

The Mech 4971

Chapter 4971 Possible Teaching Subjects

Ves felt rather odd for a long time after he finally departed from Tristan Wesseling's design studio.

He expected that he would have to argue with Master Olson a lot longer in order to drag a referral letter from her reluctant hands!

"It doesn't make sense." Ves furrowed his brows as he idly stroked Lucky's back.

The irritable gem cat did not really enjoy this excursion this time. Perhaps he would have been better off if he continued to accompany Andraste and play with her whimsical games!

"Meow meow."

"I don't think that is the case. There is hardly any friendship between the two of us. Sure, we have interacted with each other in an indirect manner, but these past instances were either competitive or purely interest-driven by nature. What she has done this time is an act that comes with many downsides for her. If word ever gets out, she will probably receive greater criticism from her own state."

"Meow?"

"Hm, maybe you have a point, Lucky. I owe a substantial favor to her now. If I ever get access to a lot of first-class knowledge and resources in the future, she may want to take advantage of that to help her in her own endeavors."

Writing a referral letter for Ves was not a huge act that demanded a major sacrifice from Master Olson, but it was still a lot more consequential to her than the other Master Mech Designers!

Ves guessed that she most definitely had greater intentions in mind when she finally expressed her agreement.

It was conceivable that once she came back to him in the future, she might make a bigger request that may not be so easy to fulfill!

No matter.

Ves would be in a much better position at that time. What mattered was whether he could get in front of a classroom that was filled with first-class mech design students with her help.

"I have six letters now." He grinned in satisfaction.

There were not that many more names on his list, and they were all poor prospects.

Ves spent his remaining time on contacting people such as Master Barnard Solas Voiken.

Unfortunately, he had run out of luck. His relationship with these mech designers were not that great.

Master Barnard Voiken was especially scathing when he learned what this conversation was all about!

"You are dishonoring yourself and your profession by asking me to commit a dishonest act! It is a breach of professional ethics for any mech designer to write a referral letter that is not steeped in

truth. You should be ashamed of yourself for demanding a recommendation from a Master who you have never collaborated with or met in person! If not for the fact that Taigen is still reliant on the profits and exposure brought by the Pacifier model that you designed with him, I would have cut all ongoing business relationships with you right this instant! As it is, I shall inform my contacts in the academic sector to be wary of a presumptuous Senior who thinks he can cheat his way into a professorship. Our industry does not welcome liars and thieves!"

Ves became so shocked by Master Voiken's vehement words that he only managed to regain his composure five minutes after the call had ended.

"That crusty old bastard!" He cursed.

His previous talks with other Masters had inflated his confidence. He mistakenly assumed that obtaining a referral letter was not that big of a challenge, but he was wrong.

It may be easy enough to obtain them from the Masters he knew well, but those who fell into the distant acquaintance category were not that eager to bend the rules in his favor.

Contacting Master Barnard Voiken had been a mistake in hindsight!

It didn't matter that the Larkinson Clan graciously gave two descendants of the Voiken Family a better stage for their work. That old and senile bastard was so set in his ways that he probably wouldn't be willing to bend the rules for his own children!

"Oh well."

Ves had to settle for just 6 letters in the end. Whether that was too sparse or a lot, he wasn't sure. The only certainty he possessed was that half of his recommendations came from MTA Master Mech Designers!

"Let's see if that is enough to give me a chance."

Now that he had completed this necessary step, it was time to put these letters into action and apply for a suitable school.

This was not a fast process. Every mech design university received lots of applications, especially in the periods between school semesters.

His expeditionary fleet may have already reached the Torald Middle Zone by the time he received an invitation to attend an interview session.

"Is there any way to hurry up this process?"

He couldn't think of any. As several Masters had already stated, Ves did not possess any particularly desirable teaching qualities. Perhaps the referral letters from Willix, Dervidian and Goldstein might cause a school administrator to take note of Ves, but the lack of proven teaching ability was a fault that could not be compensated in a short amount of time!

"Wait, I can also make use of another connection."

Ves had one other option he could employ in order to increase his prospects. He was still on good terms with Lord Pearian Yorul-Tavik and his powerful clan. There was still plenty of room to cash

in another favor, though it would only be enough to make a university take his application seriously and process it faster.

Was it truly worthwhile to use up a precious favor for this purpose?

"Let's see how it goes without relying on connections. Who knows. Maybe there is a school that is open-minded enough to take on a 40-ish year old Senior Mech Designer."

It took a bit of time and effort to prepare his application documents. He not only had to list out his mech designs, the knowledge he learned and the research that he successfully conducted, but he also had to write a lot of stuff about what sort of professor he would like to become!

Teaching was a big deal. There were so many different methods, approaches and strategies to this important process that the outcomes were all over the place!

Ves had to inform the schools he applied for what sort of teaching style he ideally wanted to adopt and explain why he thought that was effective.

Aside from that, he also had to list out the subjects that he felt qualified to teach!

Though he was just a fresh Senior and an abnormally young one at that, Ves could still teach plenty of subjects, especially the more foundational ones that first-year students learned.

As Ves filled out basic subjects such as physics, programming, metallurgy, mechanics and so on, he already understood it was unlikely that he would get to teach these subjects.

The classes for these subjects were always the largest and most well-attended ones at any mech design university. A professor could easily get into contact with hundreds if not thousands of bright and promising students when they were still young and highly malleable!

This was an excellent opportunity for any clever professor to indoctrinate the young and impressionable first-year students by slanting a lecture in the direction of a specific design philosophy!

"The more junior and less sophisticated professors should be teaching these introductory classes, not these greedy old Masters." Ves grumbled.

He understood that he would have to start at the bottom of the totem pole at these first-class mech design universities. This was why he placed much greater importance on the teaching subjects that were a little more advanced but also a lot less popular.

"Stealth technology is a good one. I can't reveal anything concrete about my upcoming Ghost Project, but most stealth mechs tend to stay classified anyway."

The enlightenment fruit that granted him Senior-level Stealth and Cloaking gave him a lot of confidence in his ability to teach a few subjects about this field.

The only flaws were that he did not design too many stealth mechs or develop any special applications in this area. The probability that he would be able to teach this subject was still low.

"Directed energy weapons, optics, crystallography and a few other related subjects are much more promising."

Ves considered luminar crystal technology to be his strongest minor. He equipped luminar crystal weapons onto practically all of his ranged mechs. Each of them were noted for their higher-than-average performance in ranged firepower.

Even if it was not permissible for him to teach luminar crystal technology to mech design students, Ves could still break it down and teach a lot of useful insights derived from alien tech!

The best part about directed energy weapons was that most of them were rather simple in foundation but also highly scalable. This meant that the fact that he mostly worked on second-class energy weapons would not hinder him from teaching relevant knowledge to first-raters.

This was because aside from using more potent materials and slightly more sophisticated technological solutions, a first-class laser rifle performed nearly identical to a premium second-class rifle!

"I can't forget about my greatest strength. Living mechs... how the hell am I supposed to teach that in a classroom setting?"

Ves had been able to impart Ketis, Maikel and Zanthar with the principles of living mechs because they were all Larkinsons. They could easily get in touch with existing living mechs and observe how they differed from ordinary mechs!

It would be a lot harder to make the same lessons stick on a bunch of arrogant brats, especially if Ves taught them in a virtual classroom!

Thinking about all of these issues gave him a headache. He eventually shrugged and pushed this matter aside.

"I'll think about this later. Let's see if the school is willing to teach this esoteric subject to its students in the first place."

It might become an elective course, but Ves did not hold any hope that a school would trust him to that extent. At least not right away.

"What else am I qualified to teach? Oh, right. I should definitely put in mech fabrication and assembly!"

Ves probably held the record for possessing the most masterwork certificates earned in the Journeyman stage!

The only other mech designer who came close to that was his own wife!

If that was not undeniable proof that he was good at putting mechs together, then he did not know how he could present anything better!

Once he exhausted his list of academic teaching subjects, he thought about whether he should mention that he could also teach... other kinds of classes.

"How to survive getting backstabbed by your own state and find yourself stuck in the middle of hostile space."

"How to survive getting backstabbed by a state you are visiting and finding yourself stuck in the middle of a planet with no friendly mech within sight."

"How to conduct ethical human experiments."

"How to organize expeditions without getting everyone killed like Lord Yorul-Tavik."

"How to defeat a military mech force and plunder an industrial planet."

"How to defeat alien warships and alien phase lords."

"How to search and harvest as much phasewater in the new frontier as possible."

"How to lead a successful pioneering organization."

Ves realized that he had acquired a lot of useful skills over his lifetime, ones that could definitely help the next generation of mech designers succeed in their future ventures!

Given that Ves wanted to teach at a mech design university based in the Red Ocean, it was conceivable that a lot of graduates might encounter similar dangers in the future.

If Ves was allowed to impart his hard-earned lessons to these young and gullible kids, they would definitely be able to avoid a lot of preventable mistakes!

"This should definitely be of interest to any serious frontier-based mech design university!"

Naturally, Ves did not literally write down all of the earlier suggested course titles. He came up with a much more elegant label to describe his proposed teaching content.

"Let's call it frontier wisdom."

Chapter 4972 Struggling And Failing Institutions

Since it usually took weeks or months for these kinds of job applications to get processed, Ves quickly submitted his own to a bunch of mech design universities.

Naturally, Ves did not randomly transmit his job application to any institution.

He read a few guides, skimmed through a few industry applications and formed a list of a hundred or so candidates.

Humanity had already entered the Red Ocean for a number of years, and the amount of people who passed through the greater beyonder gate surpassed a trillion individuals.

Capital ships that were entirely geared towards transporting passengers were akin to layered cities that could bring half a planet's worth of population across thousands of light-years!

Many of such ships had been built, and more were on the way. The Red Ocean had an incredible demand for population and the old galaxy seemingly had an endless supply of adventurous individuals.

With population came the demand for educational services.

Higher education was especially in demand as pioneers had an enormous demand for many essential professions such as shipwrights, mech technicians, fabricators, mining engineers and agricultural specialists.

Mech design also came under demand as a huge amount of mech companies needed more skilled assistants to speed up the development of Red Ocean-style mech designs.

The emergence of novel alien technologies, newly discovered exotics and the endless applications of phasewater threw the entire mech industry in a frenzy!

Every class and layer of the mech industry became enthralled by all of the new options presented by the Red Ocean.

Ves had already witnessed this trend in Davute, and he figured that the situation was not that much different in the upper zones.

Although the threshold of studying at a first-class university was so high that not even ordinary first-raters had much hope of getting admitted, they still pumped out a lot of reasonably competent mech designers that could assist in the design of highly complicated mechs.

Ves primarily set his sights on the more modest institutions that had lower recruitment thresholds.

They weren't diploma mills, exactly, but they couldn't be called centers for excellence either.

Funding, backing and heritage were all needed to found a good mech design university that could stand its ground in a highly competitive market.

The lower-tiered institutions lacked star professors that required a huge amount of incentives or even equity in order to teach in their halls. Without enough renowned and prestigious professors, the schools would not be able to attract excellent students and professors.

They also lacked enough support from a powerful state, a pioneering organization or an old galaxy power. Rival universities with better backing could easily gain more favors and bend the regulations in their favor.

The founders and investors of these schools might not have much ties with existing heritage brands in the old galaxy. This made it a lot harder to inspire trust as the lack of ties to a famous institution meant that the quality of education was still in question!

It would be nice if Ves managed to get hired by a mech design university that scored well in funding, backing and heritage, but that was as unrealistic as breaking through to Star Designer on the spot!

As a second-class mech designer and only a Senior at that, Ves ranked so low on the list of desirable professors that he only had a shot of obtaining a position at the shabbiest and most dubious universities.

"That effectively means that I should only apply to struggling or failing institutions."

There were important differences between struggling and failing schools.

The former might not do so well, but they established enough of a footing in the educational market that they could keep its gates open for at least a decade.

