

The Mech 5141

Chapter 5141 Deeper Admiration

After Ves concluded his insightful talk with Master Laila Devos, his teaching assistant bounced into the room and congratulated him on his success.

"You have managed to thoroughly convince the students over the course of a single lecture." Alexa Striker cheerfully spoke. "It is difficult for a second-class mech designer like yourself to attract sufficient interest from so many of my fellow Terrans. They are all accustomed to receiving their teachings from the accomplished Seniors and Masters of the Terran Confederation. You mainly managed to capture their attention by employing your novelty to good effect."

"Novelty wears out sooner or later. I will have to make sure I can actually teach stuff that my students are interested in. My subsequent lectures won't be nearly as bombastic."

"I have full confidence in your teaching ability, especially after I have witnessed you speak in front of nearly the entire Eden Institute. Please inform me if you experience any difficulties. It is my job to assist you in your teaching duties. If there are any difficulties that I cannot handle myself, I can contact the appropriate people to resolve your problems."

"I would be happy to receive your assistance on certain matters." The projection of Ves replied. "The battle at my end has just concluded. I expect I will be extremely busy in the next few days. Aside from that, I will probably be absent for the next week since I am obliged to attend the upcoming conference organized by the Survivalist Faction."

Miss Alexa and the school administration had already been informed about this well in advance. They had all adjusted the class schedule to take his temporary absence into account.

Incidents like this were not all that unusual in mech universities. Master Mech Designers wore many hats at the same time and assumed a lot of different responsibilities.

While these mech designers always placed a high degree of importance in spreading their teachings and philosophies, their core work mattered a lot more to them in the end.

This was why it was generally tolerated for professors to be absent at times. As long as they properly arranged their schedules in advance, the students would probably be grateful for gaining extra time to catch up on their other studies.

Of course, Ves did not intend for his students to forget about his courses entirely when he was away. He already intended to assign a lot of homework and reading material to make sure they accumulated the requisite understanding to take part in his future classes.

Novel Ves and Alexa continued to chat about related matters. Now that the semester had begun, both of them had to allocate a certain amount of hours of their time on school-related duties.

"Master Laila Devos informed me that you have rejected the opportunity to expand your classes for this semester."

"That is correct. I'm glad that my first lecture proceeded so well, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. To be honest, I kind of like it when I can interact with my students in a smaller and more intimate classroom. It is quite nerve-wracking to speak in front of tens of thousands of students all of the time. I also don't want to disappoint too many Terrans if I stumble later on. Don't forget that all of

my courses are completely new and untested. I prefer to fine-tune them over the course of a semester when the stakes aren't as high."

The teaching assistant understood his legitimate concerns. Ves could not afford to botch his first stint as a professor. If he botched this precious opportunity to pass on his wisdom in front of hundreds of smart and talented Terran students, it might take decades before he could stand in front of a class of first-class mech design students again!

"Personally speaking, I am looking even more forward for you to begin your first lecture on Introduction to Living Mechs." Alexa Striker commented. "It is remarkable that those expert mechs that have demonstrated so many different powerful capabilities in the previous engagement have all spawned from your mind. Even among first-raters such as myself, it is challenging to design a large quantity of highly diverse mechs that excel in vastly different areas. The 'Amaranto' and the 'Promethea' are both expert rifleman mechs, but their differences are too many to count. Is this truly a product of your design philosophy?"

Ves smiled and nodded. He always liked it when other mech designers appreciated his work and design philosophy.

"It takes a lot of creativity, knowledge and inspiration to design so many varied mechs. A broad and flexible design philosophy helps a lot, but it takes more than that to produce good works. I can tell you that if a mech designer yearns to work with as little restraint on the scope of his output as possible, specializing in living mechs is a good choice. Even the most modest and initially weak living mechs can grow into formidable powerhouses as long as they live long enough. This is especially the case now that we have entered the Age of Dawn."

Alexa vigorously nodded in agreement. "I believe you. Those expert mechs are only a few years old, correct? It is frankly a miracle for them to be able to cripple shielded alien warships by relying on their own power. I cannot even imagine how astoundingly powerful they can become once they have aged for an entire century!"

"Hehehe, all good things come in time. It's a pity that both of us will probably grow a lot older by the time we can see so many living mechs realize their greater potential. Right now, even my Amaranto is nothing more than a juvenile as far as living mechs are concerned. I'm not even sure whether red humanity and us will be able to survive the successive onslaughts from both the indigenous aliens of the Red Ocean as well as the more frightening natives from Messier 87."

Ves along with every other red human had largely become preoccupied with the counterattack from the original inhabitants of the dwarf galaxy.

The Red Cabal and its broad coalition of aliens was just starting to build up steam in their galaxy-wide offensive against the relatively small population of humans that occupied their stolen lands!

Under this deteriorating climate, few people were able to spare any attention towards the more distant and nebulous threat posed by the theoretically powerful alien civilizations of Messier 87.

Ves believed that this was a mistake. The phase whales, the puelmers, the nunsers, the orvens, the arche and so on were all formidable enemies in their own right, but none of them were powerful beyond the point where he gave up all hope of resistance!

Still, Ves did not have the luxury to worry about these distant threats either. He needed to make sure he addressed all of his short term needs before he could afford to look further into the future.

"I have developed a greater interest in learning your design philosophy than ever." The young woman frankly admitted, "I am impatient to learn more. I have already studied the textbooks that you have designated as the recommended reading material of your Introduction to Living Mech Design course. What else can I do to further my understanding of your specialization and increase my chances of designing an actual living mech?"

In the face of an enthusiastic mech designer who developed a genuine interest in his design philosophy, Ves did not wish to discourage his teaching assistant.

However, it was a bit exaggerated for her to invest so much time on a field that might not fit her inclinations. He did not wish to give her false hope.

"You need to be a little more patient, Miss Alexa. The textbooks that I have added to the reading list are merely background material as far as I'm concerned. As the foremost authority on living mechs, only my textbooks should be essential reading material."

"You have yet to write, edit or publish a single textbook on your field of specialization since you have become a mech designer." The woman pointed it out to her professor.

He smirked and tapped the side of his head. "Exactly. All of the essential learning material is contained within my head. The only way my students can truly learn how to design living mechs is to attend my lectures and receive my personal tutelage. I look forward to transferring my accumulated knowledge to the fourteen brats that have enrolled for this particular course. They shall be part of the first wave of Terran students to receive a formal introduction in the field that I have pioneered."

Ves used to hoard his living mechs like they were priceless treasures, but that was an outdated mindset as far as he was concerned.

Now that he had advanced to Senior and became more cognizant of the need to contribute back to the society that had enabled his rise, he couldn't wait to welcome more mech designers who were capable of designing their own living mechs!

He already had a taste of that in his own clan. His wife and Ketis were already capable of designing living mechs in a sense, though their interpretation of them was different from his own.

"By the way, professor, it is my understanding that your alliance has fought a greater battle several light-hours away in the Corellix System. If it is permissible, would it be possible for me to observe a part of the archival footage? I think I may be able to understand living mechs better if I can study more of your works in action. You may edit out any sensitive elements that you do not wish to spread."

This was a rather difficult request. When Ves decided to hold a lecture in the middle of an ongoing engagement, he deliberately limited the broadcast to the smaller scale entanglement between the Spirit of Bentheim and the pursuit fleet led by Stingray 2.

Ves made absolutely certain that no footage or information related to the much more expansive battle between the main expeditionary forces and the raiding fleet protecting Stingray 1 reached the Eden Institute.

There was no need to expose additional sensitive and strategically important information to a large number of strangers. Ves was already able to attain the effect he desired by engineering a smaller scale pursuit battle centered around the Spirit of Bentheim.

Sure, mechs such as the Amaranto, the Everchanger and the Promethea revealed a lot of powerful new capabilities, but Ves was happy to show them off. He had a lot more cards up his sleeve that the Terrans had yet to observe.

Ves briefly thought about whether it was okay to give his teaching assistant a private show. He eventually decided that there was no good reason to make an exception for a woman that he only met by remote.

"I'm sorry, Alexa, but I can't be sloppy when it comes to information control. One of the persistent reasons why our Golden Skull Alliance has managed to win so many battles is because we always took advantage of our enemy's lack of understanding of our full capabilities. This is a matter of life and death. Any transmission of sensitive information provides our current and future enemies a lot more chances to kill my troops."

Alexa adopted an apologetic expression. "You are right to reject my request. I do not wish for my selfishness to lead to a serious setback in the future. I believe I already have enough material to satisfy my curiosity for a time. I am especially charmed by your Everchanger. It possesses greater depth than all of the other expert mech in the previous engagement."

"It's okay, Miss Alexa. Perhaps you will get your chance in the future. In the meantime, if you really want to delve deeper into living mechs, then I suggest you spend more time with the copies that the Eden Institute has imported from the Krakatoa Middle Zone. Don't just stand around and feel their glows. Try to talk to them. Each of them are alive, remember? It is best that you assign mech pilots to pair up with them and exercise their mechanical systems. Their personalities and other remarkable qualities will become more pronounced once they are being used."

"That is an excellent suggestion, professor. I shall make the right arrangements right away."

Chapter 5142 Lion's Share

Once Ves handled his affairs at the Eden Institute, he could finally direct his attention to his affairs in the Corellix System.

One of his foremost priorities at this time was to sort out the most valuable loot obtained in this battle.

Even though the majority of yurzen warships had successfully escaped annihilation and warped out of the star system intact, the original alien raiding fleet completely lost its fighting intent and cohesion.

Nobody was worried anymore that the aliens would regroup and continue their original assault on the colony at Corellix HI.

The Golden Skull Alliance succeeded in its primary objective of preventing all of the colonists on the planet from getting wiped out en masse.

This was a significant contribution to red humanity!

The Red Two already expressed their intention to build a stronghold on Corellix III. This endeavor would proceed a lot easier if there was an existing base of population and infrastructure on the planet.

Aside from that, keeping the remote colony intact meant that humanity effectively remained in control of the nearby border. Once red humanity no longer possessed any presence in the Corellix System, the alien raiding fleets would begin to set their sights towards the colonies situated deeper into human-occupied space!

All of this meant that the strategic significance of saving the local colony from destruction was quite high. There was no way the Red Ocean would deny the Golden Skull Alliance the rewards that it deserved.

What was particularly important to Ves was that the Larkinson Clan contributed a lot more to the success of this operation than the other alliance partners!

Even now, Minister Shederin Purnesse had become preoccupied with furiously trying to convince the other envoys that the Larkinson Clan deserved a much greater share of the overall rewards!

"40 percent is the absolute minimum that we should go for." Shederin briefly reported to Ves after the latest round of negotiations and horse-trading had concluded. "It is very much possible for us to attain 50 percent of total rewards and spoils if we navigate the subsequent rounds correctly. We truly accrued a great amount of accomplishments in this operation."

That was not an exaggeration. Ves briefly listed out the highlights of the Larkinson Clan.

Venerable Zimro Belson and the Phobos detected a hidden threat in advance and crippled Stingray 1's warp drives.

Lucky successfully captured the rare and valuable archeship, though not without incident.

Venerabler Isobel Kotin and the Promethea burned a handful of yurzen warships into ruined husks.

The Spirit of Bentheim lured away Stingray 2 and a part of the yurzen raiding fleet before breaking their backs after a long and dangerous running engagement.

