

## Mech 4461

### THE MECH TOUCH

#### Chapter 4461 Withholding Information

The truth had finally come out after all of this time.

Ves rapidly connected the dots in his mind. All of the scattered clues that previously seemed to bear little relation to each other finally fit into a picture that should have been so obvious in hindsight!

The Palace of Shame never centered around the orvens at all. It turned out that the phase whales were the ones who set all of this into motion.

The original purpose for creating this asteroid base was not to build a retirement home for an exiled orven prince.

Instead, the phase whales just wanted to toss away one of their own criminals who had committed the unforgivable sin of devouring his or her own kind.

Why the phase whales refused to get rid of a hidden danger and execute the cannibal in the first place, Ves didn't know.

What was important was that the phase whales in all of their wisdom not only decided to imprison their fallen whale, but do so in the periphery of the Red Ocean that was sufficiently far away from the center of the dwarf galaxy.

That was probably how the Palace of Shame came to be. It was a prison that was solely designed to contain the disgraced subject for an indefinite period of time.

This also explained the true purpose of the orvens that were primarily responsible for maintaining order in the asteroid base.

"No wonder why their group is called the Unspoken. They have probably been contracted by the phase whales to act as the jailors who take care of the

Palace of Shame and make sure that the only prisoner remains under control."

The subject of unclean whales was a touchy subject among the phase whales. None of the members of the powerful race liked to publicize any information about the most deplorable members of their kind.

Since it was apparently impossible for a phase whale to commit all of his time to watch over one of their own, the powerful race instead subcontracted this unpleasant duty to a group belonging to a different alien race.

This was how the Unspoken not only watched over the prisoner for over a thousand years, but also successfully kept everyone else in the dark.

It would have been rather hard to explain why a bunch of orvens hung out in such a remote asteroid base for multiple generations.

Instead of trying to hide their presence completely, they instead pretended to be pirates. They even opened up the Palace of Shame to other occupants and lured in a large amount of pirates, smugglers and other lowlives to reinforce the impression that the entire place was nothing but a den of iniquity!

Although there were numerous pieces of evidence that the Palace of Shame was more than a simple pirate stronghold since it was able to exist for so long, the secret was still safe for the most part.

The phase whales even checked up on the state of the Palace of Shame from time to time.

This was evidenced by the testimony of the three orven prisoners that Ves had interrogated. They all spoke about witnessing secret meetings between the Unspoken and a member of the powerful aquatic race.

"It turns out that there is no great pan-racial secret order after all. This is nothing but a boss inspecting a group of employees to make sure they are still diligent about performing their duties."

Perhaps the charade was meant to persist for many more years, but the sudden arrival of humanity changed everything.

A chunk of the Red Ocean that everyone previously regarded as a quiet backwater abruptly fell into the hands of extragalactic invaders.

Few if any indigenous aliens could have seen this coming. Recent events likely disrupted whatever intentions the phase whale race held towards the captive unclean whale and the Palace of Shame.

"It even explains why the pirates refused to leave the Palace of Shame even as every other alien with a ship has long fled to safer regions. They can't abandon their duties or else they will suffer terrible punishment at the hands of the phase whales!"

The Unspoken and all of the pirate groups that had inadvertently fallen into this obligatory duty had found themselves in an impossible situation.

As humanity increasingly took control over all of the surrounding regions, the pressure for the pirates to leave became more and more unbearable.

However, without receiving permission from their powerful but uncaring phase whale masters, they could not desert their current posts.

Whatever hold the phase whales had over the pirates had forced even the most shameless and despicable pirates to stand their ground and defend the Palace of Shame to the death!

This was the most unexplainable part about this mystery. Why didn't the pirates just... run away?

No matter how much the phase whales loomed over them, the most selfish among the pirates should probably have enough self-preservation instincts to flee from the humans rather than fight for a cause that likely didn't interest them in the slightest.

"Have the aliens been brainwashed or are they stuck here for another reason?"

Ves didn't have enough information to resolve this question, so he set it aside and focused on more important matters.

One of them was how much the Gemini Family actually knew about the Palace of Shame.

When Ves recalled his past interactions with the Geminis and the intelligence he received about them, he began to grow a lot more suspicious.

Now that he found out what the Palace of Shame was truly hiding, the behavior of the Gemini Family made a lot more sense as well.

If his suspicions were correct, the Geminis most definitely knew that the Palace of Shame was hiding either an unclean whale or a phase whale!

"They fooled us! The damn incestual bastards hoodwinked us all!" Ves cursed.

Their family-wide obsession about marrying their brothers and sisters to each other must have caused a few screws to get loose in their minds.

How could these fools ever think it was a good idea to mess with the arrangements of the phase whales?!

Ves and the rest of the Golden Skull Alliance already had prior experience with that when they accidentally embarked on the Purgatory Campaign.

That instance largely ended up well, but only because the mythical phase whale that had originally created the pocket space was over a million years dead!

This situation was a lot different! Not only was the Palace of Shame set up a lot more recently, but there was also a living phase whale locked inside its belly!

There was no ambiguity about whether the phase whale or unclean whale was still alive. Not only did the creature project an active spatial barrier to resist every attack launched by the ace mechs, but Ves could even spot motion underneath that signified that the massive alien creature was moving its body.

As many different people were trying to figure out a way to solve this imminent crisis, Ves grew a lot more upset towards the people who were largely responsible for dragging him into this mess.

He inputted a command and opened up a direct communication channel to the two leaders of the Gemini Family.

"What is the matter, Patriarch Larkinson?" Matriarch Sena Gemini impatiently asked.

"You knew." Ves hissed. "Don't lie to me. You Geminis knew from the start that an unclean whale was imprisoned within the Palace of Shame. Did you ever think that we should have been warned about this in advance?! How dare you withhold such crucial information from us all! You may have doomed us all with your selfish actions!"

"That is uncalled for, Larkinson!" Patriarch Kobal Gemini replied in a heated tone. "We admit that we had indications that a phase whale may have been hiding inside the Palace of Shame, but we do not have any solid proof in our hands. It is irresponsible for us to share hearsay and unreliable evidence with

you. When our Gemini Family initially made our case to you all, we solely stuck to the facts to make certain that you do not base your decisions on fantasies and mistaken assumptions."

"Don't play word games with me! You guys know exactly what you have been doing. Even if you weren't sure about the captive phase whale, you should have come up with plenty of guesses that the Palace of Shame is a lot more dangerous than a normal pirate base. Your deliberate refusal to share your reasonable suspicions towards us has left us all in the dark about the true risks of Operation Lighthouse. This is like inviting us to travel to a star system while conveniently leaving out the possibility that the star might be ready to go supernova!"

"Calm down, Patriarch Larkinson. You can accuse us all you want, but this is not the time for recriminations." Matriarch Sena Gemini made a calming motion with her palm. "Let us address the more immediate threat first. Do you have any solution in your bag of tricks that can solve the phase whale that is disturbing the surrounding space?"

Ves scowled and shook his head. "No! I wouldn't be so angry if that was the case!"

"Doesn't your clan have a means of attack that can bypass any form of defense and directly deprive organic beings of life? Many of your mechs have just demonstrated this capability during an earlier phase of the battle."

Ves grew a lot angrier when he heard those words!

"This is exactly why it was so important for the rest of us to know about the possibility of a hidden phase whale in advance. If I knew what was coming, I wouldn't have used up this trump card. As it is, all of the mech pilots who are capable of pulling off this specific battle formation attack have already exhausted themselves. They are all resting in order to recuperate their mental

energies, but I can already tell you now that it will take at least half a day for them to regain enough vigor to pull off the same kind of attack."

He actually fudged the truth a little bit in order to prevent any possible enemies from taking advantage of this detail, but the most important message was still true.

The Larkinson Clan and the Glory Seekers could no longer pull out another powerful death energy wave attack from their sleeves!

"That is not the only method that your clan possesses. Isn't one of your expert mechs launching energy beam attacks that is channeling a similar sort of power at this very moment?"

Ves briefly turned his head to glance at a projection showing the Blade Chaser Mark II.

The glowing expert mech that was empowered by both Imon Ingvar and his sister Casella Ingvar was trying its utmost to boost the damage output of the Gray Lotus.

Ves could even sense Helena doing her best to lend as much of her power to this effort as possible.

With the support of the Daughter of Death, the first blessed weapon developed by Ves began to show its might.

Again and again, the Blade Chaser Mark II fired one inconspicuous death energy beam after another.

Different from all of the other attacks that were hitting the seemingly impervious spatial barrier that was protecting the unclean whale from damage, the gray beam partially managed to pass through!

Not even the most penetrating attacks launched by ace mechs such as the Thunderer Mark II and the Mars could imitate this result!

Yet whenever the death beams struck the massive organic body of the unclean whale, they simply sank into the fatty flesh without evoking any further changes or reactions.

The unclean whale was still merrily channeling an enormous spatial technique without any hint that it had come closer to death.

Ves grew depressed when he saw this result.

"It isn't working." He told the leaders of the Gemini Family. "A single weapon isn't enough to put a dent into a life form that is as powerful as a phase whale. Sure, the weapon in the hands of the Gray Lotus can easily kill a random human being, but it can't do anything to expert pilots and other entities with powerful mental defenses. We need to find another solution!"

That was easier said than done.

#### **Chapter 4462 Inability**

Venerable Jannzi Larkinson felt profoundly empty at this moment.

Instead of sitting inside the cockpit of her trusty Shield of Samar, she took shelter in her grand stateroom that was as far removed from the battlefield as possible.

Instead of fighting alongside her fellow expert pilots such as Venerable Stark and Venerable Isobel, was surrounded by her husband and children.

Instead of working together with her battle partner to protect her clansmen from danger and shield her fellow mech pilots from retaliation, she had become a useless burden who could not contribute much in the fight but was too valuable to risk in battle.

Jannzi felt especially upset about the latter. Just because she lost her Shield of Samar didn't mean she lost her piloting abilities. She could still hop inside the cockpit of a defensive mech like the Knight Warrior or the Rigid Spine and utilize her exquisite skills to contribute as much to victory as possible.



She was even open to piloting the Quint in a different configuration than a space knight if that was what it took for her to save as many lives as possible!

After all, an expert pilot like her could pilot rifleman mechs a lot better than the mech pilots who specialized in them. She was a demigod, a pilot whose skills and abilities had exceeded human limits. Ordinary rules no longer applied to her anymore.

She could make much more use out of a mech than any other regular pilot. Not even expert candidates could come close to her skills, reaction speed, processing power and combat experience.

Yet whenever she volunteered to defend the Larkinson Clan in the best way she could, General Verle and anyone else with enough say immediately rejected her proposal.

"We can't." General Verle shook her head. "Mechs like the Rigid Wall and the Quint are good and all, but they do not match your identity in the slightest. Just like how the Cross Clan no longer dares to transport Patriarch Reginald Cross in a flimsy shuttle, it is the height of irresponsibility to allow you to venture into battle while piloting a mech that can be shot down at any time."

"I won't allow that to happen! You know how good I am! I won't allow myself to get caught by a fatal attack!" Jannzi insisted.

"You can't guarantee that, pilot! Look, we are about to do battle against a formidable alien pirate stronghold. Unlike the human mech forces that we are accustomed to fighting, the aliens are still stuck in the era where bigger is better. The pirates will deploy many warships against us whose guns are large and powerful enough to annihilate any mech upon a direct hit."

"So? Other mech pilots do not have a problem with sorting into battle while they know they will have to fight against terrible warships. Why can't I do the same?"