The latter deteriorated so much that it was doubtful that it could keep its classrooms occupied in the next two or three years.

The problem was that it was difficult for Ves to distinguish between the two. These shabby universities did everything in their power to obscure the truth and present overinflated impressions to the public.

The galactic net was filled with so much junk information about them that it was impossible to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The most reliable way to obtain the truth was to command the Black Cats to send field agents to lurk around the campuses, but that was a needless extravagance to the Larkinson Clan.

Ves tried to resort to an alternate means of investigation. He pulled out a totem of Ylvaine and requested answers.

"Can you check over the mech design universities on this list and predict which ones will still remain operational five years later?"

The replies he got in return were murky. Ylvaine lacked the strength to make so many predictions. This was especially the case when the Great Prophet had to look into the futures of large educational institutions that employed at least a dozen Master Mech Designers!

The high concentration of spiritually powerful individuals made it surprisingly difficult for a relatively weak design spirit such as Ylvaine to make any solid judgments about the future!

Seeing that the cost of obtaining answers was way too high, Ves dismissed the design spirit and gave up on this method of inquiry.

"I need to complete my first mech design commission for Davute as soon as possible." Ves muttered and frowned. "I also need to tie him to an expert pilot in order to increase his ability to penetrate the secrets of more powerful targets."

Though Ves had neglected Ylvaine's needs for so long because of his bias against religion, he could not do so any longer now that he recognized the design spirit's strategic value.

The capacity to track down specific targets was too useful for him to abandon!

It became a lot more important to cultivate Ylvaine and allow his predictive abilities to glimpse the futures of more powerful individuals.

"Soon." Ves curled his lips into a smile.

In any case, now that Ylvaine was unable to provide any meaningful assistance for the time being, Ves was left to use his own judgment.

He first whittled down the list by applying additional criteria. Schools that were too large or were located in more restrictive states were a bit too troublesome.

He then relied on his whims and intuition to pick out half-a-dozen different names. If his initial attempt went nowhere, then he could always revisit the list and select a handful of other universities.

The ones that he intended to apply for first all had issues that made them less attractive.

For example, one of them was located close to an ongoing conflict between two rival first-class powers.

Although it was unlikely for outright war to break out, the frequent skirmishers disrupted trade and scared away a lot of potential students.

If the two sides managed to make peace in the future, then the university would probably recover as calm descended on the region.

If the squabbling powers were unable to make up their mind, then many different companies would suffer, not just the university that was struggling to retain its students and professors!

"It takes guts to attend this school."

A lot of students had already left, causing its finances to dip deep into the red.

However, Ves saw it in a different light. Not only was the school lacking in professors who could teach and manage the courses related to core and foundational subjects, the students that remained despite all of the bad news were definitely more to his liking!

There was also another school that had already gone bankrupt before being picked up by a financial group looking for opportunities.

Though the new owners stabilized the school and retained most of the professors by offering higher salaries, a lot of students had already fled to greener pastures!

With intense competition squeezing the mech design university from every direction, the new administrators could only lower the admission standards and take in less qualified students.

The problem with filling up the classroom benches with inferior students was that this made the professors more disgruntled!

Each of these Masters and Seniors wanted to pass on their knowledge to more promising future prospects. It was pretty much a waste of time for them to teach mech design students who could only become Apprentices or maybe Journeymen at best!

Unlike most snobby first-class mech designers, Ves did not look down on these so-called 'inferior' students.

"Heh. Ketis and I started out as third-raters, and look where we are today. Everyone has potential. It just takes more effort to draw it out. Maybe I can employ special means in order to give my classes an extra boost."

Ves did not have many means to employ his unique arsenal of tricks to augment his teaching by remote, but he should still be able to whip up a few solutions with a bit of planning and preparation.

He continued to apply to a few other schools in comparable dire straits. Whether they could dig themselves out of their holes was still in question, but it was exactly because of these adverse circumstances that Ves believed he had a chance!

"That should do it." Ves smiled in satisfaction after he sent out his last job application. "I might not have to wait too long to obtain a reply considering that these institutions desperately need to put out their fires."

Desperation bred expediency. All of those proper first-class mech design universities could easily take their time because they had already adopted a winning posture.

It was the schools that were doing their best to fight for another tomorrow that put down their arrogant postures and no longer put up so many obstacles as before!

Now that he had taken care of this chore, Ves set aside his thoughts on finding a teaching job and turned his attention back to his other needs.

Now that all of the excitement and novelty around his promotion to Senior had passed, it was time for him to handle the priorities that he had previously pushed aside.

"I need to complete the Ghost Project."

Superpublishing the Dullahan Project caused Ves and his collaborators to harvest a lot of new and useful insights.

While Ves had been spending his time on other affairs, Gloriana and Master Benedict had been reworking a lot of different design aspects of the Ghost Project.

They applied many of the design improvements of the Dullahan Project to the Ghost Project!

Now that Ves no longer had any distractions, he spent a few days on performing his own tweaks.

He immediately experienced many of the differences between working as a Journeyman and working as a Senior.

His Spirituality skyrocketed. His intuition became a lot stronger. He could recall existing knowledge more easily. He could solve difficult equations a lot faster. He could spot errors and inconsistencies with greater efficiency. He was able to nurture a stronger and livelier spiritual foundation for his upcoming living mech.

In short, everything became better, and this was just the start!

Ves even had the time to figure out whether these improvements came from his latest evolution or whether they originated from his upgraded connection to the Kingdom of Mechs.

He still couldn't sense this connection directly, but now that he became aware of its existence, his intuition vaguely spotted a few hints.

There were certain times during his design sessions that he suspected that he was getting a little push from the Kingdom of Mechs.

"It's strange."

He did not quite know what to make of this external help.

On the one hand, his work became smoother and he wasted a lot less time on getting stuck.

On the other hand, he occasionally felt that he wasn't doing all of the work. If he kept relying on the Kingdom of Mechs to cheat his way out of a difficult situation, he would never properly train his problem-solving skills.

Was the Kingdom of Mechs really beneficial to mech designers?

Ves seriously questioned this assumption.

Chapter 4973 A New Relationship

This was the first time that Ves worked on a mech design after advancing to Senior.

Becoming aware of the Kingdom of Mechs was both a blessing and a curse to Ves.

It was a blessing because Ves no longer remained in the dark about the processes that took place when he designed a mech.

It was a curse because Ves no longer believed that he was designing his mechs by relying on his effort!

He spent hours on monitoring his new condition. Although his efficiency and productivity had definitely improved, Ves noticed that it was not entirely consistent.

One of the more curious observations he made was that when he fiddled with the design of the active stealth system or the internals, his adjustment work became noticeably smoother than before.

He was not only able to spot a lot more areas that could clearly use a bit of tweaking, but he was able to come up with effective solutions that he would have never thought of in the past.

When he began to work on the areas of the Ghost Project that were more directly related to his design philosophy such as the Geist System and the spiritual foundation, he became a lot less productive.

It did not take much thought for him to deduce the reason.

"It is not just because I don't know all that much about this field."

The Kingdom of Mechs no longer gave him any hints or nudges either!

Ves made a bold guess after figuring out the difference.

It turned out that the Kingdom of Mechs could only offer assistance based on its existing knowledge reserve!

All of the contributions that Master Mech Designers and Star Designers made over the years caused the kingdom to build an exceptionally large and expansive library of knowledge.

Yet how many of them consisted of information related to spiritual engineering and living mechs in particular?

Ves had always guessed that no other mech designer had pioneered this field in the past.

The behavior of the Kingdom of Mechs whenever he worked on his own specialty was remarkably less helpful because it did not know what to do either!

"If this is the case..."

A thoughtful expression appeared on his face. He understood a lot more why the MTA took the initiative to inform mech designers such as Ves about the existence of the Kingdom of Mechs.

It was because at this stage that they could make these observations and learn how much of a role it played for every mech designer, not just themselves!

Ves likened the Kingdom of Mechs to a professional crowdsourced database. It was an immense and responsive library of knowledge that was only as good as the mech designers who contributed their own insights and expertise to this evolving spiritual construct.

After four centuries of continuous growth and expansion, the Kingdom of Mechs had grown to such a degree that it was able to provide substantial assistance to practically every mech designer!

A lot of highly complicated and specialized design work proceeded a lot smoother as countless mech designers managed to avoid a lot of setbacks and detours.

It was like the difference between designing a mech completely by hand and designing a mech with the help of a calculation program.

The former was a slow and clumsy method of completing a job, while the latter was much faster and more convenient!

Ves guessed that the assistance it provided went beyond pure theory.

There was also an additional and more metaphysical component!

When Ves studied the behavior of his enflamed design seed, he began to feel that it had become more remarkable in ways that were previously not as noticeable.

The most surprising change was that Ves had the feeling that his design seed's connection to the Kingdom of Mechs made it easier to design elements that only specialists in their respective fields could handle!

This effect was strongest when he worked on parts and systems that had become staples of his craft.

An innumerable number of Master Mech Designers contributed to the development of stealth systems, power reactors, sensor systems and communication systems in their own unique ways.

What happened when they realized their design philosophies?

According to Ves' guess, these promoted mech designers not only contributed their theoretical advancements, but also donated at least a part of their design philosophies!

Once they passed on the essence of their work, the Kingdom of Mechs grew stronger and more expansive as it integrated a new design philosophy.

The Kingdom of Mechs subsequently gained the capacity to channel this design philosophy for the entire collective of mech designers!

"So this is why Master Mech Designers are so important!" Ves gasped.

He strongly felt that he had deduced the mechanism that made the mech industry so vibrant and prosperous!

The entire point of it all was to turn individual extraordinary power into a collective resource that became accessible to every mech designer!

If Ves managed to realize his design philosophy one day, he speculated that the Kingdom of Mechs would evolve to better accommodate living mechs.

As a result, it became much easier for random mech designers throughout human space to enter his field and design living mechs of their own!

"It no longer requires special talent or a particularly rare mindset in order to get started!"

Ves could not help but develop an even greater appreciation for the Progenitors of Mechs.

Their product of spiritual engineering was even more brilliant and multi-faceted than he thought!

The Kingdom of Mechs provided varying degrees of assistance to mech designers depending on their ranks.

Novices and Apprentices only received a tiny amount of assistance because their connections to the kingdom could not accommodate anything more.

However, even a small connection was enough for them to get started in complicated fields which normally required exceptional effort in order to produce any results.

Journeyman formed a design seed which presumably enabled them to form a more solid connection to the kingdom.

Seniors gained significantly greater access to the kingdom, enabling people like Ves to design common elements a lot more effectively than before!

In short, the kingdom of mechs was a powerful tool that elevated the collective work of mech designers over time.

The greater the accumulation, the greater the common benefits to every mech designer!

This was also why it was so important for the mech industry to nurture successful mech designers who could eventually realize their own design philosophies.

Only Masters and higher were meaningful to the kingdom as only they could expand this collective resource!

That also explained why the Kingdom of Mechs offered huge rewards for any mech designer who taught a student who eventually managed to advance to Master!

"It is a similar model to the referral programs of popular games. If people pull in their friends who subsequently spend a lot of money and reach higher levels, they can earn a lot of in-game bonuses!"

Mech design was not a game, but Ves couldn't help that this scheme was a particularly apt description to how the Kingdom of Mechs actually operated.

Its main priority was to expand its database and accommodate a greater variety of design philosophies. Any act that directly or indirectly promoted this process was definitely deserving of a reward!

Ves briefly closed his eyes.

"It is not all that good, though."

There was a downside to the Kingdom of Mechs. The stronger it became, the more it lessened the challenge to mech designers.

Ves felt that he could grow lazy and outsource considerably more tedious design work to the Kingdom of Mechs.

"If it has already become this noticeable for a Senior, how much more intrusive will it become when I become a Master?"

Perhaps that was why there was a major gap in design results between a Senior and a Master!