The Larkinson Clan's lancer mechs expended a lot of expensive blast lances to quickly break open the defenses of a handful of important yurzen warships.

Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson and the Dark Zephyr essentially took out the formidable Stingray 1 by themselves by successfully pulling off an utterly amazing new displacement technique!

Ves really saw no reason why his clan should be denied half of the total spoils of the Battle of Corellix!

That was not to say that the other alliance partners did not make any effective contributions this time. The Glory Seekers definitely earned considerable credit for dispatching a DIVA starship and assigning Saintess Ulrika Vraken and the Macharia Excelsia to the Spirit of Bentheim.

Nonetheless, the expeditionary fleet wouldn't have been able to secure any of its objectives without the heroic and exceptional contributions of the Larkinson Clan!

"Tell those negotiators that I will not accept an outcome that is anything less than 50 percent." Ves said in a forceful tone. "We deserve to take at least one entire puelmer warship for ourselves given how our actions are primarily responsible for taking down Stingray 1 as well as Stingray 2."

"I will convey your words to our partners as best as possible."

Ves was willing to personally call for an emergency meeting if his clan received less than it was due. Although he did not wish to short his allies of their fair share of the spoils, that did not mean he was okay with getting exploited!

As time passed by, the expeditionary fleet experienced slight difficulties in properly managing two separate battlefields.

The Spirit of Bentheim continued to linger next to Stingray 2 while the bulk of the fleet stuck close to Stingray 1 and the majority of other captured alien vessels.

The Golden Skull Alliance already planned to dispatch the Wild Star along with a bunch of other capital ships to tow Stingray 2 as well as any other scattered captured hulls to the main battlefield.

This would keep all of the ships and valuable loot in a single manageable location.

All of this would probably unfold in the next few days.

In the meantime, Ves expressed a lot of curiosity towards Stingray 2. The puelmer vessel that had been initially struck by the Amaranto before the Everchanger disabled all of her exterior modules still remained mostly intact.

The most troublesome affair had been the boarding action that ensued afterwards.

The Larkinsons were physically unable to send their boarding troops into the ship because the ceilings of most of the hallways and compartments were far too low!

This was why the Larkinsons were forced to send in bots that they had fortunately prepared in advance.

It was a trivial matter for the Spirit of Bentheim to dedicate a part of her industrial capacity to mass produce a large amount of disposable puelmer-scaled combat drones.

The clan had bought the licenses from a company over the galactic net and straightforwardly produced the adorable round bots without bothering to tweak the designs.

The models chosen by the Larkinson Clan were not particularly strong or special, but they were adequate enough for the job.

Under the amplified glow of Lufa that the Everchanger purposefully radiated throughout Stingray 2's hull, the bots managed to overpower the feeble resistance from the trapped puelmer crew members with remarkably efficiency!

Although the ship still employed a lot of automated defenses that crushed a lot of invading bots, the disposable machines made use of their overwhelming numbers to sweep away all resistance by force if necessary!

The bots actually had to launch a lot of attacks onto the interior in order to eliminate all of the automated defenses that had remained unaffected by the Everchanger's glow.

"Stingray 2's degree of automation is higher than we anticipated." A man who served as one of the Larkinson Clan's alien technology experts reported to the patriarch. "What I mean by that is that once the majority of puelmers became incapacitated, the captain of the alien homeship may have activated a failsafe that caused most of the remaining active systems to operate without requiring directions from the crew. That, or the aliens already planned for this contingency in advance so that it automatically kicked in after certain conditions had been met."

Ves started to get a bad feeling about this. "What does that mean to us in practical terms?"

"Aside from the fact that our bots had to engage in extensive destruction in order to fully neutralize all of the threats inside the cramped vessel, the enemy failsafes also destroyed an extensive amount of valuables. The databases have been wiped. The warp drives fell apart. The ship's stores of pure phasewater has been entirely ruined. We're surprised that the ship did not self-destruct all at once. We believe that not even puelmers can tolerate the risk of their own ship blowing up due to faulty programming."

The damage sounded serious, but Ves did not feel too upset. He already had a feeling that the vindictive puelmers would do their best to deny as much loot to their captors as possible.

"Do what you can to salvage any remaining value from the damaged ship." Ves responded. "Can we salvage anything the puelmers have wrecked?"

"We have a good chance of extracting a lot of useful data from the vessel, sir. We prioritized the need to take control over the puelmer ship's central databanks. Our bots managed to get there in time to prevent the alien storage devices from getting physically destroyed. This gives our specialists a chance to restore portions of the wiped data. In addition to that, the individual puelmers all carry personal devices of their own that store large quantities of personal data. The Black Cats should be able to glean plenty of useful intelligence from them. It will probably take a couple of weeks for them to deliver useful information."

That took a bit too long for his liking, but it was better than nothing.

"What about the rest of the ship?"

"While it is true that the effort to capture the ship has resulted in further internal damage, the interior is not completely ruined, sir. There are still plenty of intact ship systems left, and many of them are quite sophisticated for alien technology that may or may not be of interest to you and your fellow mech designers. I believe you can make a better judgment of this than our analysts."

"I will take a look at the interior of the ship myself later on." Ves said. "What about captives? How many living puelmers did we manage to grab?"

"The ship was originally crewed by a couple of hundred puelmers, which is rather low considering her volume and technical capabilities. As you are probably aware of, the puelmers typically rely more heavily on automation than most other races. The amount of eligible captives was rather low to begin with, and the fights that ensued after the bots tried to overpower them reduced that number even further."

"Wait, the puelmers actually managed to resist Lufa's tranquility glow and fight the bots to the death?"

The alien tech expert nodded. "The puelmers became a lot more emotional once they became confronted by the intruding bots. Their strong anger and animosity may have been strong enough to overpower the effects of the glow and enable them to offer much greater resistance than normal. We have attempted to employ non-lethal measures to capture them, but the aliens frequently resorted to committing suicide to deny us the satisfaction of capturing them alive. Our bots have only managed to capture 40 or so puelmers intact."

"Damn." Ves grumbled. "I would have loved to know what knowledge all of those smart puelmers keep in their minds. Wait. Those dead puelmers. Did you dispose of their bodies already?"

"Not yet, patriarch. Their advanced round suits of armor are of notable interest to us. We have yet to begin the process of prying them away from the deceased alien bodies."

"Make sure to preserve those alien corpses as best as possible. Their skins are actually quite valuable once we process them into exotic alien leather. There is just something about their rolling physiology that just massages their resilient skin into the right consistency."

"Err... very well, sir."

Ves already wondered if he could make use of puelmer leather to produce interesting new products. Perhaps he could replace his main desk chair with one that he designed and built from the ground up by himself.

He could also try to sew a special handbag for his wife in order to commemorate their happy marriage. Although she had expressed contempt at self-made handbags once before, he bet that he could definitely give her a pleasant surprise if he elevated the product with his creative design and his exquisite craftsmanship!

There were many other possible luxury products that he could make out of quality puelmer leather. He just became a little concerned at the conditions of all of the harvestable skins. What if the bots had been a little too rough and poked a bunch of holes in them? What if energy weapons caused much of the skins to burn into ashes?

"Damn, I hope that enough of their bodies are sufficiently intact. I might have to skin some of the puelmer captives in order to harvest the highest possible quality of raw materials!"

Chapter 5143 On The Clock

Ves looked forward to the visit of an envoy of the Red Association.

The mechers were incredibly busy nowadays, but they had nonetheless confirmed that an inspector was about to drop by the Corellix System to verify the results of the battle and issue a hefty reward for saving the nearby colony settlement.

According to the rules of the game that the Red Two had set, the Golden Skull Alliance was already assured of receiving a huge reward. Being granted a billion MTA merits was not out of the question, but that was not the extent of the boons.

In order to muster more enthusiasm for volunteering to defend human space, the Red Association had also started to hand out other rewards.

From granting limited access to its restricted tech library to other privileges such as promoting one's citizenship tier, the mechers were willing to be uncharacteristically more generous so long as pioneers lifted a weight off their backs!

Although a lot of people would probably greet this development with greater enthusiasm and optimism, Ves had mixed feelings about this recent turn of events.

He was well acquainted with the Mech Trade Association's greed and profit-seeking behavior. The mechers might present themselves as the traditional 'good guys', but they sought to take advantage of every transaction.

For them to begin handing out rewards like candy indicated that the mechers no longer believed in their own ability to resist the incoming tide of aliens.

The Red Two's warfleets were already being pressed to their limits, and the native aliens had yet to bring over the bulk of the warships stationed in the more distant parts of the dwarf galaxy.

Ves recalled that traversing the stars by relying on indigenous warp drives was ten times slower than doing the same with the use of FTL drives.

All of this meant that unless the aliens started to equip their starships with human-style FTL drives en masse, it would probably take years if not a decade for all of those slowpokes to arrive at the edge of the Red Ocean that red humanity claimed.

However, once all of those slow but powerful warships finally arrived, the true test for the isolated red humans would commence!

Realizing this future trend put all of the recent decisions made by the Red Two into perspective. From introducing the Warship Quota Program to fortifying as many border systems as possible, all of these measures were meant to buy time and activate the greater potential of the human race!

Ves had the illusion that a giant clock hung over red humanity's space. The more the time ran down, the closer that everyone came to facing the true native alien offensive!

Not only would they have to resist at least ten times as many warships as now, but there was also a significant chance that phase whales and phase lords might actually enter the field themselves!

Red humanity only had a limited amount of buffer time to gear up and prepare for a crisis that would affect every corner of human-occupied space!

Ves grew concerned about the approximate timing of it all. He had only recently advanced to Senior and still needed to accrue a huge amount of accumulation before he was even remotely qualified to advance to Master.

He had no idea how long that would take. It was unlikely that he could get it done in roughly a decade. The jump from Journeyman to Senior was only a practice run for the true challenge of trying to realize a design philosophy.

"There's a real chance that I will remain stuck as a Senior by the time the true onslaught begins." He guessed.

That was bad news for him on a personal level. The right to speak of a Master was much greater than that of a Senior. It also became a lot easier for him to proliferate his design philosophy and

superior solutions. The Red Association might even take the initiative to propagate his innovations if the mechers deem that his work could make a substantial material difference in future battles!

He would miss much of that if he did not make sufficient progress during the coming decade or two. Unless he replicated the Polymath's famous speedrun, there was no way he could become capable enough to have a serious say in how red humanity resisted the war.

Even though Ves had a lot of faith in the power and the potential of living mechs in an age where cultivation made a resurgence, people needed widespread solutions that were effective right away instead of in a distant tomorrow where they may have already become extinct!

"I need to speed up my progress somehow." He concluded.

This might very well turn into a matter of life and death to him. It became clear that following the usual mech designer trajectory was no longer an option for him. It usually took at least half a century to advance by relying on steady accumulation and boring research, and that was in the best case scenario.

If he wanted to make faster progress, then he needed to break the pattern. He already had a pretty good suspicion that delving more into cultivation science and combining it with his mech designs might be a way to accelerate his progress, but he was not too sure whether it could make a substantial enough difference.

The Mech Designer System was another tool that could help him advance to Master within twenty years.

In fact, it had already played a crucial role in enabling him to become a Senior so quickly!

He needed to put more effort into completing its Missions. He disliked a lot of them for making odd demands or forcing him to go through difficult or time-consuming ordeals, but he really needed to get his hands on more Ascension Points so that he could redeem precious enlightenment fruits.