"Because you are not an average mech pilot! Your identity is different and your value is much greater!" General Verle shot back. "If you were still piloting your Shield of Samar, then this wouldn't be a concern, but the reality is different. Other mechs do not compliment you. Not only will you lack the protection of a resonance shield, but the machines themselves will not be able to keep up with your demands. Your chances of dying are far greater than before, which is what our clan least wants to see. If you are determined to make a sacrifice, then at least make it meaningful."

That pretty much blocked any further attempts to set foot on the battlefield. Jannzi had no choice but to act like any other civilian and take shelter while watching other good Larkinsons fight in her stead.

It made her feel profoundly helpless. The only reason why she hadn't gone crazy was because she was able to spend this tense and frustrating period with her husband and child.

"Mama! Mama! What is happening?" Mercer Larkinson asked as he sat on his mother's lap.

Jannzi lifted her hand and gently stroked her boy's adorable head. "Our forces have just found out that there is a powerful alien hiding within the asteroid base. All of our mechs are doing their best to finish it off before it can commit any further evil."

"It will be over, then?"

"Yup. The bad guys will lose while our clan and our friends will win. Trust in our soldiers and heroes. They are doing their best to keep us all safe."

Though she was easily able to fool her young and naive baby, her husband was not as convinced.

Though the public feeds that their family had access to did not provide any clarification or details, it was difficult to hide the desperate actions of all of the ace mechs.

The fact that they abandoned any further attempts to disable the V'gahnt-Zezne and launched as many attacks towards the interior of the Palace of Shame said much about their current priorities!

Adenau Purnesse-Larkinson, who sat next to Jannzi, glanced towards his wife.

The expert pilot without an expert mech silently shook her head as she conveyed her true feelings on the matter.

Unlike ordinary people, she possessed a much better grasp of the flow of the battle. Her extraordinary senses and judgment allowed her to extract a lot of clues from the running feed.

Those clues were now telling her that every human was in much deeper trouble than before!

The more time passed by, the more she grew unsettled, both physically and mentally.

Her physical unease came from the faint spatial fluctuations that were coursing throughout the entire battlefield and beyond.

The power of the captured unclean whale who had previously been imprisoned inside the Palace of Shame was considerable!

It appeared that long-term captivity over a span of over a thousand years only represented a brief nap to a member of the phase whale race.

As the degenerated alien beast continued to build up a grand movement that would affect a huge chunk of space, even ordinary people such as Adenau

and Mercer began to feel more nauseous due to the disturbances affecting their bodies!

The young boy even burst into tears!

"Mama! It hurts!"

"It's okay, baby! Your mother is here for you. Everything will be alright."

Though Jannzi tried her best to put up a brave face in front of her son, inwardly her frustration was mounting.

She was tired of feeling helpless!

She was tired of getting pushed to the side!

She was tired of needing to wait for many months before she could pilot a real mech again!

Her lack of agency in this situation was form of torture to her. The transition from being one of the most powerful and influential combatants of the Larkinson Clan to a harmless woman without a mech was too abrupt. She couldn't get used to returning to a life of indolence and anonymity.

Jannzi vowed to never end up in this situation again. Once she finally obtained the reborn Shield of Samar that she had been promised with, she would never allow herself to get pushed back to the rear again!

"The clan needs me." She whispered to herself. "Ves can't protect our people as well as I can. Only I have the ability to protect our family in these moments!"

Her conviction burned brighter than before!

Despite being far away from any mech, her force of will grew stronger.

She not only regained the strength that she had before, but also pushed her extraordinary willpower to the point where she was able to cover her husband and son with a weak domain!

Their expressions eased. they were no longer affected by the spatial fluctuations because Jannzi willed it so, simple as that. No demented phase whale was allowed to harm the objects of her protection!

As Jannzi continued to dream about getting back in the saddle again, Ves was not having a good time at the moment.

Nothing much happened in the next dozen or so seconds. The only meaningful developments that took place was that the analysts confirmed much of his suspicions.

The Palace of Shame had been built as a prison. They knew this now because the exposed inner structure was made out of materials that were especially good at dampening spatial phenomena and resisting a huge amount of physical force.

If that wasn't enough, the giant 'prison chamber' also featured numerous giant chains that previously restrained the only captive!

Normally, these chains should have locked the alien beast in place and suppressed his potent spatial abilities, but when the ace mechs had breached the chamber, none of the chains were bound to the prisoners anymore!

"Upon their imminent defeat, we believe the Unspoken may have activated an emergency measure that freed the captive phase whale. It may have been an act of spite as well as a planned contingency measure!"

Since the humans were about to kill off the orvens as well as the other alien pirates, the defeated party might as well go for broke and release a terrible monster as their ultimate form of vengeance!

"Since we know that those giant chains previously inhibited the unclean whale, can't we find a way to reattach them?" Ves desperately asked.

"We can't! Our mech will need to lift those chains and bring them to the body of the hostile subject, but this isn't possible as long as the latter keeps projecting a powerful spatial barrier."

It all came down to the unclean whale's powerful defenses which were even more absurd than the energy shields of the V'gahnt-Zezne.

While the battleship had to rely on multiple layers of weaker energy shields to protect herself from damage, the unclean whale only had to rely on a single, all-encompassing spatial barrier to completely resist the combined firepower of seven ace mechs!

This was a true first-class opponent!

Perhaps not even the Terrans or Rubarthans were able to put a dent into the unclean whale!

At least there was one piece of good news.

"Our collective attacks aren't getting through the defenses of the unclean whale, but they are at least slowing down the creature's progress. The attacks from our ace mechs and our other mechs are forcing the whale to put more effort into bolstering the spatial barrier!"

While that slowed the monstrous phase whale down, it did not prevent the powerful aquatic alien from continuing his or her original effort.

"Has the Lehrer Foundation figured anything out?!" Ves asked. "The Lehrers have lots of scientists and engineers on their payroll. Surely they know something, right?!"

A representative of the Lehrer Foundation sighed over the command channel. "I am afraid that we cannot offer any major breakthroughs. We have many

theories and we can offer you many possible explanations on what the alien whale is attempting to do, but none of them offer any helpful solutions. None of our suggestions matter as long as the source of our current problems can block any external manipulation with a spatial barrier."

That caused Ves to gain an idea.

"Can't we make use of the Gravity Net and other phasewater tech to disturb the spatial barrier? We only need to create a gap that is large enough for an ace mech to squeeze through!"

"We have already thought of that, Patriarch Larkinson, but not even all of our phasewater devices put together can overcome the power of the unclean whale. Our scanners have detected over a thousand kilograms of phasewater inside the creature's body. All of it is currently being leveraged. There is no conceivable possibility that our weaker measures can induce any changes. The difference in power is far too great."

"Damn it! Is there a way that you can figure out a clever way to utilize all of our phasewater tech that might exploit a possible weakness and open up a gap in the spatial barrier?"

"That is possible in theory, but it will take days, weeks or even months for us to present the inkling of a solution. We do not have the time to perform the necessary calculations!"

Time! It was all about time! The human coalition simply didn't have enough time to resolve this matter in a calm and rational manner.

Just as Ves was about to resign himself to the inevitable outcome, his eyes suddenly widened.

He just remembered that he had a way of buying a little more time for himself.

He might even be able to obtain what he needed to resolve the current crisis!

Ves closed his eyes and concentrated hard on an existence that he had long shoved to the back of his mind.

"Let me in, System!"

### Chapter 4463 Buying Time

Ves experienced a complete change in environment as soon as he thought about entering the System Space.

The transition happened in an instant.

In one moment, he was sitting inside the bridge of his flagship where all of the operators became increasingly more afraid of what was about to come.

Panic, helplessness and resignation had spread among the surrounding clansmen as they saw that their vaunted ace mechs had become as useless as a budget mech in the face of an overwhelming enemy.

The phase whales were often regarded as the singular most powerful race of the Red Ocean.

Fortunately, the giant aquatic beasts had their flaws. Their modest ambitions and their low reproduction rate held them back.

This gave a chance for the other indigenous alien races to rise up and carve their own place in the dwarf galaxy.

The fact that the phase whales hadn't been able to dominate the Red Ocean didn't mean they were weak, though!

It was undeniable that every single adult phase whale posed a terrible danger to humanity.

Every pioneer, adventurer and colonist in the Red Ocean slowly became familiar with an increasingly more common rule.

The rule stated that people should treat every phase whale as an existence on the same level as a medium-sized CFA battleship or an MTA ace mech!



Sure, the weakest among the phase whales were considerably easier to deal with, but they tended to lay low for a long time until they upgraded themselves to a level where they could confidently roam through space.

Most of the phase whales that pioneers encountered in the wild were already at least hundreds of years old, which was plenty of time for them to augment their bodies to a level where they could eat expert mechs for breakfast!

Although Ves did not have a good idea of the strength of the unclean whale that had just broken free, the cannibalistic creature was doubtlessly on the upper end of his kind!

"An unclean whale is a proven killer of other phase whales. Not only that, but a cannibal whale mainly targets victims that have developed powerful bioaugmentations for themselves. None of these phase whales should be weak, so a competent unclean whale must possess considerable power to sustain this lifestyle."

Though the unclean whale eventually suffered a defeat that eventually led to the creature's imprisonment, that did not mean the threat had diminished.

A phase whale of any kind was still too strong of an opponent for most humans!

Not even a coalition of six different pioneering groups had been able to shake the massive creature's spatial barrier!

"My overarching priority is to find a means to stop the unclean whale." Ves reminded himself.

Although the transition from reality to the System Space had been abrupt, the calm and peaceful environment granted him a much-needed break.

Now that his mind wasn't running so hot anymore, he was able to think about the situation without the weight of an imminent deadline looming behind his back.

The freedom to contemplate his situation at his own pace was exactly what he needed to regain his calm.

The peaceful mountaintop environment of the System Space also helped a lot in making him feel removed from the immediate crisis.

It was tempting for him to forget about all of the problems that awaited him back in the Boryan Belt.

However, the Mech Designer System wouldn't allow him to escape reality that easily!

Ves had conducted an experiment in the past that tested the limits of how long he was able to remain inside the System Space.

After all, since the System claimed that time spent inside its new illusionary space would not affect the time spent in reality, Ves thought he could effectively obtain more time for himself!

There were many possible ways he could make use of all of the extra time in the System Space.

He could progress his design projects, either with the help of the Workshop of Creation or just by doing all of the work in his mind.

He could review all of the knowledge that he had learned in the past and deepen his understanding of existing theories.

He could spend the time on brainstorming lots of new and innovative ideas, some of which might lead to the invention of a fantastic new application that could shift the course of the mech industry!

In short, there were so many ways a mech designer like Ves could make use of so much free time that he could accelerate his career progression by several times!

Ves even suspected that this may have been one of the tricks that the Polymath had employed to rush through the ranks as if she had boarded a rocket!

Sadly, none of this was possible for him. He found that if he did not spend his Ascension Points, he would progressively experience greater and greater rejection from the System Space.

In his last attempt to force himself to stay, he managed to hold out for approximately 15 hours before the System booted him out of the illusionary mountaintop!

Ves speculated that the System Space had to consume a lot of energy or other resources to host his consciousness.

Everything had a price. It would have been too unreasonable for the System to be able to keep this up forever!

"Oh well."

All of this meant that Ves only had a limited amount of time before he had to return to the imminent disaster that was about to befall the entire coalition!

After that, the System forcibly kept him out and prevented him from entering its Space until more than a week had passed in reality.

This pretty much ended his devious plan to effectively increase his productivity and get a lot more work done than normal!

Fortunately, Ves wasn't limited to staying 15 hours at a time.