One piece of good news that partially allayed his concerns was that he could control how much the Kingdom of Mechs interfered with his work.

It took a bit of introspection, but he eventually felt as if he could turn an invisible dial and slowly cut off the active assistance from the Kingdom of Mechs.

When he had dialed it down to the lowest setting, Ves became stumped by problems that he previously breezed past without needing to know all of the theory.

A lot of hints that Ves previously attributed to his powerful intuition actually came from his connection to the Kingdom of Mechs!

"So this is how it works."

Ves couldn't stand this state when he knew that he could save a huge amount of time by opening himself up to the feedback provided by the Kingdom of Mechs.

The most precious resource of mech designers was time!

The Kingdom of Mechs enabled many mech designers to have more time available on more important work such as progressing their core research.

This was also why he felt so ambivalent towards the kingdom. The more mech designers became dependent on its assistance, the less they developed their research ability and problem-solving skills.

Since the Kingdom of Mechs could not help them expand in a field that it was not familiar with, Senior Mech Designers who desired to realize their design philosophies abruptly had to rely on their own efforts!

This disparity made it extra difficult for Seniors to succeed in their research!

"It is no wonder why so many Seniors remain stuck in this stage for their entire lives. They may have become good at designing conventional mechs that make use of existing tech, but they are not able to succeed at developing innovations that relied on newly developed theories and principles!"

Ves feared that he would fall into the same trap. His first instinct was to dial down the connection to the kingdom to its lowest setting, but he eventually abandoned this idea.

"I can't lose a good tool."

The Kingdom of Mechs did more good than harm. Just like how conveniences such as AIs enabled humans to skip a lot of tedious work, this powerful construct increased the productivity of every mech designer by a whole level!

If Ves cut off his connection to the Kingdom of Mechs, then he would fall behind other Seniors in many ways.

This was completely unacceptable!

In the end, Ves decided that it was better if he kept using the Kingdom of Mechs as intended.

The problems he had with it were not insurmountable. He considered it a test for Seniors to overcome the downsides to borrowing from the collective resources of the Kingdom of Mechs..

So long as these Seniors became good enough to succeed in conducting original research, these Seniors fully deserved to advance to Master!

Unlike many other mech designers who specialized in well-trodden branches such as armor systems or energy weapons, Ves was already accustomed to developing successful innovations and pioneering a new field of mech design from scratch!

Ves understood now that this was the quality that truly allowed him to earn a lot of appreciation from older and wiser mech designers.

People such as Master Moira Willix and Master Benedict Cortez had been willing to invest in Ves because they had greater confidence that he would succeed in realizing his design philosophy one day!

With this advantage, Ves no longer feared the sequelae of building up a dependency on the Kingdom of Mechs.

"I just need to formulate the right strategy to maximize the benefits."

His new relationship with the Kingdom of Mechs reminded Ves a lot of his existing relationship with the Mech Designer System.

He could not bring himself to give up on taking advantage of the System, but he did not allow himself to become a slave to its powerful features either.

As long as he restrained himself and settled on a comfortable balance, he would be able to obtain the help he needed to stand out from the competition without going overboard!

Ves smiled. He felt a lot more comfortable now that he had sorted out his future path.

"Let's wrap up the Ghost Project."

Chapter 4974 Limited Responsibilities

Though Ves did not spend as many days on optimizing the Ghost Project as Gloriana and Master Benedict, he did not need to make as many changes either.

This was because the Ghost Project did not share as many similarities with the Dullahan Project in relation to his design philosophy.

The Dullahan Project's defining feature was the first real implementation of the Carmine System.

It made a lot of sense to bind Venerable Jannzi to an expert mech that reminded her a lot of her previous machine.

Ves could not apply the same argument for Venerable Zimro Belson.

As an expert pilot who had only emerged fairly recently, Venerable Zimro had no affection to any specific mech or mech design. The stealth mechs he piloted in the past were third-party products that the Black Cats procured from the mech market. None of them served as a viable basis for a Blood Pact.

Although Ves could ask whether Venerable Zimro wanted to develop a strong relationship with his upcoming expert stealth mech right away, it was way too premature to make this offer.

The man had never piloted a powerful stealth mech before. The Ghost Project was also unique and beyond anything the mech industry had ever produced.

What if Zimro disliked the Geist System?

What if he wanted to pilot an expert light skirmisher instead?

What if he did not want to tie his entire life to the continued existence of a single machine?

The Blood Pact was a serious lifelong commitment. A single mistake could literally doom the career of an expert pilot with endless potential!

In any case, the Ghost Project had nothing to do with the Carmine System, so a lot of the lessons he learned from the latest Superpublished design became irrelevant.

Ves could only make small technical improvements as well as refine the spiritual foundation of the Ghost Project a little further.

None of this took too much time. Once he became satisfied with his results, he finalized his work and prepared to fabricate the mech design.

Ves had high hopes for the Ghost Project.

Despite all of the excitement that took place after completing the Dullahan Project, the Larkinson Clan's first expert stealth mech was also a heavyweight in terms of innovation!

"This is going to turn into a real treasure." He grinned.

He also wanted to find out how much better his fabrication skills had grown now that he had become a Senior Mech Designer.

Normally speaking, it was barely possible for Senior Mech Designers to fabricate masterwork mechs.

Ves did not exactly know why this was the case. Was it because their connection to the Kingdom of Mechs provided them with an invisible boost, or was it intrinsic to their own abilities?

It would be great if the latter was the case, but Ves could still accept the former outcome.

He had the feeling that the Kingdom of Mechs shouldn't be able to make that much of a difference, though.

The reason why he thought this way was because a lot of high-ranking mech designers never bothered with fabricating their own designs.

Even if they did work with their hands, the quality of their mechs were unlikely to surpass the masterwork threshold.

Ves already came up with his own theory that explained the difference. If his suspicions were true, then his success rate should be substantially higher than before!

All of the benefits he obtained after designing so many masterwork mechs as a Journeyman did not disappear into smoke.

That accumulation still existed and turned him into a better mech designer!

It was just that Ves could not leverage this advantage as well as before due to his limitations as a Journeyman.

"That is no longer the case. Since other Seniors already have the capability to fabricate masterwork mechs on their own, my conditions should definitely be a lot better!"

If Ves already received a massive improvement, then Gloriana would most definitely become a lot more outrageous once she finally broke through to Senior as well!

Both Ves and Gloriana possessed different interpretations of what constituted a masterwork mech.

Years of cooperation allowed them to grow familiar with each other's design styles and minimize the contradictions between their respective design styles.

So long as Gloriana advanced to Master and became a lot more effective at making masterwork mechs, Ves believed that their success rate when combining forces would definitely skyrocket!

Although it was too far to think about making a grand work, Ves had little doubt that he and his wife would be able to close the gap a lot more.

This would be especially the case once they both advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer!

Ves shook his head. "It is way too premature to think about this. I need to finish the Ghost Project first."

He took time off in order to correct his mindset and put him in the best possible state of mind for this important activity.

He spent time with his children and played with them. Though his kids did not like it when their parents were about to close themselves off again in order to fabricate yet another mech, this time was a little better.

"The Ghost Project isn't as large and massive as the Dullahan Project." Ves gently told Marvaine as he held his son in his lap. "We don't have to fabricate as many parts. The ones we do have to make are also smaller and a lot faster to make. One of the challenges of the Dullahan Project was that we had to process a lot of first-class alloys that are exceptionally tough and difficult to shape. The Seferath AQ-3M Active Stealth System is not an armor system, so it is nowhere near as tough as the Bolton Armor. If nothing goes wrong, we will be able to complete this fabrication run in 5 whole days."

Ves and his wife would be putting their minds, bodies and spirits under greater stress yet again by skipping so much sleep shortly after fabricating the Dullahan Project.

However, just enough time had passed since the last fabrication run for the both of them to be in a good enough shape to maintain their health.

Once the day finally arrived, Ves entered a familiar workshop located deep within the Genesis Lab.

It still held two different first-class superfabs like last time. His own AP-VEX along with Master Benedict's personal superfab which he had yet to take back to the Cross Development Center had already gone through several rounds of inspection and preventative maintenance.

Gloriana shifted her attention away from a report about the prepared raw materials when her husband arrived.

"What is your condition, Ves?"

"I feel good. I am eager to get to work and realize the Ghost Project. I poured so much love, expectation and passion into its design that completing it is another major sign of progress for my design philosophy."

His wife smiled and briefly hugged him as he came close. "We are all looking forward to what Ves the Senior Mech Designer can accomplish in the workshop. Your understanding of mechs is much better than before, and you should be able to connect with them on a deeper level as well. You have

left a significantly stronger imprint on the latest version of the design. This should all aid you in fabricating a higher quality mech."

Her expectations were a bit high, so much so that Ves was afraid of disappointing her. Their previous attempt with the Dullahan Project did not end up well due to the added difficulties of fabricating a quasi-first-class transphasic expert mech.

The good news was that both of them learned a lot of lessons from that attempt. They would no longer get stumped by many new problems and already knew what to do when they encountered similar challenges.

The only question was whether the mech designers who hadn't been involved in the Dullahan Project could keep up as well.

Gloriana glanced towards Miles Tovar and Cormaunt Hempkamp. The two were a lot newer and had no experience with fabricating a mech of this caliber!

"I have tried to accommodate them as best I can." She explained. "I allocated the fabrication assignments so that they will solely get involved if their tasks are directly related to their design philosophies. I have also written a manual for them that explains the common problems that they will encounter when they work with first-class materials. Neither of the two are qualified to work with transphasic materials, so we will need to make up for their shortcomings."

"That won't be a problem. The issue with transphasic materials only applies to Miles Tovar. The transphasic flight system incorporates a substantial amount of phasewater. Neural interfaces have no use for this substance."

The good news was that neither Miles nor Cormaunt contributed all that much to the development of the Ghost Project. They functioned similarly to Ketis in that they only worked on what they excelled at and nothing more.

After Ves got up to speed by talking to his wife, he soon approached the pair of Journeymen.

Both of them were rather low on the Design Department's totem pole, but for different reasons.

Miles was a recent graduate from the clan's own design teams. He was an old-timer among the Larkinsons and steadily built his way up after years of diligent design work and accumulation.

His potential was not that high, but Ves did not look down on Miles because of that. The man was loyal and still had a chance to undergo a metamorphosis.

Cormaunt was a lot more promising as Ves hired him only recently. He was a true second-class mech designer with a proper foundation. This meant his potential was a lot higher. His chances of realizing his design philosophy were definitely higher!

"Hello. Are both of you ready to do the work that we demand from you?" Ves asked in a direct fashion. "I have high expectations for this fabrication run, so if there is anything you are uncomfortable with, you will need to bring it up now. It would be too late to mention your problems when we have already begun."

Miles looked pensive. "To be honest, sir, I think it may be better to allow you or your wife to fabricate the flight system without my involvement. I haven't been able to design the flight system for such a high-end expert mech without relying on the assistance of your wife and outside

developers. I have too little experience in fabricating mechs and I am even less confident in my ability to handle so many exceedingly expensive materials."

His concerns were certainly valid, but Ves did not allow Miles to shirk his responsibilities that easily.

"Relax." Ves said as he reached out and patted the man's shoulder. "Do not forget that we are a team. The Ghost Project is your work as well as mine. It is unconscionable for you to be left out of the party. Don't worry. My wife and I will constantly guide and monitor you as you undertake your work. You need to learn how to pull your own weight, and the best way to do so is to get started for real right away. It is unacceptable for any mech designer in our Design Department to avoid fabrication work. This is one of the best aspects about designing mechs."

Cormaunt nodded. "The patriarch is correct, Miles. I do not want to remain stuck as a Journeyman for too long. If I want to advance to Senior faster, then we need to learn from his example and embrace the practical side of mech design."

"That is easy for you to say. Your responsibility begins and ends with designing the neural interface."