He still yearned to take a bite out of the juicy fruit that contained the Divine Blacksmith Records!

"I'll take a more serious look at what I can do to earn more points after I've come back from the upcoming conference."

Ves returned his attention to the handling of the loot while at the same time preparing for his next two lectures at the Eden Institute.

He curiously used a bot to explore the cramped and confining interior of Stingray 2. He hoped that he would be able to find particularly interesting or powerful exotic technology inside the hull, but none of the R&D projects the resident puelmers worked upon stood out to him. Whether his eyesight was bad or whether he had simply caught the wrong ship, he soon divested his interest from the vessel.

To be fair, the fairly advanced puelmer homeship still possessed a lot of useful tech and design features that possessed great significance to Vivian Tsai and the rest of the Naval Design Department.

If Ves was not already a mech designer afflicted by a busy schedule, he might have been more willing to spend time on delving the ship for interesting secrets.

Instead, he delegated this responsibility to his subordinates and rode the Spirit of Bentheim as the ship utilized her superdrive to quickly link up with the main fleet again.

The factory ship had to return to a central position in the expeditionary fleet as soon as possible because she was far too precious and strategically important to be left alone and without any escorts.

The ship also endured an extensive degree of external damage from the running battle. Stingray 2 and the accompanying yurzen warships frequently managed to break through the transphasic energy shields of the ship and inflicted serious damage onto the hull plating.

Fortunately for the Larkinson Clan, the most recent refit completely replaced all of the old second-class alloys that comprised her hull and internal structure with first-class alloys.

Even if the salvaged and repurposed first-class alloys were not particularly refined, much of the plating possessed at least modest transphasic properties.

The Larkinsons had also purposefully cherry-picked the toughest and most resilient chunks of alien salvage to upgrade the Spirit of Bentheim's physical construction, and that investment clearly paid off. Although the capital ship bore a lot of battle scars that occasionally exposed whole compartments to open space, all of the crucial ship systems were still in working condition.

It was still a good idea to fix her up as soon as possible, though. The longer the factory ship remained in her damaged condition, the greater the chance that other malfunctions and breakdowns would occur.

This was why the Spirit of Bentheim immediately approached the Diligent Ovenbird and carefully docked alongside her Big Oven.

Unlike the Small Oven, the other dock was not completely enclosed. This made it a lot more suitable for the mobile shipyard to work on capital ships, but only when she remained stationary.

When Ves and his guards transferred to the Diligent Ovenbird in order to pay a personal visit to the most valuable piece of spoils of the recent operation, Chief Ship Designer Vivian Tsai dropped by and presented him with the bad news.

"The Spirit of Bentheim is no longer a ship that we can adequately restore with the tools and expertise that we have on hand." She reported to him. "The reality of working on a quasi-first-class hull is that we can do our best to patch up the holes and replace missing and broken components with a lot of improvisation, but it will never bring the ship back to her previous standard. It also takes significantly more time to process all of the tough first-class materials. I estimate that we will remain stuck here for at least two months unless you are willing to interrupt our restoration effort."

Ves already guessed that this would be the case. "If your crews can repair the Spirit of Bentheim as best as you can manage, how much of a beating can our flagship endure?"

"Not as much as before. The sections that we have repaired will never be able to resist as much damage. I do not recommend you to send out your factory ship on another solo combat operation."

"Understood. Don't worry. I think our alliance will be taking it slow for the next few months. We will need a lot of time to digest our recent gains."

The mech forces of the Golden Skull Alliance also exposed many shortcomings and weaknesses in the previous two operations that urgently needed to be addressed.

Once the fleet was in a better condition to resume the Trailblazer Expedition, Ves intended to put more effort into going on the offensive.

"What's your evaluation of the ship that we have currently stored inside the Small Oven?" Ves asked. "It must be pretty interesting for you to come across a completely different ship that is based on a highly exotic tech base."

"That's an understatement." Vivian said. Her mood immediately became more enthusiastic as she thought about the alien vessel.

"Every part about the archeship is fascinating. From her highly effective and sustainable active stealth system to how all of her systems can only be powered or accessed with electric resonance, there is so much novelty that it is impractical for us to research her. We don't have the personnel, knowledge, resources, lab equipment and infrastructure to decipher more than 5 percent of what goes on in that exotic alien ship."

That caused Ves to frown. "Do you require additional funding to expand the size and capabilities of your Naval Design Department? If you are short on anything, just let me know."

"Our workload and responsibilities has increased considerably since we started to gain access to large quantities of captured alien ships, but this problem goes deeper than this. The archeship is entirely made out of alien high technology as far as I am concerned. We can't easily study it and reverse engineer all of her advanced technological principles by ourselves."

"Are you saying..."

"If we want to make the most of this archeship, we can't keep her for ourselves." Vivian directly stated. "We need to outsource this endeavor to a large and competent partner. I'm talking about a state or a massive organization. Only they have the capabilities to effectively research a large agglomeration of highly advanced and exotic alien tech."

"..."

Chapter 5144 Different Tech Base

As much as he did not like it, Ves understood that Vivian Tsai was correct.

Neither the Larkinson Clan nor the other partners of the Golden Skull Alliance possessed the research capabilities to adequately figure out the archeship.

Perhaps Ves might be able to make good progress if he studied the captured alien stealth vessel in person, but the opportunity costs of doing so were too great.

He was a mech designer! If he wanted to advance to Master anytime soon, he could not afford to squander his time on rummaging through a complex alien ship.

This was why it made sense to outsource this job to a more competent partner.

The problem was that reasonably intact archeships were both rare and highly valuable. They were so elusive that only the Red Two and perhaps a couple of first-class powers managed to get their hands on similar alien vessels.

Just as Ves intended to teach in his Frontier Wisdom course, trust was always in short supply.

If he handed the captured archship over to a bigger player, would Ves and his clan actually be able to receive the research results and materials that they were due?

"We can't turn the archship over to the Red Two." Ves immediately decided. "The fleeters are the most qualified people to research the archship, and the mechers are not too far behind. However, they probably already have a bunch of these ships in their possession, so they won't particularly value our contribution. I also don't trust these guys to share all of their findings with us. There is nothing we can do if they embezzle our stuff."

Vivian could not say anything about that, so she offered a few alternatives. "Both the Hex Federation and the Colonial Federation of Davute possess the adequate research infrastructure required to study the archship. However, I don't expect these second-rate colonial states to attain quick results due to their inherent limitations. It may take five to twenty years for their best researchers to decipher the working principles of archemetal and electronic resonance."

This was just an estimate on her part. It might take a shorter or longer amount of time to attain these crucial results.

"What if we leave the archship in the care of a first-class power?" Ves threw out. "I'm not talking about an entire state, but merely a large enough organization."

"A proper first-class research group will be able to produce meaningful results faster. This is especially the case if it is allowed to reach out to other research institutions to tap into the expertise of more qualified researchers."

This was how the bigger players usually handled situations like this. Ves favored this solution a lot more than the other alternatives, but the problem was that he needed to find a trustworthy first-class partner to hand over this important responsibility.

He briefly thought about the Eden Institute of Business & Technology. After he had completed his high-profile inaugural lecture, he had managed to deepen his integration into its academic community.

While he developed a lot of respect towards Master Laila Devos, he was not certain whether he could trust the Devos Ancient Clan that she ultimately answered to. What if the snobby Terrans chose to renege on the agreement anyway?

This matter demanded a lot more careful consideration. Ves needed to explore these options at a later date. For now, he was eager to step foot inside the archship.

"Lead me to our prize."

Ves and Vivian strode towards the Small Oven. They made sure they had fully enclosed their protective suits before they strode into an artificial vacuum-filled space.

It was far too troublesome to pump in air every time the Small Oven took in a new starship or sent one out again. This was why the entire space remained in vacuum.

Engineers and shipbuilding crews already started to crawl across the complex exterior of the archship. They apparently figured out how to deactivate the alien vessel's stealth vessel, because her multi-colored hull was plainly visible to the naked eye.

"She's beautiful." Vivian spoke over the communication channel with a tone of pure admiration. "There is little that we know about the arche, but their shipbuilding tradition is completely different from anything else we have encountered. Not even the aliens of the Milky Way have developed anything comparable in their tech base."

A lot of basic technologies were rather common and universal. Pretty much every technology-oriented race inevitably started to discover and make use of electricity, alloys and warships in similar ways.

It was quite rare for alien races to step outside of established technology and come up with truly new and unique inventions.

Luminar crystal technology was one such example. Archetech was another case of signature alien tech.

As Ves and Vivian moved closer to the alien hull, they were able to gain a much better view of the alien ship.

The archeship looked like an elongated oval egg that was surrounded by patterned alien metals

The coloration of the hull plating ranged from dark bronze to rusty green copper. The primary reason why the surface of the alien ship was so inconsistent was because the arche dynamically produced it by combining a lot of random exotics together.

One of the more confounding traits of archetech was that it did not impose too high demands on consistency. As long as the arche threw in enough valuable materials with the right properties, the aliens didn't care whether a block of archemetal was a little too heavy or lacked a bit of power.

Archeships were essentially machines that were made out of a large collection of semi-ad-hoc archemetal parts.

Just like how no two puelmer homeships were the same, archeships also exhibited large individual differences in material composition and performance because their makers did not value consistency.

"Every archeship is a unique work of art." Vivian aptly described. "They are products made with a collection of individual alien shipbuilders who all developed their own style of constructing starships."

The archeship was not only colorful, but also covered with lots of patterns. Ves knew that this was key to the principles behind archemetal. Without all of the internal patterns that functioned like circuitry, it was impossible for them to evoke and respond to electronic resonance.

He could see the clear parallels between luminar crystal technology and archetech. Both alien tech bases preferred to construct large, solid objects of matter and carve out internal patterns that functioned like circuitry.

This contrasted sharply with conventional technology that essentially consisted of a lot of tiny components that were never meant to function by themselves.

The latter was a lot easier to work with. It took a lot less effort to repair a broken product, and it was also easy to modify or upgrade it by swapping a few components.

In contrast, whole pieces of luminar crystals and archetech were not as malleable. Their relative lack of modularity meant that it was a lot more difficult to repair or upgrade them if their current versions were inadequate.

It was a lot more common to discard the unwanted pieces and make use of brand-new replacements that were quite expensive to build!

The cost efficiency of archetech was clearly not as good, but the benefits may be worth all of the added complications!

"Even though this archeship is just a well-equipped scouting vessel to the aliens, her physical properties are not inferior to a warship of a slightly larger class." Vivian commented as she came close enough to study the individual patterns that caused the hull to acquire a lot of depth texture. "If we can learn and master the principles behind archetech and archemetal, we can design and produce a paradigm-shifting series of starships that are far more resilient and suitable for combat than our current collection of vessels!"

Ves was just as excited as Vivian to be honest. Archetech could be used to produce more than enormous metal constructions like starships.

It could potentially be used to construct much tougher and damage-resistant mechs!

What Ves valued the most out of archetech was that there was a drastic lack of moving parts. Entire functions that previously relied on delicate circuitry and other sensitive parts could be entirely phased out with a single solid block of archemetal!

Of course, making mechs out of archemetal also came with plenty of downsides.

For one, the Larkinson Clan needed to adopt an entirely new set of industrial infrastructure in order to produce and maintain archemetal products.

The mech designers, fabricators and maintenance crews needed to go through a lot of additional training in order to become familiar with the alien principles of this completely new tech base.

