

Mech 4471

Chapter 4471 Justification For Biomechs

Ves found the sketch to be beautiful.

The tentacled, two-headed organic defensive mech was a living machine in the truest sense of the word.

It not only represented a break from his previous work, but also an evolution on his quest to make his mech more alive.

Ves became affected by a sense of purpose as he worked to refine the sketch.

He initially wanted to stick to designing a simple landbound mech, as that would bring the least amount of complications to the design project, but he changed his mind halfway.

"This design concept is far too promising to remain unused. My clan deserves to benefit from its features!"

He decided to alter the initial draft design and incorporated a serviceable organic flight system to the rear.

In order to fit the theme and aesthetics that he wanted to impart in his mech design, Ves spent more time than necessary to expand the organic components of the flight system.

He shaped the extra mass into light but impressive-looking wings.

As Ves colored the wings in a particular shade, the biomech gained a distinctive appearance that satisfied his need to make his mech unique and recognizable.

No one would be able to mistake his biomech for anything else!

After applying a few refinements, Ves took a step back and evaluated his work in a holistic sense.

"Beautiful."

The cosmetic refinements he made to his draft design reinforced the notion that it depicted a space knight that was thick and robust enough to withstand the rigors of battle.

Different from his metallic mechs, Ves actively made changes to his visual style in order to emphasize and complement the organic nature of his upcoming mech design.

Ves had shaded the bone scales that served as the organic space knight's armor system in a maroon tint. It was a darkish sort of red that deliberately harkened back to human blood.

If that wasn't enough, Ves also shaded the beautiful feathers of the bioknight's wings in a different shade of red.

The entire biomech looked as if it had been drenched in a vat of blood to the point where the color had seeped throughout its entire organic frame.

While Ves had added touches of black to break the monotony, add more definition and make his work a little more complex, it was undeniable that the biomech was themed around blood!

This was a deliberate choice on his part.

It even extended to the two heads of his space knight. One of the armored-looking heads largely portrayed a human expression.

Although its life-like appearance caused the entire mech to look disturbingly like a humanoid giant alien rather than a biomech, there was nothing special about it other than the third eye that served as Ves' signature look.

It was the other head that signified that something might be horribly wrong about the mech.

Ves had taken inspiration from the vampire myth that occasionally experienced a resurgence in pop culture.

The second head looked like a more feral version of a human head. Ves had shaped and angled the facial features in order to make it look savage and feral.

If that wasn't enough, he also added a set of fangs to its mouth in order to complete the look!

In the end, Ves had sketched a biomech that ended up with a lot more depth than he had set out to portray from the start.

He got caught up in his excitement and went a little overboard. He simply couldn't hold himself back when he began to come up with all kinds of new and brilliant ideas.

The end result was an organic space knight that was characterized by two major themes: blood and duality.

The blood part was obvious, but it went even deeper than its look.

"Blood is the central ingredient of this biomech!"

Every biomech was a living organism for the most part. Unlike conventional mechs that used pipes or lines to transfer electrical energy and other resources from one place to another place, biomechs used veins and nerves to perform the same functions.

Most biomechs tended to incorporate body systems that adapted the biologies of strong organic species.

There was even a faction within the biomech industry that solely worked on highly modified human biotissue!

Although the differences were so big that the flesh utilized by biomechs performed drastically better from baseline human flesh, they were still 'human' in at least some sense of the word.

Ves had opted to base his new organic space knight out of a human body system rather than an alternative based on a more powerful organism.

He had ready access to the biotissue of the Titania, which was harder, tougher, richer and more superior in many other ways.

However, it was not what he was looking for. Not only was it a finite resource that would eventually get used up, Ves also didn't want to make use of biotissue that was fundamentally incompatible with the human body.

The organic space knight that Ves had designed might be a little softer and weaker than it should be, but one of the advantages of using modified human biotissue was that it was extremely easy to regenerate and maintain.

"Humans understand their own bodies the best." Ves recalled one of the lessons that he had learned. "Biomechs based on human biology are cheaper and much easier to work with than biomechs based on more complicated alien biologies."

Ves did not solely make this choice because he wanted to turn his work into an affordable and easygoing machine.

He did it because of the blood that flowed through its veins.

Considering that biomechs mimicked large organisms to a high degree, they also relied on blood to transfer nutrients to different parts of a biomech.

While there were some organic body systems that were entirely bloodless due to relying on other means to transfer nutrients, his biomech concept was the opposite.

If Ves had his way, then his biomech design would be filled with blood!

Blood played such an important role to his biomech that he even intended to incorporate aspects of a Scarlet Oak Tree into its design!

"My space bioknight can produce its own blood to regenerate itself!"

This was one of the most important functions of his biomech!

One of the distinctive advantages of organic mechs was that most of them were capable of regenerating at least a part of their biocomponents in the field.

Of course, the regeneration ability was subject to a lot of limitations.

First, a biomech could not regenerate missing tissue out of nothing. It had to have access to a large reserve of energy and spare biomass.

This was why certain biomechs usually built up a generous reserve of 'fat'. Not only did the fat tissue serve as an additional buffer against damage, but it could also be used as ingredients to help a biomech regrow a muscle.

Sadly, biomechs were limited to how much fat they could carry on the battlefield. This was especially the case for organic machines with a hard exoskeleton.

Second, the regeneration ability could not regrow every biocomponent. More complex ones as well as certain hard and dense tissue such as the external bone scales that covered Ves' draft design could only be grown in industrial biofacilities.

While it was possible to design a biomech that could regrow all of these specialized biocomponents by itself, the production speed would be so low that it would take months if not years for the organic machine to be done with healing its wounds!

"A biomech is a combat machine, not a production machine."

Nonetheless, Ves was quite happy with the projected regeneration ability of his upcoming new biomech design.

It might not be impressive compared to the better biomech designs, but it was quite adequate for a biomech of this caliber.

There was an important reason why Ves wanted blood to play such a great role in his design.

Blood was his justification for branching out into biomechs.

If Ves did not come up with a good reason why he should bother with biomechs, then he could not explain why he should even bother with organic machines that were radically different from conventional machines.

At most, he might dabble with them in order to broaden his horizons and understand biomechs to a greater degree, but that was not enough to satisfy his needs.

Blood was the driving factor of his exploration into biomechs.

By absorbing the knowledge contained within the last enlightenment fruit, Ves had learned so much about the wonders of blood.

He could even pass off as a disciple of the Blood Cult given everything he had learned about the hidden potential of the liquid that flowed through every person's veins!

"The problem is that most biomechs completely ignore all of the additional uses of blood!"

The vast majority of biomech designers were ignorant to the Blood Cult and its extensive research on blood.

They ignorantly designed their biomechs in a way that neglected the possibilities of one of their most important components!

Ves was different.

He was determined to make his biomechs stand out by utilizing blood as more than just a simple medium for transferring nutrients!

"There is a spiritual component to blood that I can take advantage of. For example, what if... the mech and the mech pilot share the same blood?"

Ves envisioned an interfacing attempt where the mech pilot not only connected his mind to a biomech, but also his body!

For example, the cockpit might have a mechanism where it attached a tentacle to the body of the mech pilot.

Once the physical connections were made, the blood of the mech pilot would get drawn out and begin to circulate throughout the enormous body of the biomech.

At the same time, those same tentacles would also circulate the blood that was inherent to the biomech into the veins of the mech pilot!

Ves recognized that this was an extremely dangerous procedure, but his insights into biotechnology told him that there were plenty of measures he could take to reduce the danger of adverse reactions.

For example, he could design additional filtering organs that took away all of the heavy metals and other poisonous substances that were inherent to biomech blood.

Once all of these problematic elements were filtered out, the purified blood that was left should theoretically be compatible with a human body, especially if the biomech had modulated its blood type and other characteristics to a specific pilot!

"If I want my new biomech design to work, then it has to be grown and attuned to a specific mech pilot. This is the only way to ensure maximum compatibility and minimal rejection!"

There was a great purpose to all of this. Ves did not come up with this harebrained scheme to allow the biomech and mech pilot to share each other's blood in order to generate shock value.

His ultimate goal was to achieve an unprecedented deep physical, mental and spiritual integration between the mech pilot and his living battle partner!

He wanted to go beyond the synergy attainable by his conventional mechs, and believed that the use of biomechs served as a possible vessel to attain deeper integration!

"It's just like the strong spiritual bonds forged by the Geminis!"

Ves had taken a lot of inspiration from the unusual family practices of the Gemini Family.

The way the Gemini Saints were able to lower each other's guards to the point where their Saint Kingdoms were interchangeable had given him a lot of inspiration.

What if he could form a similar relationship between a biomech and a mech pilot?

"What if... I can turn a biomech and a mech pilot into the equivalent of an incestuous married couple?"

He was no longer satisfied with turning a living mech and a mech pilot into battle partners and comrades in arms.

He wanted to deepen their relationship in the hopes of generating more powerful synergies, and he believed that turning them into a close approximation of 'twin siblings' might produce a powerful result!

"What better way to bind two different organisms closer together by having them share each other's blood?" Ves grinned as he became increasingly more obsessed with this extreme design concept. "In fact, if I can make it so that the genes of the biomech are partially derived from the genes of its intended mech pilot, then it is not wrong to claim that the two are blood related to each other!"

Ves had always considered his living mechs to be somewhat equivalent to human beings, but if he was able to realize this unprecedented biomech concept, then he would take his principle to an entirely new level!

"My Blood Knight Project shall be the first biomech to derive its power from the blood of its own mech pilot! It will be magnificent, hahahaha!"

"Hahahahaha!"

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Chapter 4472 The Power Of Two

Ves could state without a shadow of a doubt that it was impossible to design his new Blood Knight Project as a conventional mech.

A machine that consisted of solid alloys, inorganic composites and electrical circuitry could never bond with a human body in the same manner.

"All of the mechs that I have designed before have never made use of blood in any fashion... what a waste."

To be fair, it was hard for Ves to come up with a viable mechanism that would allow a mech pilot to bond closer with a conventional mech through the sharing of blood.

There was no reason for human blood to circulate throughout the frame of a metallic mech.

The only possible way to justify this blood sharing mechanism in a mech like the Bright Warrior was to add organic components to their existing designs.

"In other words, I first need to convert my conventional mechs into cyborg mechs before I can implement a blood sharing mechanism, and even then it will just be a watered down version of the mechanism applied to biomechs."

It didn't really seem worth it to Ves. Metallic mechs were never supposed to work with blood and trying to shoehorn it in sounded like blasphemy in his opinion.

It would be better if Ves kept the two types of mechs separate from each other.

While Ves recognized the power of blood, he did not believe it was the only method for empowerment. His original design philosophy had never taken it into account in the first place, so he could choose to keep his classical mechs on the same path.

It all depended on what he was trying to accomplish. While Ves had definitely become enamored with biomechs, once he drew out of his high, he realized that it wasn't a good idea to fully commit to biomechs.

"The mech industry is largely based on metallic mechs. Whether this is good or not, this is the reality that cannot be changed."

Of course, the biggest reason why biomechs never caught up to conventional mechs was because the former hadn't been able to present itself as a powerful alternative.

Ves believed that his newly conceived blood systems might change this paradigm, but even then the inertia in the mech industry was set too deep.

There were countless mech designers, mech companies, mech technicians and other people who had tied their interests to the current paradigms of the mech industry!

Ves should know because he used to be one of them before he became enlightened by the wisdom of the Blood Cult.