During his experiments, he found out that he could lengthen his stay by spending his Ascension Points at the Workshop of Creation.

It cost 1 AP for him to rent the Workshop of Creation for a period of 24 hours. Given that this was the case, it made no sense that the System would boot him out before he was able to use up his entire quota.

The System would be engaging in fraudulent business practices if that was the case!

While Ves accused it of many things, the System was remarkably fair and honest in its own inhuman way. It never sold a product or service that did not match the description.

This meant that Ves could effectively buy more time in the System Space as long as he paid the daily 'rent' of 1 Ascension Point a day.

Ves found that he didn't actually have to spend time in the Workshop of Creation to extend his stay by 24 hours. He could move up and down the mountain and freely stay at any of the other sites if he wished.

Right now, Ves wasn't in a hurry to start figuring out a way to resolve his latest difficulty. He was too mentally unbalanced and sorely wanted to take a lengthy break in order to completely reset his mind. Only then would he be able to enter the right state of mind to tackle his problems with a rational and sober mindset.

He did not immediately race towards the Workshop of Creation and spent 1 Ascension Point to obtain the right to make use of its facilities for 24 hours.

He would be wasting the 15 hours that he could already get for 'free'!

Ves deliberately emptied his mind of any thoughts related to the dangerous situation around the Palace of Shame and began to stroll without any particular destination in mind.

He became oblivious to the passage of time as he kept climbing up and down the mountain path.

Sometimes, he took the paths that led him to the sites where he could exchange his AP for all kinds of useful goodies.

He did not visit these places because he wanted to see whether he could use his AP to acquire what he needed to cobble up a solution.

It was too early for that.

Right now, he just wanted to cleanse his mind and bask in his isolation.

Ves hardly noticed that his life had changed so much in the past years that he didn't enjoy any moments alone anymore.

Every day, he woke up surrounded by his wife, his children and his bodyguards.

Even if he decided to take a day off and laze around in his grand stateroom, he could not escape the social interactions that had become a fixture in his life.

Whenever he performed his normal duties, he met and interacted with all kinds of people.

From his personal assistant who appraised him of the developments of his clan to his fellow Journeyman Mech Designers who he collaborated with, he worked with a lot of people in order to keep the Larkinson Clan afloat.

Ves never really thought about it over the years, but now that he finally took a moment to step away from the moment, he recognized how deeply he depended on his subordinates.

People such as General Verle, Minister Shederin Purnesse, Director Ranya Wodin, Director Calabast and many more played an indispensable role in managing the various branches of his increasingly more powerful clan.

At the same time, all of those Larkinsons also depended on their patriarch to lead the clan to a greater height. Ves did not think he was being narcissistic

when he thought that he was the only person in the clan that could truly propel his entire clan to the top of human society!

As Ves continued to reflect on everything he had accomplished in the past few years, he felt increasingly more ambivalent about his role and what he had been doing as of late.

A part of him wanted to concentrate entirely on designing mechs and progressing his design philosophy.

He was a mech designer, so why should he waste so much time on other matters when they didn't bring him any closer to beating Gloriana to the rank of Senior?

Another part of him recognized the necessity of wielding power. If Ves didn't make the right decisions, then others would definitely make them in his stead.

It would be fine if his deputies adopted the same ideas as him, but this was rarely the case.

Who knew what people such as Chief Minister Novilon Purnesse would do to his clan if he was able to make decisions with much less oversight than before!

For better or worse, Ves could not leave the job of leading his clan to others. Their interests didn't align with his own, so why should he give them the keys to his personal kingdom?

"This can't go on forever." Ves sighed and shook his head as he sat on a bench that provided him with a fantastic view of the Tree of Possibilities. "Sooner or later, I need to dedicate myself to my work and shed all of the elements that are dragging me down."

When Ves read the biographies of all of the Star Designers, he had noticed that few of them engaged in politicking or other distractions.

They were truly passionate and married to their career, so much so that they had cast aside incredibly lucrative opportunities just so they could spend more hours in their design labs!

Ves felt that he had been spending less and less time in his own design lab as of late.

This was by necessity because his clan would most certainly go astray if he wasn't at the helm, but he could not let this situation go on forever.

"I need a successor who I can trust to take charge of my clan."

Ves thought about Aurelia who was literally born for this job. Gloriana certainly liked to think this was the case, but who said that their first born daughter was only suitable to lead the Larkinson Clan?

He wouldn't mind it if his ambitious daughter decided to take charge of another large and promising organization.

Any of his children were also eligible in their own way.

If Andraste became a mech pilot, then she might be able to lead the clan in the same style as Patriarch Reginald Cross.

If Marvaine became a mech designer in the same mold as his father, then he would be able to lead the Larkinson Clan in the exact same way, thereby providing the greatest possible continuity!

These weren't the only possible candidates that he could choose from.

Though he and his wife had agreed to take a little break, Gloriana had never stopped reminding him that she eventually wanted to bear three more children in order to complete her 'collection'!

#### **Chapter 4464 A Sober Problem-Solving Approach**

Ves found it entertaining to speculate about the future of his clan.

After all, there weren't many sources of entertainment around here. The System Space had never been designed with leisure in mind. It was a solemn place that was primarily dedicated to facilitating his progression as a mech designer.

If he wasn't making any meaningful progress towards becoming a Star Designer or completing his spiritual ascension, then there wasn't any reason for him to squat in this place longer than was necessary.

Ves still had a few hours left before he had to pay his rent in order to stay any longer, so he still wasn't in a hurry to do anything productive.

He continued to use his remaining free time on contemplating the life he had led and the decisions he had made up to this point.

He found it liberating to be able to think about everything from a detached perspective with no one else passing judgment on him. Aside from the Mech Designer System itself, there was no one else who could exert pressure on him in this magical space!

Neither his wife, Lucky, Calabast, or any of his design spirits such as Goldie could figure out what he was thinking and pass judgment on his ideas.

It felt liberating for him to be able to spend his time on the notions that he had never dared to think for fear of causing an incident.

For a small period of time, Ves indulged in the darkness that he had tried his best to repress in his mind.

He thought about divorcing Gloriana.

He tried to figure out what he could obtain from disassembling Lucky.

He came up with radical spiritual augmentation ideas that might make his children a lot more powerful.



He even thought about killing off all of his weaker and more flawed design spirits so that he could replace them with superior versions!

Ves could calmly think about all of these ideas without his wife screeching in his ears or Goldie manifesting above his head before proceeding to bite him with her teeth.

Still, as much as he found it fun to entertain all kinds of taboo ideas, there were good reasons why he never dared to think about them before.

"I should get on to business." He eventually told himself.

He pushed all of his dark and inane ideas back into the depths of his mind where they belonged.

Although he felt like he could benefit from taking a longer vacation than this, he didn't know how much Ascension Points he needed to fix his way out of the crisis that was awaiting him back in reality.

Thanks to the System Mission that he had recently completed, he was not short of Ascension Points.

Contributing to the ace mech that eventually led to the death of Saint Jeremiah Gauge had netted him a whopping 1000 Ascension Points, which instantly transformed him from a pauper into a nouveau riche, at least as far as the System was concerned!

"I can do a lot with 1000 AP." Ves briefly smirked, but that only lasted for a short while. "I can also squander all of this wealth in an instant."

Ves was all too well aware of how the more expensive offerings of the System could easily tempt him into squandering his hard-earned wealth.

Just because he happened to earn 1000 AP at once didn't mean that it would be easy to earn another windfall in the near future!

The Mission Hall only presented him with a limited selection of Missions that periodically refreshed with the passage of time.

Most of the missions were frankly impossible or too impractical to complete for a Journeyman like himself.

In order to make sure that he was not missing out on another potentially lucky opportunity to earn another bag of Ascension Points, he moved to the Mission Hall and studied the current selection of offerings.

[Stairway to Ascension]

Mission: Stairway to Ascension

Difficulty: S-Rank

Prerequisites: Spirituality must be higher than 10.0

Description

The time has come for you to create a pathway to ascension that is accessible to the common man.

Combine your knowledge, resources and ingenuity to create a physical or intangible stairway that can help the worthy evolve beyond their limits with each step they take.

The stairway will only be considered complete if the final step can trigger an individual's promotion to a True God.

Reward: 100,000 Ascension Points.

Time limit: 100 years.

Penalty for failure: Permanent death of mind, body and soul.

" ... "

Ves quickly glanced at the other ridiculous or impractical Missions before he immediately turned away and left the Mission Hall without a word.

Seeing that there was no way for Ves to earn a lot of Ascension Points in the short term, he would have to make do with his current savings.

"I have 1033 Ascension Points left in my possession, so I can theoretically spend 1033 days in this System Space before I need to go back to the reality that should still be frozen all of this time."

There was no way that Ves would actually go through with a ridiculous plan!

Sure, Ves could get a lot of work done in 2.83 years, but was it the best use of his Ascension Points?

No matter how much time he spent on designing a new gadget that might allow him to break the unclean whale's defenses, he didn't have the time in reality to fabricate the object and put it to use!

If he wanted to make better use of his stay in the System Space, then he needed to invest his AP on more substantial benefits!

Ves knew that the System was able to offer all kinds of powerful boosts that could reverse his situation. He just had to spend his limited budget of Ascension Points as wisely as possible.

He created a new mental note and wrote down the points he needed to pay attention to in order to form a good plan.

"First, time is precious, but it is not the most valuable resource that the System can offer. I should only spend my AP on extending my stay in the System Space if there is no better alternative. That said, I can't allow myself to get kicked out too soon. I should always maintain a modest reserve of AP in case I need a little more time than I previously thought."

"Second, I should spend as much of my AP as possible. There are circumstances where it's best to save them up but there are also circumstances where holding back is the height of foolishness. Since my clan and I are currently confronting an unclean whale, an alien beast that is far more dangerous than a regular phase whale, I cannot afford to assume that the hostile creature will treat us kindly. Our mechs have already launched many powerful attacks towards the imprisoned whale. I doubt we will be able to receive a hug in return."

"Third, I should try and be as efficient as possible with my spending. No matter whether I use up my Ascension Points on tangible or intangible items, I should always seek to get the most while spending the least amount of money. It would be best if whatever I am spending my Ascension Points on is solely applicable to my current situation."

Ves wrote down a few more points, but they all followed the same idea. His resources were limited and he needed to spend them as wisely as possible in order to maximize his rate of return.

He made certain to reread his guidelines and also verified whether he was in the right state of mind to tackle the problem with a sober and rational mindset.

This was not the time for him to get caught up in his passion and make all kinds of foolish and wasteful decisions in order to pursue a crazy idea!

"No. That's too risky. I need to keep my cool and approach this issue like a normal mech designer."

By reducing the current matter to an engineering problem, he put himself in a specific mindset that reminded him of the times he conducted long-term research or resolved a particularly tricky design problem.

He would have never adopted this mindset if he was in a hurry, but fortunately he had enough AP to spare for a lengthy stay.

"That reminds me, I should pay my rent for the day before it's too late."

The System had already created a growing sense of rejection towards him. Though he was confident that he could stick around for a couple more hours, there was no sense in tempting fate.

He dropped by the Workshop of Creation to pay the daily fee and felt a lot more at ease all of a sudden.

"Thank you, System."

With that out of the way, he proceeded with the first step of his plan.

"I need to see what I can work with. Everything that I can exchange from the System is a potential resource that I can use to resolve the immediate problem."

He decided to stop by the Tree of Possibilities first.

In the past few hours, he developed a faint hope that the Tree of Possibilities may have grown a powerful new enlightenment fruit that could impart a powerful new offensive of disruptive spiritual technique.