Just as with biotechnology, Ves was reluctant to convert his entire clan to a tech base that diverged from the common human standard. Society generally imposed a lot of penalties to groups that tried to be more nonconformist.

"Let's not put the cart before the horse." He spoke to Vivian. "We first need to figure out how archetech works before we can explore this tech base further."

"I understand."

Once they were done with admiring the complex exterior of the archeship, they stepped off the catwalk and floated over to an open hatch.

The good news was that the interior of the archeship was not designed to accommodate the small and short puelmers.

The overall dimensions of the hallways and compartments were designed to accommodate the exaggerated sizes that the more developed archeshells could reach.

Since a typical adult arche was roughly as tall as a human, this meant that there was a lot of additional room.

Several different teams of scientists and engineers had already boarded the captured vessels.

The varied colors and markings on their hazard suits showed that every alliance partner had dispatched their own R&D personnel to the incredibly valuable archeship.

Even if they lacked the capabilities to learn how to reproduce archetech by themselves, it was always useful for them to collect a lot of data in order to increase their understanding of one of their enemies.

This would not be the last time an archeship stalked their fleet!

A detailed study of the archeship would allow the specialists to develop new sensor systems or tweak their existing ones that were much better equipped to detect the distinct alien vessels under active stealth.

As Ves and Vivian passed by dozens of researchers who were engrossed in their individual examinations, he eventually reached a central compartment that was already occupied by a bunch of familiar people.

"Hihihi! Look at my shell, Clixie! I'm a turtle now! Don't I look cute?!"

The suited form of Andraste ran around while carrying a large round wok on her back. The equally suited form of Clixie playfully chased after the girl and pounced the solid metal pan, which almost caused Andraste to trip!

"Miaow!"

Meanwhile, Gloriana held Marvaine in her arms as she started to point out interesting pieces of exposed archetech.

"What does this big bowl do, mama?" The suited boy asked.

"That is what the turtle aliens use to operate their devices. Instead of using conventional buttons and control panels like humans, the aliens directly connect their big shells into these form-fitting depressions. Can you see how the surface of this bowl is adjustable? This will help turtle aliens of different sizes attain a comfortable fit while they are connected to the archeship."

"Can we take control of the ship without a turtle shell?"

"It is possible, but difficult." Gloriana answered. "Lucky and the Black Cats are reluctantly able to control the basic functions of the archeship by relying on a combination of electronic resonance and careful manipulation of backup controls. It is enough to safely bring the archeship to the Diligent Ovenbird, but not enough to command the ship as well as her original owners. Oh, look! Your father has finally come back!"

Andraste immediately interrupted her game with Clixie and ran up to embrace her father.

"Papa! I missed you! I was so scared that something would happen."

"Haha, I'm completely fine, pumpkin. See? The aliens didn't hurt me at all. Our flagship is much tougher than she looks."

As Ves embraced her daughter, he looked around but failed to spot his oldest daughter.

"Where is Aurelia?"

"She is keeping Lucky company in another compartment of this ship." Gloriana answered. "You should visit your cat. I can't speak cat language, but even I can tell that he has become considerably disgruntled towards you. I would be careful about approaching him if I was you, Ves."

Chapter 5145 Archecat

Ah yes, Lucky might not regard Ves favorably after getting dumped into a completely unknown alien ship.

Being forced to fend for himself when contending against confoundingly capable alien troops, getting captured by a powerful arche lord and almost getting probed from the rear by the same alien leader were plenty justifications for the gem cat to harbor a lot of resentment towards the person who put him through this ordeal in the first place!

Ves did not exactly look forward to paying a visit to Lucky at this time, but he knew it was essential to furthering his understanding of archetech.

After all, compared to examining a completely alien and unfriendly ship that was unlike anything the Larkinsons had worked with in the past, it was much more convenient to study a gem cat that had apparently assimilated the new tech!

Before he went off to the bridge of the alien vessel, he first had to fend off his wife's request.

"Look at all of this, Ves." Gloriana said as she waved her free arm across the compartment. "I have never been a fan of alien tech like you, but I am finally beginning to understand why you obsess so much over luminar crystal technology. I do not have any sympathies for the arche, but their civilization has spawned an ingenious approach towards construction that is absolutely fascinating. Have you recognized the potential of archetech in mechs as well? I am filled with inspiration at this time, and I have yet to conduct a serious study of the archeship! I can completely use this to upgrade my design philosophy and pursue a superior form of perfect vessels in my work!"

Gloriana enthusiastically babbled on about all of the aspects that she liked about archetech.

Marvaine meanwhile listened on with rapt attention. Even though he was far too young to understand his mother's technical terminology, he was happy to get caught up in his mother's passion!

"Will your mechs become shaped like turtles?"

"Oh no, my dear. That will never happen. The archemechs that I seek to make will not take on alien aesthetics. They will be similar to Lucky. Their underlying construction may be radically different, but they shall still appear and behave like the mechs that we are all familiar with. This is the essence of human technological advancement, Marvaine. Our race has a long tradition of studying alien tech and converting its advantages into our own competencies."

"Isn't that stealing, mama?"

Gloriana grinned and rocked her son around a bit. "It is, but stealing is not wrong in this case. The aliens have a deadly feud against us. Anything that causes harm to them is a good deed to humans. It is our sacred duty and honor to obtain their unique inventions and assimilate them into our own tech base. If you ever find yourself in a similar position in the future, you must make the same

evaluation in order to determine whether it is right for you to steal someone else's tech. Remember this lesson carefully. Show no mercy towards the people and aliens who seek to kill you and your family!"

"Kill!" Marvaine clapped his hands and cheered.

Ves awkwardly coughed. "Ahem, let's leave this kind of lesson to me, alright? Don't stuff too many extreme opinions inside our little boy's head. As for you Marvaine, you should consider the consequences of your actions as well. One of the downsides of stealing another race's signature tech is that its original owners will get really angry at you. If our clan starts to parade around mechs made out of archemetal, I can guarantee that the arche will become so furious that they will start to send out attack fleets to punish us for our deeds."

"That's bad!"

"It is worth it in this case." Gloriana remarked. "The arche are dangerous, but they are not unmanageable once we have learned the principles of their archetech. Stealth is their greatest reliance. Once we are able to develop effective countermeasures against this tech, we will be able to claim more samples of native archetech in the future!"

That was tempting fate!

Though Ves did not necessarily object to adopting archetech on a wider scale, he did not assume that dealing with the arche would be as easy as she described.

"Let's take this situation step by step, honey. We can't figure this tech out by ourselves, so we need to employ a highly competent research group to do the work on our behalf."

"I am aware of our needs, Ves. We should transfer our archeship to the Hex Federation. There are many brilliant scientists and Master Mech Designers over there who would be happy to examine and reverse engineer archetech for free. This tech can revolutionize their tech as well as ours! Even if the most essential secrets will eventually leak to the rest of red humanity's society, we will still be a step ahead of the rest of our competition!"

Ves immediately shook his head. "That is not a good idea, Gloriana. I know the Hexers are friends and all, but they are still second-raters for the most part. The sophistication of archetech exceeds what they can comfortably handle. It may take three to five times as long for the best Hexer researchers to figure out anything useful from this alien ship. I am more in favor of presenting the archeship to one of my first-class contacts."

"What?! You can't do that! The Hexers are more than qualified to undertake these research projects!"

The married couple argued with each other as usual.

Marvaine rolled his eyes scrambled out of his mother's arms and began to join his sister and Clixie into exploring the funny looking alien devices.

Though Gloriana was adamant about transferring the archeship to the Hex Federation, she did not have the right to decide upon this matter.

"I've already spoken to Marshal Ariadne Wodin about this matter." She stated. "My aunt will back me up on this. She recognizes the value of this alien tech as well. We need all of the advantages we can get to gain the upper hand against the Friday Colonies."

It was absurd for Gloriana and the Hexers to continue to obsess over the Fridaymen when all of humanity had greater enemies to worry about!

Many of the feuds between rival human powers had become irrelevant as far as Ves was concerned. Though he understood that the Hexers would never be able to get rid of their grudge, it was a bit excessive to still be obsessed about preparing for war against the Fridaymen!

Ves grew tired of dealing with his wife. "At least half of the archship belongs to the Larkinson Clan, which in practice means me. I only need to gain the support of one other alliance partner to decide where to send this prize. I think we'll be able to obtain much better and faster results if we send it to a first-class organization like the Eden Institute. Don't argue with me on this. My decision is already set. I'm going off to check up on Lucky."

He left the compartment before his wife could resume her futile persuasion attempt. He navigated through the corridors before he ended up in a control center that pretty much functioned as the bridge.

The chamber contained over a dozen constructs that possessed the typical half-oval-shaped cavities. Each of them were normally designed to be interfaced by aliens with archshells, but Ves was greeted with an exception at this time.

The cute white-suited form of Aurelia currently stood in front of a central depression that currently held a certain gem cat.

Despite not fitting into the large bowl shape at all, Lucky still managed to reluctantly interface with the archship by virtue of his limited physical contact onto the surface!

"Does it hurt, Lucky?" the young girl asked.

"Meow..." The recently transformed mechanical construct responded.

"Mew mew mew." Mana rested on top of Lucky's archemetal body and licked his brand-new exterior plating.

As Ves walked closer, Lucky immediately started to hiss and issue his complaints.

"Meowwww!"

"Hey, I don't see why you are so mad! It all worked out for you as far as I can see. That is a cause for celebration, not complaint! I'm not entirely sure what it means to convert your body to archemetal, but I can easily guess that you've become a lot stronger now! You'll be able to do a lot better in future infiltration missions. I think you won't need to be careful and skulk around anymore when you sneak in another archship in the future. You can use your newfound control over archetech to immediately mess around with the vessel!"

Lucky's response to his words was immediate.

"Meow!..."

The artificial gravity at Ves' exact position suddenly reversed. This caused his armored form to lift off the deck and 'fall' onto the ceiling!

"Ouch! Hey, that's uncalled for! I know you are not exactly feeling well at the moment, but you don't have to take it out on me, Lucky!"

The local gravity suddenly turned normal again, causing Ves to slam right back onto the deck!

"Okay, you have your fun. Stop fooling around, okay? How much control do you have over the ship, anyway?"

Despite Lucky's demonstration of control, the cat did not magically obtain full command authority over the archeship.

"Meow meow meow..."

The arche were not total fools. They exercised proper information security and other common sense procedures. The arche lord along with the officers of the archeship were able to exert a lot of control over the ship because the entire hull was essentially keyed to the unique signatures of their archeshells.

It was the alien version of a biometric scan!

Ves had to admit that this was both an elegant and extremely effective security measure. Each archeshell was completely unique. No two shells could be the same because each of them were organically grown based on genes, environmental pressures, nutrition and phasewater.

So long as the arche in question did not turn traitor, it was pretty safe to tie their command access with their own shells.

This caused Ves to grow a little confused. "If this is the case, then how are you able to exert any control at all? Shouldn't the ship lock you out completely?"

"Meow meow."

"Ah, I forgot that you ate all of the archeshells of the former crew of this ship. You've been a little too ruthless in this, do you know that? According to the exobiologists over at the Dragon's Den, the survivors of your assault have completely lost their desire to live. It's pretty much impossible to extract any useful information from their mouths because they already consider themselves as walking dead."

Lucky predictably looked completely unapologetic about this. He deliberately spared the turtle aliens in order to prolong and amplify their suffering!