The overwhelming majority of mech insiders were unable or unwilling to go extensive retraining and reeducation in order to become qualified to work in the biomech industry.

There were also many older mech designers who had worked hard to develop and realize design philosophies that were solely applicable to metallic mechs. Each of them had made such heavy commitments to the mechs that they were able to work with that they would rather hang up their capes and retire than touch a single biomech in their lives!

Although Ves didn't particularly care about the decisions of other people, he recognized that it wasn't a great idea to completely transition to designing biomechs.

It would mess up everything, from his collaboration with his wife to the infrastructure of his clan.

"Besides, I will get bored if I design too many biomechs."

Ves was a mech designer who craved novelty and variation. He always wanted to break new ground and develop new design applications.

While there was an endless variety of biomechs that he could design, the same could be said for conventional mechs.

He would rather keep his feet in both of these fields and choose whichever suited him the most for a particular design goal.

"This sounds like a good way for me to proceed." Ves smiled as he settled his confusion about his future course. "I am not excluding anything. I am merely including biomechs as part of my repertoire."

His clansmen would probably be in for a big surprise once he returned to reality and suddenly became greeted with a Ves that not only wanted to design biomechs, but was actually able to do so despite not showing any inkling that he acquired the necessary skills!

In any case, as Ves continued to evaluate his beautiful and innovative draft design, he made up his mind about his approach to mech design going forward.

"Conventional mechs should still be my primary focus." Ves told himself. "I'm not sure if my best work will come in the form of a metallic mech, but it should definitely be the work that I am most proud of. I still believe there are ways to make them more powerful without relying on blood."

That said, Ves did not want to ignore the potential of blood either. It was just like phasewater. The liquid of life could produce amazing effects as long as he effectively leveraged its properties.

"My biomechs can serve as more experimental platforms. I can try out new tricks and test out theories on a radically different mech frame. The data that I can gather from these experimental works can be used to form a contrast to the data taken from my conventional mechs."

The purpose of this strategy was to become a better mech designer. Trying out new design applications under different circumstances was an excellent way to verify his theories and generate more insights about different aspects of his work.

"I understand what the System is trying to do by presenting this Mission to me. It wants me to go out of my comfort zone and expand my horizons. Well, I've

only entered the field of biomechs for a short amount of time, but already I am brimming with so many ideas that I've never been so excited about my profession!"

He was like an xenoarchaeologist who had suddenly stumbled upon a gigantic ruin that was based on a completely unknown intelligent alien species!

Although a part of Ves recognized that spending too much time on biomechs would most certainly take a lot of time away from his conventional mech designs, he didn't really mind this distraction.

"Designing 5 conventional mechs that all share the same base won't get me too far. I can make at least twice as much progress if I switch 1 of those mechs with a biomech."

Ves had already noticed that he had fallen into a rut of some sorts. His progress in the last few years had been steady but also slow. It wasn't until he came up with the Dullahan Project that he felt that he had his first real shot at taking a leap forward, but even then it was only a single major change.

In contrast, biomechs opened up so many potential new ideas that Ves would definitely have his hands full for a long period of time!

"It's too much."

There were far too many possibilities for him to explore in his lifetime. He would have to make a lot of hard choices and limit his explorations to the design applications that were most relevant to his overall goals and his design philosophy.

The Blood Knight Project that he had just envisioned was a potential way to achieve a major breakthrough in his design philosophy.

His ambition had always been to create greater synergy and promote mutual growth between the mech and mech pilot.

Exploring a new direction that involved a biological means of power sharing would definitely present him with a lot of new results.

If everything went well, he might be able to adapt the effects of the blood sharing process into a purely spiritual mechanism.

This way, he could apply a version of the mechanism in a conventional mech design without involving any biotech components!

"It's similar to how Master Benedict Cortez was able to develop his Endex System based on an energy bridge made through the use of the skull of a human expert pilot. He managed to develop a working substitute made out of inorganic exotic materials."

The practice of developing substitute materials and systems was a time-honored tradition in the mech industry.

"I'll probably have to become a Senior or a Master in order to pull this off, but it is definitely an interesting research topic."

It might even be a potential way for him to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer!

Of course, that was too far away for him to consider.

His current priority was to complete the Blood Knight Project to his satisfaction.

"It's a lot more complicated than I thought it would be, but it is also strong and innovative."

The Blood Knight Project fully satisfied all of his requirements and more.

The physical design of his proposed space bioknight did not exceed his current capabilities.

He deliberately planned to make use of fairly simple biomaterials and bioparts to mold his organic machine together.

There was no way he could handle more powerful and more complex elements because his proficiency in Biotechnology still remained at the Novice-level.

"Besides, even if I can make use of more powerful biocomponents, it will take a lot more time to integrate them into a coherent biomech design."

Speed was of the essence. Ves had not forgotten about his Mission. Working with bog-standard human-derived biotissue and relatively generic bioparts was well within his level, though he wouldn't be able to make his work stand out in terms of technical performance.

The only exception was the addition of the four bone-black tentacles. It would take a little more time for Ves to design them properly enough to function the way he wanted, but he felt it was worth the tradeoff.

"Still, the tentacles alone won't make this biomech design special."

The added value of his Blood Knight Project lay in its blood.

Ves would have to spend a bit more time on designing new organic components related to blood.

He wasn't sure that his expanded knowledge base was enough for him to design a mechanism where the mech pilot and the biomech could safely share each other's blood, but he wasn't willing to give up on this promising feature.

"My biomech is useless if it can't establish a Blood Pact with its mech pilot!"

The Blood Pact was what he decided to call it. The phrase represented a solemn, sacred bond between a human and a living biomech.

It was a bond that was meant to elevate their relationship beyond the usual parameters.

"A Blood Pact is greater than the relationship between a user and a tool."

"A Blood Pact is greater than the relationship between a mech pilot and a living mech."

"A Blood Pact is greater than the relationship between a mech pilot and a living incarnation."

Ves suspected that a successful Blood Pact might produce power that exceeded that of Gloriana's own interpretation of living mechs!

While Ves admired the way that the Mars had become a fully aligned vessel of Patriarch Reginald's will, he hated the way the ace mech had lost all signs of independent life.

Ever since Patriarch Reginald followed Gloriana's approach to living mechs, Ves felt an urgent need to improve upon his existing model of the relationship between mech pilots and living mechs.

What he was attempting to realize with his Blood Knight Project may be the solution he was looking for! By utilizing extraordinary means to 'upgrade' the relationship between the actors, Ves hoped that his new breed of biomechs could produce much greater synergy than ever before!

"Synergy is the key!"

The power of a mech and a mech pilot was limited. While both of them were able to become strong through different means, Ves had always been a proponent of growth combined with mutual support.

By deepening the integration of a biomech and mech pilot, Ves aimed to develop a state of fusion between the two. The lines between the two should

blur to the point where the biomech effectively fought on the battlefield as if it was a Siamese twin!

Chapter 4473 Textbook Solutions

Now that Ves had completed his draft design and considered all of its implications, he proceeded to design his biomech.

He aimed to complete the design process in 40 days, which would certainly be a challenge due to all of the added complexities of the Blood Knight Project.

"If I can finish it in 40 days, then the total cost will amount to 100 Ascension Points at most. I will definitely be able to earn a profit given how much potential is contained within my biomech design."

The end result would undoubtedly be sloppy, but Ves wasn't as strict towards his work as his wife.

Gloriana would definitely blow a fuse if she ended up with a mech design that was filled with obvious flaws and imperfections!

This was why she hated design contests and any other events that forced mech designers to rush their work.

"Luckily, I'm the opposite."

He loved design contests. Even if his current status and trajectory had caused him to turn away from them, he still had enough practice to understand what he should do under these circumstances.

Ves drafted a design schedule and tried to account for any delays related to the more difficult and original design elements.

He was fortunate enough that the Unending Regalia's database happened to contain a lot of generic component designs of both metallic and organic mech parts.

He could select what he needed from this component library and fit them together as if he was designing a conventional mech.

Even though this was the first time he designed a biomech from scratch, he possessed enough of an understanding to know how he could fit disparate organic components into a systematic whole.

It just took a lot of time due to the sheer quantity of parts. Designing a biomech was much like designing a complete living organism.

This was why every biomech designer had to be a biotech expert by definition. Without understanding how human bodies and other living organisms worked on a biological level, it was impossible to design a functional biomech!

Ves felt quite strange during the first days of his work. The selection of suitable and compatible bioparts and the initial attempts to fit them together made him feel as if he was creating a new species of organisms.

"It's like creating my own alien race."

That got him thinking. The fish-whale race was undoubtedly the product of a mad phase whale.

There were many other examples of artificial living species in his life.

Clixie was a Rubarthan Sentinel Cat who was anything but the product of natural evolution.

Though he had never studied her species too closely, Ves was generally aware that her species incorporated a lot of powerful genes from many powerful races.

Now that he had become proficient in biotechnology, Ves understood how brilliant it was to pack so many fantastic genes into an organism the size of an ordinary house cat.

Every organic life form possessed a limit. Geneticists had attempted to formulate more powerful artificial species before by blending together as many genes from other races as possible.

Most of those attempts ended up in failure. The monstrosities that managed to gain the breath of life were often so weak and malformed that there was no value in keeping them alive!

"In fact, Clixie isn't the only artificial organism close to me that has been formulated in a biolab."

Ves couldn't help but think about his children.

He used to think that a company like Witshaw & Yeneca engaged in biological sorcery when it formulated the genes of designer babies.

Their work was so opaque and confusing that Ves always found it difficult to follow the explanations of their geneticists and other specialists!

Yet now that he managed to get started in biotechnology as well genetics, he suddenly understood their work a lot more than before!

When he recalled their previous jargon-filled explanations, Ves found himself able to follow the gist of their analysis and intentions.

Sure, the specific science was still far beyond his level, but he no longer became confused at what his children actually represented!

"Each of them are unique alien species." Ves uttered in a tone that conveyed greater comprehension than before. "They have inherited a fair amount of genes from my original baseline human physique, but much of that is either cosmetic or outright junk. My blood relations with my children aren't as strong as I thought. They have more in common with the aliens who donated their best biological traits to their biological makeup than their own parents!"

It was a horrifying realization!

For a moment, Ves felt deceived. Withshaw & Seneca not only hoodwinked him, but every other customer who sought to commission a designer baby!

Ves could understand the movement that advocated for the prohibition of designer babies a lot more.

While they looked human on the outside, in reality they were almost completely alien on the inside!

It couldn't be helped. Human physiology and human genes were simply too weak and useless. Human traits were not competitive at all as there were always better alternatives available in other species!

One of the few major advantages of baseline humans was that it was cheap and easy for them to reproduce.

That was one of the most important reasons why the human race became so dominant, but it was not a strength to the people at the top.

Those with wealth, power and means wanted more from themselves and their families.

They were willing and able to modify their own genes and that of their offspring in order to obtain greater power!

Each parent was willing to forsake the humanity of their children in order to set them up for greater success in human society.

It was ironic how those very same parents lessened the commonality between themselves and their children.

"Well, it's not as if I'm human myself nowadays."

He was human in mind but not in body. The fact that his outward appearance just happened to match the look of a typical human body was merely a smokescreen on how inhuman his physique had become.

The same applied to his children. They all looked and behaved like adorable human kids, but they were actually unique amalgamated aliens that could never reproduce in a natural manner.