If Ves found a way to leverage a critical weakness in the unclean whale's spatial barrier or other aspect, he might be able to interrupt the former captive's attempts to pull off a mass displacement technique!

Ves patiently scanned all of the enlightenment fruits that were ripe for the picking.

There were hundreds of them, many of which had thankfully entered the range of his budget, but none of them were tailored to his needs.

His expression gradually soured when he failed to find the magic bullet that could stop a powerful unclean whale in an instant.

"Damn, I knew it was too good to be true."

There were plenty of powerful and useful enlightenment fruits that he could spend on with his Ascension Points, but they weren't immediately relevant to the situation at hand!

At best, there were a dozen or so enlightenment fruits that might help him on his way to solve his current problem, but only when he spent additional AP on other complementary goods.

A few of them looked particularly attractive in his eyes!

[Puelmer Mid-Level Transphasic Weapon Principles]

Price: 850 Ascension Points

Imparts a comprehensive set of essential theories and design principles related to the most widespread transphasic weapon types mastered by a mid-level weapons engineer of the puelmer race. The knowledge applies to weapons at every scale, from small arms to battleship armaments.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 2.5 or higher. Physics Skill must be Senior or higher...

Ves couldn't help but drool when he noticed this enlightenment fruit. It was larger and heavier than the others, but he believed that it would definitely impart him with the knowledge he required to develop a superweapon that could give the unclean whale a hard time!

He shook his head. "It's too expensive!"

It was too much for his budget. If he spent 850 Ascension Points in an instant, then he had precious little left to spend on all of the sophisticated materials offered by the Divine Bazaar.

All of the puelmer weapon technology in existence would be able to make any difference if Ves lacked the materials to reproduce a weapon that was powerful enough to affect a phase whale!

While it was difficult for Ves to figure out how much he needed to spend on materials, he cautiously assumed that he needed to reserve at least 400 Ascension Points on materials.

If he was able to figure out a better plan, then he might be able to get away with spending a lot less, but for now he needed to make sure he would not screw himself over by going overboard with obtaining shiny new enlightenment fruits.

### **Chapter 4465 Technophiles**

To be honest, Ves couldn't leave the Puelmer Mid-Level Transphasic Weapon Principles enlightenment fruit behind.

It was one of the most expensive enlightenment fruits hanging from the Tree of Possibilities. Its exaggeratingly high price initially deterred him a lot, but the more he thought about it, the more he appreciated its incredible value.

Although the description offered by the System was short, vague and far too open-ended to give Ves a precise idea on what it offered, he could make educated guesses.

Based on what he knew after studying the indigenous alien races of the Red Ocean, the puelmers stood as the greatest source of technological innovation in the local galactic community.

When the puelmer race burst into the scene, the scrappy and combative ball-like aliens quickly showed their worth by all of the adaptations they made after fighting against new and foreign opponents.

As preeminent technophiles, the puelmers learned quickly and constantly intensified their efforts to develop stronger and better technologies, especially when they came under pressure.

The puelmers had no qualms about reverse engineering and assimilating foreign technology. These uncultured, empathetic sentients did not attach any special subjective feelings to certain kinds of tech.

This was why the puelmers often maintained tense relationships with many other races. The orvens, the nunsers and so on all grew pissed whenever the tiny ball aliens stole proprietary tech and made it their own, all without ever asking permission!

Fortunately, as much as the puelmers excelled at learning and mastering existing technologies, they did possess one fundamental weakness that prevented them from progressing too far behind the rest of the Red Ocean.

"They're not creative enough." Ves chuckled.

Just like humanity, the puelmers initially rose into power by salvaging old products of technology and reverse engineering their principles.

It was easy to stand on the shoulders of giants, but it was a lot harder to become one of those giants!

Whereas humans utilized reverse engineering technology as a springboard for their own magnificent technological progression, the puelmers seemed to have stagnated all of a sudden!

"They're mostly plagiarists who are good at copying other people's homework but not as capable of doing their homework themselves. This is a sign of a distorted society."

There was much about the puelmer race and its society that looked distorted from his human perspective.

The ball-like aliens were apparently angry all of the time.

They easily became offended, especially when a member of a taller alien race commented on the diminutive stature of the puelmer race.



They were incapable of feeling love and affection.

They did not engage in recreation and never seemed to feel the need to have fun.

They did not care about art, music or any form of culture.

The puelmers were like organic machines in a sense. Most of them solely existed to reproduce and expand their numbers without ever contemplating any deeper philosophical thoughts.

"It's no surprise they find it difficult to engage in original research. Without passion and creativity, they don't have the drive and ingenuity to come up with their own innovations."

Ves found it perplexing that the puelmers managed to get off the ground in the first place. How could they have ever been wise and farsighted enough to rise so far when so many puelmers were as flawed as juvenile delinquents?

"There are plenty of theories on this matter."

The other members of the indigenous galactic community speculated that the puelmers were maybe similar to the orvens. Perhaps there was a secret caste of leader organisms that were pulling all of the strings, but so far there was no evidence of this kind.

To most of the local aliens, the puelmers were aggressive, touchy and annoying aliens who regularly flaunted their advanced and often stolen tech in front of others.

What was worse was that the puelmers never showed any remorse about stealing the technological fruits of other alien races!

Their only taboo was excessive biotechnology. They seemed to show a great aversion to augmentation, creating new species and other related activities.

This had to do with their fundamental beliefs that the puelmer race was perfect and not flawed in the slightest. To question this belief was to attack their self-esteem!

As flawed and stupid as these aliens appear to be, they had their good points.

The puelmer race's shameless and compulsive habit of stealing and assimilating many different alien technologies meant that their scientists and engineers had amassed enormous libraries worth of knowledge!

Not only did these libraries encapsulate their own research and development, but they also contained much of the technological fruits of other sentient alien races!

The puelmers had operated for many years. They stole the tech from almost every race and tinkered with the novelties until they extracted anything of value.

Weak, redundant or unreplicable technology had no place in their libraries. Only the most useful, powerful or practical aspects of alien technology was worth the effort for the puelmers to integrate in their own products.

"This modus operandi is starting to sound familiar."

It took a lot of minutes for Ves to figure out why he paid so much attention to this detail.

His eyes widened as his illusionary body froze.

"Wait. Isn't this similar to what the MTA is doing in human society?"

Just as how the puelmers unceremoniously stole the technological innovations developed by the other native alien races of the Red Ocean, the mechers persistently collected the technological innovations of mech designers and other researchers!

While the MTA mainly relied on voluntary transactions because of the need to keep fellow humans happy, it was undeniable that the mechers had a penchant for grabbing other people's tech.

Ves had personal experience in that. It was hard not to resist the MTA's gentle 'requests' with regards to sharing his most influential inventions such as the transcendence glow.

"The MTA should be better than the puelmers, though. The former might rip people off but the latter don't even bother with providing any remuneration!"

Another point in favor of the mechers was that they invested a lot in original research as well.

Competition from the CFA, the first-rate superstates and the alien races that were still lurking in the Milky Way constantly put a lot of pressure on the MTA.

The mechers could never rest and take it easy.

This was unlike the puelmers who largely stopped coming up with new technologies after they had reached the upper echelon of their native galaxy.

It was only after humans came out of nowhere and overwhelmed the Red Ocean with a plethora of foreign but superior tech that the puelmers were kicked into gear again!

"Hm, if past historical records are any indication, the puelmers will definitely become the Big Two's worst nightmare in the near future. Their ability to assimilate foreign tech is disturbingly effective."

Ves tabbed his armored finger against the chestplate of his Unending Regalia in thought.

He was able to bring his Unending Regalia into the System Space because he had used the Inventorize Ticket that he had obtained some time ago on his personal suit of combat armor.

He could have saved it up for another device. One of the candidates he had in mind was a compact space-faring shuttle that was just small enough to fall within the limits of the Inventorize Ticket.

The reason why he decided against it was because such a shuttle did not fit in every situation, especially when he was indoors.

In contrast, there were many situations where he could use his Unending Regalia.

That wasn't the whole story, though. The truth was that Ves mainly chose to Inventorize his Unending Regalia because it had been with him for numerous years.

The heavy use of Unending alloy had turned it into a living product that was exceptionally capable of storing and channeling his energies.

After several years of intermittent use, it had become an extraordinary relic that had undergone a subtle transformation process that was similar to the willpower baptism phenomenon of powerful mech pilots.

Perhaps the differences weren't too big at this time, but that would certainly change in a decade or a century later.

The Unending Regalia in its current form was not worthwhile for him to Inventorize, but the good thing about technological products was that they could constantly change!

As long as Ves continued to take care of his trusty suit of combat armor, his Unending Regalia would eventually become so powerful that he would thank himself for making it available to him at all times!

In any case, one of the quirks about the Inventorize ability was that he could 'physically' send it to the System Space where he could store it, wear it or even work on it with the help of the Workshop of Creation!

"How much can I upgrade my Unending Regalia once I have mastered puelmer technology?"

By a lot, he supposed. An enlightenment fruit that was worth 850 Ascension Points definitely encompassed a huge quantity of technological know-how!

Since the puelmer race was the Red Ocean's version of the MTA more or less, mastering a portion of puelmer technology essentially translated to understanding a small but incredibly powerful slice of the best of what the new frontier had to offer!

What Ves especially paid attention to was that most of the major alien races were almost just as technologically advanced as first-rate states!

Even though puelmer technology was still inferior to the best of human technology, it was still far more advanced than what he had mastered up to this point!

"I am primarily a second-class mech designer. The reason why I can't design first-class mech is because I haven't learned nearly enough variations of high technology to get started."

Ves would be able to get a lot closer to becoming a first-class mech designer as long as he ingested the Puelmer Mid-Level Transphasic Weapon Principles enlightenment fruit!

Even if alien tech was still a lot different from human technology, Ves was confident that he could fully convert all of the alien standards, principles and theories into human equivalents over time!

It was a lot easier for him to do this than to learn all of the different forms of high technology related to first-class weapons from scratch!

"That reminds me. This enlightenment fruit should also supplement my understanding of phasewater technology."

Transphasic weapon systems were intricately intertwined with phasewater. Aside from the phase whales, the puelmers probably possessed the greatest understanding of technology derived from this powerful exotic!

Ves could skip many decades of difficult learning as long as he redeemed this enlightenment fruit and absorbed all of the precious knowledge contained within.

His mind wouldn't even get overloaded as the System would ensure that he integrated the fruit as smoothly as possible.

His eyes grew sharper as he thought of the most important implication of absorbing this powerful fruit.

"If I learn everything that a typical puelmer mid-level weapons engineer is expected to master, then I can probably figure out a viable way to resolve the current crisis."

The puelmers knew much more about offensive technology and phasewater technology than him. They also managed to rise up and achieve parity against the mighty phase whale race.

It was not that big of a stretch to assume that the puelmer race managed to develop or most likely steal weapon designs that were particularly effective when employed against the phase whales!

"There is no way the puelmers have lasted this long without finding a way to restrain the phase whales from going too far! All I need is access to what they know so that I can design and make an effective weapon that can stop that unclean whale from teleporting us all into hostile territory!"

Ves felt tempted to exchange the fruit right away, but he constantly had to pull himself back for fear of going way past his budget.

If he spent 850 AP in one go, how could he have anything left to obtain vital resources and rent enough days in the Workshop of Creation to produce an effective weapon?

The fact of the matter was that he simply didn't have enough Ascension Points to obtain everything on his wish-list.

This frustrated him to no end. A compelling source of hope was dangling right in front of him, but he didn't dare to pluck this extravagant fruit for fear of running out of resources and time!