"Hey, that is not entirely accurate! I am also assigned to assist Ves in fabricating a part of the Geist System!"

"Don't take the plan too seriously, you two." Ves warned. "The situation can always change once we begin. It may not be ideal, but you should always be prepared to deviate from the original planning."

Ves already had a feeling that this fabrication run would be different. His recent advancement to Senior had changed him in ways that he couldn't describe. He was eager to find out how that related to his craftsmanship!

Chapter 4975 A Personal Commitment

When Venerable Zimro Belson entered the workshop in the company of Calabast, his mood became emotional.

After a long wait, it was finally his turn to obtain a powerful expert mech.

He had already taken a few glimpses of the completed Dullahan Project. The quasi-first-class expert mech bonded to Venerable Jannzi exuded so much power and might that Zimro developed even higher expectations towards his upcoming machine than before!

It didn't matter that the Ghost Project was not as good in frontal combat as the Dullahan Project.

It also didn't matter that he was still a relatively fresh low-tier expert pilot.

The LMC's Design Department developed an impressive record for designing unique and highly effective expert mechs!

Compared to the initial version of the Dark Zephyr that came out first, the Ghost Project benefited from a lot more accumulation!

All of the lessons that Ves and his fellow mech designers learned over the course of designing so many other high-end expert mechs had elevated the design standards of the expert stealth mech to a greater height.

Combined with the use of lots of high-end materials and the best tech that the Larkinson Clan could obtain, the Ghost Project was bound to become a powerful unit regardless of its most defining features!

Thinking about how much he struggled and suffered in the past made Zimro feel as if he finally overcame the shadows of his past.

"Are you ready, Zimro?" Calabast quietly asked.

"I am." The expert pilot whispered back. "I have been briefed on my role for this fabrication run. Jannzi and the other expert pilots already told me what to expect."

"Do not assume that everything will proceed as they have in the past." The spymaster warned. "Ves managed to become a Senior. The Geist System is also unlike anything our clan has ever worked with before. This will be a groundbreaking experience for all of us. A surprise is definitely in store for all of us, Zimro."

"Is that what you have concluded based on your analysis?"

Calabast chuckled and shook her head. "Not exactly. I formed this conclusion purely based on my belief in Ves."

"Isn't that contradictory behavior?"

"I do not need to spend my time on conducting a redundant analysis when the pattern that Ves has set has never been broken. Whenever he engages in his primary work and passion, he can continually pump out one miracle after another. He will not stop doing so unless he is being hindered. Others may suspect that he will stagnate or run out of steam after a time like most aging geniuses, but he is different."

Her eyes glinted with a special awareness that everyone else in the Larkinson Clan lacked.

As an intelligence operative who had once been exiled to the Nyxian Gap, Venerable Zimro easily figured out the multiple layers of meaning behind his immediate superior's words.

"The patriarch..."

"I do not doubt your loyalty and commitment, but it is difficult to imagine what will happen in the future." Calabast calmly spoke. "Ves has suffered betrayal throughout his entire life. He yearns to surround himself with people who are absolutely trustworthy and loyal to him and him only. Although my Black Cats and I have worked hard to prevent him from getting betrayed, this is an inevitability in the game of power and politics. As his rivals and enemies grow stronger and more unfathomable, the role that a pure intelligence network can play becomes increasingly more limited."

Venerable Zimro's expression turned serious. "I can make a difference as long as I obtain my new expert mech. The others won't regard us as useless anymore."

"The opinions of average clansmen do not concern us." Calabast shook her head. "They do not know the extent of how many potential threats and risk factors we have managed to neutralize over the years. What truly matters is whether we enjoy Ves' trust. Now that you are about to come into

power, it is imperative that you completely show yourself that you are worthy of his trust. If there is anyone you wish to pledge yourself to for the rest of your life, it is Ves."

"I am already a Larkinson, ma'am. I have served him since the Xona Stalkers and I have entered the clan and shall continue to do so until my dying breath."

"That may be true, but there are still differences between serving me, serving the clan and serving Ves. You are not as oafish as Venerable Rosa Orfan or Venerable Vincent Ricklin. Think of what may come to pass in the coming years or decades. The clan is constantly growing larger, but it has also become a beast that has become increasingly harder to control. What happened with General Ark Larkinson is only a prelude to what is to come."

This caused Venerable Zimro to frown. "I am not like the others who pursue their own ideals. I have never forgotten who I should be grateful to. The patriarch shall never have any cause to doubt my loyalty."

"That is not enough. You need to move past generalities and make a serious personal commitment. Think of what it means to the Larkinson Clan to obtain a powerful quasi-first-class expert stealth mech. Its technical specifications are already dazzling. It can function as a powerful surprise attacker on the battlefield, but its true value lies in its ability to infiltrate, sabotage or neutralize a target outside of combat circumstances."

That was a truth that Zimro knew well. "I may not have piloted the Ghost Project, but I have prepared extensively by undergoing intensive simulation training. As long as I have gained enough proficiency in my new expert mech, I will be able to execute such missions without problem."

"That sounds fantastic, but that is not the extent of what Ves needs. He needs a hidden blade by his side that he can always trust to fulfill his demands. Due to the threat that you and your next expert mech poses to any adversary, it is imperative that you make it clear that you will never turn your edge against the creator of your own mech. If you cannot bring yourself to make this personal pledge, then the patriarch will always have to remain on guard against you. This will not be conducive to your future development."

The two stopped a distance away from the mech designers as they talked about their upcoming fabrication run.

The patriarch clearly occupied the center of attention. Even if he never took any formal leadership classes, his passion and his desire to realize his vision caused him to become one of the most compelling mech designers that many people have ever met in their lives.

If an expert pilot such as Zimro had to make a choice about which mech designer he would serve unflinchingly, he would not pick Master Benedict Cortez even though he was clearly the most powerful mech designer in the room.

The only one who could inspire him like no other mech designer was the Larkinson Patriarch!

It did not seem like a big deal for Zimro to pledge his loyalty to Ves above all else. He was more than willing to do so considering all the mech designer had done for him and his fellow comrades back when they were mixing up with pirates in the Nyxian Gap.

Yet... it sounded as if this matter was not as simple as it appeared on the surface.

The expert pilot turned towards his superior and looked her directly in the eyes. "What are you truly trying to convey, ma'am?"

Calabast gave him a deep smile. "Think about the worst that Ves may order you to do one day. If he commands you to sneak onto a planet and kill all of the inhabitants of a city, will you execute your mission without fail?"

"That..."

"If he commands you to undertake a suicidal mission such as assassinating a senior Terran or Rubarthan official, will you set off with the determination to succeed or die trying?"

"If he orders you to turn your powers against your own clansmen and assassinate Commander Melkor Larkinson, will you do so without flinching?"

"If he ever separates himself from the Larkinson Clan and goes his own way, will you leave all of your friends and family behind and continue to accompany him into darkness?"

These were incredibly difficult scenarios that could make anyone pause!

Zimro was no exception. As a mech pilot serving in the Black Cats, he was not as naive as most other expert pilots.

However, that did not mean he was accustomed to thinking in such extremes!

"...I see what you mean, Director Calabast."

"What is your answer, Zimro?"

The expert pilot took a deep breath before he firmed his resolve. "If the patriarch requires a tool that can cut whatever he deems necessary, then I shall be that weapon. No matter what may happen in the future, I shall follow him whether he becomes a saint or a devil. I shall serve his interests above the clan and anyone else's including my own. Is this... what you wanted to hear, ma'am?"

Calabast nodded in satisfaction. "It is. I apologize for bringing this ultimatum to you on short notice, but I needed you to make a decision on the spot just before your mind connects to his design network. Your sincerity will be greater and your mind will not be distracted by second thoughts."

"I... understand."

"Now go to him. Open yourself up and demonstrate your commitment to him. While I cannot say whether he will lead you to paradise or damnation in the future, I hope you will not regret your decision."

When Venerable Zimro approached the circle of mech designers, Ves noticed the pilot's approach and offered a friendly greeting.

"Good morning. You have come at the right time. We are just about to start. I am sure that you have already been briefed on what you need to do. In order to ensure the Ghost Project fits your piloting style to the best possible extent, you must take the initiative to think about your past experiences in the cockpit. We may not be able to replicate the same feel, but we should be able to make your future piloting sessions a little more familiar and comfortable."

Zimro did not quite understand how all of this worked, but he simply nodded. "Understood."

Ves leaned forward. "The Ghost Project will be an incredibly challenging mech to pilot for a fresh low-tier expert pilot. It is more powerful than it ought to be. The burden that it may impose on you may be beyond our imagination. The Geist System alone is a huge unknown, but if my suspicions are correct, you will definitely struggle to control its fiends."

That did not sound good. "Is there anything I can do, sir?"

"I have a theory that as long as the Ghost Project becomes a third-order living mech, it can help you ease the burden by a substantial margin. It may even assume the responsibility for directing and controlling the fiends of the Geist System. I will endeavor to turn your upcoming machine into a powerful living mech. After my recent advancement to Senior, I already have a few ideas that might help with this. You may not need to do anything, but who knows whether I will come up with a new solution."

"I shall endeavor to cooperate with you as best as possible if you require my services."

"Good. This will be fun. The Ghost Project shall become available to you in five days. This I can promise."

The patriarch continued to chat about one aspect after another. The Ghost Project contained so much depth that Ves could talk endlessly about his hopes and expectations for his first true expert stealth mech.

Soon enough, everyone got ready to start. Ves' eyes became increasingly brighter as he dramatically raised the glowing Hammer of Brilliance.

"Start!"

Chapter 4976 Unfolding Paradise

Ves was in an excellent mood from the moment he announced the start of the fabrication run!

As Ves, Gloriana, Miles, Cormaunt and Master Benedict split up and approached their respective stations, they began to show their skills right away.

With Zimro Belson standing by the side, Blinky tied the expert pilot along with all of the mech designers in a design network.

As Miles, Cormaunt and Zimro all became fascinated by the novel experience of sharing minds with other minds, Ves mostly focused his attention on what he could do to improve the results of this fabrication run.

He first spent a bit of time surveying everyone's conditions.

Gloriana worked a lot more proficient than before. The advanced materials and designs no longer hindered her as much as before. Her understanding of mech design and her own work had improved by a small leap. This granted her the confidence to complete all manner of difficult tasks.

Ves admired how much she improved in a short span of time. She no longer underestimated the difficulty of fabricating a quasi-first-class transphasic expert mech and approached her work with an earnest mindset.

Master Benedict held a lot of expectations towards the Ghost Project. His work on the energy transmission systems interested him a lot because the last Superpublished mech had given him a lot of lessons on how to optimize his work even further.

However, the eager Master was saving up most of his ammunition for the moment when they would put together the full version of the Geist System.

Object 335 which Venerable Zimro Belson used to practice his control over the spiritual fiends did not count. The True Geist System was designed to be a lot more powerful than a simple pet carrier.

Just the thought of working to extract power from the decapitated head of a still-living expert pilot made the Master excited beyond belief!

Ves also shared the older mech designer's enthusiasm. The Geist System was just as powerful as the Carmine System as far as he was concerned.

Even if the former did not have the potential to accomplish a feat as massive as allowing ordinary people to control their own mechs, the latter opened up many other possibilities that may not be any weaker!

The only issue was that Ves primarily wanted to research the internal applications of his design philosophy. He could not afford to spend as much time on messing around with external spiritual entities as before.

That did not mean he was willing to abandon this field entirely. He craved variety and he still had a few ideas that could help him empower his mechs in unconventional ways.

Thinking about how the Geist System could turn the Ghost Project into a terror that could not be stopped or defeated through conventional solutions made him even more excited than before!

Ves truly wanted to hurry up and complete this expert mech as soon as possible so that he could finally witness the Geist System at work!

"I need to be patient." He muttered.

Fabricating a mech of this caliber was no joke. Ves needed to go through all of the steps without losing his focus.