The fact that they all needed to be fed by a specially formulated diet during their growing years was an indication of the severity of how far removed they were from humanity!

Even though Ves comprehended the greater truth behind the monstrous genetic makeup of Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine, his love for them hadn't changed in the slightest.

"They are still my babies." Ves smiled as his heart warmed when he thought of their smiles.

His children were all human in spirit and not entirely in body. Although every designer baby deviated from normal humans in many aspects, that was the point of their existence.

As long as every alteration made a designer baby smarter, stronger, healthier and more talented, then why should he complain?

He and his wife had asked for these improvements as neither of them were content with having 'normal' children.

Right now, Ves felt as if he was in the process of making another 'child'.

He never felt this way whenever he designed his previous mechs. Their metallic and inorganic construction inherently caused all them to be far removed from humanity.

Even when Ves developed living mechs that became increasingly smarter and more self-aware, he never truly treated them as creating a new child.

This was why he felt a bit disturbed during the initial days of the design session.

The flesh, the bones, the organs and other biological elements made it seem as if he was trying to make a particularly larger version of a designer baby!

It didn't help that Ves deliberately chose to design a biomech that adopted as many human traits as possible.

The more human his biomech became, the more Ves developed unwelcome associations with his own children!

Fortunately, Ves soon snapped out of this weird mindset. He was able to pull himself back before he went too deep.

"It helps a lot that it doesn't exactly look like a human."

The bone exoskeleton, the second head and the four tentacles attached to the back added a distinctly inhuman flair to the mech design.

These elements made it a lot harder for Ves to regard his Blood Knight Project as his own child!

Once he got over this unusual hurdle, the design process became a lot smoother.

He encountered relatively few insurmountable design problems, which was exactly what he was going for when he tried to make his biomech as simple as possible.

Although he had to figure out a lot of new design solutions given that this was the first time he was working on a biomech design, most of the instances amounted to textbook problems that he could easily solve by referencing the knowledge that he learned from a textbook.

Even if he didn't know a particular solution to a problem, he could always go back to his library and find the answer in one of the more advanced textbooks that he hadn't read.

"Designing a biomech is not so difficult now that I think about it." Ves muttered as he reached the halfway point. "As long as I understand how a human body works, then it is easy enough to design a mech that is largely based on the human physique."

The same applied to mechs or bioconstructs based on alien physiques.

For example, Ves at his current level would not be able to make any progress if he worked on the Titan-5 Project.

He had no idea how its alien biomatter worked and how to best harness its properties.

All of that would change once he studied the Titania's former astral beast physique.

As long as he understood how the alien flesh worked, he could manipulate the Titan-5 Project with the same ease as he was currently showing at this moment!

Ves realized that this was the essence of biomech design.

"Designing a biomech is nothing but an attempt to reconstitute the biological building blocks of an existing organism."

There was an element of creation to it, but it played much less of a role than he expected.

There weren't many biomech designers that completely invented a new type of body tissue that consisted of a completely original set of genes.

The workload was too great and it would take multiple years if not decades to complete a mech design in this way!

It was much easier for biomech designers to steal nature's homework and quickly finish their own assignments this way.

As the Blood Knight Project increasingly took shape, Ves had the illusion that he was creating a parody of a human body.

Although he had chosen to base it off the human physique for multiple good reasons, the creator side of him felt a little ashamed at how many shortcuts he had taken.

He understood on an intellectual level that mech designers had nothing to be ashamed about when they made use of other people's works.

Ves did it plenty of times whenever he commissioned a powerful transphasic mech system from companies like Morton Tech and Melmen Advanced Systems.

However, he felt that he could do more when he adopted the same approach to biomech design.

The use of human genes and human biomatter in a biomech might facilitate greater integration with a mech pilot, but Ves believed he could produce even stronger synergies if he increased the contrast.

"If the biomech becomes more inhuman, then there are greater contrasts to work with. The point of a mech has always been to combine the strengths of man and machine while covering up for their weaknesses. There isn't much to work with if the man and machine resemble each other too much."

Ves could consider this another time. Right now, he needed to keep his work as simple as possible, so he was content with basing his Blood Knight Project around highly altered human biomatter.

It wasn't until he began to tackle the more original elements of his biomech design that his progress slowed down.

He completed most of the routine design work by this time, but his experimental blood sharing system was anything but standard!

"Try finding something like this in a textbook!"

Chapter 4474 Limited Skills

Ves was happy with how his biomech design ended up so far. He filled out much of the biological frame with an intricate collection of interconnected biological components.

"It's like putting organs inside a formerly empty biological shell." He mused.

Just as with conventional mechs, it was a lot easier to start from the outside and work his way inward.

In truth, it was more proper to start the other way around, but Ves only dared to adopt this approach when he designed the metallic mechs that he had worked with for many years.

Ves adopted the easier and arguably lazier approach of designing the exterior bone scale armor system first.

Although the bone material was strange and novel to him, there was nothing complicated about its composition or its properties.

The toughness and defensive strength of the bone plates were rather mediocre in his eyes, but the upside was that they were cheap, easy to grow and incredibly easy to work with under most circumstances.

He could shape them in any way he liked and he could even add bioprogramming to his bioknight that enabled it to grow new plates on an independent basis.

Of course, allowing the biomech to repair its own exterior plating was like asking a mech pilot to perform field repairs on a heavily damaged mech.

Combat machines simply weren't set up to perform complex and resource-intensive repairs on their own. Biomechs could regenerate ordinary tissue

damage easily enough, but growing brand new bone plating would take months and also demanded access to the right kinds of raw materials.

Ves was aware of the existence of biomechs that could actually cannibalize fallen biomechs to facilitate their restoration. More advanced biomechs were even able to digest parts taken from regular mechs or any other non-organic machines!

"It's kind of like an organic version of what my Devil Tiger can do. Self-evolving organic mechs are considered some of the most advanced products of the biomech industry!"

It was much more difficult to design a biomech that could evolve its physical form on its own by devouring random materials. The depth of bioprogramming required to evolve every biological component in specific ways was so deep that Ves didn't even think about adding such a powerful feature into his Blood Knight Project.

"My Novice-level Biotechnology Skill is too inadequate. There are far too many features that are beyond my reach."

It was frustrating to set aside a promising and useful function because of his own lack of competence.

His ability to design a biomech fell far behind his ability to design a conventional mech, and the constant reminders of this fact frequently ruined his mood.

It would have been better for his mental state if he wasn't already an accomplished Journeyman Mech Designer.

This was because as long as he looked at a specific aspect of his biomech, he could always think of a way to design a much better implementation using non-organic materials and parts.

"I can't keep thinking like this. I need to let go and accept that I won't get everything perfect on the first try."

It was his inner Gloriana that was mostly kicking a fuss about all of the obvious shortcomings of his current work. He had worked together with Gloriana so many times in the last few years that her work philosophy had definitely contaminated his psyche.

No matter how many times he tried to loosen up, he could still get triggered whenever he noticed an obvious flaw.

This was good because his ability to optimize and improve a mech design had become a lot better after he started to learn from Gloriana's method.

It could also be bad in situations where he was working on a tight deadline!

Whenever Ves compared the state of his incomplete biomech design to many of the biomechs that he had encountered in the past, he became irked at the obvious differences in refinement.

Since biomechs were organic beings in essence, this meant that the Blood Knight Project was like a human who developed a lot of congenital defects.

A more skilled 'doctor' could easily address these defects, but a hack like Ves who had just gotten started in this field could do little but apply a few patches to open wounds!

Fortunately, despite his lack of depth in biosciences, Ves believed that the current state of the Blood Knight Project was quite serviceable.

"It will do the job more or less."

He relied a lot on his established mech designer capabilities to make it work. Compared to other biomech designers who had just started out, Ves was already an experienced mech designer who had dozens of original mech designs under his name.

He not only possessed an extensive set of developed Skills and Sub-Skills, many of which were relevant to both biomechs and conventional mechs, but also possessed an intuition honed over years of working with mechs.

Ves was not surprised that his powerful intuition wasn't able to provide as much assistance when working on biomechs.

He felt it had to do with his domain. His Spirituality was expected towards both life and metal.

Although this suggested that he should have a powerful advantage when working on organic mechs, his lack of practice and familiarity meant his intuition didn't know what to do at times.

The lack of cold metal components caused a part of him to feel profoundly lost. It was as if a biomech was not a 'proper' mech due to lacking the traditional parts that Ves had always associated with mechs.

Fortunately, his intuition was able to provide a semblance of a boost, so he wasn't left to his own devices.

The result of approximately 28 days of constant design work with very little breaks in between was an almost functional biomech.

"In fact, it is already functional to a degree." Ves surmised as he looked at his current design with a critical eye. "It can interface with a mech pilot with the help of a standard neural interface that is especially adapted to biomechs. It can walk on its legs, lift a tower shield and attack with its sword. Its sensors can observe the environment while its communication systems can keep the biomech connected to friendlies."

It could even fly in space, though it had been anything but easy to integrate an organic flight system to a biomech.

Different from conventional mechs, it was a lot harder for biomechs to gain flight capabilities because the processes involved took a great toll on biological systems.

Ves couldn't simply slot an existing organic flight system into the back of a biomech and be done with it. He needed to make a lot of adjustments to the organic mech frame itself to ensure that the heat buildup didn't boil the more fragile cells and so on. He also had to prevent the flight system from blowing up the biomech from the inside whenever it sustained significant damage.

It was all difficult and tedious work, and he couldn't always rely on a textbook to design his way out of a corner.

Fortunately, his abundant experience in designing conventional mechs along with his extensive knowledge base in working with conventional systems allowed him to come up with his own design solutions.

Perhaps his homebrew methods might not be as refined as the methods of more professional biomech designers, but he was confident that he managed to make the organic flight system work.

"I can't expect much from it, though."

He had opted to integrate a slower, weaker and simpler organic flight system in order to reduce any possible complications.

It wasn't all that bad, though. The beginner version of a biological flight system was also solid, robust, efficient, highly tolerant towards damage and was able to self-correct itself to a much better degree than other options.

"The Blood Knight Project won't be able to win any races, but it can hold the line and keep fighting even if it has sustained a lot of damage to the rear."

One of the annoyances of including an organic flight system to a biomech was that it limited the strength of the tentacles he had added to his biomech design.

The four, bone-covered tentacles in black gave the Blood Knight Project an inhuman vibe.

They looked a bit incongruous to the rest of the Blood Knight Project, but Ves insisted on adding them because of how much they added to the design.

Two of the tentacles were designed to help the biomech attack up close. They were rather long and could pierce an opposing mech from a side angle.

Ves had also designed them so that they could grip other objects such as lighter weapons or tools in case the Blood Knight Project needed to carry extra gear.

The limbs weren't too impressive at the moment, but they could easily be upgraded without adversely impacting the rest of the biomech.

The second pair of tentacles were a bit more special. Ves had turned them into ranged weapons by integrating a set of luminar crystals into the ends of the tentacles!

In effect, Ves had added two half-organic laser weapons to his biomech design!

"Since I have a 5 percent allowance for non-organic parts, I might as well make use of this quota."

The half-organic laser tentacles weren't capable of outputting a lot of damage at once, but they added a lot of much-needed versatility to the Blood Knight Project.

"Everything is fine except for the most important organic system of all. Without a blood sharing mechanism, there is no reason for this biomech to exist."

His ambitious plan to develop a biomech that could share its blood to its mech pilot and vice versa was an exceedingly radical notion!

