

## Mech 4371

### Chapter 4371 Greenaxe And Bloodripper Projects

Three new expert pilots emerged from the ranks while an existing one lost her expert mech in the previous battle.

This meant that the Larkinson Clan needed to design four new expert mechs in order to meet the needs of all of its expert pilots.

Ves had opted to spend most of his available time preparing for the Dullahan Project and the Ghost Project, which meant that he was not entirely up to date on the other two expert mech projects.

Fortunately, Gloriana had taken charge of them. She finally presented her plans to the Larkinson Journeymen.

She began by projecting the images of the two pilots in question. "Not many of you must have heard of Venerable Kolak Glendale and Venerable Pedro Rodrigo. Both of them joined our clan shortly after our entry into the Red Ocean. While their backgrounds are completely different, they are both talented prospects that quickly bloomed in our ranks. They managed to advance to the rank of expert candidate after they have joined their chosen mech legions and have been preparing to undergo apotheosis ever since."

This explained why Ves had never really heard anything about Venerable Glendale or Venerable Rodrigo. He stopped paying attention to the expert candidates of the clan some time ago because they weren't strong or important enough to merit his time.

Of course, that was no longer the case for Glendale and Rodrigo. The lucky bastards managed to break through just a few years after they had become expert candidates. The speed in which they transcended into demigods indicated that they possessed a lot of talent, perhaps more than everyone else suspected!

Ves believed that this was not the only factor behind their amazing success. He quickly browsed through their records and noted that their performance before their entry into the Larkinson Clan was merely good rather than great. Something about the Larkinson Clan must have activated their potential. Whether it was living mechs or the close brotherhood among the Larkinsons, Ves was glad to see that his subordinates were doing well in his organization. After explaining what the two new expert pilots had in common, Gloriana put the spotlight onto the Avatar expert pilot first.

"Venerable Kolak Glendale is a melee mech specialist that has piloted numerous different Avatar mech models over the years. He has spent time in the cockpit of the Bright Warrior, the Redaxe and the Lucid Rage. In the end, he has settled on the Redaxe as his mech of choice. He has already told me that he wishes to pilot an expert axeman mech now that he has broken through."

Gloriana projected a draft design after this. The expert mech depicted in the image shared a lot of resemblances to the Redaxe.

It wasn't wrong to describe it as the expert mech interpretation of the Redaxe design!

"As you can see, the Greenaxe Project shares many elements with our existing axeman mech design. This is by request as Venerable Glendale has already developed a preference for the Redaxe's mech configuration. He wants to pilot an expert mech that is able to wield a large and heavy axe that is good at breaking shields and armor."

This was immediately clear due to the large and imposing weapon in the hands of the Greenaxe Project. The giant axe possessed a green edge in line with its codename, but Ves believed that this would probably disappear in time because it didn't look that good.

"Is there anything special about the Greenaxe Project?" Ves curiously asked.  
"I don't see any obvious features that make it special."

"The Greenaxe Project doesn't have too many gimmicks, Ves. It is a solid expert mech that features solid performance in as many aspects as possible. It features strong attack power, respectable defensive capabilities and enough mobility to keep up with most of its opponents. The axe is the most important element of this design. It goes without saying that it will be a transphasic weapon, but I am still exploring a number of ideas."

The design of the axe was indeed crucial to the future success of the Greenaxe Project.

There were lots of interesting possibilities available to the Larkinson Clan. While Gloriana could opt to go for a relatively standard transphasic axe, Ves had a feeling that his wife preferred to go for a more advanced system in order to make her work special.

Ves was more interested in the spiritual configuration rather than the physical configuration of the Greenaxe Project, though.

After Gloriana answered a bunch of questions, Ves brought up the topic that he cared about the most.

"Did you ask Venerable Glendale what style of living mech he prefers for his future machine?"

"I did. He initially wanted to pilot the same sort of living mech as most of our expert pilots, but I managed to change his mind." His wife smugly replied.

"Huh?"

"I simply pointed out that Patriarch Reginald Cross has chosen to go for the second skin style of living mechs. Combined with the success of other expert mechs in this style such as the C-Man and the Blade Chaser Mark II,

Venerable Glendale has come to embrace the opportunity to pilot an expert mech that he will be able to control to an unprecedented degree."

"I... see..."

Ves was disappointed that he wouldn't be able to develop another powerful new expert mech, but he didn't linger over this issue.

To be honest, he was curious to see whether Gloriana could get anywhere with her alternative to his classical living mechs. Tracking the growth and development of second skin style living mechs would provide Ves with plenty of understanding of what they were doing right.

Ves already had plans to turn the Dullahan Project and the Ghost Project into powerful living mechs in line with his own principles. There was no urgent need for him to apply his work onto additional expert mech designs.

"Alright." He eventually said. "If Venerable Glendale truly prefers to go for your brand of living mechs, then that is his choice. I just hope he knows what he's missing out on. It is impossible to turn the Greenaxe Project into a classical living mech after it is completed."

"You don't need to worry about that, Ves." She said. "Let's move on to the next and last expert mech design project."

The projections that depicted Venerable Glendale and the draft of the Greenaxe Project disappeared.

"Venerable Pedro Rodrigo is a Flagrant Vandal who hasn't tried out as many mechs as the previous expert pilot. Instead, he settled on the Stingripper as soon as he had the chance."

That was fairly notable. The most popular mech model of the Flagrant Vandals was the Ferocious Piranha. The Mark III version of the light

skirmisher model was highly refined and induced a lot of mental pressure onto enemies.

It was a great machine for mech pilots who admired Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson and wanted to dominate the battlefield by relying on a combination of speed, daring and opportunism.

The Stingripper packed a lot less punch in comparison. Instead of diving in to stab a pair of daggers at the weak points of an enemy target, it maintained its distance and pelted its enemies with a luminar crystal submachine gun.

The weapon was designed to be light and easy to use at relatively closer ranges. Though the Design Department had updated the Stingripper mech line with a Mark II version not too long ago, the overall performance characteristics hadn't changed all that much. The submachine gun might be effective against other light mechs, but its caliber and punch were a bit inadequate against armored opponents.

Ves did not believe that this would be any different with an expert mech interpretation of the Stingripper design.

Gloriana confirmed his guess with her words. She activated a projection that displayed her draft for a new expert harasser mech.

"The Bloodripper Project is directly based on our earlier Stingripper design. Just like the mech that Venerable Pedro Rodrigo has piloted in the past, the Bloodripper is designed to defeat its opponents by harassing them from a distance."

Just as with the Stingripper, the Bloodripper Project clearly relied on Kalo, the Ghost Chameleon, to manipulate enemy perception into thinking it was positioned elsewhere, thereby causing a lot of shots fired in its direction to miss.

This sounded similar to the Dark Zephyr's Untouchable resonating ability, but the underlying mechanisms were substantially different.

Ves already looked forward to figuring out how he could best make the Bloodripper Project's misdirection ability effective against hostile expert pilots.

The Bloodripper Project simply wouldn't be a good harasser mech if it did not possess a good solution against enemy ranged attacks.

This was because enemy expert ranged mechs were generally incredibly precise and accurate!

The difficulty of fooling the predictive aim of powerful expert pilots such as Venerable Davia Stark and Venerable Kasia Rezkin was far too high!

The only way for a relatively fragile expert mech like the Bloodripper Project to survive against these kinds of threats was to rely on another solution!

Ves wondered whether it was enough to employ a design spirit or whether he needed to come up with a stronger solution.

In any case, there were plenty of other interesting elements that caused the Bloodripper Project to stand out compared to its parent mech.

"Interesting." He rubbed his smooth-shaven chin as he spotted additional details that were not derived from the original Stingripper design. "I can see that you have added a few additional elements to this expert mech. It is not as simple as it looks."

Gloriana smiled. "That is true. It is fine for the Greenaxe Project to copy the template of the Redaxe design because the large axe and adequate armor system already makes the expert axeman mech useful in battle. It is a different story for the Bloodripper Project. Its weapon will still remain fairly weak, which is not good news when most expert mechs have powerful resonance shields and armor."

"In other words, it will take too long for the Bloodripper Project to defeat any serious opponent because it lacks the punch to wear down defenses quickly." Ves said.

"Mhmm. This is why I have attempted to alter the mech concept and help provide it with additional power without compromising its mobility to a serious degree." Gloriana explained. "It is still crucial for the Bloodripper Project to be able to outrun all but the fastest light mechs. It does not fare well in melee combat at all and its armor is too light to sustain much damage."

Of course, this was just a relative description. Even the lightest expert mechs could still resist a lot more damage than a standard heavy mech.

The Bloodripper Project had little to fear if it was being bombarded by an enemy ranged mech unit. It could rely on its light but adequate armor to resist hits while utilizing its extremely strong evasion characteristics to mitigate the remaining damage.

"So how have you chosen to amplify the attack power of this new Bloodripper Project without slowing it down?" Ves curiously asked. "Don't tell me you plan to equip it with grenades."

"It worked for the Dark Zephyr, did it not? A grenade is the logical answer to increasing the offensive power of the Bloodripper Project. I am already exploring different kinds of powerful transphasic grenades that can be a good fit with Venerable Rodrigo's future expert mech. While I don't plan to equip it with too many grenades, I want to make sure it possesses a powerful finishing option to ensure it is able to take down its targets by itself."

Ves could understand this argument. It was the same one he used to equip the Dark Zephyr with grenades.

There was one big issue, though.

"Grenades make sense for the Dark Zephyr because it generally comes close enough to toss its payloads at enemy positions. The same does not necessarily apply to this Bloodripper Project. What if it is too far away? It will have to get closer in order to make effective use of the grenade, but that makes the expert harasser mech vulnerable to retaliation."

"That is why I intend to equip the Bloodripper Project with a small grenade launcher." Gloriana replied. "I haven't decided how I want to add this weapon module to this design, but it will definitely play an important role once the design is finished."

### **Chapter 4372 The Great Filter**

The four new expert mech design projects represented a new chapter to the Larkinson Clan.

Ves was proud and happy with the direction of each of these four crucial projects.

The Dullahan Project and the Ghost Project that he had taken charge of were both a lot more radical and ambitious in scope.

This was because he attempted to invent new solutions that would have a profound impact on the progression of his design philosophy and provide his clan with wonderful new sources of strength.

From a conceptual perspective, Ves considered the Dullahan Project as a highly ambitious attempt to breathe new life into a living mech that had perished in battle.

On the surface, it sounded like an attempt to recycle the growth of a sentient mech.

What Ves actually saw in this ambitious experimental project was the possibility to exploit death as a means to further the evolution of life.

This was related to a theory that he had developed over the course of his research on mech pilot breakthroughs and the transcendence glow.

A lot of living entities tended to accumulate a lot of garbage over the course of their lives.

Though it was arguable whether undesirable elements added character and touches of humanity to humans or other living beings, Ves had already noticed that the processes of transcendence were at least indirectly related to the amount of baggage and how badly they affected people.

Certain traumas and personality flaws weighed down people so much that they were unable to advance their ranks despite possessing enough talent and diligence.

This was also why Lufa and his numerous variations of glows were so effective at stimulating breakthroughs.

Depending on how Lufa expressed his glow, he was able to selectively dampen the influence of unhelpful baggage, allowing previously burdened people to gain much-needed relief and break through with greater ease!

This was how a seemingly ordinary design spirit made from unremarkable spiritual ingredients was able to produce an impact that was greater than that of the likes of the Superior Mother and maybe even Gaia!

After all, which design spirit was able to reduce the difficulty of breaking through by as much as 50, 60 or even 80 percent?