"Wait... if I don't have enough Ascension Points... is it possible for me to earn more, preferably during my current stay in the System Space?"

That... was an interesting idea.

#### **Chapter 4466 Getting Started In A New Field**

Ves currently had 1032 Ascension Points at his disposal.

This was a considerable sum of wealth. It was far from being able to buy everything that the System had to offer, but it still opened up a lot of attractive options.

He could acquire a lot of different enlightenment fruits and stuff his head with lots of useful knowledge if he wished.

He could spend much of it to acquire both ready made products and raw materials in the Divine Bazaar.

If he was feeling lucky, he could even splurge his AP at the Wishing Fountain!

It only took 5 Ascension Points for Ves to redeem a golden lottery ticket. If he bought a hundred of them at once, he would gain a lot of random prizes!

Ves had no doubt that the majority of those golden lottery tickets would return little of value, but even junk still had value in his eyes.

He could amass a large quantity of bulk materials which he could use as the basis of a large anti-phase whale weapon.

He could also gain much more from the golden lottery tickets as they occasionally produced a much better prize!

The only reason why Ves was reluctant to proceed with this course of action was because the results were way too random in his opinion.

He did not want to rely on games of chance to save his life from the wrath of a powerful unclean whale!

"Maybe Jovy is more comfortable with choosing this course of action, but I don't have his ability to manipulate the probabilities in my favor." Ves muttered under his breath.

He shook his head. He decisively ruled out this unreliable plan.

"The offerings of the Divine Bazaar and the Tree of Possibilities are a lot more expensive, but at least there is no ambiguity about what I can get for Ascension Points."

It was an interesting dichotomy.

The Wishing Fountain promised great rewards but at considerable risk.

The Divine Bazaar and the Tree of Possibilities offered much less value for money, but the risks were pretty much minimal.

If Ves didn't have an angry and hostile unclean whale looming over his head, he would have been more open to the idea of spending his AP like he was trying to have a good time in a casino!

As it was, Ves could never forgive himself if he blew his only shot of saving himself, his wife, his children, his clansmen and his closest allies from getting affected by a preventable disaster!



"If I go down this path, then I need to milk as much AP out of the Mission Hall as possible."

Since the Missions offered by the System at this time played a crucial role to his new but ambitious plan, he briskly walked back to the Mission Hall and studied all of his available options.

According to the rules, the Mission Hall was only capable of presenting 12 Missions at a time.

Ves had no idea how the System determined their parameters, but they were probably randomized in a way that partially took his current needs and capabilities into account.

While that was nice, there were plenty of reasons why he was less than pleased with this arrangement.

What grated Ves the most was that a large and stately structure like the Mission Hall did not bother to give him a wider selection of Missions!

"Come on, System! There is room for thousands of Missions in this place! Can't you give me a bit more leeway?!"

Naturally, the Mech Designer System did not deign to respond to his complaints.

Ves understood the logic of limiting the amount of Missions. It would have been far too easy for him to farm lots of Ascension Points by cherry picking the easiest and most practical Missions.

He figured that the System wanted to limit exactly what he was planning to do at this moment!

His hopes of exploiting its rules were dashed.

He concocted a wild scheme where he could exit the System Space as a completely new man!

This was because he could theoretically spend a decade, a century or even a millenia on upgrading himself inside the System Space as long as he had the Ascension Points to spare.

The best part about this was that the outside reality would still be frozen from his perspective.

This meant that he could get back to his actual life but at a much higher level than before!

Unfortunately, he would not be able to keep this up for long.

As far as he was aware, the Mission Hall only refreshed its available Missions after a lot of time had passed in reality.

This meant that he could not fool around in the System Space and wait for the Mission Hall to refresh its current selection with a fresh batch of Mission.

"I'll run out of ways to earn AP really soon once I have exhausted all of the viable Missions available in this round."

Ves did not hope for anything extravagant. He would be happy as long as he was able to earn at least 500 additional Ascension Points.

He figured that was enough for him to purchase the Puelmer Mid-Level Transphasic Weapon Principles enlightenment fruit while leaving enough of a buffer to buy enough time and resources to make effective use of what he had learned.

"Let's see what I can do here."

[Alien Relic Hunt]

Mission: Alien Relic Hunt

Difficulty: C-Rank

Description

The Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy is occupied by many alien races. Many of their relics and constructs hold considerable cultural and scientific value to the human race.

Retrieve 15 different items of alien origin from where they have been left by their former alien owners. These alien relics must be of significant value to humanity in order to qualify.

You will earn a higher valuation if you have obtained more items or sought out relics of greater value.

Reward: 40 Ascension Points

Time limit: 2 years.

Penalty for failure: Lower your Intelligence by 0.1.

The Alien Relic Hunt Mission sounded like an easy way to bag 40 Ascension Points.

Planets occupied by indigenous alien societies were everywhere in the Red Ocean. The problem was traveling to one that hadn't been taken care of by other human pioneers.

Still, Ves believed that it shouldn't be too difficult for him to seek out several existing or abandoned alien settlements and raid whatever junk the former occupants had left behind.

It was a pity that the only way for him to complete this Mission was to actually exit the System Space and proceed with his Trailblazer Expedition.

"That is not really helpful to me at this moment." Ves sardonically said to himself.

There were several other Missions that required him to spend a lot of time and effort in realspace, so that immediately made them irrelevant to his current situation.

He needed to accept Missions that he could complete entirely inside the System Space.

[Introduction to Biomech Design]

Mission: Introduction to Biomech Design

Difficulty: B-Rank

Description

A rounded and versatile mech designer must work beyond the familiar patterns of mechs. A mech designer that only possesses experience in designing conventional mechs can get stuck in narrow and incomplete paradigms, making it difficult to embrace new theories. Getting started on biomech design is a good way for certain mech designers to expand their horizons and increase their versatility.

Design one viable second-class biomech. The biomech design must be at least 95 percent organic in nature. The higher the performance parameters of the biomech, the more Ascension Points awarded for completing this mission.

Rewards: Up to 250 Ascension Points

Time limit: 1 Year

Penalty for failure: Lower your Intelligence by 0.1

"This is a good one." Ves muttered.

Introduction to Biomech Design only required him to deliver a design, not a real and functional product.

He did not have to spend hundreds of Ascension Points on acquiring lots of materials needed to grow a biomech.

Funnily enough, the Workshop of Creation happened to offer him a complete set of facilities that he could use to grow a biomech, but it was not necessary for him to bother with this particular feature.

"The only limiting factor to completing this Mission is that I don't actually know how to design a biomech from beginning to end."

Oh, he learned a couple of lessons over the years. His exposure to biomechs during his visit to the Life Research Association allowed him to learn a lot of general principles.

He knew the differences between conventional mechs and biomechs. He understood what parts of his knowledge he could apply to the latter, which was surprisingly much.

He also learned a lot of insights related to biomechs and bioconstructs by overseeing the development of the Titan-5 Project.

That wasn't enough, though.

His biggest shortcoming was that he lacked a systematic education on how biomechs worked and what he should pay attention to when designing them. All of the sciences involved were largely related to biology, an incredibly broad field that was far too foreign to many conventional mech designers!

Ves recalled that there were numerous enlightenment fruits available that offered him the expertise he needed to complete this potentially lucrative Mission.

They might not be ideal, but at least they provided him a pathway towards success!

"If I want to complete this Mission and earn a high evaluation, then I need to become proficient in biomech design." Ves determined. "Failing that, I need to acquire a systematic foundation in any field of biotechnology. It doesn't really

matter what specialty I acquire as long as it provides a base for me to combine biotechnology with mechs."

Ves did not rush to accept this Mission on the spot. Instead, he turned around and left the Mission Hall.

He rushed back to the enormous Tree of Possibilities and studied the enlightenment fruits related to biotechnology.

Unfortunately for him, the big tree did not offer any enlightenment fruit that could directly instill the essence of human biomechs into his head!

"I can only take refuge in tangentially related fruits."

With hundreds of available fruits, there were bound to be a few that could get him started in biotechnology!

[Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual]

Price: 30 Ascension Points

Imparts a complete manual on how to develop, grow and care for special oak trees according to the methods of the Blood Cult. Scarlet Oak Trees can produce blood of different species with remarkable properties depending on their bioprogramming and the nutrients they absorb when in use.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 1.3 or higher. Spirituality must be 1.5 or higher.

"Well, it's easy to guess who developed these oak trees in the first place."

Problematic origin aside, knowledge was still knowledge. The science on how to cultivate these so-called Scarlet Oak Trees not only encompassed plant life, but also animal life considering they were meant to produce different kinds of blood.

This gave Ves the confidence that this affordable enlightenment fruit would provide him with enough of a foundation on biotechnology as well as provide a little extra expertise on trees.

"That stuff about trees isn't very relevant to me at this moment, but I can definitely make good use of it once the crisis has passed."

Ves and the T Institute experienced a lot of setbacks in the years they worked on the Spirit Fruit Project.

The spirit trees that he envisioned as a way to empower a large number of people did not grow the fruits that he wanted.

It was clear that he and the Aduc bioresearchers were missing several crucial steps.

Previously, Ves thought that the only way to fill in the blanks was to spend a lot of time on trial and error.

If he was able to obtain a part of what the Five Scrolls Compact knew about special trees, he was confident that he could achieve a breakthrough in the Spirit Tree Project and finally attain a practical result!

"In that sense, 30 AP is a fantastic deal!"

Still, was it enough for him to be able to design a biomech?

#### **Chapter 4467 Biotechnological Relations**

There were several pros and cons to ingesting the Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual fruit.

The advantage was that it was cheap. It promised to provide Ves with a lot of theories and understanding for just 30 Ascension Points.

The subject was also relevant to Ves, though not in relation to the current crisis.

As long as he learned the ins and outs of the Five Scrolls Compact's version of a blood synthesizing machine, he bet that he could apply his newfound expertise on developing effective trees whose fruits could turn any human into an extraordinary individual!

However, the downsides were also serious.

One of his most serious concerns was that the cheap enlightenment fruit offered more advanced knowledge without including any of the basics!

It was the basics of biotechnology that Ves needed the most in order to get started on biomech design!

Ves was much more confident that the expensive Puelmer Mid-Level Transphasic Weapon Principles fruit would provide him with a systematic foundation from beginning to end. The description suggested as much.

The second issue was that Ves might not even be able to apply most of what he learned.

The mission he had in mind requested a biomech design, not a tree design!

If the Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual ended up filling his mind with little else than science related to trees and plant cells, then he could probably do little but design a biomech in the form of a living tree!

Ves winced at the picture produced by his imagination. It might be sturdy in a sense, but its abysmal mobility and reaction speed would definitely result in a low evaluation!

He needed to design a powerful biomech in order to earn a high enough score. Presenting a biomech design with fatal flaws certainly wouldn't impress the Mech Designer System!

"Well, it might not be as big of a deal as I thought. As long as I learn enough knowledge to call myself a biotech researcher, if only barely, I can quickly get



started on biomechs by quickly studying the essential theories that go into the specifics of their design."

The jump from a conventional mech designer to a biomech designer was too big.

The jump from a biotech researcher to a biomech designer was not as intimidating!

Biomech design was often treated as a specialized branch of biotechnology to begin with. If he developed a good foundation in the latter, it should only take him a short time to understand the quirks that made organic mechs possible.

Since Ves was already highly competent in designing conventional mechs, he did not have to learn the necessities related to mechs in general. He already had that covered.

Although it was still necessary for him to study the essential theories related to biomechs, Ves did not have to worry about lacking the necessary learning resources.