The difficulty of designing the biological parts that could perform all of the necessary processes was not low.

He needed to solve two major challenges in order to allow his biomech to forge a working Blood Pact with its pilot.

First, he had to ensure that the biomech and mech pilot did not get adversely affected while foreign blood was running through their veins.

This would require him to dig much deeper into the field of Biotechnology than before.

Second, he had to make sure that this mutual exchange of blood empowered both parties through developing an accompanying spiritual mechanism.

Ves had to apply his spiritual engineering capabilities in a completely different context in order to turn his newly conceived Blood Pact into a reality!

While Ves had been able to coast by up to this point, it was clear that he could no longer muddle his way through.

Although the second challenge sounded the most difficult, Ves was fairly confident he would be able to develop a suitable spiritual mechanism to the blood sharing system.

He was accustomed to developing new spiritual engineering-related solutions. This was the advantage of figuring out how to manipulate spiritual energy from scratch. His habit of developing new spiritual constructs to solve different problems made him confident that this would be no different.

"The real challenge is the physical component of the blood sharing system. There is nothing in my basic biotechnology textbooks that can give me any clue on how to tackle this assignment."

That said, there was one source of knowledge that might help.

"Scarlet Oak Trees might provide me with the examples that I need..."

What was special about Scarlet Oak Trees was that they possessed a defined tree biology. Yet they also included a different set of bioparts that produced blood that clearly weren't native to the trees.

The Scarlet Oak Trees were not only capable of producing alien blood, but were also able to circulate this foreign substance throughout its trunk without causing any harm!

Neither the plant cells nor the blood cells experienced any decay!

"In fact, it's the opposite!"

One of the more brilliant traits about Scarlet Oak Trees was that they actively nurtured the blood they produced!

The blood that poured out of the trees whenever the Blood Cultists came to collect the harvest was always rich and filled with vitality.

Since blood played such an important role to the Blood Knight Project, Ves wanted to reproduce this effect!

"If I can pull this off, then the enriched blood can not only improve the biomech, but also the mech pilot who is physically integrated with the organic machine!"

It was a completely new form of mutual growth!

It was so radical and innovative that Ves couldn't predict whether it would end up as a revolutionary new form of empowerment or turn into a horrendous biohazard!

"I can't wait to see what happens!"

Chapter 4475 Biological Rejection

Ves tried to figure out to what extent he could transplant the biology of a Scarlet Oak Tree into the frame of a biomech.

It was not that simple.

"All of the other organic parts I've added to the Blood Knight Project share a common human root."

They were like human organs and body parts that all happened to have mutated in different directions. Although the bioparts all possessed radically different genes, it was still possible for them to get along with each other as they used to belong to the same human body in a sense.

What Ves wanted to do at this junction was a break from this pattern.

Instead of transplanting another highly mutated human organ inside a body, he wanted to integrate parts of a tree into his biomech design!

Naturally, trees normally didn't get along with human bodies.

Although biomechs were not as sensitive in comparison, there was still a limit to how much foreign matter they could integrate!

Ves was not accustomed to dealing with this problem. Conventional mechs were normally able to integrate all kinds of weird and unusual parts.

For example, many of his ranged mechs were largely based on conventional human tech, but they were also armed with luminar crystal weapons that were based on a completely different tech base!

If he wanted to, he could equip his mechs with all kinds of alien and inhuman equipment. As long as all of the different parts could communicate with each other and such, who cared about their origin?

It was a completely different story when it came to biomechs, though. Rejection and even death was a real possibility when attempting to integrate bioparts derived from radically different organic species into a biomech frame! "It's still possible, though."

This was not an old problem. From the moment when biotech researchers first started to develop more sophisticated bioproducts, they already attempted to mix and match bioparts from different species together.

Much of these early attempts crashed and burned, but they all paved the way for solutions that eventually worked.

Nowadays, it was relatively common for biomechs to mix and match the best traits of different alien species. The biomech industry undoubtedly developed a lot of standardized solutions that addressed the compatibility problem.

Ves accessed his library and pulled out a few books that thoroughly expounded on this common problem.

"Hm, so it's like this. That makes sense."

A large part of why modern biomechs have become more tolerant towards foreign biocomponents was because all of them were based on adapted genes that were inherently more tolerant towards differences.

Unlike typical biological organisms that violently rejected any foreign organs as if they were hostile invaders, the biomechs of today were all a lot more tolerant and welcoming towards alien biocomponents.

Not only that, but even if the differences were rather big, the biomechs prevented this from becoming an issue due to the way they were produced.

"The alternative production process of biomechs helps a lot with preventing compatibility problems."

Conventional mechs were produced by fabricating their parts before assembling them together in a single whole.

While it was possible to produce biomechs with the same approach, in practice it was never done because of how much more complicated it was to graft so many different biocomponents together.

"It's like trying to create a new human being by producing all of his organs beforehand before putting them all together. You can't just expand the human population through this manner."

This was why the industry favored the production of small biomech seeds. Once they were planted in special nutrient pools, they rapidly absorbed the materials around them to grow into their 'adult' forms.

By growing and nurturing all of their biocomponents from the ground up, it was a lot easier for the foreign biocomponents to integrate into the rest of the biomech frame.

If any possible rejection phenomena occurred, then the bioengineers who supervised the growth pools would take action in order to solve the problems while the growth process was still in an early stage, thereby preventing a lot of future ailments.

That didn't mean that Ves could stuff any foreign biocomponents in a biomech design. There were still limits to everything, and he needed to make a lot of adaptations in order to ensure that the biomech would grow smoothly without producing too many complications.

"If this is what biomech designers have to deal with all the time, then it is no wonder that organic machines have never been too popular."

The requirements were simply too great. Biomech designers not only needed to study biotechnology, which was a full discipline on its own, but also had to

do a lot more work than ordinary mech designers to develop their own products.

Ves would have been able to move forward and smoothly integrated any alien technology into a mech if he was working on a normal project.

"Oh well. At least the payoff should be worth it." He consoled himself.

The potential of the Blood Pact more than compensated for all of the additional difficulties and complications!

The blood sharing system that he envisioned wouldn't be as good if he attempted to realize it in a half-hearted cyborg mech. The blood that circulated in the frame of a metallic mech simply had no purpose and would never form a close connection to the machine in question.

The Blood Knight Project was different. Blood ran throughout every part of its body, from the top of its two heads down to the bottom of its feet.

"I can't fail at this point!"

Ves had approximately 12 days left before he hit his self-imposed deadline.

Though he originally planned to dedicate half of his remaining time on optimization and refinement, he was afraid that he may need to spend all of it on the blood sharing system alone!

He no longer delayed any further and proceeded to tackle the most difficult challenge of this biomech design project.

It immediately became clear that he was entering brand new territory. He could no longer follow a simple multi-step plan to resolve a familiar problem.

Instead, he had to formulate his own plan based on his analysis of different sources.

Ves spent days on consulting and cross-referencing the textbooks that specifically dealt with the compatibility problem.

He also consulted several biology and medical textbooks that specifically explained the science of blood and any related organs.

Finally, he analyzed and extrapolated the relevant information about Scarlet Oak Trees and the more metaphysical properties of blood.

He took a lot of notes and made his own conclusions based on the inferences he made.

It was difficult to believe that he was still a mech designer considering that he behaved exactly like an academic researcher at the moment.

He had set aside the biomech design interface as he no longer busied himself with working on the current biomech design.

Since he became obsessed with putting together a new theoretical framework, he needed to make extensive use of modeling and data analysis software in order to test all of his hypotheses.

Ves spent a lot of time on applying the scientific method on his problem, but he was making steady progress.

As time went on, he managed to solve one point of uncertainty after another.

His modeling and simulation work generated a continuous stream of results that either proved his theories or told him that he was off the mark.

He even began to engage in practical experiments in the later stages of his research.

Although the Workshop of Creation sounded as if it was largely centered around the design and production of mechs, it also offered a relatively full suite of powerful lab equipment.

After a brief period of familiarization, Ves made use of the lab tools to conduct his experiments.

He mainly created small chunks of biomatter that were supposed to represent the mech frame and inserted different plant cells into their midst.

Many times, the biomatter recoiled violently. Their inherent immune systems drummed out different measures in order to kill the intruders!

This was not what Ves wanted to see, so he continually tweaked the different variables to reduce the instances of rejections.

This was tedious and frustrating work as many of his initial experiments returned negative results.

Even when he started to achieve a few successes after a day, he wasn't always able to reproduce the results in repeated experiments.

Sometimes, the biomatter rejected the plant cells.

Other times, the two got along as if they were best friends.

Ves had to conduct a lot of trial and error to slowly understand and address the variables that contributed to a negative result.

He finally became happy when the immediate rejection rate of the latest iteration of his experiment had dropped to 20 percent.

While this was still an unforgivably high failure rate by his standards, Ves knew that the remaining problems would probably not be a factor anymore due to how biomechs were produced.

"This is the best I can do I suppose."

Ves took the results he obtained by combining theory with empirical data and proceeded to design the blood sharing system with confidence.

While Ves had no idea if the results of his successful experiments could be translated to the full implementation of the blood sharing system.

Without the room to conduct more experiments, he could only hope that he had got it right and accounted for all the major risk factors.

"If it comes down to it, I still have a way to solve this potential problem."

He continued to design and integrate all of the separate elements of the blood sharing system.

Surprisingly enough, developing the biocomponents responsible for filtering and processing the blood before they transferred into a different body was hardly a challenge.

The textbooks offered many existing designs and templates of a similar nature.

Ves experienced greater challenges in trying to make the Blood Knight Product produce and make use of a specific blood formula that corresponded to the biology of an individual mech pilot.

This was way more complicated than it sounded because it affected the entire biomech!

However, dealing with this matter was easier than trying to design the spiritual components that gave meaning to the blood sharing system.

The Blood Pact was not merely a way to bring the biomech and the mech pilot closer through the sharing of lifeblood.

Ves also wanted it to stand for a mechanism of mutual spiritual empowerment.

"This will probably be a one-sided affair most of the time."

Most mech pilots did not possess any spiritual potential, so their chances of developing their spiritualities on their own was miniscule.

"Yet what if these mech pilots don't have to rely on themselves anymore? What if they can borrow the spiritualities of their biomechs to do the heavy lifting?"

This was the essence of the Blood Pact and the entire reason why he was committed to the Blood Knight Project!

If Ves was able to pull this off, he could potentially develop a revolutionary new means to enable mech pilots who possessed no inherent talent for greatness to surpass the extraordinary threshold!

"Forget about spirit fruits. Forget about glow shenanigans. Only a mech can truly help a mech pilot grow!"

The concept of the Blood Pact fully aligned with his design philosophy.

If not for the fact that biomechs was not his core preoccupation, Ves might be able to advance to the rank of Senior Mech Designer as long as he could get the Blood Knight Project to work!

"Damn, I'm so close. I can't wait until I've completed this design!"

The remaining hurdles no longer hindered him as much as before. He learned so much and removed so many obstacles that he deftly managed to complete his initial implementation of the blood sharing system.

The design was functionally complete. The Blood Knight Project had finally reached a state where he could produce a complete biomech out of the design.

Although Ves could spend a few more hours or days to smooth out the most obvious wrinkles in the design, he did not want to get bogged down by this project any longer.

"While I love working on biomechs, I still need to resolve the crisis that is waiting for me back in reality."

Ves hesitated for one more instant before he submitted the design.

[Please wait...]