As he continued to fabricate the transphasic parts that comprised the highly sophisticated Optaar Integrated Solutions Seferath AQ-3M Active Stealth System, he became surprised by how much less demanding his work had become.

Many difficult operations that Ves struggled to do well suddenly became a lot less stressful than before.

Though Ves still encountered plenty of challenges, he managed to resolve them without losing his rhythm.

Did his advancement to Senior make that much of a difference?

As Ves continued to keep track of his own condition as he fabricated more and more stealth-related parts, he understood why he became so much better.

The Kingdom of Mechs played a major difference. Its value was greatest whenever Ves worked with advanced technological components that demanded a high degree of theoretical understanding in order to fabricate correctly.

With the Kingdom of Mechs providing hidden guidance every now and then, Ves no longer had to spend his valuable time and brainpower on figuring the right solution! His 'intuition' simply pointed him in the right direction so that he could easily move on to his next work assignment!

Another reason why he improved so much was that he was simply more effective as a mech designer in every way.

His mind and Spirituality had not evolved as drastically as when he created Veronica, but it became more attuned to mechs and mech design.

The advancement process of mech designers was a journey that enabled ordinary humans to evolve into higher life forms.

The further a mech designer climbed up the ranks, the closer they became to turning themselves into energy-based lifeforms!

Though Ves was still a long way to breaching the critical threshold of Master, he already understood that he was anything but an average Senior!

His Spirituality was much stronger!

His cognitive functions enabled him to design mechs without relying on any tools!

His affinity to mechs was abnormally high after fabricating more than half-a-dozen masterwork mechs!

His three incarnations granted him additional abilities and made him a lot more versatile!

All of these factors already empowered his mech design capabilities to such an extent that he had probably become the most powerful Journeyman among the second-raters!

Now that he had advanced to Senior, his upper limitations had been raised to a huge degree.

He no longer experienced any constraints for the time being, which meant that all of his design-related attributes were able to grow unscrupulously!

If Ves' previous self was like a bathtub that was overflowing with water, he could now be likened to a swimming pool that already had enough water to allow his kids to have fun!

Of course, the swimming pool was still nowhere close to being filled. The upper limitations of Senior Mech Designers were so high that even Ves had to work honestly for at least a couple of decades in order to reach the minimum threshold for becoming a Master.

In any case, his new condition had lifted a weight that Ves never really noticed in the past. He had the impression that he no longer operated under an artificial handicap that forcibly locked him within the boundaries of a Journeyman Mech Designer.

"I'm free!"

Ves could clearly notice the differences when he compared his own performance to that of his wife.

The two had already started to diverge, but the gap between the two had become even wider!

While Gloriana still struggled to fabricate the most difficult first-class components, Ves could complete the same job with plenty of attention to spare.

"That is not all." Ves thought.

Becoming a Senior Mech Designer meant that he had come one step closer to assuming the powers of a Star Designer.

Even if the gulf between the two ranks was still huge, Seniors could come a lot closer to touching the essence of mechs!

As Ves continued to get into a good rhythm, he felt that his high affinity for mechs provided him with a significantly greater boost than before.

He felt closer to the Ghost Project in a way that he couldn't fully describe. It was as if he was not just making a new mech, but also his own child!

An hour into the fabrication run, the work pattern began to shift.

Ves gradually became more dominant while the other mech designers started to take a few steps back.

He occupied an increasingly greater presence in the design network that connected their minds together.

This not only caused him to become the fulcrum of the fabrication run, but also allowed him to dictate the pace, allocation and order of work tasks.

Given that he was able to complete his work assignments 20 to 40 percent faster than before, Ves took the initiative to fabricate a few parts that were originally left to his collaborators.

He was not being selfish when he claimed this additional work for himself. He did this because he knew without a doubt that he possessed the closest connection to the Ghost Project!

The way he perceived his expert mech design had changed. He understood nuances that weren't as apparent as before, and he felt more than ever that it was alive and responsive in a way that he felt stupid for overlooking when he was a Journeyman!

As Ves continued to fabricate the parts of the large and expansive active stealth system, he continually tried to figure out a way that could increase his advantages.

He did not have the impression that he had reached his limit. He felt he could do a lot more in order to improve his results.

His eyes suddenly widened as he connected a few ideas together.

"Wait a minute. As a Senior Mech Designer, my life stage has improved even further compared to before. What if..."

He issued a brief warning to the others through the design network in order to prevent them from getting surprised. He did not want them to botch their current tasks.

Once he was sure that everyone else was mentally prepared, Ves took the initiative to loosen his own restraints.

His presence grew stronger as his aura spread across the workshop.

He had unveiled his glow yet again!

This was absolutely unique among mech designers below Star Designers!

Not even Masters could radiate a glow-like effect and sway everyone around them with the essence of their design philosophies!

Right now, Gloriana and everyone else became subjected to a strong sensation that combined life and mechs.

While they were all strong enough in their own right to resist and ignore this glow, that was not what Ves wanted to happen.

"The design network allows me to share a portion of my perspective of my design philosophy, but that is not the full story." Ves explained. "If you truly want to understand the Ghost Project from my perspective, you will need to feel the life I infused into its design."

Although opening themselves up to Ves' glow made it a little more difficult for the other mech designers to stick to concentrate on their own design philosophies, they suddenly understood living mechs on a deeper level!

The only regret was that the difference this made was not that great. Ves' glow had become a bit stronger and more developed than before, but it was hardly comparable to the overwhelming domain that the Polymath had once unveiled!

Compared to that grand demonstration of power, Ves fell so far behind that he was like an ant in front of a CFA battleship!

This was not the extent of his plan, though.

Ves could still do more.

"Blinky!"

"Mrow!"

The cat maintained his design network for a time now, but this was not even his main function.

Ves and Blinky took the initiative to contact the Superior Mother.

The powerful design spirit harvested so much spiritual feedback every day that most of it went to waste!

It was not much to ask for Ves to borrow a heap of energy. Even if the transfer was incredibly wasteful, the Superior Mother could still bear the loss!

As soon as the Superior Mother supplied Blinky with a stream of spiritual energy, the Star Cat swallowed it all up and digested it into a more familiar form.

Ves took in the newly-converted spiritual energies that were attributed to both life and mechs and used it to supercharge his glow!

Each and every step in this chain produced a lot of loss and waste. However, he thought it was worth it as his glow intensified to the point where he was able to establish a pseudo-domain!

Everything and everyone in a sphere around became exposed to Ves' interpretation of mechs!

Now that his supercharged glow had become strong enough to produce qualitative changes, its effects on the mech designers and the materials they worked with became a lot more noticeable!

For a moment, Ves felt as if he had transformed his workshop into a paradise for living mechs.

Even if the other mech designers such as Cormaunt Hempkamp understood little about living mechs, Ves had the illusion that his glow could make the neural interface specialist add a touch of life to his own work!

This had major implications!

Chapter 4977 Blessed Workshop

What Ves managed to do was both strenuous but also incredibly rewarding.

By forcibly using his glow to spread his inner self, he had the illusion that he had become a god of his own workshop.

His design philosophy became more dominant in many different aspects.

The materials that were waiting to be processed became infused with life in advance. This primed them for the transformations to come, and allowed them to become a slightly more effective carrier of life than if they remained inert!

The parts that everyone made become alive and coherent. The differences between the output of Ves and the others diminished because the latter were able to borrow Ves' design philosophy to a significantly greater extent than before!

It also became easier for Miles and Cormaunt to borrow Ves' skills and insights on mechs. They were able to perform their work a lot more competently as the powerful glow combined with the design network allowed them to comprehend more advanced theories and improve their fabrication skills at a rapid pace!

Even if they ended up ruining the Ghost Project, the benefits that these two less experienced Journeymen harvested this time were already massive!

All of this and more had only become possible once Ves unfolded his glow and increased its power to an unsustainable degree!

Even he did not fully understand what he was doing! His comprehension of glows was not high and he was not capable of tracking all of the differences that could be attributed to his latest move!

This was the first time that Ves leveraged his power as a demigod as well as a mech designer.

All of his weird experiences that made him stronger and allowed him to obtain advantages that were out of reach for every mech designer at his stage finally culminated in an exceptional new ability!

The glow that previously seemed useless in the past finally started to show its value!

As a human 'design spirit', Ves should have known that he was not as weak in this capacity as he thought in the past.

The only possible application for his anomalous identity that he previously figured out was to use it as a channel to allow him to descend onto the Everchanger.

This could enable him to tweak the designs of mechs in the field without exposing his real self to the dangers of the battlefield.

Still, as handy as this sounded, Ves much preferred to strengthen and empower his mechs before a fight commenced. It was in his nature as a mech designer to do all of the necessary work in the design lab or the workshop rather than the battlefield!

Ves became euphoric when he confirmed that his glow could enhance his work.

Even when he was by himself, his glow could assist him by radiating his workplace, the instruments and the materials around him with his core attributes.

Perhaps a more detail-oriented mech designer might go crazy due to inducing all kinds of unpredictable and unplanned changes to his work environment, but Ves especially embraced the new possibilities!

The chaos around him caused him to recognize all kinds of new possibilities, many of which were rather small and inconsequential, but could make significant difference when added up over the course of a fabrication run!

"Designing and fabricating living mechs has become easier than ever!"

The reactions from his collaborators to his glow varied.

Gloriana received the least benefit on account of her high familiarity with his work. His intrusive glow actually interfered with her own efforts, especially when it comes to maximizing the quality of her output.

This was why she reduced her exposure to his own design philosophy. She was confident enough in her own work that she thought that she did not need so much handholding from her husband.

Still, his latest move still helped her fabricate significantly better transphasic parts. This was because she could borrow Ves' much greater affinity and instinctual understanding of phasewater!

This was a huge extra benefit that was mostly derived from the fact that Ves also happened to be a phase lord!

Not even Master Benedict despised this boost!

As a Master Mech Designer, his learning ability was not comparable to the younger generations.

Even if his work was less reliant on phasewater than other mech designers, Benedict still devoted a lot of study sessions to quickly mastering the uses of this key substance.

Yet for all of his book learning, his exposure to phasewater was still too short.

Through the glow radiated by Ves, Master Benedict discovered that he was able to pierce through an invisible barrier and understand hidden truths about phasewater that eluded him in the past!

It was as if he was an indigenous alien scientist who worked with phasewater for much of his life!

As a full day went by, everyone's approach towards their work changed drastically.

The design network enabled everyone to adapt to the changing circumstances without requiring the mech designers to stop and hold a meeting.

Ves continued to burn a copious amount of spiritual energy in order to fuel his glow.

Blinky's powerful energy digestion ability allowed Ves to have no concerns about running out of energy! The Superior Mother could easily meet his needs on account of the humongous spiritual feedback she harvested from the Hexer on a daily basis!

It did not matter if the Superior Mother eventually reached a limit for whatever reason. Blinky could simply switch to absorbing the energies supplied by other 'wealthy' design spirits such as Lufa or the Solemn Guardian!

The real limitation was Ves himself. He was never meant to amplify his glow like this on a long-term basis.

He increasingly began to treat it as his own little 'kingdom'.

14:40

Though his mental resilience enabled him to keep up this state for a few days, his work would increasingly suffer as his concentration deteriorated over time.

Still, the effects were more than worth the increasingly severe headache and side effects!

The way he looked at his workshop had changed now that he had inundated it with his glow for many hours.

He increasingly began to treat it as his own little 'kingdom'.

It was nowhere near as tough and dangerous as a Saint Kingdom.

It was also not as versatile and useful to mech designers as the Kingdom of Mechs.

However, so long his glow continued to affect the environment, his workshop turned into a blessed land for living mech fabrication!

The results became much more evident once the mech designers completed the fabrication phase.

All of the parts radiated with so much more life.

Ves grinned when he concluded that they surpassed the parts of the Dullahan Project in quantity as well as quality!