Aurelia walked up to her father and held up her hands towards him. "I found this, papa. They're so shiny and ugly at the same time. What are they?"

Ves suddenly lost his train of thought as he beheld the small collection of misshapen gems in his daughter's hands.

"Those are very precious gifts. I will show you what you can do with them in the future. For now, let me take them so that I can keep them safe."

He carefully took possession of all nine recently produced gems and placed them in a pocket built into his Unending Regalia.

While he definitely intended to study them in greater detail once he returned to his design lab, he could already tell that they were anything but normal based on their appearances and their descriptions!

For example, one of the gems that remained in his armored palm exuded a particular sense of threat!

[CARICAS FRAGMENT]

A semi-processed gem that inadequately contains the spiteful song of a malignant phase whale. Destabilizes all nearby phasewater and phasewater phenomena according to the emotional responses of the remnant contained within. Strong emotions may bleed over and affect the surrounding environment.

Chapter 5146 Malformed Gems

When Ves concluded his awkward conversation with his angry cat, Ves left the bridge so that he could take a closer look at Lucky's gems.

The gems all looked malformed and distorted in a way that just looked wrong to Ves.

Although none of the gems gave him the vibe that they were unstable to the point where throwing them at a bulkhead would cause them to explode, they still triggered his sense of danger.

Ves could not treat these gems like almost all of the other ones that Lucky had produced in the past.

The gem cat normally did a good job in producing solid gems with clear positive benefits and no discernable risks.

That meant that Ves never had to worry too much about imparting any significant negative consequences to the mechs that bore his gems.

If Lucky's gems truly posed a significant risk to the mech or the pilot that would be making use of the upgraded machine, then the Quint would have gone utterly crazy by this time!

This meant that Ves had little experience to draw upon in figuring out the precise effects of this new batch of malformed gems.

Their inconsistency, randomness and hints of malice made it so that he felt extremely reluctant to impart them to any of his mechs.

They might genuinely do more harm than good!

"At least I've gained a better idea on what goes on inside Lucky's body." He noted to himself.

As a mech designer, Ves did not really like to make use of components that he did not fully understand. The act of designing a mech always entailed combining many different parts and technological principles together into a seamless whole.

Gems complicated this process because they exerted an extremely powerful effect but also caused his work to become less understandable.

He had no confidence at all in his ability to fabricate an identical mech that performed in the exact same manner as a machine whose performance had been mystically boosted just through the addition of a single tiny element.

It was not until much later on that Ves was able to figure out the general working principle of Lucky's gems. Seeing what happened to an ace mech like the Mars heavily hinted that the gems vaguely acted like an instant injection of willpower baptism.

The biggest differences from traditional willpower baptism was that the gems exerted the strong influence or domain of a presumably powerful but long-deceased entity on a mech and that it happened in an instant. The transformation medium acting on a machine also appeared to be a lot different from willpower.

It reminded him of the explanation he received in the past of how exotic materials originally came into being.

This was a bit different from that natural process because Lucky's mysterious digestion system was able to exert a lot more control over the transformation process.

"There's much I still don't understand, but I think I'm a bit closer to the truth than before."

The insufficiently processed gems granted him a snapshot of what took place in between the time it took for Lucky to ingest different metals to the moment where he finally popped out his gems.

One of the common shortcomings that Ves was able to glean from the descriptions of the new gems was that they did not do a perfect job of containing the more superfluous and potentially negative influences of what they contained.

This showed that Lucky actually had to put a lot of effort into turning a gem that was raw but powerful into a more tempered and moderated product.

The greatest implication of this discovery was that gems could actually be a lot more powerful if it didn't matter if they came with a few downsides!

Ves drew out the gems from his armor compartment once again. He read through the descriptions provided by the System and tried to figure out whether he could pick up a few other interesting patterns.

[LOBIS FRAGMENT]

A semi-processed gem that contains a fraction of a dancer who could not cease. Will compel a mech to dance to eternity with the grace of an ancient master of her art. All motion shall bear a touch of elegance and refinement that can captivate any audience that is able to experience emotions.

[CURSE OF AIKIREON]

A semi-processed gem that contains the remnant of an ancient curse that has afflicted a long-forgotten sinner. This curse will gradually petrify a mech until it becomes a monument of a burden left untouched.

[INDIGNANT LORD FRAGMENT]

A semi-processed gem that contains the simmering hatred of an ancient lord towards the phase whales of the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy. Any mech that bears this gem will unlock the power of the ancient lord and become compelled to fight any phase whales to the death.

[PORTEND OF AN INEVITABLE ENDING]

A semi-processed gem that contains the collective despair of an ancient race that has become extinct. Any mech that bears this gem will become the carrier to an overwhelming quantity of fear and despair towards a doom that cannot be avoided, but will also trigger the release of power born out of unwilling futility.

[VIEAK FRAGMENT]

A semi-processed gem that contains the royal conceit of a second-born prince that has lost the struggle for the throne. Imparts an aggressive form of regality that will always be inadequate compared to authentic royal authority. Any discussion or behavior that hints or accuses the mech or its user of being a pretender, illegitimate, a spare or second-best will invoke violent retaliation.

[TAINTED KNIGHT'S BROKEN OATH]

A semi-processed gem that contains the regrets and resentment of a once-noble knight that has broken an important oath. Will blacken a mech that bears this gem until it becomes a rejected monster that seeks to taint anything it touches with corruption and degeneration.

[SOLOIS FRAGMENT]

A semi-processed gem that contains a fraction of the lost divinity of a forgotten god revered in ages past. Will cause a mech to bear the unstoppable curse and blessing of metal. The qualified inheritor of this ancient god may gain a gift of immense power, but must also bear all of the karma of its origin.

[RETRIBUTION OF MAKOWOL THE LOST]

A semi-processed gem that contains the irreconcilable soul of a rebel leader who disappeared on the eve of victory. Will impart greater damage resistance from any attacks launched by figures of authority and their oppressed subjects.

"Who are the figures that bear all of these names?" Ves wondered.

The System's descriptions mentioned a lot of names that sounded alien. Whether entities such as 'Aikireon' and 'Makowol the Lost' were originally alien or human was unclear.

If they were alien in origin, Ves could not exactly determine whether they originated from the Milky Way, the Red Ocean or a completely separate universe. The descriptions were incredibly lacking in this regard, and while not perfectly processed, the gems still did a great job in preventing any form of energy leakage from occurring. This cut him off from any further clues.

"What's up with all of these personalities?" He frowned. "There's an awful lot of losers and defeated figures among them. Is that what is common around these parts?"

It might be a function of availability. If Ves assumed that these past entities were all powerful transcendents or divinities, then the ones that were most prone to dying and polluting the environment with their spiritual compost were those that suffered tragedies.

Powerful beings that did a lot better had a greater chance of remaining alive. If they ever died, then they had probably made arrangements that prevented their power and heritage from spilling out in an uncontrolled fashion.

Despite the obvious dangers and lack of precision of these prematurely released gems, Ves still came up with a few possible suggestions on pairing these gems to specific gems.

He felt the urge to try out at least one of the nine malformed gems, if only to see what kind of influence it would exert onto a mech and mech pilot.

For example, the Lobis Fragment thematically matched the Star Dancer Mark II. Perhaps he could add this gem as a little extra when he finally came around to updating the expert rifleman mech's design.

"I'll need to make a careful decision about this. I can easily ruin an important work if I make the wrong choice."

He put the gems back into a secure compartment in his armor. This was probably not a good place to keep these potentially dangerous objects. He would have to arrange more appropriate storage for them all in case they interacted with each other or induced a form of contamination that he had yet to detect.

Ves proceeded to dedicate the following few hours to examining as much of the interior of the relatively small archship as possible.

He did not obsess too much over digging into anything specific. He just wanted to get an overall feel and impression of the precious alien vessel from the inside.

He made plenty of interesting observations throughout his extensive tour.

He gleaned how extensive archmetal and electronic resonance dictated the relationship between the archship and her users.

He noted how extensively the structure of the archship was able to adapt and maintain its overall integrity when suffering extensive damage.

He also gained a bit more inspiration on how he could potentially design a mech comprised completely of archmetal based on the design principles utilized by the aliens.

Ves developed a strong appreciation for archmetal. It became even more important for him to find a research partner who could take this captured vessel and figure out how she worked as soon as possible.

This was because he developed a vision where he could formally step into first-class mech design by relying on archmetal to stand out from the competition!

"It would be just like how luminar crystals had become the staple feature of most of my ranged mechs!"

The competition in the first-class mech market was extremely fierce. The industry simply had too many excellent players, many of which possessed so much backing or accumulation that it was nearly impossible to dislodge them from their dominant positions!

If Ves wanted to squeeze his way into this highly competitive market that generally held a lot of mistrust towards newcomers emerging from below, he needed to make a splash by relying on a gimmick that was much more straightforward than living mechs!

"I'll be holding my next lecture tomorrow at the Eden Institute. I can ask around for help while I am there. Even the Terrans should hold a lot of interest in getting their hands on a relatively intact archship."

Once their visit to the archship came to an end, Ves and Gloriana took their children back to the Spirit of Bentheim.

Despite the fact that the factory ship was currently docked alongside the Diligent Ovenbird, that did not stop the Larkinsons from returning and assuming their old duties and responsibilities.

In fact, the clan had a high demand on her production capabilities in order to replenish ammunition, produce a lot of hull plating to patch up the factory ship damaged hull and fabricate entirely new mechs to make up for the losses in the previous battle.

While the Spirit of Bentheim slowly came back to life, Ves received an unexpected visit from his grandfather and his daughter.

Venerable Benjamin Larkinson entered his private office while holding Andraste's hand.

"Hello grandfather. What's up? Did Andraste get up to mischief again?"

"It is a little more serious than that." Benjamin spoke in a grave tone. "I wanted to wait until the battle was over to bring this matter to your attention. Andraste, can you show him what you learned?"

"Okay, great-grandpa-"

Under Ves' bemused expression, his daughter proceeded to sit down on the deck in a lotus position.

She then proceeded to cultivate according to an unknown method, causing a small energy vortex form around her body!

The sight came as an abrupt shock to Ves!

"What?! Where did you learn this cultivation method?! I don't recall teaching you anything. This is impossible!"

Chapter 5147 10,000 Permutations

For a brief instance of time, Ves had the illusion that his second daughter turned into a miniature living mech that was cultivating the Greater Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra.

Had the arche or the puelmers secretly infiltrated his clan and surreptitiously replaced his flesh-and-blood daughter with a facsimile that actually consisted of a miniature mech?

Ves soon shook his head. This was a ridiculous thought!

He knew his children extremely well. Only his wife possessed a greater familiarity towards the child she once bore in her belly.

When Ves activated his spiritual senses, he began to study his daughter while she was cultivating according to an unknown method.

He immediately made several observations.

First, the cultivation method primarily centered around Andraste herself, but Yaika was able to pitch in due to her inherently spiritual nature.

Second, his daughter was exceptionally suited to cultivate as energy not only poured into her spirit, but also her blessed body!

Third, whatever cultivation method Andraste got her hands on was relatively mild and ineffective.

Fourth, Ves did not think that it was beneficial for Andraste to cultivate this method because his daughter was absorbing spiritual energies without making too many distinctions between their attributes.

While Ves did not sense that Andraste was actively causing any acute harm towards herself, that did not mean the cultivation method was benign.