THE MECH TOUCH

Chapter 4476 Value Of A Biomech

[Design Evaluation: Blood Knight]

Model name: Blood Knight BO-O-01

Original Manufacturer: Ves Larkinson

Weight Classification: Medium

Recommended Role: Organic Space Knight

Armor: C+

Carrying Capacity: C-

Aesthetics: A-

Endurance: B

Energy Efficiency: B-

Flexibility: D-

Firepower: C-

Integrity: B-

Mobility: D

Spotting: C-

X-Factor: B-

Cost efficiency: B+

Project involvement: 100%

Original component composition: 9%

Overall evaluation: The Blood Knight is a second-class organic space knight that is affordable but not particularly powerful. Its basic performance parameters are mediocre when compared to competing biomech models, but the reliability and the fault tolerance of the Blood Knight are relatively good. The newly invented 'Empowered Blood Sharing System' is the only standout feature of the biomech and has the potential to bring great benefits to both the organic machine and its pilot.

Ves nodded as he read the System's evaluation. He hadn't seen one in a long while.

"Hm, that's what I thought. I'm glad the System also concurs with my judgment."

A mech designer possessed the deepest understanding of his own work.

That didn't necessarily mean that they were the best judges of their own mech designs.

Biases and emotions frequently distorted their objective views. There were way too many mech designers that developed overly rosy pictures of their own mech designs.

This was also why it was important for professionals to design commercial mechs.

It was only when they subjected their work to market forces that they would truly find out whether their mech models were as competitive as they thought!

While Ves was confident that his new Blood Knight design was able to pass muster, he wasn't certain whether that was actually true.

The System's evaluation of his first biomech design did not completely tell Ves whether his new Blood Knight design lived up to its promise. The phrasing with regards to the Empowered Blood Sharing System was a bit unusual.

[You have received 1 Ascension Point for completing an adequate original design that has no other equivalent.]

"Ah, I almost forgot about that. There are more ways to earn Ascension Points than completing Missions."

Ves hadn't really paid any mind to this rule because he hadn't completed any mech designs lately.

The side projects he worked on such as the Gray Lotus and the Instrument of Doom were both brilliant products, but they weren't complete mechs. Neither of them earned any recognition from the System.

Instead, Ves managed to earn a reward by designing a biomech that was much weaker and less impactful on the battlefield. It reinforced the notion that the Mech Designer System still centered around mechs for the most part.

"C'mon. Tell me how well I've handled the latest Mission. I did good, right?!"

He didn't know why the System delayed the announcement. He could only sit around and wait until it finally issued its judgment.

[Congratulations for completing the following Mission: Introduction to Biomech Design. The design of your submitted mech design is both complete and viable, showing that you have learned and mastered the basics of biomech design. However, the lack of time spent on designing your first biomech and the lack of access to more advanced resources have set back the performance of your work. Your experimental Empowered Blood Sharing System can potentially produce dramatic results, but requires time to take effect. The immediate effects of this new design application are not as significant and will reflect on your score.]

[You have been awarded with 114 Ascension Points for submitting your Blood Knight biomech design.]

"...That's it?" Ves questioned.

He had toiled for 70 straight days for this Mission. This was a lot of time. It was difficult for Ves to recall his original mentality when he had just entered the System Space.

He spent so many hours on studying how to design a biomech before he proceeded to work on the Blood Knight Project.

Although Ves was more than satisfied with all of the knowledge that he had gained and the fantastic new experimental biomech design that he had rushed to complete, the profit he made at the end was hardly worth the effort!

With a total investment of 100 AP, his net profit only amounted to 15 AP in the end!

15 AP!

"After all of this effort, I refuse to settle for this reward! I deserve more! You know how promising the Blood Pact can be. It is a revolutionary new method of empowering mech pilots that can give people like Commander Melkor a chance to become an expert pilot one day! I know that all of this future stuff might not really fit the criteria of the latest Mission, but surely this is what you truly want from me, right?"

Ves was so emotional about his paltry profit that he could not control himself in front of the System.

He didn't expect much from his venting as he knew that the System had always been rather inflexible about its rules.

However, it turned out that the System wasn't done.

[You have been awarded with 200 additional bonus Ascension Points for designing a biomech that exceeds the parameters of your Mission.]

"DAMNIT! Couldn't you have announced this to me sooner?!"

Ves had no idea whether his whining had worked or whether the System always intended to give him a bonus.

In any case, Ves had become a much richer mech designer!

He started out with 1032 Ascension Points. This was a generous sum, but not good enough for his purposes.

After spending 70 days in this System Space that was frozen to reality, he finished his Mission with 1247 Ascension Points in his pocket!

"1247 Ascension Points!"

Ves was much better off than before!

If nothing else, he bought himself a lot more time for himself. He could spend all of the profit he made on extending his stay in the System Space by 215 days, which was more than worth all of the stress and strain he experienced!

He spent several minutes celebrating the good news before he finally regained his composure.

The outcome of this endeavor fully satisfied his initial goal. He was in a much better position to resolve the crisis than before. The more Ascension Points at his disposal, the greater his ability to come up with a viable solution.

He still hadn't forgotten about his other goals, though.

He wanted to accumulate a minimum of 1500 AP to feel comfortable with developing a weapon that could interrupt the unclean whale that was previously imprisoned inside the Palace of Shame.

"It would be even better if I can earn 2000 AP, but that seems unlikely."

Ves gained a better understanding of the System after completing the latest Mission. It was quite brutal in following its rules, but it was also generous enough to reward him if he earnestly worked on new innovations.

Developing new design applications played a key role in the progression of a mech designer. Ves would have never been able to make so much progress if he didn't work so hard to invent new means of making his mechs more powerful.

The best Master Mech Designers and Star Designers were all brilliant innovators who weren't afraid of common sense and fully committed to realizing their unique visions!

"I am still far from reaching their level, but I can still imitate their unrelenting drive."

Ves took a small moment to take a well-deserved break.

He was not eager about wasting more Ascension Points than necessary, but after subjecting himself to so much pressure, he needed to decompress and reset his mental state.

He had plenty of time to reflect on his work and evaluate his Blood Knight design from different angles.

"It's decent, but that doesn't change the fact that it is a rush job. The System was a bit generous when it judged that it was worth 114 Ascension Points at first. Its performance really can't keep up with the mainstream offerings on the market."

That said, the Blood Knight Project could still be incredibly popular and well-regarded if its Empowered Blood Sharing System worked as intended!

If a Blood Knight and a mech pilot were able to deepen their relationship by becoming intimate 'blood relatives', then there was definitely a pathway to enabling a mech pilot to leech off the spiritual development of the biomech!

In essence, the Blood Pact took advantage of one of the greatest advantages of living mechs, one that never seemed important until he came up with this revolutionary biomech concept.

"The spirituality of a typical human being is deficient. Most of the time, it is weak and hindered by numerous barriers that prevent it from growing stronger."

This was the congenital weakness of the human race. It limited the activities of the Five Scrolls Compact and kept the Transhumanist Faction of the MTA busy all the time.

Ves had invested way too much of his time on trying to solve this problem. His great obsession with making his mech pilots grow in pace with their living mechs had driven him to try out all kinds of solutions, but to no avail.

"There is no viable way to solve this congenital defect unless I can plant a companion spirit seed into an unborn fetus while it is still malleable."

While Ves was happy that he could ensure that all of his children obtained spiritual potential through the growth of their companion spirits, this was hardly a solution that could be applied on a wider scale.

Yet what if any mech pilot could solve this congenital deficiency by piloting a specific biomech? What if they didn't need to do anything else but exchange their blood with that of an organic machine over the course of performing his duties?

Compared to all of the weird and expensive procedures that had yet to achieve any solid results, the Blood Pact was a much more practical way to turn large amounts of ordinary mech pilots into extraordinary heroes!

This was because living mechs didn't seem to experience any bottlenecks in their spiritual growth!

As life forms that were inherently more energy-based than humans, living mechs seemed to operate by different rules that were much more generous than usual.

Each of his products had the opportunity to evolve into a third order living mech as long as they experienced enough precipitation!

Given that third order living mechs were quite powerful in a spiritual sense, a mech pilot could gain a massive spiritual boost as long as they were able to borrow at least a fraction of their battle partner's strength!

"It's a way for a mech pilot to rely on an external source to kickstart their own development. As long as the biomech and the mech pilot are close enough to each other, their Blood Pact is bound to produce results!"

Of course, Ves also recognized that mech pilots who possessed spiritual potential wouldn't necessarily be able to develop their hidden strength.

Their mentality, discipline, skills, courage and conviction also played important roles in their progression as mech pilots.

"Increasing the pool of eligible high-ranking mech pilots is still incredibly useful! It is always better to give everyone a chance. Even the most hopeless loser has a chance to reinvent themselves when given the opportunity!"

Perhaps Venerable Vincent Ricklin served as an example of this. Ves never thought well of the idiot of a mech pilot, but the man had certainly shaped up to become a powerful warrior and a useful asset on the battlefield.

"My work has enabled me to turn trash into treasure! Vincent would have remained a nobody if not for my intervention!"

Ves had facilitated the growth of several mech pilots, but none had started out as low as Vincent!

If Ves was able to provide chances to not just a handful but to thousands of Larkinson mech pilots, then he would definitely be able to elevate the Larkinson Army into a true force composed of demigods!

"In fact, why stop there? Why not go further?"

If he was able to design a commercial version of the Blood Knight mech, then he could easily transform the lives of millions, billions or even trillions of mech pilots!

Anyone who was brave enough to take in the blood of their own biomech and share their blood back to the organic machine would be able to step on the road to becoming a god pilot!

"A bonus of 200 Ascension Points is too cheap! You should have given me a million Ascension Points!"

Chapter 4477 Material Anchors

Ves gained so much during his initial attempt to design a biomech that he gained a lot of enthusiasm for what else he could do in the System Space.

The fact that he had made such an enormous leap in capabilities and expanded his range of mech designs by an entire category had caused him to develop a much greater appreciation of the Mech Designer System.

"Maybe I have been too reticent about making use of the System all this time."

A part of him regretted that he ignored the System for so long. If he studied the Missions more closely and figured out that he could complete them with the help of a cleverly chosen enlightenment fruit, he would have been able to expand his repertoire without spending as much Ascension Points.

After all, he not only spent 30 Ascension Points to buy enough time to study the essentials of biomech design, but he also spent 40 Ascension Points to cover the time needed to design the Blood Knight Project!

"Well, it's not a waste to spend 70 Ascension Points to extend my stay in the System Space. Time is the most valuable resource of all. There are lots of mech designers who would literally kill entire states if they could obtain more time for themselves!"

This was one of the many wonders of the Mech Designer System. Humanity managed to master many forms of high technology, but Ves seriously doubted whether anyone aside from maybe a god pilot could manipulate the power of time!

For Ves to be able to buy extra time for the price of a single Ascension Point a day was extremely convenient, so much so that it could literally change his life!

"This is a potent power and one that I should treat with great respect." He reminded himself.

His ability to earn Ascension Points was still relatively limited, so he could not squander them on buying time alone.

There had to be a greater purpose behind this action in order to justify the expenditure.

"It's much more useful for me to spend my Ascension Points on enlightenment fruits." He affirmed. "Increasing my capabilities and acquiring exotic knowledge that is far out of my reach can immediately boost my career and improve my work."

He had been impressed by how much knowledge he had gained from absorbing the Blood Cult Scarlet Oak Tree Growth Manual enlightenment fruit.