Now that the assembly stage had begun, his glow had less dramatic effects on the processes, but still made a noticeable difference.

The way that everyone put together the parts became more harmonious. The design network already helped a lot with making this happen, but his glow enabled everyone to build up the Ghost Project in a manner that maximized its living properties!

Ves no longer treated his fellow collaborators as separate individuals who brought their own design philosophies to the table.

Instead, he started to see them as temporary extensions of himself!

By allowing themselves to get influenced by his glow, Gloriana and the others slowly incorporated his own interpretation of mechs in their work approaches!

This resulted in much more synergies and happy accidents, each of which elevated the quality of the Ghost Project in their own little ways.

Not even the most challenging steps of the fabrication run stumped Ves any longer.

He and Cormaunt carefully assembled the Geist System with the high-quality parts that they had fabricated with loving care.

Once the system became complete, Ves took exceeding care in integrating it into the internals of the expert stealth mech.

By connecting this powerful system to the expert mech in just the right manner, he ensured that the Ghost Project would be able to exert stronger control over the Geist System!

By the time the Ghost Project neared completion, Ves called over Zimro Belson and gestured at the slim but exceptionally dangerous machine.

"What do you think?"

"This has been... an unforgettable experience to me." Zimro humbly said. "I never imagined that mech design was so impressive and that my expert mech contains so much power. The way you look at mechs and work with them is truly beyond my comprehension."

Ves smiled. "I have exposed you to my glow for several days now. Your nature as an expert pilot makes it difficult for you to get affected by it, but you should still understand the principles of living mechs a bit better if I am correct."

"I am not qualified to judge whether that is the case, sir."

"No matter." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "While my colleagues and I have built up your expert mech, I couldn't help but notice how much you have opened yourself up to me. Even if Calabast instigated you down this path, I appreciate your willingness to dedicate yourself to me and me alone. You are probably the second expert pilot after Venerable Joshua that is willing to do the same."

"I am not identical to Joshua." Zimro softly replied. "He is an expert pilot that can better compliment your work. He is also an upright and honorable champion that is best at fighting your enemies on an open battlefield. I... can serve you in a different capacity. The Ghost Project and I can complete the missions that Joshua and the Everchanger can never pull off, either due to technical or moral constraints."

Ves looked intrigued. "I get what you are saying. In any case, I accept your service. I don't think I have an immediate use for you yet, but that might change in the future. For now, I want you to cooperate with me on a little experiment. I just received a bit of inspiration as I worked on this expert mech. I am not certain that it will work, but I am confident in my idea."

To his credit, Zimro expressed no doubt. He assented right away!

"I am at your disposal."

"Then come."

The two of them lifted off the floor and floated closer to the Ghost Project until they reached its upper torso.

"Can you feel how much life this expert mech contains?"

"I... do."

"Extend your willpower and feel how attuned you are to your expert mech. Do you feel how eager your new partner is to work together with you?" Ves asked with a smile.

"I do."

"That is not quite correct. Let's descend a bit. Try and extend your senses deeper into the machine. Can you feel the difference?"

Venerable Zimro slowly frowned. "There are foreign elements inside my machine that repulse my influence. I already recognize one of them from Object 335."

"That is the Geist System. The biggest flaw of your expert mech is that its performance is dependent on the cooperation of the living entities attached to this unconventional feature. If you want to leverage it more effectively, then you must increase your control over this important system."

"How can I do that, sir?"

"With blood." Ves grinned. "It won't be as effective as the Carmine System, but as long as you spill it with a drop of your blood, I can do the rest. The mech is already primed and ready."

Though Zimro felt reluctant, he did not want to go back on his pledge. He used a small knife to cut his own finger and spill a few drops onto the exterior of the Ghost System.

Normally, the coating should have caused the blood to slide away, the red liquid somehow remained in place.

Ves fell silent as he began to utilize his own abilities to inject a portion of the power hidden in Zimro's blood to a specific element of the Geist System.

Nothing seemed to happen for a couple of minutes, but once Ves forged the most crucial connection, the expert pilot floating by his side suddenly experienced a burst of pain!

"Ah! What is happening, sir?!"

"Don't resist! Open yourself up and lower your defenses! No matter how uncomfortable you feel, you must not resist!"

"Ahhh!"

The weirdest part about Zimro's outburst was that it wasn't his voice that was shouting in pain alone.

"Muw!"

The head of a black cat emerged from his head and yowled in pain as well!

This was his companion spirit Xavier!

However, the spiritual cat was not the source of his distress this time.

"It is time to bring you to completion."

He had already figured out an important theory as he channeled his powerful glow for so long.

A third and much more ominous voice escaped from his throat at the same time!

A flicker of darkness briefly overlapped with the expert pilot's body!

These frightening flickers became more and more frequent as Zimro continued to accept the changes without offering any excessive resistance.

Ves grinned at the sight.

What happened was not an accident.

Mephisto, who normally lurked in the Geist System, had suddenly forged a bond with Venerable Zimro!

With the power of Zimro's blood acting as a connecting medium as well as a catalyst, the expert pilot gained the ability to channel the leading fiend lurking within the Ghost Project!

Although the side effects were probably great, the benefits should be substantial!

Ves predicted that Zimro would be able to empower and exert more direct control over Mephisto.

The expert pilot might also be able to host Mephisto in his own body while he was away from the Ghost Project.

If the Ghost Project ever suffered an accident, then Mephisto could still be preserved as long as Zimro survived!

This was just a handful of all of the possible benefits.

Still, the main point of all of this was that Venerable Zimro shared more in common with the Ghost Project now. The two should definitely be able to cooperate with each other more effectively now that Mephisto acted as a bridge!

Now that Zimro became indisposed as he tried to adapt to his new connection with Mephisto, Ves turned back to his expert mech that had somehow become more exquisite in his eyes.

"It is time to bring you to completion."

He had already figured out an important theory as he channeled his powerful glow for so long.

It was a theory that he intended to exploit to the fullest!

"It's a pity that I did not make this realization when I was working on the Dullahan Project, but you shall definitely harvest a great benefit!"

Chapter 4978 A New Standard

The Ghost Project was on the cusp of completion.

Ves, Gloriana and Master Benedict Cortez had carried most of the weight and put all of their prior experiences and insights to good use. Compared to what they imagined a few weeks before, the estimated combat effectiveness of the actual product had most definitely increased by a considerable margin!

While the newbies consisting of Miles Tovar and Cormaunt Hempkamp hardly contributed to the fabrication of the mech, their modest involvement already granted them unimaginable gains at their stage in their career.

Witnessing several excellent mech designers in action, working on a mech that was way more powerful than they could ever design by themselves and more importantly getting exposed to Ves' domain and design philosophy more directly had given them a much better understanding of the life that could be buried inside a mech!

The two mech designers had already distanced themselves from the nearly completed expert mech. They had already completed their tasks and sticking around would do nothing except get in people's way.

Their expressions displayed a mixture of awe and confusion as the two Journeymen no longer possessed a clear grasp of what was taking place.

"Ves... has gone completely off the rails this time." Miles softly spoke as his exhaustion at staying awake for five straight days became evident. "Everything started out normal, but once our patriarch activated his glow, our work quickly deviated from the plan. Now, I do not think anyone except for our boss himself knows what will happen next."

The much more recently recruited mech designer standing next to the former member of Tovar Family looked a lot more hopeful.

"The patriarch knows what he is doing. When we were still connected to the design network, we could all feel his overflowing confidence and certainty. Sure, even he might not be able to predict the outcome of his methods, but he just knows that he is working in the right direction. I believe the Ghost Project will end up just as powerful as the Dullahan Project if not more. He is a Senior now. He's a lot more capable than a two weeks before."

There was a clear delineation between Journeymen and Seniors in the mech industry.

It was not unheard of for outliers such as Ves to exhibit design ability that far exceeded that of his peers when he was just a Journeymen, but Seniors still possessed advantages that more junior professionals lacked.

What would happen once this exceptional Journeyman advanced to Senior?

Would Ves lose much of the advantages that made him so great?

No!

Ves would retain his strengths, and even take a few more steps forward due to becoming a Senior with a much stronger foundation and set of design solutions!

This was the way that mech designers were like. Early advantages led to even greater capabilities as they advanced!

It was not without reason why the mech industry paid so much attention to rising stars.

As long as they managed to retain their excellence and persist in their hard work, which was anything but certain, they were bound to become leaders in their own fields!

Miles Tovar started off as a third-class mech designer from the Bright Republic, so his understanding of the mech industry was not as good as that of his colleague.

As a genuine second-class mech designer who worked for several large mech companies in the past, Cormaunt understood a lot better that there was no Journeyman or Senior that was anything like his patriarch!

Just the act of producing a glow and turning the entire workshop into a pseudo-domain was straight out of a fantasy drama!

If that was not the template of a future overlord in the mech industry, then Cormaunt did not know what else Ves needed to do in order to prove his excellence!

It was a great blessing and opportunity for mech designers such as Miles and Cormaunt to work for such a generational star.

The benefits they harvested this time were unimaginably valuable.

What about next time?

As long as they kept working for Ves, they were bound to get better at their jobs purely by osmosis!

However, it was also a curse for them to work for such an incredible genius. Their self-esteem took continuous hits as they constantly recognized their inadequacy when they compared themselves to Ves.

Anyone who worked in the Design Department for a few months would soon lose their confidence in their ability to excel. They would adopt a more subservient mindset and always let Ves take the lead.

This had happened to every promising Journeyman that Ves recruited over the years. From Sara Voiken to the most recent Beatrice Hendrix, each of these talented mech designers had consciously and unconsciously lost their arrogance and greater ambitions due to working in the Larkinson Clan.

The only Journeyman in the Design Department that remained immune to this effect was Glorian Wodin-Larkinson.

She refused to admit that she was inferior to Ves in any way despite her rationality telling her so. Her arrogance and conceit often made her come across as unpleasant to others, but they were also her greatest support.

Narcissists were often maligned by society, but they were also the source of many brilliant advances throughout history!

Much of what allowed improbable events to happen was to possess enough confidence and motivation to pursue unlikely goals.

Nothing would happen if everyone acted cautiously and conservatively, but people like Ves and Gloriana were both built differently somehow.

"What do you think Ves is doing next?" Miles asked his colleague.

Cormaunt shrugged. "Don't ask me. He hasn't shown any indication that he was planning to do anything extra now that we are close to finishing the expert mech. He is in a state of high inspiration at the moment. It is clear that what is on his mind has only emerged in the last few minutes. Only the patriarch himself knows what the Ghost Project will look like at the end."

The fabrication run started off as a cooperative venture, but quickly mutated into a Ves show due to his shenanigans.

Everyone else became side characters as Ves decisively took the lead and even wrote a new ending to the script!

The problem that concerned everyone was that the rewrite happened as soon as the show was almost done.

Would Ves' last-minute ideas enhance the Ghost Project or complicate it to the point where it became a different beast?

As Ves had just tied Venerable Zimro Belson to Mephisto the Firstborn, he paused for a minute in order to survey the changes to the expert mech.

The spiritual foundation of the Ghost Project experienced mild changes as a result. Ves tried his best not to miss any detail. He was not interested in studying the reactions per se, but he just wanted to confirm one of his theories that played a central role in his next set of actions.

His lips curled into a smile. "So this is the case. I can definitely proceed."

"Ves." A slightly tired-looking Gloriana flew up to his side. "I have been incredibly patient with you for the last five days. I understand that you have become a Senior and felt the need to flex your power. I also understand that you did not want to wait and implement your new plans as you formed them on the spot. However, now that we have come to this point, it is time for you to give us an explanation."

Her husband grew a little annoyed at the distraction. Couldn't she wait until he was done?

"I have learned a lot after becoming a Senior." He slowly told her. "My perception and my ability to internalize my existing theories and assumptions have improved as well. It is almost as if I am constantly whacking my head with my hammer day and night. I have become a considerably better mech designer than before, and because of that I have formed new connections between different theories and deduced greater possibilities that eluded me in the past."