However, Ves knew from his secret research and periodic exchanges with Master Dervidian that fulfilling the ultimate dream of universal transcendence was easier said than done.

He recalled one particular discussion in the past that taught him that inducing breakthroughs without showing much restraint may not be a good idea.

"Almost everyone in our field agrees that mech pilots break through far less frequently than the mech community desires." Master Derividian said over the comm. "Too many brave and heroic soldiers have fought all their lives for a chance of becoming more than mortal, only for them to be denied their chances due to factors outside of their control."

Ves smirked. "We can change that once we can popularize our new method of fostering transcendence."

"You think too simply, Mr. Larkinson. The reason why we have held back from expanding our scale of testing is not just because we are trying to maintain secrecy or because we do not think human civilization is too unprepared. We have an even greater concern that has become increasingly more acute now that we have monitored batches of expert pilots that have reached their ranks through artificial means."

That did not sound reassuring to Ves.

"What do you mean by that, Master?"

"Let us consider the current situation regarding breakthroughs. The threshold and requirements for breaking through are high. The drawback of circumstance is that few mech pilots are able to succeed. The advantage is that those who are able to succeed against all odds are always the best, most driven, most earnest and most disciplined of their peers. They may possess personality traits that deviate from what galactic human society deems normal, but among the total population of mech pilots, the ones that have risen above the masses generally represent the best of this warrior class."

Ves recalled every expert pilot that he knew in person. People like Venerable Tusa, Venerable Dise, Venerable Jannzi, Venerable Jannzi and Commander Casella Ingvar had all turned into heroes of the Larkinson Clan.

The Glory Seekers had Venerable Brutus and the Handmaidens of Death while the Cross Clan practically revered Patriarch Reginald Cross as a god.

Other groups also nurtured their own share of strong and exceptional personalities. A few of the names that immediately stood out in his memory were Venerable Orthox De Massie and Saint Yila Mayorka.

None of them gave him the impression that they were cruel, lazy or corrupt. Lowlives and punks simply didn't have what it took to break through their limitations and burst out with far greater strength than what mortals ought to possess.

The only ones that came close was someone like Venerable Vincent Ricklin. Ves considered the former Brighter as the most unworthy expert pilot in human space.

When Ves remembered that Vincent Ricklin ultimately experienced apotheosis after the Everchanger began to channel the transcendence glow at a large scale during the Purgatory Campaign, he suddenly understood Master Dervidian's underlying message.

"If we make it so that mech pilots don't have to work as hard to break through, then a lot more people will turn into expert pilots." Ves concluded. "Not all of them represent the best and brightest of every mech pilot. When impure, corrupt and possibly even criminal expert pilots begin to emerge with the help of a solution like the transcendence glow, our entire society will welcome a lot more violence and suffering!"

Master Termenao Dervidian's projection nodded in a grave manner. "That is indeed the scenario that our analysts have predicted. What your ground-breaking invention is able to accomplish amounts to lowering the threshold of breakthroughs. This is certainly a method to solve the shortage of high-

ranking mech pilots, but it is not the desired solution of our Transcendence Faction. Do you know what we actually prefer?"

It did not take long for Ves to figure out the answer after he thought about the Master Mech Designer's words.

It was similar to controlling the enrollment of a university. There were two ways to increase its study body.

The first way was to lower the enrollment requirements. This was the easiest way to increase the amount of students attending the educational institution, but the disadvantage of doing so was that the average performance along with the overall culture and standards would drop as well!

The second way was to increase the amount of applicants that met the original requirements of the university. This was a much more desirable option because the school got what it wanted without damaging its reputation or the overall academic results of its students.

"What you actually want is to raise the qualifications and worthiness of existing mech pilots so that they can meet the original requirements." Ves spoke with a lot more clarity in his voice. "This way, the expert pilots that emerge from the ranks will still be pure, reliable and generally heroic in nature. What we are working on right now is a flawed solution that may very well introduce problems that will make our situation worse."

Master Dervidian looked away for a moment. "Your transcendence glow is still useful. Do not misunderstand us. Strength is more important than stability. If the primacy of mechs is under threat or if human civilization is being eroded by hostile alien races, then we will take measures to increase the rate of breakthroughs across the entire mech community as much as possible. This is the greatest value of your invention. You have given us a strong and powerful lifeline that can increase the survival chances of the human race."

Though Ves didn't expect the Transhumanist Faction and probably the Survivalist Faction to view his transcendence glow in this light, he would take what he could get even though he felt like he deserved more appreciation for his massive contribution.

"Thanks... I guess. So what does that mean for us going forward?"

"We continue our research. We continue to study the effects of the transcendence glow on test subjects over time. We must understand exactly what happens to different expert pilots who were originally unworthy but broke through with ease with the help of your transcendence glow. This will at least give us a more thorough understanding of how our society will change once we open Pandora's box."

It was never a good development when an invention of his was equated to this ancient myth.

Ves found it to be an apt analogy. Pandora's box contained many evils, but it also contained hope amidst the darkness.

However, it would be difficult to restore order in a society where power had run amuck.

When the number of high-ranking mech pilots in human space multiplied by a hundred in a short amount of time, a large proportion of these mighty warriors would probably come across as the opposite of heroes!

Power inherently possessed a corrupting influence on people's psyches. No one was immune to its influence, but most expert pilots today were too noble and honest to violate their own principles.

Yet what if expert pilots emerged that possessed weaker principles? What if they had no principles and bottom lines in the first place?

If these lowlives began to advance to higher ranks in larger numbers, then the damage they could do to the people around them may be even more terrible than any hostile alien race!

In time, those who made it all the way to the rank of god pilot would no longer be admired as living deities in human form.

The darkest among this top group would become known as tyrants.

No. Maybe it would be even worse. Maybe people might even come to regard them as devil pilots!

Ves grew a lot more nervous after he made this realization. If it became known that he had enabled the rise of the most terrible butchers and warlords of the mech community, then it would be difficult for him to escape responsibility for their many crimes!

He began to look distressed.

"Is there a way to solve the problem of popularizing the transcendence glow?"

"That is what we must work on." Master Dervidian stoically replied. "There are no convenient solutions available. We believe that your transcendence glow must be paired with another solution that is just as revolutionary in order to limit the negative consequences. For example, an obvious remedy would be to develop a measure that can restrain or remove the negative traits of mech pilots. If these warriors can be healed, cleansed or guided to the right directions, then they will no longer pose such a great threat to society anymore. In fact, their chances of advancing without relying on your transcendence glow will rise dramatically."

In other words, this was probably the solution that the Transhumanist Faction and other groups truly wanted to attain!

Ves thought about how such a feat could be accomplished. "What you're talking about can't be done through normal means. Mech pilots must be strong-willed in order to break their limits, so they are the hardest people to change their minds. Those that become more susceptible to outside persuasion are exactly the kind of people who aren't capable of breaking through."

"We are aware of this dynamic, Mr. Larkinson. This is why we are seeking a more radical method of changing mech pilots. If we can alter their very personality and character on a deep and extensive level, we can purify them so that they become better versions of themselves. We have conducted more research on this topic than you can ever imagine, but I am not afraid to say that most of our experiments have yielded no usable results."

A shudder ran through Ves' body. He could easily imagine a lot of taboo experiments revolving around operating directly on human brains or using external tools such as cranial implants or tampered mechs to alter their cognition in crude and damaging ways.

"I see. We won't be able to make much progress, then." Ves said in a grim tone.

Master Dervidian clasped his fingers. "Human society is not as strong as it looks on the surface. It is surprisingly fragile. Any major change to the status quo can lead us to a darker future. That is the opposite of what we wish to accomplish by pursuing our ideals. If human transcendence leads to decline, degeneration and bloodshed, then it is better for us to remain weak and mortal. The Age of Conquest has taught us that the vast majority of humans are too unworthy to bear greater power. That is why they only deserve to be treated as space peasants. Only true galactic citizens are fit for greatness."

"..."

## Chapter 4373 Developing New Luminar Crystal Weapons

One of the reasons why Ves valued the Dullahan Project so much was because he saw it as an opportunity to increase the potential or upper limit of the growth of living mechs.

What was even more important was that a method that worked on living mechs might also work on mech pilots.

After all, the two ultimately became one at the end of their progression.

The implications of succeeding with the Dullahan Project therefore ranged far beyond giving Venerable Jannzi back a version of her old Shield of Samar!

It had the potential to upend the entire mech community and introduce a brand new age where heroes emerged among mech pilots in far greater numbers!

Of course, Ves did not dare to commit too much to this incredible ambition. He could only treat it as a hopeful dream that he should aspire towards.

What was interesting about his past discussion with Master Dervidian was that the man left Ves with one important remark.

"The reason why we pay so much attention to the qualities and the mentality of mech pilots is because they play a crucial role in determining whether ace pilots are able to survive the transition to becoming god pilots." The accomplished Master Mech Designer revealed to Ves. "At the end of this dangerous journey, an ace pilot must give up his remaining humanity and everything that holds him back. Can you imagine how much is lost in this final process? If the pilot loses too much of himself at once, he will not retain much strength to survive the transition. This is the primary reason why so few of them have survived this difficult test."

Ves gained a much deeper understanding of the difficulties that mech pilots had to endure in their attempt to become the top powerhouses of humanity.

They had to meet extremely high requirements at every major junction. Any serious flaw or imperfection was enough to disqualify them from moving further!

More and more mech pilots fell off at every pass until only a scant few exceptional individuals succeeded at the end. This was an incomparably brutal gauntlet and one that was way too harsh for too many mech pilots!

Ves developed the drive and ambition to figure out a way to help mech pilots pass these difficult tests so that more of them would be able to gain the strength that they deserved.

Of course, that was easier said than done. The MTA researched this topic for centuries but never made any serious progress as far as Ves was aware of. There should have been a lot more god pilots than the hundred or so that were known today if the mechers managed to come up with a viable solution.

Ves therefore did not think too much about this matter and went back to pursuing his own projects.

He thought he would have to become a Master first before he had an opportunity to come up with an innovation that could change the status quo in a more desirable fashion.

It was a completely welcome surprise that the Dullahan Project might give him an early preview of what he needed to do in order to make transcendence accessible to many more people!

Compared to the great significance of the Dullahan Project, it looked as if the other three expert mech design projects were not that important.

Ves didn't see it that way.

The Dullahan Project promised profound changes and a possible power-up, but it would probably take a lot of time to realize the benefits.

What the Larkinson Clan needed in the short and medium term was greater combat strength. Ves couldn't afford to wait decades or centuries needed to allow his grand plans to come to fruition. He needed powerful mechs that possessed clear advantages on the battlefield.

Each of the three remaining expert mech design projects possessed special advantages that gave them an edge against enemies.

For example, the Ghost Project might become one of the few successful implementations of a melee stealth mech that could become a powerful champion killer in battle.

The Greenaxe Project was another opportunity for Gloriana to incorporate the lessons she learned from the evolution of the Mars from a classical living mech to a post-living mech.

The Bloodripper Project allowed Ves to apply his own lessons to the creation of a new classical living mech from scratch.

In short, each of these projects possessed great significance to Ves. Even the Greenaxe Project where Gloriana would leave the biggest stamp on the upcoming expert mech would provide with a lot of data related to his field of expertise.

Ves smiled as he finally concluded the long but fruitful conference meeting. He expected to make massive gains by the end of this final design round.