This event had taught him that he shouldn't underestimate the value of any enlightenment fruit, even the cheapest and most unassuming ones!

"It's all about relevance and fit. A single textbook's worth of knowledge on spirituality is much more useful than a library's worth of information on financial management."

One of the more curious effects of absorbing the latest fruit was that Ves not only gained a lot of scientific and mystical knowledge on blood and trees, but also gained awareness of the rituals and ideology of the Blood Cult.

Though Ves could not call himself a card-carrying member of this secretive organization, he knew enough about the blood cultists that he could blend inside their midst for a time!

Ves even developed the urge to seek them out and hold a civilized exchange with them. The knowledge contained in a single enlightenment fruit was only the tip of the iceberg. The Blood Cult's understanding and mastery of the tangible and intangible properties of blood encompassed so much more!

Although the cultists preferred to use the word 'qi' and other strange terms to refer to spiritual energy and such, that did not stop Ves from appreciating all of the theories they developed.

"If I can obtain more core secrets from the Blood Cult, I can improve the effectiveness of the Blood Pact. That will make it much easier to convert average mech pilots into powerful heroes!"

Ves did not think about how odd it was to use the methods of vile cultists to enhance the functionality of mechs.

"It's a pity that there aren't any further enlightenment fruits related to the Blood Cult available at the moment."

He silently decided to pay attention to any further fruits related to this cult in the future.

There were still many other fruits available that were tied to different cults. Each of them possessed names that Ves had never heard of. He suspected that a large proportion of them had become extinct.

"Hm, let's see if these other fruits can help me out as well."

Now that he managed to restore his condition, he became eager to continue his quest to earn more Ascension Points.

He moved to the Mission Hall and studied the 11 Missions that remained.

"None of them are easy. What is worse is that I can only complete a few of them without returning to reality."

He did not let the difficulty deter him. His previous success had given him a lot of confidence.

Now that he figured out the right strategy, he was eager to repeat his success formula and accumulate more knowledge and Ascension Points.

"Let's see what I can choose."

[Divine Artifact Creation]

Mission: Divine Artifact Creation

Difficulty: B-Rank

Prerequisites: Spirituality must be higher than 10.0

Description

As a human attempting to undergo Spiritual Ascension, you must obtain an object that symbolizes the essence of your power and rules. The existence of a material anchor is essential to the continued existence of deities. Without a

connection that can tie them to the material realm, they are no different from the dead.

Create or acquire a material object that reflects your traits and symbolizes your authority. Let this anchor be the strongest physical trace that can expand your reach, accelerate your ascension to divinity and allow you to escape the fetters of mortality.

The greater the power of the divine artifact, the greater its ability to facilitate your Spiritual Ascension. However, a stronger artifact also requires a greater sacrifice in order to take effect. Do not overdraw your essence and ruin your future potential.

Reward: 100 Ascension Points

Time limit: 2 Years

Penalty for failure: Lower your Spirituality by 2

Ves grew reluctant as he read this description.

Compared to the previous mission, this new one was a lot more vague about what Ves needed to make this time!

The religious claptrap and the clear warning about the dangers of overreaching had made him doubt whether it was a good idea to accept it in the first place.

"It sounds like creating another totem or an ancestral heirloom, but the difference is that I won't be making them for one of my design spirits this time. If I am interpreting this mission correctly, I have to make an artifact that represents myself!"

Ves furrowed his brows. If this was it, then he could easily make one in a matter of days. He didn't even have to absorb an enlightenment fruit in order to complete the Mission.

He did not think it was that simple, though. The Mission suggested that this was an incredibly important step that might have a profound effect on his future progression.

A poor and shabby artifact would not only be of limited use, but would also drag him down in the future.

A strong and impressive artifact would probably be able to provide him with much more help down the line, but nothing came for free.

The System made it clear that power had a price. Ves would definitely have to make a huge upfront investment in order to create an object that could make a huge difference.

"This upfront investment may be so much that I might end up shooting myself in the foot!"

To be honest, Ves preferred not to get involved in any dangerous affairs. There was plenty of time for him to consider such a matter in the future.

He might not even want to create such an anchor. His goal had always been to become a Star Designer. That was the only way he could design and make the best mechs that could serve humanity.

Ves accepted the previous Mission with a bit more enthusiasm because it did not compromise his ambitions as a mech designer. Even if he initially thought that biomechs were a little weird, he did not regret his decision to branch out as it ended up complementing his design philosophy.

He wasn't sure whether that would be the case this time. This Divine Artifact Creation Mission was clearly related to the more esoteric side of the upgraded Mech Designer System.

What Ves found strange was that this Mission implied that the Hammer of Brilliance didn't qualify as a divine artifact.

After all, the hammer that he had made represented Vulcan in many ways and was even capable of channeling the power of the God of Mechs, Dwarves and Craftsmanship.

"Maybe that's the problem." Ves furrowed his brows. "Vulcan is an incarnation of me, but it doesn't represent me. Vulcan has its own strengths and weaknesses that are only tangentially related to me. When people think of Vulcan, they have an image in their mind that looks nothing like myself."

If Ves was right, then this Mission may be related to a notion that Ves entertained in the past.

"Can I take on the role of a design spirit?"

Ves instinctively wanted to say no. His spirit was completely different from that of Vulcan or any of his other design spirits.

Much of his Spirituality was locked inside his design seed, which provided enormous help to his mech designer activities. It also functioned as a beacon that propagated his design philosophy and the living mechs that he designed.

"Wait a minute. Doesn't that sound similar to how design spirits are able to exert their influence onto mechs?"

He never thought about it before, but once he made the comparison, he could see the parallels.

Of course, the way he tied his design spirits to different mech designs was not that deep.

High-ranking mech designers were passively able to improve the technical performance of their mechs.

The higher their rank, the greater the differences.

If not for the fact that this only worked for mechs, mech designers would probably be able to fool people into thinking that they were gods!

"Maybe this claim is essentially true in the case of Star Designers."

During his only meeting with the Polymath, he managed to get a taste of her enormous majesty.

The power she possessed far exceeded his expectations of the power of a Star Designer at the time.

He was too weak and inexperienced to properly understand the transcendent might of the Polymath. A part of him even became convinced that the secret holder of a fragment of the Metal Scroll had become a god in human form!

Her spirit was so vast and powerful that she had essentially completed her transformation from a corporeal life form to an energy-based life form!

"In other words, her human body is nothing but a symbolic shell that serves as a convenient puppet for her to interact with other mortals."

Thinking about this gave Ves an additional hint on why it might be useful for 'gods' to create a divine artifact.

A human body was too fragile to serve as a permanent anchor to reality.

A being as powerful as the Polymath didn't exactly belong in the material realm anymore. It was much more appropriate for her to ascend to the imaginary realm or another higher realm that Ves was not aware of. It took conscious effort for her to prevent herself from flying away.

At least that was what Ves thought. He might be wrong. He had no idea whether his guess was true since he was working with limited information.

"I will naturally get in touch with these secrets as I go higher up the ranks. There is no need for me to plan too far ahead."

For now, he needed to earn more AP. He needed to decide whether it was a good idea for him to accept the Divine Artifact Creation Mission.

"Do I want to embark on a life-changing project that has major implications to my future growth in the hopes of earning less than 100 Ascension Points?"

Ves couldn't decide for a while.

Chapter 4478 Alien Practices

He had difficulty deciding whether he should accept this Mission.

His mind said no. Rationally speaking, it was way too reckless to create an important totem that was tied to himself when he didn't know the consequences of treating himself as a design spirit.

Ves was not a normal spiritual entity like his incarnation Vulcan. He had no idea how much a so-called divine artifact would affect his capabilities as a mech designer.

He had no qualms with experimenting on design spirits. If anything went wrong, Ves wouldn't be the one to suffer from the consequences!

"My specialty has always been to let other people suffer from the consequences of my actions!"

He wouldn't be able to do that anymore now that the System requested Ves to treat himself as a test subject.

"It might not even be possible for me to create a totem based on myself. Wait... what if it doesn't have to be me? What if... I can use one of my other incarnations?"

Aside from Vulcan, Ves also had Blinky!

Although both of them were different reflections of himself, they were still fundamentally different from each other.

Vulcan was an external incarnation that possessed a complete life of his own. He just happened to be connected to Ves in various ways.

Blinky was an internal incarnation that resided in his very mind. The Star Cat was more of a split personality of Ves that just happened to gain an infusion of power.

Unlike Vulcan, Blinky's domain and spiritual energy completely mirrored that of Ves!

If Ves' suspicions were correct, he could probably utilize Blinky as his surrogate design spirit!

"What do you think, Blinky? Would you like to join the party and empower mechs and totems with your presence?"

The purple spiritual cat dove out of his mind and flicked his black-tipped tail in a reluctant manner.

Mrow....

"I know, buddy, but the risks are much lower if we use you as a subject instead. You're not a mech designer so your spiritual makeup is much closer to that of a traditional design spirit."

Mrow mrow mrow!

"You may have a point. If this divine artifact stuff is greater than an ordinary totem, then I might need to do more in order to complete the Mission."

Mrow!"

"Silly Blinky. Have you forgotten how I managed to complete the previous Mission already? If I don't know how to do something, then I will find a way to obtain the necessary knowledge! The Tree of Possibilities still offers many enlightenment fruits that are related to various cults."

Mrow...

Ves frowned for a moment. "Maybe you're right. If it turns out that the enlightenment fruit I need is too expensive, then I will leave it be and consider another Mission. I don't want to end up spending more Ascension Points than I can gain."

He planned to handle this Mission as quickly as possible.

While it was customary for him to spend months or years designing a good mech, there was no need for him to spend as much time on smaller projects.

As long as he wasn't too ambitious, he should be able to develop an excellent totem in a week or two. This was especially the case if he utilized his existing tools.

Part of the reason why the Blood Knight Project took so long was because Ves insisted on developing a new innovation.

Ves didn't think it was necessary for him to repeat that approach. When it came to an object that might have major implications to his future, it was better to stick to familiar territory.

"I should head down to the Tree of Possibilities and see which fruit can help."

When he approached the majestic tree, his gaze quickly flicked from fruit to fruit. He already had an impression of most of them, so quickly narrowed down the ones that sounded relevant.

Fortunately for him, he found an enlightenment fruit that might contain what he needed.

There was just one caveat.

[Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altar Design]

Price: 25 Ascension Points

Imparts the design and annotated notes of a ritual sacrifice altar utilized by the orven race. The leaders of the orven civilization regard themselves as gods, and one of their many means of empowerment is sacrifice. An Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altar is a sacred object that represents a leader of the orven race. It can only be made by integrating a soul fragment of the leader orven. Sacrificing the lives of orvens and other living beings can feed back a part of their strength to the aspiring god, but relying too much on this method can lead to problems.

At first, Ves skipped over this enlightenment fruit. It sounded completely abhorrent and Ves had no intentions of imitating any alien rituals.

He changed his mind when he examined it for a second time.

"If my guess is correct... then a Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altar may be the alien equivalent of a divine artifact."

If Ves assumed that spirituality and spiritual energy were universal phenomena, then what applied to humans also applied to aliens!

"It's just like phasewater. If aliens can develop warp drives, so can humans. This should be a similar case."

Since this was the case, learning how the orven race built and made use of their special altars should provide Ves with lots of useful clues on how he could make his own divine artifact!