"Even if there isn't any useful enlightenment fruit available, I can still draw on the database that I have integrated in my Unending Regalia."

When Ves developed the Unending Regalia, he had made sure to stuff it with lots of information in case he lost access to the galactic net.

He had even upgraded the memory banks of his combat armor over time, allowing him to store all kinds of relevant books and articles!

He not only included a comprehensive encyclopedia about everything, but also made sure to put in all of the textbooks and academic literature that was relevant to his profession!

Ves waved his hand and projected an interface that allowed him to explore the comprehensive library that he had put inside his Unending Regalia.

"I never thought I would be grateful to myself for stuffing all of the textbooks related to biomechs in my combat armor."

He had access to an extensive selection of textbooks. Many of them originated from the Friday Coalition, the Hexadric Hegemony and the Life Research Association.

Although the collection was hardly complete enough for his liking, they at least covered all of the basics as well as a decent selection of more advanced topics.

Learning all of it through self-study from scratch would definitely take years despite his current capabilities.

"I can't afford to waste hundreds of Ascension Points on this."

He needed to make sure that the enlightenment fruit that he was willing to absorb would give him the foundation he needed.

"Maybe this is not the best option for me at the moment."

He needed to address his immediate priorities rather than his long-term aspirations. All of his hopes about developing effective spirit trees and spirit fruits could wait for later.

Ves shifted his attention to an alternative that might have what he needed.

[Yarman Basic Organic Starhome Design Principles]

Price: 50 Ascension Points

Imparts a comprehensive set of essential theories and design principles related to design of the extinct yarman race's organic starhomes at the level of a junior ship designer. The yarmans were native to the Red Ocean but lost their home planet over the course of their history. They have become a nomadic species that have taken to living inside enormous, multi-functional bioships that the yarmans treat as mobile homes rather than ships. Yarman

organic starhomes are not equipped with warp drives and can only traverse interstellar space at sub-light speeds.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 2.0 or higher.

This was a much bigger package. Even if the fruit only offered him knowledge that a relatively low-ranking shipwright was able to learn, that still provided him with a huge variety of expertise related to biotechnology!

The bioengineering of enormous organic starships likely touched upon a broad range of knowledge, with a high assurance of including all of the basics that Ves sought!

If Ves was able to design one of these so-called starhomes, then he should definitely be able to design a small and simple biomech!

There were a few problematic elements, though.

"The biggest issue is that I have no idea how easily I can combine all of this alien tech with human biomechs."

Reconciling yarman tech with human tech might be a lot more troublesome than he hoped. If that was the case, he would have to waste a lot of time and by extension Ascension Points on getting ready to design actual biomechs!

"Well, who says I need to go through all of that effort?" Ves suddenly thought.

"Why can't I stick to alien tech as a base and go from there? A biomech is a biomech no matter its underlying design principles. I just need to make sure its performance is good enough."

Ves had another concern. From what he could tell from the description, the yarman race did not come across as a powerful or advanced alien race.

The fact that they managed to become a space-faring race only to traverse the void in organic versions of generation ships sounded archaic to Ves!

These yarmans obviously hadn't come into contact with the greater community of the Red Ocean. They would have been able to equip their bioships with serviceable warp drives if that was the case.

The knowledge imparted by the Yarman Basic Organic Starhome Design Principles fruit may not be sophisticated enough for his purposes.

"Damn, this is far from a perfect solution."

Ves believed that the System valued it correctly at 50 Ascension Points, but he was afraid that much of it was based on a lot of irrelevant nonsense about outdated organic ship systems that had no place in a biomech.

"What about the next one, then?"

[Nunser Basic Infantry Bioaugmentation Collection]

Price: 75 Ascension Points

Imparts a collection of comprehensive theories, methods and manuals related to the augmentation of able-bodied nunser individuals. The nunsers have a long tradition of infantry combat and have developed a great interest in strengthening their own bodies. The collection encompasses a broad set of augmentation plans at the basic infantry level.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 1.8 or higher.

This sounded a lot more promising. It was the closest to biomech design among the enlightenment fruits he could find.

Compared to the previous two fruits, this one was a lot more expensive. Ves found it difficult to imagine that he would be able to earn a significant profit if he used this as his starter.

"I not only have to spend 75 Ascension Points up front, but also a lot of AP on buying additional time. I not only need to adapt what I have learned, but I also have to design the damn biomech."

If he spent more than 75 days on this endeavor, then he would essentially give up on earning any profit.

He might even end up with less Ascension Points in his reserves than he started with! That was not exactly ideal even if he had become a qualified biomech designer in the process.

However, out of all of the options, Ves was the most hopeful about this fruit. It directly concerned the application of biotechnology in combat!

Not only that, but any knowledge related to the nunsers race was bound to be sophisticated even if the tech mainly dealt with alien grunts.

From what Ves knew about the nunsers, the herbivorous aliens were anything but peaceful and fuzzy.

They possessed weird behavior quirks due to being a part of a highly communal race.

If the Larkinsons already valued family to a high degree, then the nunsers went absolutely nuts about protecting their own kind!

However, just because the nunsers intensely protected their own people against foreign alien races didn't mean that they all lived in harmony.

The nunsers engaged in a lot of duels and ritual fighting. They mostly fought about mating rings, status or the plain old motive of asserting dominance.

Whatever the case, the nunsers weren't shy about upgrading their formidable buddies so that they could stand a better chance at defeating their opponent in the dueling arena or the battlefield.

In any case, seeing how passionate the nunsers were about fighting with their augmented bodies, this enlightenment fruit definitely had to be good!

It didn't matter if the nuser biotech augmentations weren't designed with biomechs in mind. He merely had to scale up his work and make sure to learn whatever else he needed to design a viable biomech.

Ves only worried that he was at risk of putting all of this effort without earning much in return.

"The price is a bit too high. I can't really justify this purchase no matter how much I want to know how the nusers get so jacked."

That left him with two viable choices.

After a moment, he signed and decided to take a gamble despite vowing not to do so earlier.

"My goal is to earn a handsome profit." Ves reiterated to himself. "30 Ascension Points for the Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual fruit is probably a bargain. It's human tech for the most part so I won't have to pay too much rent to adapt the knowledge. I only need to spend a relatively short amount of time on learning biomech-specific details before I can quickly devote myself to designing a biomech."

He wanted it to be as good as possible, but that probably wouldn't be possible due to his shallow foundation.

If he had to rush his work while he was at it, then the resulting end product would hardly be good!

"I should just treat this as a design contest if that's the case. "

It had been a while since he had last designed a competition mech. He needed to focus solely on maximizing performance and could not afford to think too much about optimization, bug fixing and other faults.

"Can I design a biomech in 30 days if I assimilate Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual?"

That sounded like a horrible rush job, but Ves didn't have much of a choice. It should still be possible for him to design a serviceable biomech within a month, but he would have to take special measures in order to maximize his productivity.

"Am I going to do this?"

If he played his cards right, he might end up with 150 more Ascension Points than before!

### **Chapter 4468 Ves The Biotech Researcher**

After considering the three biotech-related enlightenment fruits, Ves eventually chose to take a risk.

"The Mission is about designing a good biomech in my first attempt. From the way it is set up, I can earn more AP if I deliver a better product, but it will be difficult for me to gain a high evaluation for my very first try. If I can only get a passing grade at best, then I should make sure I don't commit too many Ascension Points to this venture. It's not worthwhile to go through all of this effort only to net a dozen AP in the end."

Ves had to remind himself that the calm and tranquility of the System Space was but a false illusion.

A Sword of Damocles that was already in motion awaited him back in reality.

As soon as he exited this illusionary space, he would immediately have to bring out a solution that could stop the falling sword from chopping through his neck!

"I can't allow myself to forget about the gravity of the situation back in reality. Earning more AP doesn't necessarily guarantee a way out for me, but having more spending power at my disposal will definitely raise my chances of success."

1000 Ascension Points wasn't enough for him to gain confidence in a solution. He would feel a lot better about his situation if he had at least 1500 Ascension Points at his disposal, but it would be even better if he could accumulate 2000 Ascension Points.

"Let's start small and see how I should go from here." Ves decided.

Just before he bought the enlightenment fruit, he hesitated for a moment.

He did not forget about his earlier resolve to maintain his distance from biotechnology.

A part of him thought that branching out into biomechs would enrich his work all that much. He was already doing more than fine with conventional mechs. Messing too much with organic mechs might distort his design philosophy if he became too obsessed with this latest distraction.

Another part of him was afraid of what he might create. His work always produced weird interactions with organic constructs. Ves only had to look at the Titan-5 Project to see that making biomechs alive might not always be the best idea!

Although his conventional living mechs were able to gain a certain degree of autonomy over their own mechanical frames, they were much more limited in the end.

Conventional mechs were deliberately designed to function with human controllers at their core.

It took a considerable amount of changes to convert them into autonomous battle bots.

The same couldn't be said for biomechs. From what he understood, they were designed and grown into complete organic life forms. They even possessed their own 'brains' because the biomachine simply couldn't function without an



organic control interface that precisely regulated all of the complicated biological processes.

There was no other way to sustain and control such a complicated living system!

From his work with the Titan-5 Project, Ves found out that even if everyone tried their best to limit and neuter its autonomy and control, the living personality would find a way to twist the biology and gain control somehow!

"If the side effects of an organic mounted wargear loadout are already this bad, how much worse will it be if I design an actual living biomech?"

The possible outcomes were so terrifying that even his intuition felt the need to give him a warning!

He needed to be exceedingly careful about what kind of biomech he brought to life in the future!

Ves eventually shook his head. "This shouldn't be a reason for me to reject this course of action."

He acknowledged the dangers, but contextualized it as a discipline problem. He already had a good idea on why the Titan-5 Project's living personality turned into such a feral monster.

"I can learn from my mistakes."

As long as he clamped down on his impulses and strictly limited his work to basic and proven implementations, his biomechs shouldn't turn into monsters like his Titan-5 Project.

He no longer hesitated and plucked his chosen enlightenment fruit.

[Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual]

Price: 30 Ascension Points

Imparts a complete manual on how to develop, grow and care for special oak trees according to the methods of the Blood Cult. Scarlet Oak Trees can produce blood of different species with remarkable properties depending on their bioprogramming and the nutrients they absorb when in use.

Requirements: Intelligence must be 1.3 or higher. Spirituality must be 1.5 or higher.

In the end, he went for the most cost-effective choice. The Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual enlightenment fruit was too much of a bargain in his eyes.

It offered both short-term and long-term benefits. Though the enlightenment fruit undoubtedly had ties to the dreaded Five Scrolls Compact, at least it was still based on human knowledge.

The other two enlightenment fruits brought their own benefits, but Ves was afraid that he would need to spend too much time and effort on reconciling alien and human technology.

"Let's hope this enlightenment fruit doesn't go too deep into whacky mysticism."

Ves ate the fruit in an instant after sitting down at a nearby bench.

As usual, the bites soon dissolved into energy and began to rush towards his brain as if it was a powerful stimulant!

Ves closed his eyes and did his best to absorb the influx of knowledge.

It was easier than last time. The quantity of knowledge was not as great as the previous two fruits he had eaten, but it was not barebones either.

A part of him was disappointed that he didn't gain too much this time, but the lack of pressure made it easier for him to digest all of the knowledge that he had gained.

A modest smile appeared on his face.

"I was right!"

The enlightenment fruit not only taught him more about the so-called Scarlet Oak Trees than he ever wanted, but also provided him a 'starter pack' of some sorts of the more basic branches of biotechnology!

The latter served as a basic foundation for anyone with no systematic background in biotechnology to understand the science of Scarlet Oak Trees.