"We are in a special time." Ves spoke at the end. "Each of us have made a lot of gains from witnessing a major battle up close. Our works have all been tested under punishing conditions while the works of our enemies have taught us many lessons. This is the point where we must apply our gains to our new design projects and advance the quality, capabilities and performance of our mechs. I will be severely disappointed in you if your mech designs in the

following year are hardly better than the mechs that you have designed in the past."

This was both a request and a warning to his subordinates. The reason why he was so eager to go on adventures and embark on the Trailblazer Expedition was to gain more material to fuel the progression of his design philosophy.

He wanted colleagues by his side who also benefit from these experiences.

If there were dummies around him that could not gain any useful benefits from the Larkinson Clan's activities, there was no reason for them to stay by his side!

No one was immune to this rule. He was even willing to boot the people he cared about the most like Gloriana and Ketis if they stopped becoming a productive force within the Design Department!

Of course, this would never happen. The two women were just as passionate and driven as him. They were so invested in mechs that they would never stop trying to push their design philosophies to a greater height.

As the meeting finally wrapped up, Ves and the others began to start their design work in earnest.

While the expeditionary fleet continued its journey to the border region between Krakatoa and Zelmar, Ves was already starting to flesh out the initial drafts of numerous mechs such as the Eye Project and the Bloodripper Project.

Both of them stood out from the many other current design projects because they were equipped with luminar crystal weapons.

Of course, their weapons were bound to be radically different.

Ves needed to design an affordable but also powerful long range luminar crystal rifle for the Eye Project.

This was difficult because Ves needed to change his mindset from that of abundance to one centered around frugality.

"It's not about designing the most powerful luminar crystal rifle, but the most cost-effective one." He muttered.

He needed to find a good balance between power and cost. Although Ves believed that the greatest selling point of the Eye Project should be enough to turn it into an attractive product, he did not want its performance to be mediocre.

The Bloodripper Project was much different. It needed to be equipped with a powerful luminar crystal submachine gun that was both light but powerful enough to threaten expert mechs.

The challenges related to this weapon were different. Ves was in control of the design budget and he could practically pour as much money as he wanted in the development of this weapon.

The problem was that the weapon's mass and dimensions could not be too excessive. Making the gun too big and heavy would slow down the Bloodripper and make it easier for enemies to catch up with an expert mech that was supposed to be fast and elusive!

Ves scratched his head. "Neither of these weapons will be easy to design."

Fortunately, he already built up a notable amount of accumulation in luminar crystal technology. He spent enough time on digesting the research conducted by the MTA and conducting numerous experiments himself to expand his repertoire and deepen his understanding of this alien tech.

Though he still felt that he did not understand the essence of luminary crystal technology, the years he spent on working on it slowly allowed him to develop his own understanding of this tech.

"I don't know how the original luminar race sees their own creations, but to me they are all weapons that have the potential for greatness. The weapons that I have developed until now only utilize a fraction of the power of luminar crystals."

One of the secrets behind luminar crystal technology was that it could interact with spirituality and spiritual energy.

Ves hadn't been able to make much progress on this front because there were too many unknown and convoluted aspects about luminar crystal technology, but he managed to come up with a few shallow tricks with the help of the Illustrious One.

If he applied those tricks to the two upcoming weapon designs and put additional effort into coming up with further design solutions, he might be able to enhance their firepower even further!

"No matter what kind of special gimmicks these mechs are able to rely on, their technical performance must not fall behind."

With that thought in mind, Ves started his work on the two ranged mech design projects by working on their weapons first.

It was easiest for him to start with designing the standard weapon for the Eye Project.

He already visualized the weapon during the drafting phase. Instead of taking advantage of the ability to swap out multiple different attack phase crystals to change the damage output of this weapon, he intended to stick to laser beam output for this project and seek to maximize its performance.

"It should be possible to integrate the laser beam attack phase crystal to this weapon to such a degree that I can improve the performance of this combination by 10 percent."

Designing rifles around laser beams, positron beams, light beams and all kinds of other damage types introduced a lot of additional requirements that required Ves to make a lot of compromises in the weapon design.

Ves no longer had to do that as long as the new weapon design solely fired laser beams.

He was quickly able to design the basic setup of a laser-oriented luminar crystal rifle with considerable power.

Since the Eye Project was designed to be a marksman mech oriented towards extreme firepower like the Amaranto, it went without saying that Ves would equip the Eye Project with a heavier version of the standard luminar crystal rifle.

However, according to the deal that he had made with the MTA, a heavy luminar crystal rifle had to bear additional security measures to prevent them from being used by unauthorized users.

This was a troublesome requirement that significantly reduced the convenience of commercial mechs that were equipped with this weapon.

Ves had to spend many hours to implement the additional spiritual and technical security measures he developed years ago to the Eye Project's primary weapon.

This was a tedious chore but he was already used to doing all of this extra work.

His bigger concern was that he didn't think the weapon was powerful enough. Ves had a feeling that he could add more power to the weapon if he went out of his way to try out new ideas.

"How can I make it stronger while also keeping the cost under control?" Ves frowned.

Obvious solutions such as using phasewater was out of the question for this commercial project. Ves needed to rely on a more ingenious design solution in order to squeeze more power out of the same building blocks.

"What can I do?"

### Chapter 4374 Litterbox

As Ves thought about how he could push his luminar crystal weapons to the next level, he suddenly received a notification that immediately caused him to set aside his current ideas.

He left the design lab and returned to his grand stateroom where his children along with a couple of cats had already gathered.

"Meow...! Meow...! Meeeeeeoow...!"

"Are you finally ready, Lucky!?" Ves eagerly asked as he stepped close.

"Meooooow..."

His three children looked up at him in concern.

"Is Lucky okay, papa?" Aurelia asked as she held Clixie in her arms.

Ves responded with a reassuring smile. "You don't have to worry, my dear. His tummy ache will finally end after today. He's just about ready to use his litterbox this time."

He had waited a long time for Lucky to digest the huge amount of high-quality materials that the cat had unscrupulously devoured in Pima Prime.

There were many times where Ves felt tempted to feed his cat a laxative in order to stop his agonizingly long wait, but he held himself back every time.

Ves couldn't guarantee whether prematurely interrupting Lucky's digestion process would negatively affect the final quality and effects of the newly produced gems.

In order to maximize the value of Lucky's output as much as possible, Ves had to give his cat enough time to process as much materials as possible.

Of course, there was a significant risk that Lucky would end up appropriating all of the nutrition to upgrade his own body further, but Ves already formed an understanding with the gem cat in this regard.

A gem cat existed to produce gems!

How could Lucky possibly continue to function without fulfilling his primary purpose at all? There should be limits to how much he could keep everything he ate to himself. He needed to purge his 'waste products' from his body eventually before they began to harm his body too much.

It was already amazing that the gluttonous beast managed to postpone his bathroom visit for a long time.

"Meeeeoow... meeeoow..."

This time, it became clear that Lucky really couldn't hold it any longer. The cat didn't even think about absorbing any further nutrition. He just wanted to remove the source of the pressure inside his body as soon as possible so that he could finally gain relief from his lengthy pain!

Ves sat down on the deck and began to wait for Lucky to get ready.

In the meantime, he distracted himself by playing and cuddling with his children. Their giggling delighted his ears and their happiness warmed his heart.

Mew mew...

Maaaw.

Mrow mrow mrow!

Nyaaaa!

"Miaow miaow!"

The cats also started to play around with each other. Little Mana, Yaika and Denny climbed up the bodies of the likes of Goldie and Blinky or started to wrestle for dominance against each other.

At one point, Ves happily explained what he loved about mech design.

He lifted his hand and activated a projection that showed his iconic works. From the Bright Warrior to the Everchanger, each of them possessed characteristics that no other mech designer could imitate.

"Do you see this mechs?"

His brown-haired kid eagerly nodded. "Those are yours!"

"Yup. They are mine. Each of them are attempts to bring my vision and my ideals to life. I have become so good at this that millions and millions of people are relying on my work every day. Whether it is enforcing the peace or beating up enemies, my mech designs are changing many people's lives for the better. That is what every mech designer aspires to do with their work. We either make a difference in society or we quit the profession and do something else in our lives."

His youngest kid looked with wonder at the projections of his mechs. Marvaine did not pay too much attention to the strength or mech type of the machines.

To him, a humble mech like the Desolate Soldier was just as impressive as an expert mech like the Everchanger.

This was because they were all designed by his impressive father!

"Is it hard to design a mech?" Marvaine curiously asked.

"It is difficult." Ves answered. "While it is relatively easy to design a basic mech if you have studied the right courses, it is incredibly difficult to design one that people want to pilot."

"Huh?" Marvaine looked confused.

Ves grinned and picked up a toy mech that the children had recently played with. The soft plushy version of an orange dinosaur looked cute but was lacking in details.

"It's like designing a toy that kids like you enjoy playing with." He said. "For example, what sort of toy do I want to design? How large do I need to make it? What should be its colors? How should I design its shape? These are only a handful of the many questions that I need to answer in order to design a new mech. Many of the problems that I need to deal with on a daily basis are a lot more technical than what you just heard. I need to use a lot of math and science in order to come up with answers that will allow mechs that weigh multiple tons and consist of millions of different parts to work."

Though Ves used a lot of complicated words that would have caused a normal child of Marvaine's age to feel utterly lost, the boy only grew more enthused at what he heard.

Perhaps he didn't understand all of the words, but he enjoyed the love and passion expressed by his father!

Marvaine reached out and grabbed the orange dinosaur for himself. "I want to design a mech too. Can you teach me, papa?"

Ves chuckled in delight. "Let's wait until you are ten years older before you decide what you want to do in your life. I don't want you to choose too soon

and regret your choice. Besides, learning how to design mechs requires a lot of learning. The classes that you have taken so far are nothing compared to the advanced sciences and theories that you need to cramp into your little brain."

"Will you still teach me when I am old enough?"

"Of course I will!" Ves happily replied. "You're my son! I will help you find your own way or allow you to inherit my entire life's work depending on what you want. Don't tell your mother, but I will teach you tricks that I would never pass on to her. This is because she has different ideas about what makes a good mech."

Marvaine looked confused. "What makes mama's mechs different from yours?"

"That is a bit too complicated to explain, but I will keep it simple. My mechs may be flawed, but they are great at working together. Your mother's mechs on the other hand try to be as perfect as possible, but in my eyes they are always a bit empty on the inside."

Marvaine looked back and forth between the projections of mechs that were primarily designed by Gloriana and the ones designed by himself.

"I don't understand..." The little kid said.

Ves smiled and ruffled his baby boy's hair. "You don't need to understand. You should be playing with your toys instead of worrying too much about mechs. Wait until you are older and completed a few science classes before you think about this. If you have decided that you want to design mechs in the future, you will need to make a choice who you want to learn from. You can either learn from me or your mother."

"I don't want to choose. I want papa and mama to teach me everything!"

"That's not possible, Marvaine." Ves gently answered. "We can both teach general subjects to you, but once we start to impart our specialties to you, our lessons will conflict with each other. It is best if you learn from just one of us from beginning to end so that you will learn exactly what you need to know to inherit one of our design philosophies. Of course, if you insist on developing your own specialization, you can do that as well. You can design any sort of mech in the future depending on what you learn. I suggest you think about this early. The sooner you figure out what sort of mech you really want to design, the better we can tailor your studies to your dreams."

Ves actually wanted his son to learn from him but also pursue his own ideas. He knew that it would be a lot harder for Marvaine to engage in his own original research and develop his own innovations if he became too accustomed to relying on other people's work.

On the other hand, Ves really wanted his son to inherit his design philosophy and help him explore living mechs from another angle. The more people working on living mechs, the stronger and more varied they would become over time.