"I'm not going to engage in any ritual sacrifice, though. I'm not crazy and I don't need to engage in barbarism in order to grow stronger."

Ves would love to become stronger, but not at the cost of compromising his dedication towards mechs. His desire to become a Star Designer exceeded his desire to become a god!

The only reason why he hesitated was whether it was a good idea for him to absorb foreign knowledge.

The enlightenment fruits he absorbed before all came from different human influences. The knowledge they imparted all stayed within the realm of human understanding.

This was different. Despite the narrow scope of this enlightenment fruit, he would definitely implant a lot of strange and alien thoughts if he absorbed its contents!

"It's cheap though, and there is nothing else that relates to the Mission that I want to complete."

After a bit of thinking, he decided to take a gamble and go through with this decision!

He wasn't afraid of the fruit. He might be able to learn a lot about orven culture and society!

"Besides, if Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altars have nothing to do with the Mission, then I will have only squandered 25 Ascension Points at most."

That was an acceptable loss in his eyes.

Ves proceeded to buy the fruit and pop it into his mouth without any further delay.

"Alright, here it comes!"

He sat down and completely focused on absorbing and integrating the influx of alien knowledge!

It was not as much knowledge as he thought. The so-called ritual altars weren't that complicated from a technical perspective.

The orvens engaged in sacrificing their own kind from the beginning of their history.

Back when they were ordinary savages that roamed their primitive planet, the chieftains and the other leaders of the various tribes came up with a brilliant new method of punishment.

Instead of wasting a life by executing an orven, why not try to put him on a funny-looking stone altar and try to siphon away his strength?

This was how the practice of ritual sacrifice came about. Somehow, the chieftains and their lackeys managed to discover a way to make it work, and proceeded to refine the altars from that point onwards.

The context and form of ritual sacrifices changed many times throughout the history of the orven race.

It started out as a more productive form of execution, but slowly included voluntary sacrifices.

There were plenty of brainwashed lower caste orvens who were completely willing to dedicate their lives to the higher castes they regarded as gods!

When the orvens reached the stars and spread throughout the Red Ocean, they also began to sacrifice other intelligent alien races on their altars.

The results were largely mixed. The feedback provided from involuntary sacrifices tended to be less... lower in quality. The feedback provided by alien beings was even more mixed.

In any case, the orven race was one of the few indigenous races of the Red Ocean that had mastered an effective form of empowerment through sacrifice.

It took advantage of certain traits that were unique to orvens to enable a relatively easy method of spiritual cannibalization!

Not only that, but the orvens also managed to transform it from a taboo to a widely accepted practice within their society!

"If something like this happens in human space, the Big Two will come down so hard that nothing will be left of the perpetrators!"

Ves didn't feel tempted to create an Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altar for himself at all. Its mechanisms fundamentally clashed with his own principles.

His purpose had always been to foster mutual benefits. While the mechs he made could certainly be used to harm fellow humans, this was the natural course of internal competition.

An altar made by the orvens was much more nefarious. It not only harmed the population, but also corrupted the would-be god that acquired power without working for it. Ves found it surprising that orven society could still remain stable when led by degenerates who were drunk on power!

"Maybe I am being too judgemental of them. This fruit hasn't told me much outside of how to design and build one of these altars."

He turned his attention towards the form and function of these altars.

The more advanced and sophisticated ones possessed many different parts and mechanisms, but none of them were important. They mostly attempted to automate the sacrifice process, limit any complications and clean up the mess once the ritual was complete.

"What is truly important is the spiritual design."

Ves came in touch with true alien spiritual engineering this time!

It was the most valuable gain of this enlightenment fruit. Not only did he obtain a substantial amount of knowledge in spiritual engineering, but also included a lot of helpful theories that explained spirituality from a systematic perspective!

The orvens had their own measurements and classifications of spiritual energy. They developed their own understanding of spiritualities, though they also mixed in plenty of superstition as well.

The knowledge was not complete, though. The fruit only granted theories that directly related to the altars and nothing more.

"It's enough. I can't expect much from a fruit that costs just 25 Ascension Points."

Ves gained the most from the enlightenment fruit when he combined everything he learned with the knowledge that he already possessed.

As Ves tried to reconcile everything he learned with his existing foundation in spiritual engineering, he found out that there was a considerable overlap.

He already figured out a lot of truths by himself. He just gained a different perspective on the same topics.

Though he still managed to learn a number of new theories and insights, he did not gain the ability to create a lot of weird and powerful alien artifacts.

He just became really good at making Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altars.

"That's not entirely true. I can also adapt what I've learned to make other stuff!"

While Ves appreciated much of what he learned, one of the most relevant gains from the fruit was teaching him what divine artifacts might be and what made them so important!

"If I assume that an Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altar is comparable to a divine artifact, then it is way more than just a totem!"

In order for the orven leaders to obtain a channel where they could receive sacrifices, they first had to make a sacrifice of their own.

The most serious sacrifices entailed chopping off a limb that would subsequently be merged into the altar!

Although not every altar had to be made this way, the other methods were all inferior.

"Creating an altar is like creating an incarnation that is locked inside a solid object!"

Chapter 4479 Divine Artifacts

Ves left the Tree of Possibilities and climbed up the steps leading to the summit of the mountaintop.

He hadn't visited the top of the mountain for a long time. Compared to the more practical areas of the System Space, the Sacred Temple provided little obvious benefits to Ves.

The Pantheon was where Ves could check up on his state and the state of his incarnations, but he wasn't able to do much else.

The Chosen Courtyard was where he could host his so-called Chosen Envoys, but Ves had yet to recruit any for his cause.

The Sacred Hearth was the core of the Sacred Temple and supposedly held his Divine Core and that of his incarnations.

Ves still had a poor understanding of Divine Cores. He didn't know what they represented and what made them different.

All he knew was that his Divine Cores were all underdeveloped. Each of them resembled flickering candle flames that looked as if they could be snuffed out at any moment.

The one corresponding to Vulcan was a little stronger due to his greater spiritual development, but its quality was still low for the most part.

There was an important reason why he entered the Sacred Hearth.

The knowledge imparted by the latest enlightenment fruit had caused him to develop a strong suspicion.

"The reason why Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altars and by extension other divine artifacts are special is because they have merged a part of a powerful individual's Divine Core!"

This went beyond anything that Ves had dealt with before. Not even the act of creating an incarnation was as extreme as splitting off a shard of Divine Core before merging it into a different object!

This was an exceedingly dangerous process and could easily kill or cripple the orven that wanted to make an altar.

The reason why the orvens were able to create their special altars to begin with was because they prepped the leader orven with a lot of nonsense.

By creating an elaborate ceremony around this event, the priests essentially drugged and hypnotized the leader orven into exposing their Divine Cores before subsequently chopping off parts of them to use in the creation of the corresponding altars.

"The reason why cutting off the limb works is because it puts the leader orven in the right mindset! The flesh isn't that important. What matters is that the individual also cuts off an invisible part of themselves in the process!"

Not every orven could complete this ceremony. Only a small part of the total population was able to make a useful altar. Ves believed that was because only a few of them possessed sufficient spiritual strength and talent to form a Divine Core in the first place.

The ability of certain orvens to create working altars formed one of the foundations of the orven caste system.

The upper caste orvens were so powerful and capable of doing so much more that they didn't even regard the lower caste members of their race as individuals!

"Being an orven is great if you are spiritually talented, but if you're not... then you will never get to enjoy true freedom."

The orvens showed many traits that were similar to humans, but they also adopted customs that completely set them apart.

Ves found everything related to their sacrifices to be abhorrent, but that didn't mean he was willing to discard what he learned.

He obtained a lot of useful knowledge, including a way for him to make a divine artifact if he wished.

"I don't even have to read orven religious scriptures for several weeks on end while ingesting various mind-altering substances."

The reason for that was because of the ethereal flames that were burning in front of his eyes!

"It turns out that one of the purposes of the Sacred Hearth is to make my Divine Cores more accessible!"

Ves never really figured out the point of building the Sacred Hearth until he ate the latest fruit.

The System had somehow brought the Divine Cores or a reflection of them to this place.

Not only that, but the System also made them tangible, allowing him to touch and manipulate the Divine Cores as if they were physically present!

Perhaps Ves might not know how profound that was before today, but now that he learned the unique cultural practices of the orven race, he understood how precious it was to be able to manipulate his Divine Cores on demand!

"A Divine Core is like the source code of a god. Changing it can directly change a deity!"

It turned out that the Mech Designer System 2.0 provided Ves with a huge opportunity by setting up the Sacred Hearth.

Gaining access to his Divine Cores without needing to turn himself into a pilgrim and drugging himself stupid was a massive convenience!

"No wonder those orven prisoners spilled so much information to me back then." Ves suddenly realized. "Their so-called gods are truly able to wield a lot of power if they have received enough sacrifices."

There was another factor that enabled the best and most talented orvens to break their biological limits.

In order for the leader orvens to expose their hidden Divine Cores and make it possible to slice out a part of them, they had to be injected with a dangerous substance.

That substance was known as phasewater!

"Crazy! These orvens are mad for coming up with this step!"

The earliest orvens had access to phasewater. Somehow, they came up with the idea of ingesting the substance or injecting it directly into their bodies.

Most times, these crazy experiments ended in gruesome deaths, but there were rare cases where the stupid bastards managed to survive!

Ves guessed that the first orven 'gods' came into existence through this reckless experimentation!

"The existence and presence of phasewater has certainly distorted the societies of many alien races." He surmised. "Without phasewater, the orven race would probably be a lot more similar to humans."

He didn't know how it worked, but somehow the act of injecting phasewater into the body of an orven helped with exposing that individual's Divine Core.

It was as if the Divine Core existed in a different dimension or realm but could somehow be brought to the material realm.

Even as the orven race became more advanced and began to master the power of technology, they never found a way to get rid of this essential step.

Although modern technology, extensive augmentation and more optimized ceremonies had substantially reduced the lethality of this move, fatalities and crippling injuries still occurred from time to time!

Normally, if Ves wanted to make his own divine artifact, then he would have to subject himself to the same dangerous treatment.

"Luckily, I don't have to do that!" Ves grinned.

A part of him understood now why the System offered the Divine Artifact Creation Mission.

It was well within his means to complete it given the resources and facilities within his reach.

That said, the process could still be dangerous to him depending on how far he was willing to go in exchange for power.

He was confident that he could create a weaker divine artifact without taking any risks. He just had to take as little away from his Divine Core as possible.

"Taking away a tiny shard won't fundamentally affect the health of my Divine Core." Ves said. "It is only when I go further that problems will occur. Divine Cores can restore themselves over time, but it becomes harder if it has sustained more damage and lost too much strength."

There was another point of concern that caused him to hesitate a bit more.

"A divine artifact has to be a true extension of myself." He sighed. "Sorry, Blinky. I can't use your Divine Core as a substitute. It has to be me who makes the sacrifice."

The Mission description was rather clear in that he needed to create a divine artifact based on the essence of his power and rules.

Blinky might be another part of himself, but the companion spirit still possessed slight differences that would end up imbuing a divine artifact with different properties.

"It has to come from me. There's a reason why there are three Divine Cores in the Sacred Hearth instead of two. The System still considers us as separate entities with separate Divine Cores."

It was an interesting observation that had a lot of implications. Ves didn't have the time to think it through, though.

He had no interest in jumping too deep into the Spiritual Ascension rabbit hole.

"Let's start with designing my first spiritual artifact."