For example, it might cause her to turn into an odd form of qi cultivator that completely precluded her from becoming a mech pilot.

The cultivation method might also cause her to develop an affinity into elements that did not suit her goals or inclinations.

There were way too many possible side effects and adverse outcomes for Ves to allow his daughter to continue with her activity.

Although Ves did not want to become an overbearing parent who had to control every single aspect of his children's lives, he did not want Andraste to engage in a method that would lead to unpredictable outcomes!

"Cultivation is not a game, pumpkin." Ves stated in a stern voice. "It is a life-changing activity that can be dangerous or irreversible. It is never a good idea to engage in a practice without guidance from an actual expert or authority in the relevant field. For example, you learned your swordsmanship from Ketis, who is both skilled and trustworthy enough to prevent you from inflicting harm onto yourself. Where did you find this method, anyway?"

The little girl grew a little timid as she rose up to her feet again. "I found it on the galactic net."

She proceeded to provide him with a brief explanation on how she stumbled upon a meditation method that claimed to turn any child into a potentate.

A lot of commenters expressed skepticism towards this dubious mantra. They apparently felt they did not gain any discernible benefits from practicing this strange method.

Andraste was the exception. She actually managed to experience real changes after she started to follow the written instructions!

Benjamin meanwhile was helpful enough to transmit a virtual document that contained the original text that described this so-called 'meditation method'.

Ves immediately entered into an analytical mode and started to dissect the entire text. He utilized his current understanding of cultivation science as well as spirituality to cut past all of the marginal content and decipher the more functional and critical components of the method.

The more he studied the method, the more he grew concerned.

"What do you think, grandson? Is there any truth to its claims?"

It took a few seconds for Ves to offer his response.

"This cultivation method definitely has a basis in authentic cultivation." He eventually said. "There are many parts to it that look like it has been copied from numerous ancient books before being

pasted together to make up for a brand-new method. The author subsequently added a few original elements to the mantra in order to tie all of the components together in an attempt to produce a specific result. I can vaguely surmise that whoever did all of this work had no malicious intentions. It is truly an earnest if somewhat clumsy attempt to increase the chance for children to develop more suitable genetic aptitudes."

Andraste's eyes lit up all of a sudden. "Doesn't that mean that I will definitely pilot mechs in the future?!"

Ves immediately shook his head. "Not so fast, my girl. Did you just miss what I told you earlier? We have no idea whether its creator is competent enough to make a safe and effective cultivation method. It might not be good for you either because you are much different from normal humans. Without a central authority similar to the Mech Trade Association that can professionally check and certify whether a method meets all of the requirements, it is highly uncertain whether it is safe or not. You can't afford to make any mistakes in matters like this. You should have gone to me a lot sooner."

Andraste looked like she was starting to understand her mistake. "I'm sorry, papa."

"I need to confer with a more knowledgeable expert about this subject. Please wait for a moment."

Ves went still. Both Benjamin and Andraste thought that he was silently contacting another person through his cranial implant.

The actual truth was that he was using Veronica to pay another visit to Cynthia back in the Milky Way Galaxy.

His mother provided him with a lot of interesting insights that he missed due to lack of knowledge or vision. Her analysis and guesses about the motives of the unknown author made a lot of sense. She also gave him a few tips on how he could take matters into his own hands and do a better job.

Once Veronica concluded her little visit, Ves went back to addressing his grandfather and daughter.

"Okay, I think I know what is going on here." Ves said. "Let me bring up the galactic net and perform a quick search to see whether similar cultivation methods have recently started to show up in different communities and portals."

He called up an advanced search engine and rapidly set up a new search request that looked out for any texts that contained identical phrases or text structures to the method that Andraste practiced.

"Sure enough."

Both Benjamin and Andraste looked confused as Ves projected over a hundred different virtual documents!

Each of these texts had been posted in many different places. From a virtual game forum to an interactive yoga teaching site, all of these places offered visitors access to different variations of cultivation methods that all claimed to help children rearrange their own brains!

The documents had mostly been allowed to stay up because no one really understood them. Cultivation was still completely unknown to the general public, so the administrators did not understand any of the dangers.

This was a huge fault that was bound to produce a lot of accidents over time!

"Do you see what is going on, now?" He asked primarily to his daughter. "You should be able to see a lot of common elements between all of these cultivation methods. That is a strong indication that they were all authored by the same individual or organization. The purpose of doing this should also be clear. They all claim to produce the same result, but do so by slightly different methods. This is a classic experimental approach. The researcher has a vague idea on how to attain a desirable result, but hasn't dialed in the most optimal solution. He or she has therefore created a lot of different possible iterations that contain a lot of different permutations of the same set of variables."

The apparent truth of what was actually going on was extremely clear to a mech designer like Ves, but it was different for a young girl that was still a few years away from becoming 10 years old!

Fortunately, Venerable Benjamin helped out by offering a similar analogy.

He used his comm to project an old-fashioned numerical keypad with buttons ranging from 0 to 9. Such keypads were typically used to lock doors or containers.

"Imagine a safe, Andraste." The old man explained. "This safe stores a large sum of money and treasures. You really want to take possession of these riches, but in order to do that you will need to enter the right passcode. Let's assume that this electronic lock can only be opened by inputting the correct string of four numbers. How many possible combinations can you submit to this lock?"

A typical little girl would have no idea on how to answer this mathematical question.

Andraste was different. She received a lot of advanced tutoring as of late, and probability theory had been a part of her lessons early on due to its importance in many different sectors and professions!

"Uhm... to get the answer, I will need to multiply the amount of options for every number. That means $10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 10,000$."

Ves grinned. "Correct! You can input 10,000 possible strings of four numbers into this keypad. The problem is that only 1 string is correct while the other 9,999 are all wrong. Let's expand on this analogy even further, shall we? If you input the correct keycode, then you will unlock the safe without incident and obtain a huge amount of money. If you input an incorrect keycode, then the safe will explode, which not only destroys what you wanted to get, but also kills you in the process!"

"That's dangerous!"

"Indeed." Ves seriously nodded. "Now think about the cultivation method that you just practiced and compare it to the other ones that I have easily found across the galactic net. Do you think the one that you originally got your hands on is the correct keycode that can make you rich, or one of the many wrong keycodes that will cause you to blow up into pieces?"

"...I did not feel anything wrong, papa. It's not dangerous... right?"

Ves sighed and wiped away all of the projections. He leaned down and softly patted his daughter's orange hair.

"You don't know that. You did not possess the right expertise to make this judgment or consult a qualified professional. That is really dangerous, baby. I cannot tolerate anyone turning my precious

little girl into an unwitting test subject. This should be illegal as far as I am concerned. If I have an opportunity to do so, I will raise this topic with the Survivalists when I attend their upcoming conference. People cannot be allowed to recklessly spread dubious cultivation methods on the galactic net. It's not a big problem for now, but they can definitely produce a lot of accidents once exotic radiation has more time to transform humans into organisms that have adapted to a higher energy environment."

"What do you mean by that?" Benjamin frowned and asked. "Is it dangerous or not, Ves?"

"It's situationally dangerous. According to a reliable source, the cultivation methods all share a common flaw. They are derived from ancient but actually effective methods that are mainly geared towards people with spiritual potential. Long-term exposure to E energy radiation can vastly boost the chances of developing this crucial quality. However, the Age of Dawn has barely begun, so most people have yet to experience this benefit. A lot of gullible and ignorant children that have attempted to practice these 'mediation methods' have been wasting their time without any result, which is actually good compared to the alternative."

"Yet Andraste is different."

"Yes. She's special. All of my children are special. I imparted each of them with companion spirit seeds early on, which means that they all managed to develop spiritual potential from the moment of their births! Despite all of the possible risks, it is extremely helpful for people to obtain this quality. I did this in order to make Andraste and her siblings stronger."

"Your actions also prematurely exposed them to risks and dangers that they are not necessarily equipped to handle." Benjamin accused.

Ves grinned in response. "That's what I am for. Even if you did not bring up this matter to me, I would have noticed what she was doing sooner or later. In fact, Goldie should have warned me about this from the moment she detected my daughter practicing an unknown cultivation method that I most certainly did not approve of! You need to be more alert about this kind of stuff!"

The Golden Cat materialized into the office in order to defend herself!

"Nya nya nya nyaaaaa!"

"You were still negligent!"

"Nyaaaaa!"

Chapter 5148 You Are Not A Fish

It was a little unfair to blame Goldie for her negligence on this matter.

Cultivation was new to everyone. The Golden Cat was no different on this matter.

While various mechs and design spirits had already begun to experiment or practice with cultivation methods that they either figured out themselves or obtained from Ves, very few adverse incidents took place.

This gave Goldie a false impression that cultivation was not that dangerous!

Unfortunately, just because her experiences with cultivation did not involve any serious accidents did not mean that others had nothing to worry about!

Aside from a few exceptions, design spirits were pure energy based life forms. Their sensitivity and perception towards spiritual energy was extremely high, which enabled them to gain a much better overview of the process of cultivation.

Design spirits also benefited from having access to natural cultivation from birth. This was a ready-made cultivation method that might not necessarily produce great results, but was absolutely safe and completely compatible with their own attributes!

Goldie and many other design spirits had been using their own intrinsic natural cultivation methods as a basis to form their own individual qi cultivation methods.

Ves saw no need to intervene in this matter because pure energy-based lifeforms were able to figure out pretty quickly if anything was amiss.

The same could not be said for humans. They did not possess a good grasp of spiritual energy and spirituality for many reasons.

Even humans that were close to primordial humans could get a lot of different stuff wrong!

Cultivation was inherently more dangerous and riskier for humans because they were much further removed from the ideal state of a True God.

The more inadequacies they possessed, the more extreme measures they needed to take in order to attain more power and extend their longevity.

As Ves explained these points to his audience in a simplified manner, he hoped that each of them would no longer recklessly engage in cultivation.

"Certain life forms such as Goldie and the Superior Mother are like fish." He used another analogy. "Do I have to teach a fish how to swim in the ocean?"

Andraste shook her head. "No."

"Exactly! Fish don't need to be taught how to swim because they are born to swim from the start. Perhaps they can figure out ways to swim a little faster or make themselves more maneuverable in a pool of water, but it's pretty much impossible for them to lose control and drown. Contrast that with organisms that are born on land like humans. If you throw someone in water, there is always a risk that they can drown. They are not really designed to live in water. They need to be taught how to swim, and while it is not really all that difficult, they will never be able to equal the performance of a genuine fish. Is this clear to you both?"

Both Andraste and Benjamin nodded.

"Fish is yummy. Can we eat fish for tonight, papa?"

"Hahaha, let's check with your mother first. She is rather adamant about sticking to a strict diet schedule." Ves chuckled.

His grandfather paid more attention to the origin of the cultivation methods posted on the galactic net.

"Have you obtained any clues where they might come from, grandson?"

"Not really. I'm not sure who spread this original set of cultivation methods, but from my perspective, they are the works of an amateur that does not possess a sufficient grasp in cultivation science." He replied. "Andraste, don't practice this mediation method anymore. I want you to grow up into a strong and capable warrior, but it is not worth risking your entire health and wellbeing just to turn yourself into a test subject of an unknown party."

His daughter looked a lot more scared than before now that she understood the horrifying truth behind the publication of all of these random meditation methods.

"I understand, papa. I will be more careful. What do I do instead, then? Is there really no way to help me become a potentate?"