As Ves continued to regale Marvaine about the process of designing mechs in simple terms, Lucky endured a particularly strong spike of pain!

"MEEEEEOOOOW!"

"Make way! Lucky urgently needs to go to the bathroom!"

Ves gently set his son aside and stood up while picking up his first cat.

The gem cat felt hot to the touch. It was as if Lucky had turned himself into a furnace in order to process all of the materials he had eaten into other forms!

"Let's give you a bit of privacy, shall we?"

"Meeeeeeow!"

Ves brought his pet to the nearest bathroom of his grand stateroom and closed the hatch to allow the mechanical cat to do his business.

Several minutes went by as Ves waited next to the hatch. He could feel spikes of energy and other activity from the other side of the closed entrance.

Almost five minutes passed until Lucky slowly phased through the hatch.

"Meeeeoooww..."

The cat looked tired to his bones. His stomach no longer bulged and his activity levels had dropped to the lowest point in many years.

Lucky floated to a nearby couch and fell asleep as soon as he landed on a cushion.

Ves no longer paid any attention to his gem cat. He unlocked the hatch as fast as possible before he entered the large and roomy bathroom.

He had already set aside a special metal litter box that was exclusively reserved for Lucky.

Three large and shining gems glinted in the light.

Though Ves did not detect any power from them, he already inferred that each of them were presumably a lot more powerful than the gems that Lucky had produced in the past.

"Please don't be weak!"

Ves quickly approached the litterbox and picked up the three gems in an instant. He eagerly inspected them with his System sight in order to ascertain their effects.

[King's Authority]

The authority of a fallen sovereign is locked within this gem. Increases the control of all transphasic parts of a mech by 100 percent.

[Jeremiah's Inheritance]

The discipline and pursuit of swordsmanship is captured within this gem. Increases the speed of learning swordsmanship and related skills up to a limit by 200 percent.

[Shield of Sacrifice]

The dying wish of a powerful soul is contained within this gem. Increases the damage resistance of a mech up to 100 percent in proportion to the damage it has incurred.

"...What?"

His initial reaction to the gems was not delight, but rather uncertainty.

Though the percentage boosts were impressively high this time, their effects were not as straightforward as Lucky's previous gems.

Ves even had the feeling that Lucky had scammed him once again.

It wasn't until he read the descriptions a second time that he realized that the strength imparted by these gems could be used to produce incredible results as long as he used them in strategic ways!

However, that was not his only gain from today.

The names and descriptions of the gems confirmed a theory that Ves had come up with after studying and making use of Lucky gems for a long time.

"So it's true. The power of these gems are truly derived from the strength of the remnants of powerful spirits..."

### **Chapter 4375 Useful Gems**

After waiting for multiple years, Ves finally obtained a new batch of gems.

Was the delay worth it? That was questionable. The quantity of gems left a lot to be desired. The more gems he obtained, the greater his options. In

addition, a larger reserve of gems allowed him to transform more high-quality mechs into masterwork mechs.

However, it was clear that Lucky's latest three gems were different from the ones he made before.

The most immediate factor that stood out was not their power but rather their suspected origins.

It did not escape his notice that their descriptions and effects were clearly related to a number of powerful individuals that he had recently encountered.

[King's Authority]

The authority of a fallen sovereign is locked within this gem. Increases the control of all transphasic parts of a mech by 100 percent.

This gem no doubt derived its power from the Phase King.

He found that to be odd because when the Golden Skull Alliance fought against this powerful fish-whale king and his lackeys, Venerable Vincent beat up the ancient exobeast so hard that Ves was able to harvest the Phase King's spirituality in a fairly whole state.

These days, the Phase King was doing pretty well for himself after Ves had converted his defeated opponent into a design spirit.

How was Lucky able to produce this gem, then? Did the cat quietly sucked up the loose bits of spiritual energy that the Phase King had shed upon his death?

Ves scratched his head in confusion.

"Whatever. It's not that important for me to understand what has happened. What I should actually be doing is figuring out how to best leverage this gem."

The System sight only provided him with a single sentence that explained how the gem would affect a mech under its influence. This was barely enough for Ves to figure out what it actually did to a machine.

"The Phase King was one of several powerful fish-whales that the creator of the Purgatory pocket space had brought to life inside a biolab." Ves recalled after a bit of time. "What is impressive about this batch of fish-whale kings was that they lived on long after the disappearance of the phase whale that created them. The Phase King and his brothers must have lived over a million years."

Eons had passed by while the Phase King, the Cerebral King, the Hive King and Fusion King divided Purgatory among themselves and fought intermittent wars against each other.

While each of these four kings likely didn't improve that much over time, they had each accumulated a scary amount of knowledge, experience and skill after experiencing the passage of so many years!

The King's Authority gem only captured a fraction of the Phase King's incredibly wisdom and understanding of phasewater manipulation, but that already encapsulated an immense degree of mastery!

Even 1 percent of the Phase King's understanding of phasewater manipulation was enough to revolutionize the performance of a transphasic mech!

Ves fully understood that the value of this gem was especially great in the early days of the introduction of phasewater technology!

At this time, humanity's understanding and depth of phasewater technology was still shallow. Though many researchers were able to gain a head-start by taking advantage of stolen alien knowledge and technology, they were still far from matching the ability of the likes of the phase whales.

Even if the Phase King was not a genuine phase whale, his incredibly long life allowed the once-powerful creature to develop an extremely impressive intuitive understanding of phasewater and how to bend it to his will!

Perhaps the Phase King's long-term isolation and lack of exposure to how phasewater was being utilized in the Red Ocean meant that the fish-whale king did not develop any advanced techniques, but Ves had no doubt that the sovereign mastered the more basic applications to an extremely powerful extent.

That was what made the gem so valuable to Ves. Humanity's familiarity and exploitation of phasewater technology was still at the level of a child in the eyes of the most powerful native aliens of the Red Ocean.

"With this gem, I can effectively turn a human mech pilot into a fish-whale when it comes to understanding and utilizing phasewater technology. The more transphasic systems the mech possesses, the more value this gem will generate!"

As such, the best mech that this gem should be used on was a machine that was infused with as much phasewater as possible!

The Mars was the most obvious candidate for this gem. It was the most powerful mech in the Golden Skull Alliance and with cutting-edge transphasic products such as the Abasis Armor and the ARCEUS System, it was loaded with enough phasewater to fund the acquisition of an entire fleet!

However, Ves already gave the Mars a gem, which didn't appear to be playing a major role these days now that Patriarch Reginald's overbearing willpower baptism had overridden its effects.

Since Lucky's gems appeared to work in an identical fashion to willpower baptism, Ves had learned that it was largely a waste to employ them in ace mechs or more powerful machines.

"I should put my gems to use in weaker mechs that will remain useful for a long time." Ves concluded.

The best way to utilize the King's Authority gem was to employ it into a fairly powerful mech that integrated a lot of phasewater. It would be best if it was a high-tier expert mech of the same caliber as the initial version of the Mars.

However, the Larkinson Clan had yet to obtain any high-tier expert pilots.

Those that were on track to reach this height in the coming decade or two already piloted powerful expert mechs that already benefited from their own gems.

"None of our new expert mechs are suitable either." Ves shook his head.

He already had plans for the Dullahan Project while the Ghost Project, the Greenaxe Project and the Bloodripper Project were all starter machines prepared for recently advanced expert pilots.

He sighed. "I guess this gem will be collecting a lot of dust."

Ves carefully put the large and glowing blue gem away in his secret pouch.

"Meow..."

At this time, the innocent-looking tiger-striped gem cat responsible for producing the gems had dozed off on a pillow.

"Miaow~"

Nyaaaaa.

Clixie and the Golden Cat both moved over and licked Lucky's cheeks before settling down next to his body.

Though Lucky looked and acted like a cat most of the time, Ves started to comprehend how remarkable he was. From the mechanical creature's dimensional stomach to how he was able to capture remnants from powerful

spirits, Ves couldn't imagine how much conventional engineering and spiritual engineering it took to create such an amazing sentient tool!

He began to wonder more and more about the creator of this gem cat. Who created him? What purpose did Lucky serve? Why make him alive?

Whatever the case, Ves was happy that Lucky ended up as his pet. The gem cat provided him with a lot of convenience and crucial assistance whether it was on the battlefield or in the bathroom.

He wouldn't have gotten here if not for Lucky. The gem cat's existence was also the reason that Ves imparted his children with their own little companion spirits.

Though Mana, Yaika and Denny did not possess material bodies and did not come close to matching the capabilities of Lucky, their potential was just as great if not greater!

Ves bestowed these lovely little feline companion spirits to his kids in the hopes that their own versions of Lucky would provide them with just as much help and protection.

Of course, the companion spirits still needed to grow up. Right now, even the oldest of them could do little more than act cute and perform a few minor spiritual tricks.

He turned his attention back to the remaining two gems that his cat had just produced.

The latest batch of gems were larger and more lustrous than the ones he obtained before. They even glowed in the light, which was an indication that whatever they contained was powerful enough to generate energy.

[Jeremiah's Inheritance]

The discipline and pursuit of swordsmanship is captured within this gem. Increases the speed of learning swordsmanship and related skills up to a limit by 200 percent.

The providence and the effect of this glowing silver gem left no ambiguity who it was derived from.

Somehow, Lucky managed to catch enough of a fragment of Saint Jeremiah Gauge to turn it into a source of power for this gem!

A part of Ves was angry at Lucky's gem production system because it choose to express the power of a ace pilot in a different fashion from before.

Unlike the gems that straightforwardly increased the defense or offensive power of a mech by 20 to 40 percent, Jeremiah's Inheritance provided no direct performance boost whatsoever!

Ves would rather obtain a weaker gem that increased the cutting power of a bladed weapon held by a mech by 100 percent or less.

This way, a mech like the Blade Chaser Mark II or the upcoming Greenaxe Project would immediately become a lot more effective in battle!

However, when Ves thought about how he could best exploit this gem, he realized that the value it could generate for the clan may be greater than his other gems!

"This is the most ideal gem for a training mech!"

The more he looked at it, the more his eyes lit up. If he was able to cooperate with Ketis to develop the ultimate training mech oriented towards swordsmanship, then they would be able to give birth to the ultimate swordsmanship tutor!

Each mech pilot that interfaced with this new training mech would essentially improve in a way that made it seem as if they were being tutored by Saint Jeremiah Gauge himself!

"This is an excellent way to train a lot of swordsman mech pilots!" Ves realized.

The Heavensworders would especially go mad for this kind of mech!

No matter what sword style the aspirants practiced, the wisdom and mastery of an ace pilot was so great that a mech that incorporated Jeremiah's Inheritance would always be able to help!

Perhaps Ves could make another mech in the style and function of the Quint but solely dedicated to swordsmanship and swordsman mech pilots!

His eyes shone as he quickly came up with several ambitious plans for this gem. The only question was whether he could persuade Ketis to play along.

He wasn't sure whether Ketis would be willing to make use of Jeremiah's Inheritance. The woman possessed strong principles with regards to swordsmanship and swordsman mechs. Who knew how she would think about exploiting a fragment of an honorable opponent.

Still, even if Ketis refused to lend her services, Ves would never allow this precious gem to remain unused.

"I've already designed training mechs like the Chiron and the War Squire. I can definitely develop a third one oriented towards swordsman mechs if necessary.

Perhaps that might be an even better idea because it would allow Ves to implement unusual ideas that might produce dramatically different results.

There was nothing wrong with traditional swordsmanship, but it was hardly the only kind of swordsmanship in human space.