Gloriana frowned. "That much is clear, but you have yet to give us a solid answer. What do you intend to do with the Ghost Project? It is already complete aside from lacking a few components. What else can you do to make it any stronger or more effective?"

Ves gazed at the Ghost Project, though his eyes did not focus on anything in particular. He was perceiving the expert mech in a completely different manner.

He did so all the while he was radiating a glow that was filled with the breath of life and a love for mechs!

"Mrow."

Blinky had been diligently putting his formidable energy devouring and digesting capabilities to use.

With the likes of the Superior Mother, Lufa and the Solemn Guardian feeding the Star Cat with copious streams of spiritual energy on rotation, the companion spirit processes so much power that it could have been used to fuel hundreds of battle formation attacks!

Blinky took all of those energies and converted them into spiritual energy that was completely compatible to Ves.

Ves subsequently burned it all in order to supercharge his glow!

In fact, it was a little inaccurate to say that Ves directly overloaded his glow. He was in fact powering himself up beyond his natural capacity, causing him to temporarily acquire a portion of the powers and abilities of his future and much-stronger self!

To put it differently, Ves exploited his complicated and multi-faceted powers to imitate the domain of a Star Designer!

Any knowledgeable mech designer who understood the significance of this act would probably go crazy if they learned of this event!

It was inconceivable for a little Senior Mech Designer to exhibit one of the defining abilities of a Star Designer in advance!

Although the pseudo-domain displayed by Ves was incomparably weak to the real domain briefly demonstrated by the Polymath, it was already enough to enable his next moves.

"The Ghost Project is primed." Ves observed. "Every single part, no matter whether it is tangible or intangible, has been contaminated with life. Much of it still remains dormant. They are like a pile of bricks that don't do anything when mashed together. What do you think will happen when I take all of these bricks and use them to build a structure?"

His wife furrowed her brows. "Isn't that what you have been doing with your mechs and mech designs all of this time?"

Ves grinned. "This is a little different. The foundation is stronger and my glow has done a better job at infusing all of the parts and materials of the mech with the element of life. To put it in simpler terms, the Ghost Project carries a considerably greater quantity of life. Even if the quality is not that much, I can build a much grander structure with more bricks!"

He finally went to work. He began to weave the Ghost Project's spiritual foundation to its physical frame by using the latter's infusion of life as a bridge!

Gloriana made use of Alexandria to observe what Ves was doing.

Her eyes widened as she realized what he was doing!

"You... you are creating a third order living mech by yourself! I thought a mech could only reach the third order by becoming a masterwork mech or evolve towards it over time!"

Though Ves was deeply immersed in his own spiritual engineering activities, he still had enough attention to spare to laugh at her statement.

"Who says that I can't create a third order living mech from scratch? The biggest reasons why I could never do so in the past was because my vision was too shallow and the life in my newly fabricated mechs was not abundant enough to meet the requirements of a third order living mech. All of that has changed now that I have become a Senior! From now on, any mech I make by hand shall always start off as a third order living mech! Unless I have a reason to settle for less, mechs of this order shall become my new standard!"

Gloriana looked shocked! She was deeply familiar with his design philosophy and theories, so she knew how significant it was to be able to make a third order living mech on demand!

Chapter 4979 Subsequent Development

Ves Larkinson's Orders of Life emerged as a means to systematically categorize the living qualities of different mechs.

First order living mechs barely possessed any coherent signs of life. They were mechs with a weak degree of X-Factor. Ves had been able to produce first order mechs since the moment he first formed the building blocks of his design philosophy.

Second order living mechs became Ves' default standard. They already possessed a rudimentary amount of sentience, intelligence, awareness and autonomy. Each mech pilot could easily get in touch with them as long as they interfaced with the machines.

The spectrum of second order living mechs was quite extensive. There were massive differences between a living mech that was mass produced at a third-party mech factory and a living mech fabricated by Ves in his own workshop!

While there were noticeable differences between the two, even the best living mechs fabricated by mechs had never managed to breach the upper threshold upon their creation!

The requirements to make a third order living mech were too high!

Let alone Ves, no one else who possessed a slight understanding of living mechs could ever hope to fabricate such a potent machine through their efforts!

The only mech designer who could solve this problem and develop a viable method to make third order living mechs on demand was the pioneer in this new field!

Not even Ves himself expected to be able to fulfill one of his smaller but no less significant ambitions!

The best part about discovering this new method was that it was not a fluke nor an accident.

Ves could easily reproduce the conditions needed to repeat this feat!

This newly discovered approach which he had taken to calling the Living Workshop Method had endless potential.

His techniques were still rudimentary as he mainly relied on brute force and passive contamination to infuse the production machines and the raw materials with the elements of life.

What would happen if he refined his techniques and contaminated the aforementioned objects in a more sophisticated manner?

What would happen if he became a better mech designer and developed the strength to channel a lot more spiritual energy?

More refined techniques combined with a greater quantity of energy would allow Ves to make stronger and more superior third order living mechs!

This may very well serve as an essential step to his eventual goal of birthing a mythical fourth order living mech!

Still, as Ves grew a lot more tired now that he had successfully converted the Ghost Project into a third order living mech, he immediately recognized that his new approach had two major flaws.

The first flaw was that it was not applicable to delegation mass production. Only Ves could replicate these conditions. Unless there was another mech designer who could project a similar glow, there was no way anyone else could perform the same feat!

"For now, at least..." Ves murmured under his breath.

His thoughts briefly drifted to his son. Marvaine not only had the makings of a great mech designer, but was also endowed with a companion spirit that was already attributed towards life.

Although Denny was still a young and growing spiritual kitten for the time being, what about a decade later? What about two decades later?

Once Denny grew up and realized a portion of his potential, it was not impossible for Marvaine's companion spirit to pull off the Living Workshop Method by himself!

However, there was another major flaw to this technique that made it a lot less likely for his son to pull it off by himself.

This was because the energy requirements were too high!

Where did life come from? It did not emerge out of nothing!

The Living Workshop Method was just a particularly creative way to brute force the creation of a third order living mech by spending spiritual energy like flowing water.

It was the stupidest and least efficient way for Ves to create a third order living mech!

If Ves did not have free access to the nearly limitless supply of low-quality spiritual energy accumulated by a bunch of friendly design spirits, he would never be able to fuel this extravagant process by himself!

Ves would have sucked himself dry in an instant if he only relied upon his own spiritual energy!

Though he did not like the fact that he became dependent on external sources of energy in order to keep up his Living Workshop pseudo-domain for an extended period of time, he had no other alternative for the time being.

He estimated that he would either have to become a highly developed Master Mech Designer or an outright Star Designer to gain the strength needed to support this method by himself!

If it was already this bad for Ves himself, it was worse for everyone else!

Blinky allowed Ves to cheat his way out because his companion spirit derived his main ability from the spiritual remains of the Unending One.

As far as Ves could recall, Marvaine's companion spirit did not contain any ingredients related to Blinky or the Unending One. This was a serious shortcoming that signified that his son was probably unable to follow his exact path.

That was fine. Though Ves deeply wanted Marvaine to inherit his design philosophy, it would be wasteful for him to become a clone of his father.

Marvaine should be allowed to figure out his own goals and develop his own design style.

In any case, Ves did not have to worry about these issues for the time being. It would take at least two decades before Marvaine was ready to set off as a mech designer.

Ves directed his attention back to the Ghost Project.

Although Ves had elevated its spiritual foundation to a third order living mech, the mech was not complete.

This was an important distinction.

So long as he and his fellow mech designers did not put in the final parts and regarded it as complete in their own hearts, it would not completely come to life!

The current condition could be likened to a highly developed fetus that was a single step away from taking his first breath of life.

As Ves carefully scanned the spiritual design of his own work, he grinned as he saw an opportunity to pull off his follow-up plan!

"There is still room for manipulation."

One of the more special qualities of his living products was that once they came to life, it was not possible to reengineer them without putting them at enormous risk.

However, so long as his living products were still 'in construction' for a lack of a better phrase, Ves could still keep building up his work as long as he had a way to improve on their current state!

From his current perspective, the Ghost Project had surpassed the threshold of a third order living mech, but that was all. It had only taken a step into this territory, but had yet to do anything special.

The reason for that was not necessarily because it lacked the energy to go forward.

The real cause why it started out as a blank third order living mech was because it lacked further direction!

Normally, whenever a third order living mech emerged within the Larkinson Clan, the machine itself slowly directed its own growth and evolution based on its own experiences.

The feedback and interactions with the mech pilot also influenced the adaptation and specialization of the third order living mech.

All of this took a huge amount of time and could only be done after the living mech was complete and put into use.

These conditions were clearly invalid in his workshop at the moment, so if Ves wanted to expand upon the Ghost Project's life, he needed to employ a new approach and assume more active control over its spiritual development?

This was a way for him to help the Ghost Project start off on a stronger footing!

To put it in another way, if the Everchanger and the Minerva became third order living mechs by virtue of being masterwork mechs, they most certainly started at level 1!

Even if the bonus provided by becoming a masterwork mech gave these expert mechs enough resources to reach level 9, the machines themselves did not know how to spend them all to reach this height!

In contrast, if Ves was manually created a third order living mech and took an active hand at shaping its subsequent spiritual development, then he might be able to make the machine reach level 5 right at the start!

When Ves became stronger and refined his Living Workshop Method even further, it was not impossible for him to make his third order living mechs reach level 20, level 50 or even level 99!

His eyes burned brighter as he thought about what would happen if he was able to do even better!

If Ves developed his third order living mechs to such an extreme that they surpassed a distant threshold such as level 100, would he gain the chance to create a fourth order living mech?

He strongly believed that this was the case!

Perhaps all of his current third order living mechs such as the Amaranto and the other two aforementioned expert mechs could evolve to the next order through their own efforts, but how long would that take?

Ves couldn't wait a century for these living mechs to evolve into powerful myths!

It would be a lot better and more convenient if he could fabricate them in his workshop on demand!

"Hm, let's not get distracted."

He shook his head in order to clear his mind of distant possibilities. What mattered the most was what he could do with his current conditions and resources.

Aiming to make a level 50 living mech or a fourth order living mech was way too far away for him. He would already be happy if he could turn the Ghost Project into a level 5 living mech.

"Let's see. The spiritual foundation has been set in the initial shape of a third order living mech, but there is clearly room for expansion and modification."

Ves understood the differences between a fresh third order living mech and one that has grown for a number of years. He periodically inspected all of his expert mechs in order to observe and record their changes over time.

He possessed a rough understanding of how third order living mechs grew and developed beyond their starting point!

In the past, Ves had been content to let these powerful living mechs dictate their own growth direction, but this time he intended to make these decisions on behalf of the Ghost Project!

What Ves wanted to do was not as simple as make a few initial decisions. He wanted to shape the entire evolution trajectory from beginning to end!

However, it was easy to make a plan.

It was much more difficult to ensure the Ghost Project would realize it and acquire the abilities that Ves had theorized when he drafted the plan!

In order to direct the Ghost Project's growth and ensure it would gain a set of powerful abilities that not only fit its circumstances, but also synergized well with each other, Ves decided to draw upon resources that could play a helpful role in this process!

"The design spirits can act as the supervisors!"

They possessed the age, life experiences and abilities that any freshly fabricated third order living mech lacked.

Although not all of his design spirits were wise and powerful enough to fully undertake this responsibility, they would only grow older and more capable over time.

Once a design spirit becomes as powerful and knowledgeable as the Superior Mother, it should be easy for the spiritual entity to optimize a living mech's evolution and maybe even bestow the spiritual attributes that were needed to develop a specialized ability!

"This new spiritual framework shall be known as an Ascension Path!"

Ves couldn't help but laugh when he thought about the endless potential of implementing a more systematic approach to the growth of living mechs!