If an individual who was already proficient in biotechnology ingested this enlightenment fruit, then the starter pack would only serve as a quick refresher course.

Director Ranya Wodin who specialized in the study and application of exoplants would not gain much out of it, but Ves was completely different!

Ves quickly tried to parse and organize the basic and advanced understanding that he had gained from the enlightenment fruit.

"I can call myself a biotech expert now. I only need to undergo an examination before I can get an official certificate from a relevant trade association."

Of course, no one would take him seriously unless he obtained a credible diploma from a university.

It would be easy enough for Ves to 'attend' a virtual university that was nothing more than a diploma mill in practice. After a semester or two, he could complete his exams and obtain a brand-new diploma that would make it a little more believable that he could work with flesh as well as metal.

Ves had no intentions of doing so, though. It was a pointless endeavor and his existing reputation should already be good enough to prevent people from doubting his biomechs.

He was much more interested in understanding his new capabilities. He took a few more minutes to make sense of what he had gained.

First, he obtained a basic but solid entry into biotechnology. It was the equivalent of studying four years at a decent biotech university.

"It's nothing impressive, but the wealth of systematic understanding has given me a good understanding of this broad field."

The System would probably classify his newfound Biotechnology Skill at the level of a Novice.

This did not sound that impressive, but it was a proper start that was far more preferable to spending a year or two on self-study in a completely different branch of science!

Second, he also gained a bit more specialized knowledge related to plant life.

"I never imagined that I would become familiar with dendrology."

He did not become an expert in this field, but he at least learned all of the essentials needed to understand what made Scarlet Oak Trees special compared to other tree organisms.

Third, Ves even got started on genetics and genetic modification!

Again, what he learned was nothing impressive. It was enough for him to apply for a job as a junior lab assistant at a genetics company.

He mainly needed this knowledge in order to enable him to develop new Scarlet Oak Trees that produced different kinds of blood.

Ves understood now that Scarlet Oak Trees weren't purely made out of plant cells. They incorporated the genes of other organic life forms such as humans and aliens. How else would the trees be able to produce the right type of blood?

When Ves tried to figure out why the Blood Cult bothered with these trees in the first place, he obtained several clear answers.

His expression grew weird as his own understanding of life allowed him to poke through the superstition.

If anyone wanted to, they could cultivate artificial blood by relying on proven machines that were readily available on the market.

However, these machines that were capable of mass-producing blood of many different species known to humanity possessed a major shortcoming that rendered their output useless.

"The blood produced by these cold machines doesn't contain any life."

As one of the most essential fluids for many organic life forms, they acquired additional properties when flowing through actual bodies.

The more remarkable the life form, the more remarkable the blood!

The blood of an average human possessed decent value, but the blood of a more remarkable individual such as Ves or an expert pilot possessed much more latent power!

Ves couldn't imagine what more the right people could do with the blood of an ace pilot!

"Let alone human blood, alien blood is also useful!"

Extremely powerful alien organisms such as phase whales were truly filled with treasures!

Ves couldn't imagine what a knowledgeable organization like this Blood Cult could do if it managed to obtain the lifeblood of a powerful phase whale!

Even Ves started to come up with ideas on how he could make practical use of this surprisingly valuable resource!

"Those blood rituals that I used to scoff at weren't so useless after all. There is real value in dripping blood onto a newly forged sword or a recently fabricated mech!"

Lifeblood could serve as an excellent carrier of spirituality, especially after undergoing a bit of processing.

The Blood Cult might not be good at everything, but if there was one area this group was good at, it was the study and application of blood!

In particular, the Blood Cult was obsessed with tapping the extraordinary potential of blood!

Its demand for blood was extremely high, but there was a huge problem concerning supply.

Scarlet Oak Trees were just one of the many sources of blood for the cult.

The blood produced by these trees were considered inferior compared to the blood spilled from real individuals, but the advantages were plenty.

Fully mature trees were able to produce blood at an industrial scale as long as they were fed with enough nutrients.

They were robust and did not die after getting drained.

They were easy to grow and maintain.

Scarlet Oak Trees became the preferred source of mass-produced blood!

Ves grew incredibly intrigued at what these trees could add to his clan.

The knowledge he gained and the possibilities they opened up had given him a possible inkling on how he could achieve a breakthrough on his stalled Spirit Fruit Project!

"I never knew that blood was so versatile!"

The forbidden knowledge in his mind had opened his eyes to the potential of blood as a resource.

"Some types of blood can even rival phasewater in terms of value!"

When the knowledge of the Blood Cult merged with his existing knowledge base, he became captivated by so many new ideas.

"There might be a way to produce a man-made P-stone."

"There might be a way to form a blood bond between a mech and its pilot."

"I may be able to enhance the properties of a totem by combining it with blood."

"I can even figure out a way to accelerate my growth by absorbing the energy contained in the blood of powerful life forms!"

#### **Chapter 4469 The Beauty Of Biomechs**

Ves became completely entranced by the knowledge granted by a single enlightenment fruit.

In his opinion, its value to him far exceeded the worth of 30 Ascension Points!

"I was wrong. This isn't a bargain. This is a jackpot!"

Just like how a glass of water was much more valuable to a man dying of thirst, the knowledge related to the cultivation of Scarlet Oak Trees proved to be exceptionally useful to Ves!

There was hardly anyone like Ves who was both a mech designer and a spiritual engineer. His exotic specialties enabled him to augment his mechs with increasingly more powerful spiritual properties.

Right now, the discoveries he made about blood could spark a potential revolution in his work!

All of the new possibilities that came to mind could fill a lot of gaps in his existing endeavors!

Ves had come up with so many ideas and projects over the years. Their promise was great, but many times he got stuck after lacking a means to proceed.

All of that might be over now that he understood the potential of lifeblood!

Many times, Ves made a comparison between blood and phasewater.

Just like how phasewater could augment many forms of technology, blood could play a similar role!

Of course, the applications were entirely different. Blood wasn't capable of enabling warp travel or allowing attacks to penetrate through obstacles.

Blood could provide different forms of enhancements. Ves gained a massive boost in his spiritual engineering capabilities even though the enlightenment fruit did not provide him with any concrete designs or methods.

Ves smirked. "It doesn't matter. As long as I understand the principles, I can build my own applications of blood!"

He actually preferred it this way. The Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual enlightenment fruit was just right for him. It taught the bare essentials concerning blood but did not put him on a predisposed path towards its applications.

Ves only had a vague idea of how the Blood Cult made use of all of the blood produced by their Scarlet Oak Trees. There was no need for him to look in this direction any further.

"I can forge my own path." He said as he confidently raised his fist.

He spent several more hours on organizing what he learned and what he managed to come up with after connecting a lot of dots in his mind.



It would take days if not weeks for him to process all of the new insights and ideas that his active imagination constantly produced, but he couldn't afford to waste so much time at the moment.

"I still need to design a biomech."

When Ves shifted his attention to this topic, he became a lot more confident in his ability to design a biomech.

Sure, he was still missing a lot of theoretical understanding, but the gaps weren't as overwhelming as before!

Even a Novice-level understanding of biotechnology was already enough for him to understand how biomechs worked for the most part!

He just needed to hit the books and quickly learn how to design specialized organic components such as a bioreactor, natural musculature and a highly robust nervous system.

The quantity of subjects he needed to learn was still great, but Ves could easily understand the learning material with the help of his new foundation in biotechnology.

He called up all of the textbooks related to biomech design that he had stored inside the memory banks of the Unending Regalia.

Ves could tell that the textbooks published by the Life Research Association were definitely better than the competition.

"The starting point is higher, but the content is also better!"

He made a selection of basic books and skimmed through all of their contents.

If he wasn't in a hurry, then he would ideally like to take half a year to slowly digest the books over time. There were many nuances to biomechs and he would only be scratching the surface if he studied a bunch of university-level textbooks.

However, Ves couldn't afford to take it slow. Each day inside the System Space was worth 1 Ascension Point, and before he knew it he could blow through 100 AP after getting too absorbed in his studies!

"Let's see. I already spent 30 AP. If I try to compress my study period to 30 days, then that means I am only 60 AP down from the start."

A period of 30 days was extremely tight, but Ves was not an average mech design student anymore.

He not only benefited from a lot of physical and spiritual augmentations, but also became a highly competent Journeyman who derived a lot of assistance from his developing design seed.

"I can definitely do it as long as I don't get distracted by other pursuits during this time!"

After that, he needed to proceed with designing his very first biomech.

This was bound to be a difficult and bumpy ride, and he truly wished he could spend an entire year on this project in order to make it right.

Sadly, Ves had little choice but to prioritize speed over quality. He tried to estimate how much time he would need to design a biomech that could at least earn a passing grade from the System.

"Hmmm... 30 days is cutting it... but 40 days might end up eating into my profit."

The Introduction to Biomech Design Mission promised to award up to 250 Ascension Points, but it was a delusion for him to think his first foray into this field would earn the maximum possible grade.

It was much more reasonable for him to score well enough to earn between 100 and 200 Ascension Points.

This meant that he should expect to earn a profit of 50 Ascension Points, which was hardly an impressive sum.

"Well, it's worth it even if I don't bother with any other missions." Ves consoled himself. "50 Ascension Points is 50 days of additional design time. I can put in much more work into a solution to the problem that I need to address back in reality."

This alone made this foray into biomechs worthwhile.

In fact, Ves was even willing to suffer a loss in exchange for all of the knowledge he obtained about biotechnology, Scarlet Oak Trees and the spiritual properties of blood!

He might be able to prevent the unclean whale from pulling off a mass displacement technique based on what he learned!

"All in good time. Let's start with designing a biomech first."

One of his current problems was that he had just added an entirely new branch of technology in his knowledge base, but did not put any of it in practice.

This caused him to have a poor estimation of what he could and could not do with his newly gained expertise.

"The only way to solve this is to get to work."

Ves mulled over the concept of his very first proper biomech design as he stepped away from the Tree of Possibilities.

He proceeded to settle down and spend 30 days on learning lots of essential biomech-related subjects.

His shallow foundation in biotechnology and his much deeper foundation in conventional mech design made it a lot easier than if he started from scratch.

In fact, he was surprised at how quickly he was able to understand the more complicated biomech theories!

His study speed became faster as he went through all of the easier textbooks at a frightening rate.

The more he learned about biomechs, the more he understood all of the organic machines that he had come across in the past.

Not only that, but he also gained a much greater comprehension of strange and unique bioconstructs such as the Uranus and the Titan-5 Project!

Both of them turned into horrible monsters that could only be suppressed with violence, yet both of them were also marvels of bioengineering.

Ves could see the beauty in those works now that he understood so much of their underlying elements and design.

He felt so ashamed of his prior ignorance towards these beautiful organic machines.

To treat them as disgusting monstrosities was a great disservice to their power, beauty and unique advantages!

"I was a fool to reject them out of a misplaced sense of disgust!"

Biomechs weren't so scary to him anymore now that he had become a qualified biotech researcher.

Flesh and bone were merely a different variety of materials than the alloys and composites that he was used to working with. Organic materials were even superior to conventional materials in many ways!

For a moment, Ves dreamed of applying his newfound expertise on all of his existing mech designs.

He could add something to pretty much every product.

"I can replace the arms of the Ferocious Piranha with organic limbs that could allow the mech to exert more force with its attacks."

"I can replace the flight system of the Stingripper with an organic version that is even lighter and faster."

"I can even design a suite of organic weapons for the Everchanger that should synergize well with Venerable Joshua's domain!"