The mech community mostly utilized a more modern and data-driven approach towards swordsmanship that was rooted in the sciences.

"I'll see what Ketis has to say." Ves decided.

A gem like Jeremiah's Inheritance needed to be used as soon as possible. If Ves hadn't started up the latest design round a short time ago, he would have added a relevant project to the schedule.

"Well, I can wait until I've completed one of my active design projects before adding a new one that is tailored to this gem."

Training mechs were one of his favorite mech types because of how deeply they were intertwined with the concept of growth.

A gem that specifically accelerated learning was like a dream come true to a mech designer like Ves!

#### **Chapter 4376 Warm And Cold Mechs**

There were a lot of effective ways to make use of the previous two gems.

Though their properties limited the range of mechs that they could be utilized to an effective degree, Ves still had a lot of freedom and choice in the specific mechs he could choose to impart with additional effects.

Ves did not have the impression that he possessed the same freedom of choice with the third gem.

[Shield of Sacrifice]

The dying wish of a powerful soul is contained within this gem. Increases the damage resistance of a mech up to 100 percent in proportion to the damage it has incurred.

It was already obvious from the start that there was only one possible mech that was destined to bear the Shield of Sacrifice gem.

"I can't justify the decision to put it in any other mech than the Dullahan Project." He sighed.

The Dullahan Project was not only Venerable Jannzi's next machine, but was also a living mech that would either become a descendant or a continuation of the late Shield of Samar.

No matter what, much of the spiritual foundation of the upcoming expert space knight would be based on the Shield of Samar.

If Ves added a gem that was undoubtedly related to the same living gem to the new Dullahan Project, then an unexpected event might take place!

The uncertainty of what would happen if he combined these two elements did not make him feel apprehensive.

Instead, he became excited at the idea!

Every gem that he utilized before were derived from existences that Ves had never encountered in person. He suspected that many of them were powerful alien personalities that had died long before he was even born.

This was different. It was a lovely coincidence that he had just started a design project that was centered around designing a direct successor of the Shield of Samar while also obtaining a gem that shared the same origin.

It would be unreasonable if the completed Dullahan Project did not produce a special reaction once it integrated this gem!

Ves happily put away the last gem. If nothing went wrong, he would probably be able to witness this event in a year or so. Even if it did not produce any dramatic results, the effect of the gem alone was quite powerful under the right circumstances!

"If I am interpreting its description correctly, then the more the mech incurs damage, the harder it is to destroy the remainder!"

This was a rather troublesome effect because mechs like the old Shield of Samar performed at their best when they were in their most complete and undamaged state.

Once an enemy pressed them to the point of breaching their armor, the damaged machines risked getting crippled or destroyed after every subsequent attack because their internals got exposed.

"What is the use of amplifying the defense of a mech by 30, 50 or even 80 percent if the Dullahan Project is already full of holes?" Ves wondered.

Even if the Dullahan Project received a lot of internal strengthening, there was only so much that these measures could stop a serious attack from affecting crucial mech parts that were essential to the functioning of a machine.

"Still, it is better than nothing, I suppose. If the Dullahan Project is able to redirect incoming attacks from its exposed internals to its remaining armor plating, then that would vastly increase its longevity in battle."

Ves suddenly thought back on the recent Maiden of Adversity that had become a popular mech model among the Hexers.

Its iconic Battle Skirt System was an amazingly effective modular external armor system. It allowed the new hero mech model to always have access to additional armor plating that it could position where they were needed the most.

"There's no reason to leave this option off the table."

Adapting a higher-end version of the Battle Skirt System to the Dullahan Project added a lot of complexity and additional cost, but Ves thought it was worth the price.

He already intended to make the Dullahan Project lighter, slimmer and more offense-oriented than the last iteration of the Shield of Samar.

Adding the Battle Skirt System to the upcoming expert space knight was a way to maximize the value of the new gem.

This was because if the Dullahan Project ended up in a difficult battle against a powerful enemy, it would constantly be able to take hits without succumbing entirely with the help of the Battle Skirt System.

Even if the condition of the Dullahan Project deteriorated to an awful level, as long as enough of the modular armor plating of the Battle Skirt System remained intact, then the improved defense power of these movable plates would become increasingly more effective at blocking attacks!

Of course, it was extremely unlikely that the Dullahan Project would be able to remain operational when it was 70, 80 or 90 percent damaged.

That was usually the point where a mech turned into a powerless and lifeless wreck!

This was why Ves felt a bit ambivalent towards the effect of the Shield of Sacrifice gem. That part about 'increasing the damage resistance of a mech up to 100 percent' was a bit of a bait because there was no way the Dullahan Project would ever come close to reaching the upper limit of this effect.

If Ves had a choice, he would rather obtain another gem like the Lament of Exod that increased the defenses of a mech against physical damage by 50 percent.

In fact, Ves originally reserved the Lament of Exod gem for the Dullahan Project shortly after he came up with the design project, but that was no longer the case now that he obtained the Shield of Sacrifice gem.

"Oh well. At least I can save up the Lament of Exod gem for another defensive mech."

It was about time for the Larkinson Clan to add another powerful defensive mech to its lineup.

Venerable Jannzi shouldn't be shouldering the burden of defending against powerful attacks alone.

Maybe Ves should pay more attention to the training and guidance of defense-oriented expert candidates.

Now that the expeditionary fleet was heading into dangerous regions, the demand for additional defensive assets would only grow higher.

"I'll think about this later."

After he was done with analyzing the properties and possible uses for his new gems, he went back to working on his mech design projects as there were no ways to make use of his new gains right away.

Lucky soon recovered from his weeks-long ordeal and became healthy again. The cat seemed to have gained a new appreciation towards life and began to play and wander around a lot more in the following days.

He had especially taken a liking to playing with Andraste. The energetic little girl regularly accompanied Lucky to one of the open parks aboard the Spirit of Bentheim in order to play various games.

"Fetch, Lucky!" Andraste called as she threw a small frisbee in the air.

The device did not follow a simple trajectory but began to make various loops and turns as its integrated antigrav module controlled its flight.

Despite the frisbee's crazy maneuvering, Lucky accurately predicted its trajectory and flew at just the right spot to catch and bite the object between its teeth!

"Meow."

Lucky arrogantly flipped his tail when he returned his prize back to Andraste, this time with a couple of extra tooth marks onto the composite surface.

Andraste merely giggled at the sight before she threw the frisbee out once again.

Meanwhile, Marvaine began to spend more time with Ves in the design lab.

Though Ves needed to devote a lot of time to his design work, he was willing to spend half an hour on shaping his boy's views towards mech.

It was never too soon to indoctrinate his own child.

"Aren't mechs like these fun?" Ves grinned as he placed a few mech figurines of his models on a table. "Pick one of them up if you want."

Marvaine lifted one of them up with a bit of difficulty. The metal figurine was a bit large and heavy for a boy of his age.

"Ohhh." He said as he took a closer look at a reasonably accurate scale model of the Bright Warrior Mark II. "So warm! Feels like Goldie!"

"That's right." Ves smiled. "Now take this other mech. Is this one just as good?"

He picked up a mech figurine that he had bought in Davute a few years ago. Its design and appearance was exquisite, but Marvaine did not pay much attention to these elements.

He frowned and began to hug the mech figurine of the Bright Warrior Mark II in his arms.

"Not good! It's too cold!"

"That's because this mech isn't alive." Ves explained as he shook the third-party mech figurine. "This is what makes my work different from everyone

else's. My mechs are warm while the mechs designed by others are cold. You like the mechs that feel warm and fuzzy to you, right?"

Marvaine eagerly nodded. "Warm mechs feel so nice to me. I don't want to play with colder mechs."

Ves reached out and rubbed Marvaine's head. "I don't want you to play with cold mechs either. They're no fun to me and you. The reason why my mechs feel warm to you is because they are alive. Do you know what that means?"

"It means... I can talk to them, right?" Marvaine tentatively replied.

"You can do much more with them, my son." Ves replied and held another living mech figurine in his hands. "Mechs like these are similar to pets like Lucky and Clixie. They're alive even if they don't look like it at first. However, each of them have the potential to become your friends and companions in the future. Doesn't that sound nice, Marvaine? As long as you inherit my design philosophy in the future, you can make as many friends as you want! It will be a lot more fun than if you learn from your mother instead."

Marvaine's eyes lit up at the mention of friends, but they quickly became confused when Ves mentioned his wife.

"Why not learn from mama?"

Ves lifted up the third-party mech figurine again. "Because her mechs are almost as cold and lifeless as this machine. Her works are still strong, but what is the point of making them when they are just as cold and unresponsive as simple dolls? The best toys are always the ones that are able to interact with you. The same goes for mechs. Let me show you one of the projects that I am working on and tell you how I plan to make it alive. It is a lot easier than it looks. Maybe you can do this as well one day."

He lifted his son onto his lap and began to work on a couple of ongoing projects.

Marvaine curiously watched and listened as his father explained a few simple actions.

Though it was impossible for a child of his age to understand anything about actual mech design, the boy enjoyed all of the personal attention that he was receiving.

Ves tried his best to plant a seed into Marvaine's mind that tied living mechs to all kinds of positive associations.

Living mechs were warm.

Living mechs were fun.

Non-living mechs were cold.

Non-living mechs were boring.

Perhaps he was going too far in his effort to 'encourage' his son to inherit his design philosophy, but Ves genuinely believed that he was doing Marvaine a huge favor.

It would be an awful waste if Marvaine opted to become a mech designer but ended up pursuing a relatively ordinary design philosophy in the future!

So far, Marvaine absorbed everything like a sponge. The kid's frighteningly effective designer baby genes had massively improved his learning abilities, which meant that he was even more susceptible to indoctrination than the average human child!

Ordinary children forgot most of what they heard in less than a minute.

Marvaine could recall at least half of his father's words in the same amount of time!

## Chapter 4377 Viable Combinations

Though Ves allocated a bit of time on putting Marvaine on the path of becoming his successor, he did not turn his attention away from his ongoing projects for long.

After handing Marvaine over to his nanny or his mother, Ves was able to work on his design projects without any unnecessary distractions.

The luminar crystal weapons of the Eye Project and the Bloodripper Project continued to occupy most of his attention.

Even as he fleshed out their designs by forming their shapes and finding the right material composition for specific crystals, he still felt that the guns lacked a crucial element.

Ves became increasingly more annoyed as this thought continued to take root in his mind.

It was as if he was designing a mech without making it alive. The luminar crystal weapons that he would develop at the end would never feel complete to him because of missing a mysterious factor.

Ves eventually became so unbalanced during the middle of a design session that he forcibly pushed himself away from his desk terminal so that he could pull himself away from the moment.

"I can't keep working like this. I need to resolve this issue now instead of later. If not, my work efficiency will continue to be impacted by my unease."

The worst part about it was that he didn't even know why he was feeling this way. He never thought that his luminar crystal weapons were weak or inadequate.

Sure, he hadn't been able to draw out more potential from this amazing tech, but Ves had never been in a hurry to advance his utilization of luminar crystals.

His core specialty had always centered around living mechs. His work on luminar crystals was merely a sideshow to him. It wasn't particularly important for Ves to further his progress on understanding how they worked because it had no direct impact on his design philosophy.

"This doesn't make any sense." He frowned.

It was as if the unconscious part of his mind was trying to tell him that he was all wrong and that advancing his understanding of luminar crystals would be extremely helpful to his progression.

"Am I wrong about luminar crystal technology? Is it more related to my design philosophy than I thought?"

Ves normally placed a lot of importance on what his heart was telling him. As a passionate mech designer, he often made decisions that didn't always make sense but somehow worked out because he listened to his intuition.