The significance of developing systematic Ascension Paths for all of his living mechs was groundbreaking to his design philosophy!

If it wasn't for the fact that he had already used the creation of the Carmine System as the trigger for his recent advancement, he would have been able to break through on the spot by coming up with this brand-new concept!

Chapter 4980 Ascension Path

Ves came up with the concept of an Ascension Path after getting inspired by recent events.

To be more precise, the source of inspiration that enabled him to connect the right theories and assumptions together was the Kingdom of Mechs!

Ves had become incredibly fascinated by it ever since he learned of its existence and a part of its mechanisms in his most recent visit to the MTA.

One of the more amazing capabilities of the Kingdom of Mechs was how they granted all humans the possibility to ascend to higher existences in two highly defined advancement trajectories.

Any mech pilot could work towards becoming a god pilot by unconsciously following the trajectory set by the Kingdom of Mechs.

Any mech designer could work towards becoming a Star Designer by doing the same!

This was extremely remarkable and an incredible gift to humanity when Ves thought about it. An age where humanity did not have access to the Kingdom of Mechs would definitely be a lot worse!

This was because outside of a small group of talented and knowledgeable people, it was impossible for common humans to ever ascend to the level of a True God!

Compared to an age where the power of ascension was monopolized by the Five Scrolls Compact and its splinter organizations, humanity benefited a lot more if billions more individuals set off on one of the two advancement trajectories opened up by the Kingdom of Mechs!

It reminded him of the System's new expansion. It had gone from a pure Mech Designer System to a weird hybrid where it also sought to facilitate his own Spiritual Ascension!

Without this recent change, Ves would have no chance of sublimating himself and creating Veronica!

All of this taught Ves that systematic evolution was much more effective and efficient than randomly groping in the dark!

Ves only had to look at the contemporary state of traditional swordsmanship in order to notice the difference.

While the mech community had become more prosperous than ever due to the assistance provided by the Kingdom of Mechs, the swordmasters of the Heavensword Association found it impossible to go any further!

The Heavensword may be an extremely powerful artifact and a suspected grand work, but even it was not built to carry forth the complete inheritance of traditional swordsmanship.

At most, it could only convert a single swordmaster into a sword saint by force.

When Ves looked at these examples, he concluded that if he wanted a specific population to grow stronger in an easier, more systematic and more universal manner, then he needed to create a brand-new spiritual framework that any qualified candidate could follow to the end!

While Ves was not arrogant enough to create a third advancement trajectory for the human race, it was a different story when it came to living mechs.

"I am the progenitor of living mechs." He told himself. "I brought them into existence. While other mech designers may reluctantly be able to turn their works into first order living mechs by turning them into masterworks, I am the only one who can design or make second order and third order living mechs."

There was no one else who understood living mechs better than Ves!

If Master Willix couldn't do it, Ves did not believe that anyone else could match or exceed him in this capacity, at least so long as he did not realize his design philosophy!

The story might be different once he made his design philosophy available to the entire mech community through the Kingdom of Mechs, but that did not erase his enormous head-start.

Ves possessed a lot of confidence in his ability to further develop the power and evolution parameters of living mechs.

His next idea that he wanted to apply to the Ghost Project was rather simple but incredibly ambitious.

He wanted to become the mech designer to impart living mechs with advancement trajectories that were suitable to their nature!

If the Progenitors of Mechs had been able to pull off a similar feat, why not Ves?

Sure, Ves was nowhere near as powerful or knowledgeable in spiritual engineering as the founders of the Age of Mechs, but there was no need for him to wait until he became a Star Designer!

He only needed a sufficiently strong living mech and at least one cooperative design spirit to put all of the pieces into place.

"There is not much point in meddling with the evolution of first order and second order living mechs. They are still too young and rudimentary to do anything special."

They were akin to human babies or teenagers. Perhaps they could develop minor powers if they specialized a lot, but it simply wasn't worthwhile at these stages.

Once a living mech reached the third order, they essentially turned into adolescents that were ready to choose their own jobs.

An Ascension Path was simply a combination of a study programme as well as a career plan.

Just like how mech designers started off their journey to become a Star Designer by attending a mech design university, a living mech could set off on its own Ascension Path from the moment they reached the third order!

While it was all well and good to come up with this idea in theory, it was a little more complicated to put it in practice.

Ves frowned for a moment. "Let's see. I can choose from at least two possible approaches. I can either set a common Ascension Path that is either associated with a specific design spirit or a mech design, or I can set a custom Ascension Path for an individual living mech."

The first of the two possible approaches were more applicable for mass production models.

The latter approach was clearly more suitable for a high-value product like the Ghost Project!

There was no question that Ves should impart the Ghost Project with a unique Ascension Path.

"Let's begin."

Ves made contact with the design spirits of the Ghost Project.

When he designed the expert stealth mech, he had decided early on to connect it to three different spiritual entities.

Kalo, the Ghost Chameleon, was the natural design spirit for every stealth-oriented expert mech!

Although Ves had only used this design spirit to make his Buzzy Bee model a lot less noticeable on the battlefield, Kalo could play a powerful role in dampening the spiritual fluctuations of the powerful expert mech.

As Ves quietly communicated and cooperated with Kalo, he slowly built up the foundation of the Ghost Project's Ascension Path.

"Since a stealth mech relies first and foremost on remaining as undetected as possible, this Ascension Path must continually provide the Ghost Project with easily accessible means to improve its ability to hide itself against different adversaries and in different environments."

Kalo was the dominant design spirit of the Ghost Project, so the Ascension Path was largely themed around the Ghost Chameleon's intrinsic spiritual attributes and abilities.

Since the Ascension Path was technically a plan and not a powerful tool that could force the Ghost Project to grow into a much more formidable living mech right away, there was no need for Ves to inject it with lots of energy or add too much definition to the abilities.

He only needed to add a lot of details to the beginning of the plan. This was enough to set an initial evolution structure that could successfully elevate the Ghost Project from level 1 to level 5.

It would be up to Kalo along with the Ghost Project to figure out how to realize the plan step by step after this level. Both of them would have plenty of time to flesh out the Ascension Path.

Ves expected this to be difficult for all third order living mechs in the short and medium term. It was only until the design spirits accrued more experience and understanding that they would be able to complete much of their associated Ascension Paths by themselves!

Still, the benefit of having a loosely defined Ascension Path was that there was a lot of room for individual choice!

A flexible plan could accommodate many changes at the cost of making it more difficult to reach the end.

A rigid plan did not offer as much room for individualization, but it was a lot easier to follow a straight trajectory that led straight to the destination!

What Ves sought to create was an Ascension Path that granted the Ghost Project and Venerable Zimro Belson at least a bit more choice.

"What if the Ghost Project is already stealthy enough? What if its tech and its existing spiritual properties already makes it virtually undetectable?"

It would be a waste to strengthen a feature that did not make any difference to its operation.

This was why the Ghost Project needed several branches in its Ascension Path!

"Another design spirit will help."

The second design spirit that Ves attached to the Ghost Project was Titania.

The ancient exobeast excelled at controlling autonomous or semi-autonomous constructs. Ves had decided to turn her into a minor design spirit for the Ghost Project in order to improve its control over its spiritual fiends.

Ves had no idea how well Venerable Zimro was able to make use of the Geist System, but from his practice sessions with Object 335, it became exponentially more difficult to maintain control over greater quantities of fiends!

"If the Ascension Path can help the Ghost Project improve its control over its spiritual fiends by slowly assimilating the power of Titania, then that will make it even more effective in covert operations!"

This was a good branch to develop if Ves and the Larkinson Clan mostly needed the Ghost Project to take care of targets out of combat.

However, Ves did not believe that the relatively weak spiritual fiends could make a substantial difference in a battle against another expert mech.

In order to enhance its assassination capabilities, Ves decided to tie the Ghost Project to Helena as its third design spirit!

Expert mechs and expert pilots were notoriously difficult to take out in battle.

If Ves wanted to give the Ghost Project an extra edge in its attempt to overpower the resonance shield of an opposing expert mech, then borrowing the power of Helena sounded like a decent option!

Though Ves could have chosen Lufa for his neutralization capabilities, the Angel of Tranquility was not a good fit with the Ghost Project.

Obtaining Helena's cooperation was not only easy, but incredibly helpful to his current endeavor.

A ghostly woman appeared by his side as he completed the very first Ascension Path for a living mech!

"I truly love this latest idea of yours, Ves." Helena remarked as she studied his current work in fascination. "The Mech Trade Association gave every human two foolproof methods to ascend to godhood. It is only fitting for a deity in the making like my little brother to make ascension more accessible for all of your living mechs! This will substantially reduce the difficulty of nurturing them into gods, especially in the future when your more successful Ascension Paths have proven their viability through trial and error!"

Her words reminded him that it was possible for Ascension Paths to lead the growth of living mechs into a dead end.

Though Ves was afraid that his first attempt was so flawed and shabby that it might hinder the evolution of the Ghost Project in the later stages, this was not a reason for him to abort his current plan.

"I need to implement an Ascension Path at least once in order to test whether it actually works according to my estimation. The Ghost Project shall be my pioneer." Ves declared.

Once he completed the Ascension Path, he was just about to apply it to the Ghost Project when Helena made an interruption.

"I believe it is best if you give it a name of its own. Where does this path lead to, brother? What does it try to impart on your expert mech?"

Ves briefly paused in thought. "Now that I think about it, this Ascension Path is actually made out of three branches. Each of them are already Ascension Paths in their own right, so we should actually come up with three distinct names. The branch associated with Kalo should be called the Path of the Hidden Stalker. The branch associated with Titania should be called the Path of the Ghost King. As for the final branch associated with you..."

"I know!" Helena interjected with a grin! "Let us call it the Path of the Soul Reaper!"

"...Okay."

The names weren't that important anyway. They just granted Ves a convenient reminder on what they were all about.

Once Ves settled the three new Ascension Paths, he had the illusion that he had just upgraded a virtual game with an RPG-like leveling system.

Since the Ghost Project had already grown enough to invest an 'evolution point' in one of its available Ascension Paths, Ves took the initiative to invest it into the Path of the Hidden Stalker.

The spiritual foundation of the powerful expert mech became even more powerful as a response!

Ves worked together with Kalo to make the Ghost Project even more difficult to detect, primarily on a metaphysical level.

In order to realize this path upgrade, Kalo had to donate a portion of his spiritual energy in order to grant the Ghost Project the right spiritual attributes it needed to manifest its improvement!

"We did it! The Ghost Project has become a more powerful third order living mech than before!"

This was already proof that his new Ascension Path concept was viable, though only at the beginning stage.

Ves looked forward to what happened next, but in order to do that, he needed to end this fabrication run.

"I am finished, Gloriana. You can put it in the final part."

"I have been waiting to hear that." His wife impatiently said.

From the moment that Gloriana installed the final part, the Ghost Project reached its complete and final form.

It was at this point that the long-awaited expert stealth mech of the Larkinson Clan truly came to life!

"What!?" Gloriana expressed her shock at what was unfolding!

From the moment the expert mech gained its full living traits, the overall quality of the expert mech rose by a surprisingly large margin!

The quality increase of a third order living mech turned out to be much greater than a second order living mech!

Ves burst out in laughter yet again! "Hahahaha! I knew this would happen!"

The technical quality of the Ghost Project was substantially higher than the Dullahan Project.

While its physical frame still fell short of approaching the masterwork threshold, Ves and the other mech designers at least knew what they were doing when working with difficult transphasic materials and first-class materials this time!

What was much more different this time was that Ves had not only methodically birthed a third order living mech right away, but also structured its growth trajectory by adding three new systematic evolution trajectories!

Combined with the extra growth after initially becoming a third order living mech, this just happened to be enough to 'perfect' mech to the point where it became a masterwork mech in its own right!

"The Ghost Project is a feat of innovation that is worthy to become a masterwork!"