While it was not necessary to convert all of his existing mechs into full biomechs, he felt it was incredibly worthwhile to selectively replace underperforming parts with better ones that were organic in nature.

The resulting cyborg mechs would not only be stronger, but also more unique and intrinsic to the Larkinson Clan!

Ves felt that it was especially attractive to apply this treatment to the Larkinson-exclusive mech models.

"The main problem with cyborg mechs is that it is too difficult for ordinary mech forces to repair and service mechs that are both mechanical and biological in nature."

The Larkinson Clan did not have that problem. Its strength lay in the design and production of conventional mechs, but it also had a strong biotechnology arm!

All of the money and resources that Ves had poured into the Larkinson Biotech Institute finally came in handy. It had the personnel and infrastructure to support a sizable cyborg mech and biomech force!

On top of upgrading his existing mech lines with biological enhancements, Ves could also enrich his clan by raising a new biomech legion!

He always wanted to expand his Larkinson Army with a unit that embraced biomechs, but this was the first time that he felt that he was ready to take concrete action.

"I have so many new ideas for biomechs that I don't even know where to begin!"

The days he spent on studying biomechs were not tedious to him at all. He became fully engaged in the subject matter and continually entertained himself by coming up with radical new biomech concepts.

He couldn't wait to bring the best of them to life!

As his love, passion and hunger for biomechs continued to grow with each passing day, he finally put down his last virtual textbook after 30 straight days.

"Damn, I can't take it any longer! I want to design a biomech! I want to realize my latest dream!"

He no longer delayed any longer. He recalled his original plan and figured out what he had to do next.

First, he raced towards the Mission Hall to accept the Introduction to Biomech Design Mission.

He hadn't accepted it earlier because there was no sense in eating away at the deadline while he had already committed to studying biomechs for 30 days.

"Thank you, System!"

With that set, he moved to the Workshop of Creation and sat down behind a sophisticated design interface.

The familiar tools and functions greeted him like a familiar friend. Ves had spent years on making his mech designs come to life with the help of this kind of interface.

The software may be different, but the general layout and the design tools were the same across the board.

Every mech designer was familiar with this design interface. Everyone had mastered its uses. The mere sight of it was an open invitation to design a brand new mech.

Ves shakily lifted his armored hand and tapped a projected button that he had never touched before.

The projected design interface changed.

Certain elements remained the same, but there were many changes and additions that were unfamiliar to most mech designers!

This was because Ves had switched the design interface over to 'biomech mode' or whatever it was called!

Ves examined and familiarized himself with the substantially different interface.

For the first time in years, he no longer felt as if he was a seasoned and accomplished mech designer.

The strange design interface gave him the illusion that he was a recent graduate who was just making his first steps into the mech industry.

His lips curled into an excited grin.

"Everything is new to me again. How exciting!"

#### **Chapter 4470 First Original Biomech Concept**

Ves had already checked his Status to see all of the new Skills and Sub-Skills he had gained as of late.

Ingesting the latest enlightenment fruit and spending 30 days on studying biomech-related subjects had given him a lot of new understanding that was recognized by the System.

[Biotechnology]: Novice - [Biomechs I] - [Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Cultivation III] - [Dendrology I] - [Genetics] - [Genetic Modification I]

Ves was proud and happy to see this entry. It represented the initial mastery of a completely new branch of science and technology.

[Spiritual Blood Theory I]

Aside from that, he also gained a new Sub-Skill related to Metaphysics. It not only encompassed the sparse theories he learned from the enlightenment fruit, but also contained all of the additional insights he had deduced based on his existing expertise as a spiritual engineer.

Though Ves was rather upset to see that the System still had a low evaluation of the depth of his understanding of all of these new fields, they were just enough for him to proceed with the next phase of his plan.

"Let's move onto the biomech that I want to design."

He wasn't short of ideas. He spent an entire month inside the System Space at this time. Though he pushed himself to constantly focus on his studies, he couldn't help but let his mind wander at times.

Every interesting subject he learned about prompted him to imagine how it would fit in a biomech.

Sometimes, he imagined a knight biomech.

Other times, he visualized a rifleman biomech.

He even wandered into more advanced types such as tiger biomechs and hybrid biomechs.

Compared to conventional mechs, the biomechs he envisioned were scrappier, more flexible, more autonomous and much easier to maintain.



They also synergized well with his design philosophy. It became a lot easier for his living mechs to experience the same sort of stimuli as their human partners.

Though Ves couldn't wait to explore all of these new ideas, they were far too advanced to be considered a good choice for his initial biomech.

It was far too likely for him to screw up and produce a mech design that failed to live up to its potential.

"I need to stick to a simpler design." Ves reminded himself. "Less variables equates to less stuff that can go wrong."

That meant he needed to set aside his current favorites such as an organic tiger mech or an organic hybrid mech that was embedded with luminar crystals.

His default choice when he wanted to design a simple mech was a defensive mech.

A simple organic knight mech had few moving parts and possessed very generous tolerances.

Even if Ves ended up with a sloppy design because of a combination of lack of time and lack of experience, a knight biomech could still be trusted to perform up to standard due to its inherent robustness and lack of complicated movements.

"It's a decent choice all-considered. The only problem is that it will be hard to earn a higher evaluation unless I add a powerful gimmick to the design. That should be easy enough if cost and material availability is not a problem."

One of the quirks about his latest System Mission was that it imposed no obvious restrictions on the cost or the material usage of the design!

If Ves wanted to, he could make use of lots of Unending alloy or Black Demon Steel without any limit because a design was just imaginary in the end!

Unfortunately for him, Ves did not have access to any organic tissue formulas that converted those alloys into powerful organic materials.

The biomech had to be at least 95 percent organic, so Ves couldn't cheat by covering up his work with a strong alloy shell or anything.

"What about phasewater? Since there is no restriction regarding its use, I might as well go wild!"

He wanted to make his mech transphasic by incorporating phasewater into its systems, but he soon hit a wall.

The biggest problem was that he did not have a clue where to begin!

Without access to outside consultants and specialized development companies, there was no viable way for him to incorporate transphasic biocomponents into his designs.

Inventing them himself would take way too much time and he doubted he possessed the expertise to succeed.

He needed to tone down his ambitions and focus on designing a more basic biomech that didn't incorporate any advanced materials.

He couldn't even make use of the powerful exobeast flesh that the Larkinson Clan had studied and made use of. Ves stored many of the files related to the Titan-5 Project in the Unending Regalia's memory banks, but he was not confident in his ability to adapt the Titania's harvested biomatter into a working biomech.

He needed to make many changes and alterations to the astral beast flesh in order to have them function in different capacities. That required a lot more

expertise in biotechnology and specialized understanding in astral beast biology for him to produce any usable results.

"No, I can't do anything fancy with the materials. I need to stick to simpler organic tissue that is boring but easy to mold into different forms."

Ves at least had access to a decent selection of older formulas through different sources. They weren't capable of giving a biomech a powerful performance boost, but they were cheap and extensively documented.

Seeing that he was limited by the materials that he could make use of, it appeared that he had little choice but to go for an affordable and cost-effective biomech design.

Would that hurt his chances of earning a higher score?

"Probably, but I don't have much choice. I just hope that the System also takes cost into account when it makes its evaluation."

This should probably be the case or else it would have been too easy to complete Missions like his current one by acting as if he had an unlimited budget.

Designing mechs without any regard for cost was antithetical to good mech design. The goal of a mech designer had always been to achieve the greatest results at the lowest possible cost.

That put him in a bit of a problem. It was difficult for him to come up with methods to increase the performance of a mech that was based on budget materials.

He needed to get a little creative and reach a little deeper in his bag of ideas than he liked.

He came up with two possible approaches to his Mission.

The simplest solution that would probably guarantee at least a moderately high score was to rip off his existing work.

If he could take the best elements of his existing mech designs and adapt them into a coherent biomech, he could probably get a good evaluation because he was making use of a proven formula!

"For example, I can design a knight biomech that possesses the same glow as the Ferocious Piranha. I can turn it into a fear knight that is extremely difficult to defeat up close because its glow interferes with the performance of enemy mech pilots."

He could also add other existing features to the biomech design such as an organic adaptation of the Battle Skirt System that made the Maiden of Adversity so effective in combat.

"Well, maybe not. Developing an organic version of the Battle Skirt System takes way too much time and effort."

In any case, there was no explicit reason why he should put a lot of effort into designing a new and original mech. As long as his mech performed well enough, it was not a big deal if there was hardly anything original about its concept and configuration.

However, there was a part of Ves that rejected this easy approach.

A true mech designer would not stoop to this level. If Ves wanted to expand his horizons as a mech designer, then he shouldn't rehash his old work whenever he wanted to design a new biomech.

"Organic machines are wonderful and special. They possess their own pros and cons and they are best served if I design them with their unique circumstances in mind."

Ves thought about how he could design a defensive mech that not only made excellent use of its biological functions, but also synergized with its living properties.

His mind eventually drifted to a bold and controversial idea.

It was not a completely new notion as the Titan-5 Project already realized this idea in part.

However, Ves believed that he could make use of it to turn his knight biomech into a much more special machine!

"The premise is simple." He said as he finally raised his arm. "It starts by recognizing that the shape of a biomech isn't static. It can change and morph according to the situation. It is just like smart metal mechs in that sense."

He began to sketch a draft design of a knight biomech. He made sure to differentiate it from a generic biomech by emphasizing the elements that made it unique.

It did not take long for his basic sketch to take shape.

When Ves took a step back from his work, he looked at it with an appreciative gaze.

"Lovely. So lovely. It's so simple, but it is undeniably unique!"

The biomech he sketched initially looked like an organic version of a knight mech.

Just like many other defensive biomechs, the draft design featured an exterior exoskeleton as well as a tower shield made out of rigid but solid organic metal.

Producing these bones took a lot of time, and most biomechs were not capable of regenerating them in the field.

Nonetheless, they offered a lot of upfront protection and were almost on par with conventional alloy armor plating.

Its defensive systems weren't important. What he truly cared about was the additions that he had made to what would otherwise be a straightforward knight biomech!

The most distinctive feature was that the knight mech possessed not just one, but two heads.

The knight mech almost resembled a Siamese twin due to how there were two heads at the top of the torso instead of one! It was an odd and perplexing design choice that didn't seem to make any sense!

However, Ves thought that it made a lot of sense. Even though heads weren't that important to mechs considering that the machines could perform just as well without them, they still possessed a few useful functions.

There was hardly any point to adding a second head to a typical mech because that would only add a redundant set of sensors to the package.

Ves felt differently about it because he could do a lot more with an extra head than anyone could imagine.

Aside from this weird and unusual design choice, the knight biomech also featured another set of additions in the form of four organic tentacle-like limbs extending from its back!

The tentacles were relatively long and thick. They were also covered by many segmented bone sections, allowing them to withstand a lot of damage without breaking.

Although the limbs weren't as fast and dextrous as he would like, they possessed plenty of power to attack a mech in the front and in the rear!

Ves initially wanted to add a single powerful limb in a similar fashion to the Skorpion Kommando's impressive tail, but then he thought that he could do more with several more limbs.

Two tentacles were better, but Ves thought he could fit in double that amount without compromising too much individual muscle strength.

The addition of the tentacles partially reminded him of his Blessed Squire design, but these ones looked much more ominous due to their organic nature!

Not only that, but the weaponized qualities of the organic tentacles made it clear that they were solely designed to attack rather than provide support!

"I like the look. It's different. Besides, a good bioconstruct should always have a set of tentacles. Tentacles are great. Tentacles are useful. Tentacles are versatile."

The extra limbs made his proposed biomech look a lot less human, but who cared as long as it was useful?