He suspected that this was yet another one of those moments.

"The problem is that this is too open-ended. Even if I accept the premise that I can do more with luminar crystals, what should I do next?"

It was a lot harder to identify a problem than fixing it! There were many different aspects about luminar crystal technology that Ves could try to improve, but his knowledge base was not deep or broad enough for him to push it any further.

He had already spent a lot of time and effort into expanding what he could do with this tech in prior years. Now that he had plucked all of the low-hanging fruit, it became a lot more difficult to attain further progress.

"Maybe that was the case in the past, but I am in a different situation now. What if the key to achieving a breakthrough in this tech lies with the insights and lessons that I've learned from the recent battle?"

Ves thought back on the Battle of Pima Prime, but did not notice any obvious connections.

While luminar crystal weapons played a major role in helping the Larkinson Clan defeat the mechs of the Sundered Phalanx, they did not do anything outside of his expectation.

The only instance where a luminar crystal weapon achieved a shocking effect was when the Amaranto unleashed a super-powered beam attack onto the Shockshell just as Rebecca Andus broke through to ace pilot.

Ves waved his hand and activated a projection that played back this memorable moment.

"How powerful."

The Amaranto's Instrument of Vengeance rifle was already powerful enough to rival a high-tier expert mech in damage output.

Ves was able to amplify the damage of one of its shots by exploiting a strange connection between himself and his masterwork mechs.

While only he and Ketis possessed the power to directly amplify the combat power of one of their masterworks through this method, it was a powerful trump card that could turn the tide in a battle, just as it had accomplished in the last battle.

Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin in thought.

"Hmmm. Is this what I should be looking into?" He wondered.

His intuition did not provide him with an answer, so he had no idea whether he was on the right track.

He thought about it for a while and came up with a possible answer why this phenomenon might be of interest to him. It had to do with one of the meanings of a masterwork.

"A masterwork product is an extension of its creator." Ves reminded himself. "In other words, it is already alive even if I'm not involved in its development."

Could he use this connection to come up with a new theory and design solution that could make his luminar crystal weapons more alive?

Perhaps doing so might allow Ves to unlock the greater potential of luminar crystals, but he wasn't sure whether this was true. He might end up wasting months of his time on fruitless research.

He eventually shook his head. "I'm sure I can gain something from studying this phenomenon, but I don't think I am ready to look into it yet. I need to gain a better grip of masterworks before I can figure out this stuff."

Ves decided to look in a different direction and rewatched the footage of the battle from the beginning.

It wasn't until the Minerva and the Blade Chaser Mark II appeared into view that Ves suddenly remembered that he had recently made another notable luminar crystal weapon!

"How could I forget about the Gray Lotus?!"

So many mechs and people were involved in the previous battle that it was easy for Ves to overlook anything that wasn't as flashy.

The Gray Lotus was definitely powerful, but it didn't play as big of a role as Ves initially hoped.

Its effectiveness against other mechs was relatively good but nothing worth drooling about.

The weapon displayed a lot more effectiveness when fired against other targets.

No matter whether it was mechs, space stations or starships, when gray beams of death struck their exteriors, the people inside might already be dead even if there weren't any breaches!

The reason why a strange and abnormal luminar crystal weapon like the Gray Lotus could exist was due to two reasons.

The first reason was that it derived its death energy from the Black Lotus and by extension Helena.

Without a source of attributed spiritual energy that possessed a lot of lethality against certain targets, the Gray Lotus would have functioned like a normal high-quality luminar crystal weapon.

The second reason was that Ves was able to make the Gray Lotus output death energy by incorporating a rare material called Black Demon Steel to a unique luminar attack phase crystal.

The fact that he had only obtained this material by coincidence from the System had discouraged him from trying to make more weapons like the Gray Lotus.

This was because Ves saw no viable way to create another powerful attack phase crystal that could directly channel the lethal power of a design spirit. At least, not to the degree that would make a substantial difference in combat.

However, what if this assumption was wrong?

What if Ves could make use of this approach to make another amplified luminar crystal weapon?

Though his intuition did not give Ves any clues, he became more and more certain that this may be the solution he was looking for in order to develop the next generation of luminar crystal weapons!

Ves waved his hand and called up his design schematic for the Gray Lotus.

He was quite proud of his work. He had made it for Helena as well as for his clan and tried his best to make sure that it would be able to remain relevant for decades if not centuries.

The weapon wasn't actually all that complicated, though. It looked like any luminar crystal pistol if Ves disregarded the abnormal attack phase crystal.

It was this single element that set the gun apart from his other works and granted it an undeniable connection to Helena.

Ves pressed his finger onto this special crystal to center the projected view around it. He let his imagination run wild as he tried to explore different possibilities.

"I don't see any way to make another death-aspected luminar crystal weapon without a suitable material like Black Demon Steel, but who says I need to stick with Helena? Shouldn't I be able to apply the same approach to other combinations of materials and design spirits?"

The problem with that was that it was difficult for Ves to come up with any materials that were compatible or aligned with different spiritual entities.

The reason why Helena's power played well with Black Demon Steel was because the latter already possessed a high compatibility with attributes related to death and darkness.

If Ves wanted to push this idea forward, then he needed to spend time on discovering other viable combinations.

"Should I take a trip down to the vault and see if there are any useful combinations?"

That would take a lot of time. The clan recently expanded its strategic materials reserve by adding rare materials that the Larkinsons had plundered

from Pima Prime. Ves would probably have to spend days or weeks on finding more matches!

This didn't sound like a productive use of his time.

Ves tried his best to figure out a good combination through logic and theory. After several minutes of aimless puzzling, he suddenly straightened his back as he happened to figure out a fantastic relationship!

"The Phase King!"

The design spirit's affinity to phasewater was undeniably great!

The former fish-whale king's life was literally tied to this substance when he was alive, and now that he had become a spiritual entity, his connection phasewater had not diminished in the slightest!

Instances such as the moment where the Everchanger channeled the Phase King in order to exert more control over the meat suit's transphasic abilities served as solid proof of this assertion!

"I should have thought about this upon the moment that I first came in touch with transphasic luminar crystal weapons."

An MTA research team had managed to develop the first true transphasic luminar crystal weapons a few years ago. Ves only provided a minor amount of assistance to this research effort.

This was why he accepted this new development without thinking too deeply on how it worked. Ves didn't understand phasewater technology to the extent where he could develop this solution by himself.

In hindsight, he should have spent more time on this technological development.

The MTA researchers were extremely proficient in materials science. The breakthrough in their research solely focused on the material aspect of

transphasic luminar crystal weapons and never really delved into more esoteric variables.

Ves was different. His background in spiritual engineering and his collection of design spirits gave him the potential to do more with this existing tech!

"I need to test this theory right away!"

It was not enough for Ves to come up with all of these ideas. He needed to prove that he was on the right track by creating a real transphasic weapon that possessed greater potential than the ones he developed in the past.

He quickly designed a simple handheld luminar crystal pistol. He then gathered the necessary materials and used the lab equipment to fabricate the new weapon.

What was notable was that Ves did not hesitate to use up a small drop of phasewater to synthesize a valuable transphasic attack phase crystal for this new experiment.

"Now let's see how much the Phase King can do with this gun!"

#### **Chapter 4378 Children's Art**

While Ves engaged in his research related to developing an enhanced version of luminar crystal weapons, his wife took on the burden of watching over their children.

Gloriana smiled with satisfaction as her three children all sat down and sloppily used the projected interface to draw different images in the air with their fingers.

Each of them have seen their parents designing mechs in a similar fashion for years now, so they developed a particular liking for expressing their creativity in this way.

Of course, compared to the complicated professional design suites utilized by full-time mech designers, the three munchkins had to make do with a simplistic children's drawing program.

This was more than enough for them to draw crude figures. The art, style and aesthetics did not matter much to them as their imagination was already doing most of the work.

Though Gloriana objectively found the drawings of her children to be ugly and a stain on her eyes, her overflowing love for her son and daughters allowed her to overcome her inherent disgust.

None of her children had taken any formal art classes, so how could they know anything better?

Even their designer baby genes offered little help in making them more proficient in drawing. They would have to be conceived with designer genes especially formulated to raise artists or artisans.

Gloriana walked up behind Aurelia and kissed her proudest girl on her cheek.

"What are you drawing, my dear?"

"Can't you see, mama? They're cats! Look, here is Clixie, and here is Lucky. Don't they look cute?"

"They certainly look cute." Gloriana lied as she tried her best to maintain a pleasant demeanor.

Aside from the blotches of color, there was nothing in the drawing that looked anything close to a feline. Gloriana would have to be drunk if she could recognize a single cat from this mess of lines and colors!

"Miaow~"

Clixie didn't seem to mind at all. The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat happily laid beside Aurelia as more and more 'cats' began to fill up the projected drawing interface.

Gloriana couldn't stand her perfect daughter continuing to make a mockery out of art, so she gently tutored her girl so that she would at least be able to make passable drawings next time.

"Remember what I told you, okay? Start by getting good at outlining a single cat before you go any further. Clixie is by your side all the time, so you always have a readily available model by your side. If you are able to make a decent line drawing of her, I'll give you a present."

"Really?"

"Mama never lies, sweetie!"

The young mother showered her eldest daughter with kisses before she moved over to her other daughter.

"Meow~"

Lucky happened to keep the younger girl company. The mechanical cat had draped his body over her lap which made for a comical sight.

Fortunately, Lucky didn't weigh much more than an organic cat despite all of the advanced hardware in his body, and he possessed the ability to manipulate his own gravity, so Andraste hardly bore any pressure.

Unlike Aurelia who had opted to use all kinds of colors in an attempt to depict different cats, Andraste kept it simple and stuck to making sketches with simple black lines.

Of course, Andraste was also younger and might not be proficient in manipulating the drawing interface, but Gloriana could already tell that her second daughter simply preferred it this way.

"Hm?"

Andraste showed greater talent in art than Aurelia. The mech she drew looked surprisingly good even if its proportions weren't accurate at all. The angle of view and the pose of what appeared to be a Valkyrie Redeemer looked like it was taken straight out of a snapshot of the mech in battle.

"Do you like mechs, honey?" Gloriana asked.

"Yup!" The little girl chirped. "I want to pilot a mech just like this when I grow up! I will beat lots of bad guys with auntie Helena when I am strong!"

Gloriana smiled with both pride and concern. She came closer and hugged her doll-like daughter from behind.

"I'm so happy for you, but don't be in such a hurry, okay? Let us wait until you are 10 years old before we plan out your future. No matter if you become a mech pilot or not, you will always be able to work with mechs. This drawing of yours tells me that you might be able to follow in my footsteps! Doesn't that sound great, sweetheart?"

Andraste clearly didn't think so because she immediately shook her head.

"Designing mechs is boring, mama. I want to fight with them! I don't want to sit around all day!"

The two chatted a bit further before Gloriana kissed her second child on the cheek and approached her only son.

Marvaine's ability to draw sketches should have been the worst considering his young age.

However, his specialized designer genes granted him a considerable advantage in this area.

Even if he was still too young for his designer genes to exert their full potential, Marvaine instinctively mastered crucial skills that would allow him to visualize mechs to an impressive degree when he matured!

Gloriana curiously studied what Marvaine was working on at the moment.

At first glance, her son had chosen the same subject as Andraste, making it look as if he was copying his sister.

However, the image looked substantially different.

Andraste had opted to make a line drawing of a mech she loved. Her feelings for the mech prompted her to make the mech look as cool as possible. Accuracy and realism weren't big concerns to the energetic young lady.