Ves no longer delayed any further and proceeded to accept and start his work on his new Mission.

There was a lot of leeway as far as divine artifacts were concerned. They could be small, big, strong or weak.

Bigger divine artifacts tended to be more powerful, but also imposed greater demands.

For example, when it came to the Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altars, their maximum size was limited to the strength of the fragment of a Divine Core.

More powerful entities with more powerful Divine Cores could probably get away with obtaining a much larger divine artifact!

"As for me... I should probably lower my expectations."

Ves wasn't willing to push the limit on this. He was deeply reluctant to inflict too much damage on Divine Core. He didn't really see much benefit in creating a powerful divine artifact.

"As a mech designer, the only way for me to grow stronger is to design better mechs and progress my design philosophy."

He already understood what it took for a mech designer to become a Senior. He also had a decent idea on what he needed to do to become a Master.

However, the gap between a Master and a Star Designer was enormous. Ves could not rule out the possibility that a divine artifact might play a useful or even an essential role in the subsequent evolution of a mech designer.

If Ves settled for a perfunctory divine artifact, then it would be a lot more difficult to make any progress in the future!

Despite this possible truth, Ves wasn't too afraid of starting out small.

He thought about his mechs, his design spirits and many other products.

The one thing that all of them had in common was their capacity for growth!

"In fact, even Orven Ritual Sacrifice Altars are able to grow stronger over time, but that is usually because the orvens they are attached to have gained strength."

Ves wasn't satisfied with that. He guessed that the relation between a divine artifact and a 'god' was similar to the relationship between a mech and a mech pilot.

The stronger the mech pilot, the stronger the mech.

The stronger the mech, the stronger the mech pilot.

If this comparison held up, then a stronger divine artifact might be able to help Ves become a lot stronger over time!

In what way, Ves didn't entirely know, but it should definitely be a positive development!

"Just like how a masterwork mech has helped Patriarch Reginald Cross to overcome his bottleneck and become a Saint, a powerful divine artifact can lower the threshold of my own future breakthroughs!"

He could be wrong, but he didn't think the System would lead him astray. Since it had issued a Mission that encouraged him to create his own divine artifact, then it should definitely provide a lot of help to his development.

He just hoped that it would help him become a Star Designer as opposed to an unholy abomination.

Ves spent a bit of time to come up with a direction for his divine artifact.

He wanted to make one that was small and easy for him to carry around.

It didn't necessarily have to be strong from the start, but it had to possess a good foundation and an excellent growth framework.

It also needed to be alive and related to mechs.

His eyes suddenly lit up as he stumbled upon a fantastic idea!

"Oh, I know! Let's make a cat!"

Chapter 4480 The Case For Cats

If Ves had to make a living artifact that not only embodied his extraordinary identity, but also had to serve as a tool of evolution, he wanted it to be a cat.

Why a cat?

"There are too many reasons to count."

Ves adored cats and was most definitely a cat person. Even though his family already collected a lot of cats, there was always room for more.

The cat was literally and figuratively the totem animal of the Larkinson Clan, which he personally founded and represented. It made little sense to resort to another animal unless it was a member of the Felidae family such as a tiger or a leopard.

A cat was also an inherently mobile object, which suited a living product the best.

Ves had made a number of other totems in the past. The Unending Regalia which he wore right now, the Hammer of Brilliance which he occasionally made use of and the Larkinson Mandate which he used to track his clansmen all had one trait in common.

"They can't move on their own."

Technically, the Unending Regalia could operate by itself in a limited fashion, but it truly wasn't built to function as an autonomous battle bot.

As for the other two totems, neither of them possessed any inherent mobility systems. Their only chance of escaping a calamity was to beg Goldie or Vulcan to exert great power to and manifest a part of themselves to take the hammer or book away.

Ves didn't want to impose this limitation on his divine artifact, not when he had the ability to do better.

A cat fit all of his requirements. A cat was not only compact and easy to bring along to different places, but also excelled in evasion and running away from danger.

"Cats might not be as strong and powerful as other native earth animals, but if there is one aspect that they are good at, it is keeping themselves alive!"

That was exactly what he wanted from his autonomous divine artifact!

Ves had contemplated other options that were more dignified in nature, but none of them were any good at avoiding danger by themselves. Even if he integrated a small antigrav system in their construction, it simply wouldn't be as good.

"A crown or another book looks nice, but I can't just carry them around in informal settings."

Ves had an affinity to both crowns and books. He took pride in the masterwork crown that he had made for his favorite dwarven emperor. The Imperial Crown was an excellent masterwork totem and he thought there wasn't any way he could do better until he learned about the existence of divine artifacts.

However, Ves couldn't really justify the act of wearing a crown or even a circlet in his daily life.

He could settle for a smaller item such as a necklace or an earring, but Ves was not a big fan of wearing jewelry.

He much preferred to equip himself with more practical objects that could help him out in case he encountered danger.

This was why a cat was so much more convenient. Ves already developed a well-known habit of bringing along Lucky and Clixie whenever he visited a different place.

Few of his hosts ever took notice of the cats. Even if it was rather clear that the cats possessed a certain degree of combat power, their adorable appearances and playful behavior made them so charming that they simply didn't evoke much threat in the eyes of other people.

It was only when Ves attempted to enter an area that was secured through automated systems that the cats had to stay outside. Artificial intelligences possessed no heart and were not fooled by the inherent cuteness of cats!

"That doesn't detract from their effectiveness."

These instances had taught Ves that cats could get away with almost anything. They were just too cute.

For multiple millennia, cats had accompanied humans across the stars.

Throughout the ages, the adorable furry mammals constantly conditioned their food providers into treating them like babies or princesses.

This pattern had persisted for so long that it had practically become an instinct that was baked in the human psyche.

Although Ves doubted whether cats still came across as cute in front of alien races, the diminutive size and the lack of apparent threat should still allow the felines to escape notice.

"Camouflage is important." Ves summed up his goal.

While he felt tempted to go for a big and ostentatious artifact, it made more sense to avoid too much attention.

Going for a divine artifact that looked indistinguishable from normal cats was much more in line with his current strategy!

As the holder of a fragment of the Metal Scroll, Ves had long embraced the habit of making himself look more unassuming.

Even though he couldn't help himself at times and exposed his trump cards one after another to the MTA, none of these secrets were important to him. As long as the truth about the Mech Designer System never came out, he didn't really care about exposing his other advantages, especially when he was constantly growing stronger and more confident in his own position.

"I can't reveal anything about my divine artifact, though. The mechers probably know that this kind of secret is tied to the core of the Five Scrolls Compact. I can't explain how I discovered the existence of divine artifacts, let alone make one on my own with the resources and facilities that I have available!"

A divine artifact needed to incorporate a fragment of a powerful individual's Divine Core. Ves had learned that it was exceedingly difficult to expose it, let alone take out a slice!

Using phasewater to manipulate a Divine Core was extremely dangerous. While there were undoubtedly other methods that could produce the same result, Ves shouldn't have access to any of these high-end techniques.

In any case, a cat would solve many problems. Ves and the Larkinson Clan already had so many of them that the addition of a random cat would not even merit any attention from outside observers.

He just had to make sure that his family did not kick up a fuss.

Now that he thought this matter through, Ves was eager to start his new design project.

One of the reasons why he was so eager to design a cat was because he already possessed a good understanding of how felines worked.

Back when he designed the Devil Tiger, he extensively studied how cats and other cat-like creatures moved and fought. He learned their shapes and proportions and became familiar with how those variables affected their performance in different situations.

Not only that, but Ves had also been working on an informal side project over the years.

He didn't really have a hobby due to his busy life, but he occasionally passed the time by working on a few whimsical designs.

Ves accessed one of those designs that he had stored in the depths of his implant's memory banks.

A projection appeared that depicted an incomplete design of a mechanical cat.

The cat happened to share a large resemblance to Lucky.

As far as Ves was concerned, his very first cat was one of the best and most sophisticated mechanical cats that had ever been made. It was natural to take a lot of inspiration from Lucky's excellent design.

"It's too bad I can't replicate him." Ves regretfully sighed.

The reason why the mechanical cat design was incomplete was because Ves had no idea how to design the internals.

Ves had never been able to scan Lucky's internal architecture. Who knew what kind of advanced components were contained in his small and cute metallic body.

Although Ves could design an internal structure of his own, he never really dared to do so. He knew in his heart that whatever he designed would be far inferior to Lucky's extremely advanced interior.

It was illogical for Ves to feel ashamed for designing an inferior product when Lucky was obviously developed by a much better creator, but he couldn't help it. He didn't want to feel ashamed whenever Lucky and his new mechanical cat sat side by side.

Now that Ves felt compelled to design and make an important new cat, he could no longer allow these feelings of inadequacy to get in his way.

"Maybe I don't need to follow Lucky's template to the letter." Ves mused as he began to entertain several alternatives. "I have my own advantages. I can do much more if I apply my own style and design applications to my cat design."

According to what Ves learned from the last enlightenment fruit, there was no obligation for people to make their own divine artifacts. It was much more customary to leave the job to the professionals who knew what they were doing.

However, the individuals that went through the trouble of doing so usually attained better results. This was because they were much more capable of making ritual sacrifice altars that best fit themselves.

From this, Ves made a general observation. "The greater the compatibility between the divine artifact and the principal, the greater the benefits. The risks should also be lower as there are less chances of conflict or rejection."

What did that mean for his cat design?

"I feel like designing an organic cat."

Ves would have never entertained this idea in the past, but he was a changed man now. He had recently completed his Blood Knight design which he couldn't wait to test in reality!

While cats weren't comparable to biomechs, Ves possessed just enough competence in biotechnology and genetics to develop a basic designer beast.

He was sure that he could find enough resources about the biology of cats in his large library. Cats were so ubiquitous in the Larkinson Clan that it was essential to gather relevant information.

While he probably didn't have access to the designs of more advanced designer cats, he did recall that he obtained enough medical data about Clixie, which he could use as a reference.

"It's too bad I can't replicate a cat as powerful as Clixie." Ves sighed.

Rubarthan Sentinel Cats could only be grown under highly specific circumstances. Without setting up a specific growth environment and without providing them with the right nutrients at the right times, it was impossible for them to grow up healthy, let alone stay alive!

This was a common form of copy protection that ensured that the developers of popular designer beasts were able to protect their commercial rights.

Since Ves never bothered to buy any advanced organic cat designs of his own, he didn't have any existing templates that he could build upon to design his own flesh-and-blood cat!

He grimaced. "The only way I can make this work is to go off the beaten track. I can design an organism that superficially resembles a cat but is actually completely different on the inside."

This did not sound like an attractive solution to him because he would have to do way too much work.

He had not forgotten about his goal of earning more Ascension Points. If he spent too much time on fiddling with genes, he would rapidly reduce the amount of profit he could earn at the end!

"I need to go for a more expedient solution. I'm already familiar with how to design metallic products. What is even better is that I am already half-way done with designing my own mechanical cat. I just need to design the internal architecture before I can proceed with fabricating my latest work."

That said, he didn't want to give up on the advantages of an organic cat, especially after he learned so much about the power of blood.

As Ves continued to look at his existing, incomplete cat design, he suddenly came up with a bold idea.

"Why not do both?"

A mechanical cat was too boring while an organic cat was too complicated.

If he took his existing mechanical cat design but filled up its internals with biocomponents, he might be able to strike a favorable balance!

"I'm going to make a cyborg cat!"