gobsmacked. "What...? What is a Divine Core? What is a godhood?"

[Your godhood is the form and expression of your divinity. A Divine Core is the most central and critical component of a True God, which is a divinity.]

???

Ves grew even more confused! He had the illusion that he had just barged into the Ruined Temple of the Five Scrolls Compact! He received so much nonsense that he didn't even know how to process all of this dubious information!

"Please slow down for a moment. What is a divinity, and what is a True God?"

[A divinity is a classification of an existence that can be defined as a 'god'. Each divinity is an energy life form that is so far removed from their mortal beginnings that they are no longer constrained by their former species. In your society, the divinities that you are most familiar with are Star Designers, god pilots and sword gods. They are not the only possible divinities that can emerge from humans. More general divinities that are not specialized are defined as True Gods, and their existences are defined by their Divine Cores.]

"I see."

That clarified a lot. In fact, the information conveyed by this answer clarified a lot of uncertainties that Ves had accumulated in his mind.

If the System's description and classification of these so-called 'divinities' were accurate, then people who advanced far enough eventually became so powerful that they started to be treated as gods.

This was strange to him because he did not typically worship Star Designers as literal gods. In fact, this was the prevailing trend within the mech industry.

While it was quite normal for average mech designers to idolize and revere these peak mech designers, no one was ever forced to worship people such as the Polymath as literal gods!

There was probably a lot of weirdness going on that the System had not explained. Seeing as how it was uncharacteristically responsive to his questions, Ves asked another one in order to obtain as much clarification as possible.

"What separates divinities from those that have not reached this standard?"

[True Gods and those that have yet to become gods are divided by the strength and functionality of their Divine Cores. A pre-divinity phase Divine Core is weak and limited and can be divided into early stage, middle stage and late stage. A post-divinity phase Divine Core is much more powerful and has many uses. Such activated Divine Cores can be divided into low tier, middle tier, high tier and further tiers of strength and development.]

This sounded like a brand-new power system to Ves!

He suspected that it was likely the mainstream power system adopted by the Five Scrolls Compact.

He took a closer look at the ball of light. The more he concentrated, the more he was able to glean details from it. Given what he had just learned, he was able to distinguish that the light ball actually consisted of three Divine Cores that were closely mashed together!

This caused them to exist both separately but at the same time support each other.

There was one Divine Core that probably corresponded to himself given that it was actually a virtual copy of his design seed!

There was another Divine Core that apparently corresponded to Blinky.

Then there was a larger Divine Core that was connected to Vulcan.

Ves managed to figure out the stages of his three Divine Cores.

If he was reading this correctly, his own Divine Core as well as that of Blinky were still in the early stage of the pre-divinity phase.

What was notable was that Vulcan's Divine Core had probably reached the middle stage of the pre-divinity phase!

"This matches up to my own impressions."

Vulcan had developed quickly since his birth. Since he was unbound by the constraints that Ves was subject to, the spiritual incarnation was able to grow like a rocket, especially after the Creation Association started to supply him with an increasing amount of spiritual feedback!

If this trend continued, then Vulcan would probably be the first version of himself to reach the post-divinity phase!

Ves decided to ask an important question.

"What is the difference between a pre-divinity humans and a post-divinity True God?"

There had to be a good reason to make such a distinction. Ves deeply wanted to know what set people who were comparable to Star Designers and god pilots apart from their lessers.

[Pre-divinity existences cannot attract and absorb the energy generated by the faith of sentient beings. Post-divinity True Gods are able to do so and develop their Divine Cores further.]

"!!!"