"Genetic aptitude is not necessary to live a happy and fulfilling life, young lady." Venerable Benjamin gently told his descendant. "Take it from me. Whether you will have what it takes to interface with a mech with your brain will only become clear when you are 10 years old. Even if you do not get the result you are hoping for, there may still be a chance for you to get what you truly want."

Ves coughed at his grandfather. "Let's not make promises that we might not be able to keep. Anyway, I will look into this further. Whoever made these cultivation methods clearly doesn't really know what he or she is doing, but it is different for me. My heritage is much more comprehensive and complete. I think I can do much better, but..."

"What is the matter?"

"I'm sure you know a lot about genetic aptitude. Unless the mechers have been holding out on us, nobody truly understands how adequate genetic aptitude comes into being. There are so many possible variables that affect this end result that it is impossible to precisely control its formation. I don't think that a cultivation method will be able to make that much of a difference, whether today or in the far future. It's like how throwing a bucket of water at a burning house can hardly make the fire go out sooner."

Ves did not exactly possess a good understanding in this area. One of the most uncertain variables about all of this was the fact that most children simply weren't ready for formal cultivation.

Their minds and spiritualities were too weak and underdeveloped. Without enough spiritual potential and concentration, they were bound to achieve little actual results unless they grew a lot older.

However, it would already be too late for them once they surpassed 10 years old.

No matter whether it was even possible for humans to develop the right genetic aptitude when the growth and development of their brains had already reached a mature state, what was the point of entering a mech academy when they were already in their twenties or thirties?

While early cultivation was probably useless to the vast majority of human children for a long time to come, Ves was not entirely certain whether the same rules applied to Andraste and his children.

Different from other kids, Ves, Goldie, the Superior Mother and Gaia had empowered their spiritualities and bodies to the point where they had all become extremely spiritually gifted!

Not only did they possess spiritualities that exceed the level of a gifted adult human, but their body cells were also more attuned to spiritual energy, similar to the primordial humans of the past.

A strong spirit made it easier to induce greater changes through artistic conceptions.

A more spiritually attuned body made it easier to alter it by leveraging spiritual energy in conscious and unconscious ways.

When Ves thought about what little theory that humanity knew about genetic aptitude, he figured that it was a purely organic phenomenon.

In order to have it, it was necessary for a human's brain structure to fall within a specific range of forms that made it suitable to connect to neural interfaces.

This meant that in order for a cultivation method to encourage the formation of a desirable brain structure, it had to engage in a specific form of body cultivation.

Although he never really intended for this to happen, Andraste and his other children were highly compatible with body cultivation!

At the very least, they possessed a much stronger compatibility for it than other people!

This actually gave Ves a lot more hope that he would be able to help his daughter with making her dream come true.

"Let me work on this, Andraste." He gently told her. "You need to give me time to do a bit of research and compose a proper cultivation method. Your grandmother can probably help us out a lot in this regard. She won't refuse the opportunity to help out her cute little grandchild. Just be patient, okay? You still have a few years to go before you reach your tenth birthday. There is plenty of time to make changes."

His daughter looked up at him with her pitiful big eyes. Don't take too looooooong. I don't want to wait!"

"Haha, I will be sure to work on it, but I need to do this right. I also can't guarantee that I can make this work. This subject is a lot more complicated than you think."

It took a while to placate his daughter. Ves knew that he had to make quick progress on this matter, or else his girl might try out other crazy stuff.

"Goldie, I am counting on you to keep a closer eye on not only Andraste, but all of the children of the Larkinson Clan. If they ever try out a cultivation method that we have never personally verified and approved, you should do everything in your power to stop them or warn others so that they can step in, understand?"

"Nyaaa!"

The feline ancestral spirit agreed with Ves now that she became more cognizant about the possible risks and dangers.

With that set, Ves felt a lot more reassured that nobody would be doing anything foolish in the short term.

asked.

21:59

Ves smiled at him. "There is no need for mech pilots such as you to do anything different from usual. This subject was way more complicated and involved than what was apparent on the surface.

For one, Ves had no idea whether the Red Association was related to it in any way. He did not believe that the successors of the rebels who used to be part of the Five Scrolls Compact but eventually managed to topple this overlord were incompetent when it came to cultivation!

There was a good chance that the mechers had already dug out all of their accumulated knowledge on cultivation as soon as it became clear that the power of heaven had become available once again.

If that was the case, then the Red Association may already be working on developing proper cultivation methods that were safe and simple enough to make them available to the public.

Ves would probably be able to get more answers on this subject once he attended the conference that was scheduled to start next week.

His grandfather asked one more question before he left.

"Can this 'cultivation' business help mech pilots become stronger as well?" Venerable Benjamin asked.

Ves smiled at him. "There is no need for mech pilots such as you to do anything different from usual piloting activities. The thing about mech pilots is that they have always engaged in cultivation. The simple act of piloting a mech and using it to fight in a battle are enough to make progress in this area. Where do you think breakthroughs come from? It is even easier to track once you have become an expert pilot. You can track your progress by observing the rate of growth of your resonance strength over time."

Part of the reason why this was the case was because willpower cultivation paid much less attention to specific techniques than qi cultivation.

What willpower cultivators lack in versatility, they more than made up for it with force!

So long as the Kingdom of Mechs continued to hold dominion over mech pilots, there was no need for this privileged group of warriors to worry about the process of cultivation.

The bigger problem was getting there in the first place. Hopeful children such as Andraste deeply wanted to gain the qualifications to become a mech pilot, but reality had crushed so many of their dreams.

Ves was no exception in this regard. It was exactly because of his own disappointing experiences in his youth that he wanted to save Andraste from the pain that depressed him during his teenage years.

Was it truly possible to come up with a cultivation method that enabled spiritually gifted children like Andraste to develop or improve their own genetic aptitudes?

Ves believed it was possible based on his current theoretical framework on cultivation, but whether he could develop the right method remained to be seen.

Chapter 5149 Loot Handling

Cultivation was largely useless to humanity back in the Milky Way. The absence of the power of heaven meant that spiritual energy was too scarce for most methods to play any significant role.

The most viable source of spiritual energy that people could gain access to was by generating it themselves through their own thoughts and emotions.

It made a lot of sense that mech pilots and mech designers still managed to do well in this galactic energy desert.

Mech pilots fueled their own progression by pushing themselves beyond their limits and generating extreme emotions in the heat of battle.

Mech designers advanced by getting immersed in the creation of unprecedented works and receiving the validation of their clients and customers.

Yet as exotic radiation continued to enrich the Red Ocean Dwarf Galaxy, traditional cultivation that ancient humans abandoned a long time ago suddenly became viable again.

Ves predicted that a lot of dusty old cultivation methods that certain groups with long heritages kept in their vaults might make a resurgence again.

The Aduc Family that had long practiced the Annals of Terra Vita without any apparent results for a long time would definitely be able to notice the changes.

It was extremely likely that other families and inheritors of secret cultivation traditions had already begun to exploit cultivation once again!

It was already bad enough if all of these forgotten offshoots of the Five Scrolls Compact utilized cultivation to secretly get ahead of the competition.

Ves found it even worse if random people recklessly engaged in cultivation without knowing the full risks and dangers of the method they employed!

The Red Two had to step up their regulation on this front. In fact, Ves predicted that the Transhumanist Faction were already on the job. The faction was not only monitoring the current situation, but had also begun to formulate a complete response in order to shape red humanity's relationship with cultivation.

"The longer they take, the more elaborate their plan."

A quick and hasty response might be able to plug the immediate gap, but a slower and more elaborate plan would lead to fewer fault lines in the future.

"Hopefully the Survivalists that I will meet next week will know a thing or two about this plan."

Ves set aside his concerns about cultivation for the time being. Though he had promised to work on a possible way to help his second daughter increase her chances of developing the right genetic aptitude, this matter was way too complicated for him to tackle by himself.

He needed to consult a lot more with his mother and he also had to find out what the mechers were up to. Only then did it make sense for him to tackle this dubious project.

Still, as Ves thought back on the contents of the experimental meditation methods spread across the galactic net, he personally did not have much hope that this approach would actually work.

Cultivation had limits. If anyone could become a fire-breathing dragon or an invulnerable multi-armed goddess just by wishing for it really hard, there wouldn't be any point to designing mechs anymore!

Humanity did not fully understand all of the variables that determined one's genetic aptitude, so anyone who attempted to base a cultivation method around it would never be able to get it completely right.

"It would be great if it can actually be done, but I'm not getting my hopes up." Ves murmured under his breath.

The difficulty of developing a viable cultivation method to promote genetic aptitude was as difficult as trying to produce a modern mech with the use of primitive ancient blacksmithing tools.

Perhaps it might be possible to forge the larger and simpler parts with an old-fashioned forge, but it was impossible to fabricate the complicated circuitry, the incredibly difficult alloys and the huge amount of tiny parts that all needed to meet tight tolerances!

The best that Ves could do in this situation was to design and forge a highly simplified mech that was lacking in a lot of features and was only a fraction as strong.

Ves already took into account that he may not be able to make Andraste's dream come true. He hated the thought of disappointing his little girl, but sooner or later his children all had to make the realization that not every gift was destined to fall into their hands.

Genetic aptitude was not a phenomenon that was intrinsically related to cultivation to begin with. It was mainly a biological requirement to effectively control large and complicated machines through the use of a neural interface.

The only individual who was probably closest to understanding it was Divine Hussain Albedo, the leader of the Transhumanist Faction.

Unfortunately for Ves and many people in the Red Ocean, the Chosen Human was still stationed in the Milky Way as far as everyone knew!

The esteemed hero was not among the 8 known god pilots who stood up for red humanity.

This was an enormous regret for Ves. If the Chosen Human was stuck on this side of the greater beyonder gate when the Great Severing occurred, then he would have definitely become as accessible as the Polymath!

So long as Ves made enough contributions to the Transhumanist Faction and quickly gained the appreciation of the higher ups, there would have been a good chance that he would get to meet with this legendary god pilot in person!

Unfortunately, it was not to be. A lot of brilliant Star Designers and god pilots that could each play a useful role in the Red Ocean had all been left behind.

Ves shrugged. "Oh well."

He left this matter behind and spent his time on other matters.

He took care of a lot of important business for the rest of the day.

He made sure to transfer a sufficient amount of living puelmer and yurzen captives to the Dragon's Den in order to increase his supply of test subjects.

He presided over a meeting to formally finalize the division of all of the loot. The Larkinson Clan got what it wanted and was able to lay claim to 50 percent of all of the spoils.

This expressly included ownership over half of the archeship as well as total ownership of Stingray 2!

Deciding what to do with all of this advanced alien tech became the next headache.

The other alliance partners agreed to transfer the archeship to a first-class research group so long as the deal was not too sketchy.

It was not practical to keep Stingray 2 close at hand. The hull had suffered a lot of damage and had lost much of her essential functionality.

"Let's send her back to the Davute System." Vivian Tsai proposed. "Our branch in the colonial state can keep her safe and employ its own researchers to study the alien vessel. Depending on our goals, we can either disassemble her to obtain the greatest amount of research results, or we can convert her into a human warship if you are confident that we can win an appropriate Warship Token."

Ves snorted at that last suggestion. "Given the mass and volume of Stingray 2, only a Heavy Cruiser Token will grant us permission to use her in the field. According to the current bounties, we must find a way to kill a phase whale or a greater phase lord in order to earn this reward."