Marvaine adopted a different approach towards his sketch. He already began to imitate the demeanor of his two parents and did his best to pretend as if he was a mech designer.

His sketch showed an attempt to depict a draft design with as much accuracy and fidelity towards realism as he could manage.

Even if Marvaine was far too young to master any real knowledge or skills, he appeared to be quite good at learning from his parents!

"How impressive." Gloriana genuinely spoke as Marvaine did a surprisingly good job at reproducing a draft design for a boy of his age. "Is this the Dullahan Project that your father is working on, Marvaine?"

Her son nodded but pouted at the same time. "Yes, mama, but I hate it. My mech is not as good as that of papa."

"Oh, dearie. You are still too young to be thinking about drafting a mech at our level. Your sketch is completely fine. You already show a much better sense of proportions and angles than your sisters."

Her son did not accept her praise at all. Instead, he sulked even deeper.

"It's all wrong!"

The mother grew concerned. "What is wrong, Marvaine?"

"It's not warm!"

"Huh? What do you mean by that?" Gloriana looked puzzled.

Marvaine waved his hand at the projection, causing a lot of messy lines to appear due to his uncontrolled gesture.

"My mech is cold. Papa said that cold mechs are bad. Only the mechs that can make me feel warm are good."

Gloriana began to sense that something was horribly wrong. She lifted up her little boy in her lap and began to stroke his head.

"What has your father been teaching you lately? Can you tell me? Tell me what a warm mech is supposed to be. Why do you want to sketch one so much?"

It didn't take long for Gloriana to obtain the answer from Marvaine's enthused and partially-incoherent babbling.

Her expression soured more and more as Marvaine professed his complete liking for supposedly 'warm' mechs!

Though Gloriana had long been aware that her husband wanted to groom Marvaine into his successor, that didn't necessarily mean she was willing to let one of her own children develop a warped perspective on what constituted a good mech!

Whatever nonsense that Ves had drilled in Marvaine's mind was completely wrong!

"You shouldn't listen to your father all the time." She told him. "He can be a dum-dum sometimes. Just because he likes to design living mechs doesn't necessarily mean they are good."

Marvaine shook his head. "You're wrong, mama! Papa's mechs are warm while everyone else's mechs are cold!"

"Whether a mech is warm or cold doesn't determine how good it is." Gloriana sternly retorted. "Let me give you an example."

She waved her hand to set aside her son's drawing and summoned up projections that showed two different mechs.

One of them displayed a Desolate Soldier Mark II Version B, which was a rather basic but popular budget model in the LMC's product catalog.

Though the mech was one of the cheapest products sold by the Larkinsons, it still stood out for its useful and desirable duty-based glow.

This made it especially popular among second-line troops and garrison forces. The mech pilots employed by these forces weren't the most elite or well-trained of the bunch, so the glow of the Solemn Guardian was able to make these soldiers a lot more diligent in doing their jobs.

Floating next to the image of the Desolate Soldier was a snapshot of the Mars in battle.

Compared to a commercial standard mech design, the unique and domineering ace mech exuded a lot of more majesty and power!

The Desolate Soldier looked like an inconspicuous blade of grass next to a blooming red rose.

Not only did the ace mech radiate an immense amount of masculine power, the ace hybrid mech also looked a lot more impressive when it was in the

process of firing all of the integrated energy weapon modules of its ARCEUS System!

"Which of these two mechs is better, Marvaine?" Gloriana gently asked.

"That one!" Marvaine immediately pointed towards the Mars!

"Which of these two mechs is a warm mech?"

"Uhhh... this one?" The boy pointed at the same mech again.

"Wrong! That's not a warm mech according to the definition of your father. It's a cold mech, don't you see?"

Her words threw her son in utter confusion.

"I don't understand..."

"I know." Gloriana responded. "That's because your father has been lying to you. Warm mechs or living mechs can be useful, but they are not always the best mechs. Do you see these two mechs? The Desolate Soldier is a living mech designed by your father while the Mars is a perfect vessel that is largely designed by myself! Did you know that the Mars started out as a warm mech upon the insistence of your father, but that it changed into a cold mech because its pilot liked it that way?"

"Huh? Isn't it nice to have a friend?"

Gloriana shook her head. "Not everyone wants their mech to be a friend, my dear. You can't control a mech if it has ideas of its own. Warm mechs aren't always good, Marvaine. A cold mech like the Mars is actually the strongest mech in our fleet, and there are good reasons why that is so! It used to be weaker back when it was a living mech, but now that it has gotten closer to perfection, it has become much stronger! Can you see these smooth lines? Can you feel the power in the metal? Can you pick up how well its proportions

are set? Your mother is largely responsible for designing such a powerful mech."

Though her son was obviously impressed by the sight of the Mars, he didn't understand anything that her mother was trying to press into his mind.

"I'm confused, mama."

"That's okay, Marvaine. I will tell you as much as you need to understand that perfect mechs are stronger than the sloppy mechs of your father. There is no reason to admire his work when they are completely uncontrollable once they become alive. While it may be nice to turn a mech into your friend, it is not necessary for you to build a relationship with a machine. There are already many family, friends and pets around you. They are more than enough for you to play with for the rest of your life! Rather than make new friends with the mechs you want to design in the future, you should rather strive for developing stronger and more perfect mechs so that you can protect all of your pals!"

"Ohhh..."

### **Chapter 4379 Blessed Weapons**

As Gloriana was giving her son a much-needed corrective lesson, Ves just completed his initial test of a brand-new weapon concept.

The plain-looking luminar crystal pistol that he had made in a hurry still glowed with energy as Ves had just discharged a series of laser beams at a practice target.

The power of the laser beams was hardly impressive, but that wasn't important.

What Ves actually paid attention to was whether the transphasic properties of the gun displayed higher-than-average performance due to the active intervention of the Phase King.

The reason why he did not look happy was because the results did not appear to be any better than usual.

"Is my theory wrong?" Ves began to doubt his work. "No. It's too soon to make any conclusions. I need to generate and gather more data."

He went back to the lab machines and began to fabricate an identical transphasic luminar crystal pistol.

The difference was that Ves made sure not to make his living gun alive. The lifeless weapon did not possess any coherent spiritual foundation nor displayed any connections to the Phase King.

When Ves took this mundane pistol to the small firing range and opened fire on another practice target, he carefully studied the data collected by the advanced sensor systems.

"There are no meaningful differences." Ves furrowed his brows.

Though the initial gun that he had made according to his latest theory showed slightly better power and penetration characteristics, the differences were so small that they could be attributed to other factors.

Ves did not get the impression that making the first pistol alive made any difference to its hard performance.

Trying to forge a more extensive connection between its attack phase crystal and the Phase King seemed like a wasted effort.

"No! I'm still overlooking a couple of details!"

He picked up the first pistol and fired it a few times while observing it carefully.

There was nothing technically wrong with the weapon, but when Ves tried to observe its spiritual activity, he did not sense any special spiritual activity.

It remained almost completely dormant when Ves pulled the trigger.

He frowned at this sight. This was not what he envisioned.

"I understand now. It's not enough to form a passive connection to the Phase King and call it a day. The design spirit needs to put in actual effort to enhance the firepower of this gun."

Ves called up the footage of the Blade Chaser Mark II making use of the Gray Lotus in battle.

Though rewatching old footage was not as good as watching a battle as it happened, Ves tried his best to observe and infer the performance and workings of the relic mech pistol during the previous battle.

It became quite clear to him that Venerable Imon Ingvar and his expert mech weren't the only ones who were powering the Gray Lotus.

The weapon was able to output substantially powerful shots with the help of the energy supplied by the Blade Chaser Mark II and the true resonance generated by Venerable Imon, but that was far from everything.

The true reason why the Gray Lotus was able to output powerful death beams was because Helena played an active role in this engagement.

Though Ves didn't know for certain how much help she provided during this battle, he could always call her up and request clarification for her in person.

"Helena!"

"You called, little brother?"

Ves tried his best to hide his displeasure. He didn't like it when Helena browbeat him into accepting her status as the eldest sister in their 'family' when she was only around half a decade old.

He had lived at least three decades longer than Helena! He should be the big brother in this relationship!

It was a pity that whenever Ves raised this issue in front of his spiritual sister, she immediately showed a part of the power and ferocity that came with being the Daughter of Death that harvested many souls in the Nyxian Gap!

Helena was so much stronger than Ves in terms of absolute power and combat ability that she could rewrite any history by force!

"Ahem, I need your help this time." Ves spoke and waved at the projection.

"Do you remember this battle?"

Helena smiled. "I do. There were a lot of deaths back then. I remember that the wielder of that pistol managed to harvest a fair amount of soul with my power at the time."

"Can you explain to me what you did to facilitate the functioning of the Gray Lotus?"

"Sure."

It turned out that the Gray Lotus was so tied to Helena that it only operated at full power at the behest of Helena. If she did not do anything special, then the gun wouldn't have been able to fire any potent death beams no matter whether it contained any Black Demon Steel or not. This was because the material served as a channel rather than a source of strength.

The Gray Lotus was not so much a self-contained weapon but rather a conduit with a strong connection to Helena and the Death Lotus.

In other words, whenever Venerable Imon pulled the trigger, the Gray Lotus did not solely generate all of the destructive energies that it was able to spit out from its own structure.

Instead, it siphoned a substantial amount of death energy from Helena through an invisible connection and mixed it up with other energies to generate a powerful energy beam.

What was special was that this powerful attack ultimately imitated Helena's power to a large degree.

This was what Ves was trying to accomplish. With his eldest sister answering every question he asked without any omissions, he fully understood why his initial experiment did not make much of a difference.

"I need to have a good talk with the Phase King and tell him to help in this matter." Ves concluded.

Helena shook her head. "You can do that once or twice, but it will start to become a problem if you do it many times."

"Explain. What do you mean by that, sister?"

"Do you think that fueling the Gray Lotus is easy for me? That gun doesn't require that much energy from me, but it takes a lot of effort to complete the transfer. It's a troublesome process and I don't like to do it too often. The main reason why I helped as much as I could in the last battle is because I want to do my part in protecting you and helping you win against your opponents. If the Gray Lotus is being used for target practice or to shoot down weak and worthless aliens, I would be much less inclined to provide any help."

That caused Ves to frown. This was disappointing news. It meant that weapons as powerful as the Gray Lotus weren't as reliable as more conventional luminar crystal rifles.

The weapons equipped by the likes of the Rifle Warriors and Transcendent Punishers derived their power almost entirely from their designs and materials. These were all physical elements that could clearly be manipulated in order to determine the damage output of a luminar crystal rifle.

What Ves had accomplished with the Gray Lotus was to break past these limits by inserting an additional source of power that was not as tangible.

The advantage of connecting a design spirit to the attack phase crystal of a luminar crystal weapon was that its wielder was able to inflict more damage than normal.

The disadvantage of doing this was that the luminar crystal weapon was only powerful when the design spirit played along.

There was also another factor that Ves had to take into account.

"How many weapons like the Gray Lotus can you support at the same time?" Ves asked.

"It depends." Helena furrowed her brows. "I really can't say. I have built up a lot of reserves, so I can easily support hundreds of weapons like the Gray Lotus. However, it's impossible for me to sustain their consumption for long if they just keep squandering their energy. I will have to cut off my supply to the weapons that carry my blessing in order to preserve my strength."

"I understand. That is a bit of a disappointment."

This meant that it was not viable to borrow spiritual energy from design spirits such as Helena on a massive scale.

It appeared that Ves wouldn't be able to apply this new design solution to the Eye Project.

His new technique which he decided to refer to as design spirit channeling could only be applied to individual mechs that could most use an additional boost in firepower.

Mechs armed with existing luminar crystal rifles such as the Amaranto, the Everchanger, the Minerva, the Promethea and so on could all be upgraded on an individual basis with the help of his latest innovation.

However, it was out of the question for Ves to spread this boon to the mass production mechs such as the Bright Warriors, the Valkyrie Redeemers, the

Transcendent Punishers or even the new Nullifiers employed by the Battle Criers.

Making too many blessed weapons would drain his design spirits and encourage them to stop cooperating with Ves and his clan!

It was better for Ves to reserve this new design solution for a small number of exceptional mechs.

The stronger the design spirits, the more blessings they could support.

"Can you give me advice on how to gain the cooperation of the other design spirits?"

"I can do that, little brother. I can also speak to them on your behalf if you want to make any special arrangements with them. I think it is better if you let me manage your network of 'design spirits', seeing as I am one of them."

Helena said.

Ves wasn't so sure whether that was a good idea. Helena may be strong, but a few of his design spirits were difficult to work with. Gaia was a good example of a spiritual entity that had slipped out of his control.

He was willing to give her a shot.

"Can you talk to the Phase King and tell the fish-whale to extend his power to this test weapon? I need him to cooperate more actively with this experiment for me to prove the concept of design spirit channeling. His help is crucial to my effort to develop and introduce more weapons like the Gray Lotus in my clan."

"I will see what I can do, brother."

Helena's manifestation winked out. Several minutes passed by before she returned.

Her expression looked odd, which gave Ves the idea that not everything had gone right.

"Well? What did the fish-whale king say?"

"My talk with him did not entirely go according to plan." Helena reluctantly said. "The Phase King is shrewd and human enough to know that he has leverage. He isn't willing to lend out his power for free when he knows he can demand concessions from you. He even drafted up an entire contract!"

Ves blinked and paused for a second.

It soon dawned on him that he had been looking down on the Phase King way too much.

Not only did the design spirit learn from humans for over five years, but his astounding age and accumulation meant that he was incomparably wise!

He was hardly a mindless beast that knew how to do little else but fight and meet its basic needs.

Ves sighed. "Give me the contract. Let's see what the Phase King wants."

Helena transferred over a spiritual document that contained the ancient fish-whale king's demands.

Surprisingly enough, they weren't as harsh or troublesome as he feared.

The Phase King was mostly concerned with earning a higher share of spiritual feedback and serving as the design spirit for a greater quantity of mechs.

The design spirit also wanted to enjoy a higher rank and status within the hierarchy of design spirits.

More specifically, the Phase King wanted to rebuild a semblance of his old life by ruling over a bunch of weaker fish-whale spirits!

"Crazy!"

## Chapter 4380 Human-Design Spirit Negotiations

Ves looked ugly as he processed the list of demands from the Phase King.

A few of the requests weren't that troublesome. Ves already planned to design more transphasic mechs in the future, though most of them would probably be high-end machines so the Phase King would not be able to connect to too many mech pilots.

However, the quantity and quality of spiritual feedback from expert pilots was much better than millions of ordinary mech pilots, so the Phase King should have nothing to complain about!

It was the other demands that unsettled Ves. It appeared that the Phase King not only understood contemporary human society, but also comprehended the status and positioning of the Larkinson Clan.

The Phase King was not a stupid alien beast that was kept in the dark for over a million years.

Though the Phase King had died during the Purgatory Campaign, Ves had successfully preserved the powerful creature in spirit and finally brought him out to the wider cosmos.

Perhaps the Phase King initially couldn't adjust to the drastically larger and more complicated reality around him, but enough time had passed for him to acclimate to modern times as well as his new state of life.

In one sense, that was good because the Phase King appeared to be willing to become a productive member of society. Ves did not raise his design spirits just so that they could laze around and freeload off the spiritual feedback they received from the mechs under their supervision.

However, changes also made the Phase King shrewder and more willing to leverage his power over Ves and the Larkinson Clan.

This made Ves feel as if he needed to be a lot more careful about how he handled this situation.

Any deal he struck with the Phase King would not only affect his relationship with a single design spirit, but would also serve as a template of how he handled other powerful design spirits in the future!

Aware of how much of a precedent that this round of negotiations might set, Ves did not immediately speak out but instead forced himself to pause and think over the situation.

The Phase King introduced a lot of headaches to Ves by making a number of weird and unusual demands.

Ves did not want to indulge the Phase King or any of his design spirits too much. He wanted to make it clear that as their progenitor and the person responsible for providing new channels for spiritual feedback.

He should always remain in charge!

After figuring out how he should handle this issue, he turned back to Helena.

"I can agree to a number of these demands, but the Phase King should not go too far. It is difficult for me to bring a bunch of little brothers to life just so that he can boss them around and pretend that he is a king again. The life that he has lived in the past is gone. He's not even a fish-whale anymore since he has detached himself from his biological roots."

"Hey, I don't necessarily disagree with you, but the Phase King doesn't think this way." Helena replied. "I've talked with him for a while and I have noticed that this demand is a lot more important to him than you think."

"What do you mean by that, sister?"

Helena crossed her arms. "You really don't know enough about us. Do you think that gods like us are content with sitting around in the dark while doing

nothing else? We all have our own wants and needs. There's an entire plane where your so-called design spirits have started their own lives. No matter whether they are human like my mother or beasts like Qilanxo, they have all tried to find meaning in their lives."

"What are you trying to say, Helena?"

"You can't treat us like employees who are willing to slave for you every hour of the day. We want to relax, have fun and find fulfillment in our lives. We are a lot more human than you think we are. While most of us are able to find our own ways to occupy ourselves, the Phase King is different. He is too used to the idea that he is meant to rule over his lesser subjects. He has spent so much time at the top that he feels lost now that he is alone."

"I see. I didn't know that. I neglected to inquire about the status of my design spirits." Ves belatedly said. "I'll go talk to him directly to figure out what he truly wants."

He closed his eyes and made contact with the Phase King. He conducted a silent discussion which confirmed what Helena had said.

There was no way to lie when communicating directly from spirit to spirit. Ves could feel the desire of the Phase King in a clear and unambiguous fashion. The design spirit truly felt as if he was out of his element without any fish-whales to rule over!

As Ves negotiated with the Phase King about lending his power to blessed weapons, it became impossible to sway the design spirit from this crucial demand.

A king without a kingdom did not have any meaning!

Though Ves managed to negotiate away all of the other troublesome or excessive demands, the Phase King was adamant about becoming a king in truth again!

"It's impossible for me to give you hundreds of fish-whales to boss around in your own private kingdom." Ves told the design spirit. "It is a lot of trouble for me to create even one of them. Even if I agree to your demand, I don't have any fish-whale spiritual remnants on hand, which means I can't bring any genuine fish-whales back to life. I'll have to make new ones based on ingredients taken from your own spirituality."

The need to rebuild a semblance of his own kingdom was so strong that the Phase King did not mind all of these complications.

It didn't matter too much if the new fish-whales weren't identical to the Phaser fish-whales that he reigned over in the past.

This informed Ves that the Phase King wasn't necessarily asking to bring back the individual fish-whales that accompanied him for most of his life.

Instead, the Phase King just wanted to satisfy his own ego and feel as if he was in charge again.

The remaining negotiations progressed a lot faster than before.

In the end, the two signed a symbolic contract that allowed both sides to get what they wanted from each other more or less.

Ves agreed to create a dozen brand-new spiritual fish-whales. There were no excessive requirements for these spiritual entities. None of them had to be as smart, talented or powerful as actual design spirits. It also wasn't necessary to impart them with as much growth potential as the Phase King himself.

With Helena serving as a witness to this ground-breaking agreement between a human and a design spirit, Ves had a sense that he had just made history.

"I think you have done the right thing, Ves." Helena impishly smiled as she fiddled with her Black Lotus. "You're finally treating little old design spirits like us as equal partners rather than your subordinates. We are not like one of the

many Larkinsons in your clan. We are all powerful and capable of helping you defeat powerful opponents with our strength. It is only fair to reward us for our contributions."

Though Ves preferred to maintain greater authority over his design spirits, he knew that it wasn't wise to keep exploiting them over the long term.

This was why he relented a bit and took a step back. By making the Phase King happy, he not only obtained the design spirit's gratitude and friendship, but would also be able to count on the powerful creature during times where his help was needed the most.

It was the same as with other close design spirits like Qilanxo and the Superior Mother. Ves knew he could always count on their help because they were so intertwined with him and other Larkinsons.

"Well, let's get this over with so that I can resume my experiment."

Though it was a bit tedious for Ves to create new spiritual products, the Phase King did not ask for much at the start.

Ves first sent out Blinky to collect a dozen small spiritual fragments from the Phase King.

He then processed the fragments before beginning to make brand-new spiritual fish-whales in quick succession.

Naturally, he did not spend that much time and effort on fleshing them out or imbuing them with lots of abilities and such, but the process still took place without any issue.

After all, the spiritual fragments taken from the Phase King already provided enough of a template to create new spiritual life forms that behaved almost identical to the fish-whales that the Phase King reigned over in the past.

Though there were still many differences and inadequacies, by the time Ves ended his exhausting run, a dozen new baby-like spiritual fish-whales aimlessly floated around without a care for themselves or their environment.

"Here you go, Phase King! Take your damn subject so that you can set up your own spiritual kingdom or something!"

The powerful design spirit happily arrived to take his new subjects back to his own private territory in the imaginary realm.

Ves took a brief rest before he finally resumed his original experiment.

He held the experimental luminar crystal pistol that he originally hoped to create a new and stronger class of weapons.

"Phase King, help me out here. Do whatever you can to amplify the power of this gun as much as possible!"

The design spirit answered by expanding his presence over the weapon and increasing his control over the phasewater-infused attack phase crystal.

The Phase King did not possess any understanding on how luminar crystal weapons worked, but he was familiar with its most basic principles.

The creature was only able to exert effective control over the attack phase crystal because that was the only part that Ves had augmented with phasewater.

This crystal began to glow and accumulate more energy as the Phase King tried to find out how he could affect this specific part. The attack phase crystal responded well to his manipulations.

As Ves sensed more and more power building up inside the experimental weapon, he suddenly realized that it might not be a good idea for him to hold such a dangerous object in his hand.

He quickly summoned a bot that could hold the gun in his stead before backing away until he reached a safe distance.

"Show me what you've got!"

Just before the bot pulled the trigger, the silhouette of the Phase King briefly appeared over the gun.

An animalistic ferocity radiated from the weapon as it finally fired a laser beam that not only drilled straight through the initial practice target, but also passed through two more identical dummies before striking the solid metal wall behind!

The pistol wound down while Ves quickly observed the results.

The target dummies each displayed damage that corresponded with getting hit by a laser beam, but it was not as bad as it could have been.

The transphasic laser beam had bypassed most of the obstacles in its way so that it was able to preserve much of its energies before reaching the final target!

The metal wall placed behind the dummies was meant to protect the rest of the workplace from incurring any damage. It was several meters thick and made of thick and dense alloy.

As Ves employed a scanner to study how deep the laser beam had extended, it turned out that this simple weapon that wasn't particularly powerful managed to penetrate the wall by over two meters!

"That is more than enough to damage the internals of a typical mech!" Ves gasped!

If the experimental weapon was able to penetrate so deep with an infantry-grade pistol, how much more would a mech-grade luminar crystal weapon be able to penetrate?

"Now this is a true blessed weapon!"