"Did we not manage to defeat not one, but several phase whales over the course of our stay in the Red Ocean?" Vivian innocently asked.

"...Let's keep our options open. Are you sure Stingray 2 can be converted to human use? Her ceilings are so goddamn low that no human can crew her, let alone get past their tiny hatches!"

The shipwright was well aware of this issue. "This is why this project is not a refit but a reinvention. It is never a good idea to rely too much on alien tech. We will have to rip out most of her ship systems and put human equivalents in their place, so the interior will be completely different anyway. The reason why we are not starting completely from scratch is because we require more extensive drydock facilities to construct a strong outer hull that can fully withstand the ravages of war. Keeping the current hull and essential structural elements will save us a lot of work."

"I see." Ves understood what she was talking about due to his background as a mech designer. "You can order the Larkinson Branch to do what you want. Don't be in a hurry to transform Stingray 2 as it is unlikely that we'll be able to earn that Heavy Cruiser Token anytime soon. Technology is constantly advancing. Perhaps we'll be able to master the production and use of archemetal in a few years. Make sure that the hull is empty enough to accommodate the latest advancements."

The woman nodded. "Understood. We will take care of it. If you don't want to wait for a token, we can also choose to convert Stingray 2's hull into a first-class combat carrier. Her mech capacity won't be optimal due to her sleeker and more narrow structure, but her defenses and mobility will be more than satisfactory. We can use the converted carrier as the perfect chaser of fleeing alien warships and phase lords as long as we fill her up with expert mechs or extremely powerful ranged mechs."

That was actually a good alternative. The Battle of Corellix exposed a lot of inadequacies, one of which was an inability to effectively pursue fleeing starships.

During the end of the Battle of Ramage Repulsor, the Trampier of Stars easily made a getaway when he saw that his battleship was bound to fall into the hands of his human attackers.

Ves still felt pained about this. Who knew whether other phase lords such as the Eminence of Torment would be able to flee the reach of the Golden Skull Alliance just as effectively.

"Your suggestion is good. Please prepare the hull of Stingray 2 that we have the option to choose."

Once he took care of this matter, Ves temporarily separated with most of his clansmen and boarded a stealth shuttle in order to complete another chore that had to be kept secret at all cost.

This was because he wanted to retrieve the hidden weapons of mass destruction that the Phobos had quietly parked beyond the range of most sensors!

The weapons were all rather sizable, so it would cost Ves a hefty amount of Ascension Points to free up enough space in the Vault of Eternity.

Due to his recent spending spree, Ves was only left with 135 Ascension Points. He was extremely reluctant to spend a dozen or more AP to accommodate these sizable weapons on a long-term basis.

"Wait, I don't need to store them in their entirety."

It took a bit of effort to study the powerful superweapons while keeping everything as hidden as possible, but Ves eventually discovered that the bombs and missiles could be partially disassembled.

The arche had constructed them in a semi-modular fashion. The warheads were largely self-contained and could be placed inside different containers and delivery vessels.

What this meant was that Ves could get away with using up a small amount of storage space inside the Vault of Eternity to store the only forbidden parts about the anti-matter bombs and transphasic fusion missiles!

The only downside to doing this was that it would be rather inconvenient to make quick use of them from the moment he pulled them out of his System Space again.

Ves did not mind this shortcoming.

It took a bit of time and effort to take out the warheads one by one and deposit them into the Vault of Eternity.

He had already freed up as much space as possible by dumping out all of the remaining stores of phasewater that he kept in his private storage.

This left him with a small collection of empty archemetal shells. Ves eventually decided to secretly transfer them over to the Blinding Banshee for safekeeping. Who knew when he might have a use for them again in the future.

Chapter 5150 Introduction To Living Mech Design

At the start of the next day, Ves prepared to hold his second lecture of the week.

Since the lesson content was a part of his Introduction to Living Mech Design course, he deeply wanted it to succeed.

He decided it was unnecessary for him to adopt the strongman image once again, so he traded his Unending Regalia for a more subdued and professional business suit.

"I'm not about to teach another lesson on Frontier Wisdom, so I can dispense with the theatrics."

He also had to stand in front of a completely different audience this time. Ves no longer needed to present his case in front of the majority of the entire student body of the Eden Institute.

"Only 14 students, huh?"

Ves actually preferred to start with a smaller and more intimate class. This made it a lot easier to monitor and provide guidance to each and every individual student.

Although the probability was small, Ves would celebrate the emergence of every mech design student that successfully managed to get started with living mechs!

He might not be able to help anyone master the basics of living mech design if he had to supervise a relatively sizable class of 250 students.

In contrast, he felt a lot more confident about helping 2 or 3 of these bright young brats get started in a tiny class of just 14 students!

As Ves went through his morning routine and spent a bit of time with his wife and children, he already started to think about the individual circumstances of each person who enrolled in his Introduction to Living Mech Design course.

He already had an opportunity to observe the enrolled mech design students during his previous lecture. A few of them appeared to possess spiritual potential, though this particular trait was bound to become a lot more common in the future.

Nonetheless, Ves was impatient for success. He ideally wanted to spread his design philosophy sooner rather than later, and it would be best if he focused on the handful of students who already demonstrated a better talent towards extraordinary pursuits than their peers.

"It was a bit difficult to know for sure whether a student has any spiritual potential last time, but it should be a lot easier to make this determination in the upcoming class."

Different from teaching a remote class through the use of conventional physical projection technology, Ves intended to take advantage of the brand-new Hyper Chamber this time.

He did not agree to invest 100 million MTA merits on this high-tech boondoggle just to provide an ideal remote learning environment for his children!

Gloriana knew how important this course was to her husband. She gently patted his shoulder and leaned in to give him a kiss for encouragement.

"Be careful around the Terrans. You may have managed to amaze them in your earlier lecture, but they are still first-raters at heart. You must not grow too complacent and make sure that each of your students benefit from your teachings. If they think that they will not be able to obtain anything useful from your lessons, they may start to issue complaints."

Novel "I'm aware of that, honey. These Terrans expect much from me, but I think I can manage. The subject falls within my core area of specialization, so I won't have to worry about running out of stuff to teach."

"Have you met any prominent Terrans yet that our clan can cooperate with in the future?" Gloriana curiously asked. "We will need as much friendly support as possible to ease our entry into the world of first-raters. I would love to help in this matter, but the only first-raters that I am familiar with are the Mech Supremacists, and they have become far too preoccupied as of late."

"There isn't a part of the Red Association that has enough free time these days." He muttered.

"Good luck, Ves. I know you can do a good job. It is not too important whether you can forge new partnerships with Terrans. The more time you spend around first-raters, the easier it becomes for you to integrate into their greater community. That is already precious enough."

Once he was ready, he moved to the central section of the Spirit of Bentheim where the Hyper Chamber was located.

Despite having access to it for a while, Ves never took the initiative to make proper use of it. The Hyper Chamber worked best when it established a connection with servers that were designed to accommodate its features.

These servers almost exclusively catered to first-raters, which meant that Ves would stick out like a sore thumb if he appeared all of a sudden.

A lot of virtual communities were also private and hidden from the public. The only way he could get into one of them was to receive an invitation or a referral from an existing member. Perhaps he could get one from Jovy Armalon, but he would have to meet with him first.

As Ves entered the high-tech Hyper Chamber, he took a brief moment of time to look around. The giant chamber was sizable enough to accommodate a large lecture hall as well as a bunch of mechs.

If he wanted to, he could even order the Hyper Chamber to form a small production line and fabricate a mech in a way that allowed his remote students to observe his process with fantastic fidelity!

It might even be possible for him to use the Hyper Chamber to essentially fabricate a complete and proper mech from a distance!

"I'll need to upgrade the Hyper Chamber's functionality to make that possible." He reminded himself.

That was not necessary for the time being.

Ves briefly spent a moment of time on calling up the diagnostics of the Hyper Chamber and confirmed that it was working properly.

He proceeded to form a connection to one of the Eden Institute's classrooms.

The environment around him changed. The cold and hollow metallic chamber made way for a warm wood-paneled classroom environment. Only the floor was made out of tough ceramic tiles that were strong enough to comfortably bear the weight of mechs.

Despite the small number of students that showed up, Ves still chose to hold this lecture in a large classroom because he wanted to show off his living mechs.

In fact, many of the more advanced courses related to mech design tended to be taught in these kinds of spaces because it was important for students to get into frequent contact with mechs at their full scale.

The classroom at least had a setting that dynamically rearranged the amount of seats and their placement according to the specific needs of each class.

Ves had opted to arrange the seats into a small circle. A few students had already arrived a bit earlier and sat next to their closest friends and acquaintances.

Most of the mech design students who initially signed up for this course were fourth-year students. There were a few men and women who were in their third or fifth years of their studies, but they were the exception.

Third-year mech design students were generally far too busy with completing their studies in the core science subjects such as quantum mechanics and materials science.

Fifth-year students had already completed most of their studies and devoted a lot more time on practical courses in preparation to complete their graduation projects.

Alexa Streon strode inside the classroom at one point. Many of the students briefly looked at her with expressions of curiosity.

She wore a modest beige coat that was devoid of any patterns and looked as if she could blend right in with the other young adults.

"Pay no mind to my presence. I am here to assist Professor Larkinson and benefit from his teaching as well."

The most powerful student arrived shortly after Alexa took her place behind Ves' projection.

Ryan Shuku floated into the chamber and settled down on the central seat as if he was a sovereign surrounded by his councilors.

Compared to everyone else, Ryan conveyed a much stronger sense of inherent superiority and background. His presence was so strong that nobody seemed to pay attention to the physical projection of their professor anymore!

Yet Ryan was not the student that captivated Ves the most.

Whether it was deliberate or not, Gabriel Sekkar was the last student to enter the classroom.

A lot of students actually expressed surprise that Gabriel had enrolled for this course in the first place.

This was because he was a second-year student!

If that was not already exaggerated enough, he was one of the few students of the Eden Institute who pursued a degree in both mech design and business at the same time!

How could he possibly spare the time to attend classes for yet another non-essential optional course?

There was no need for the heir of the Sekkar Clan to explain himself. His attendance was already enough to explain how confident he was in keeping up with his extremely bloated study schedule.

Ves made a soft clap. "Everyone is here, so let us begin this class. Welcome to Introduction to Mech Design. This is a new and experimental course that aims to introduce you to my primary specialization which also happens to be the field that I have pioneered. I have already written this in the course documents, but the main purpose of this course is to develop a thorough familiarity with the traits and general principles of this variation of mechs. It is not required for you to be able to design a living machine as the difficulty is far too great."

An eager-looking student immediately raised his arm.

Ves grinned in response. "I believe I can guess the question that you wish to ask, Mr. Klaus Robar-Fulton. Yes, it is possible for you to be able to design an actual living mech with my guidance, but you will need to fully embrace my teachings and work hard to understand the essence of living mechs. The amount of academic credits that is awarded to you after completing this course cannot encompass all of this additional work. I may turn this condition into a requirement for a future follow-up course, assuming there is enough demand."

It would be better for him to wait until he advanced to Master before he taught an advanced course like this. Masters were able to generalize a part of the essential theories and working principles behind design philosophies into a universal format. This made it a lot easier for other mech designers to quickly master the basics!

Ves would truly be able to pick up a lot of disciples at that point!

Another mech design student raised her arm and asked a question. "Professor, if it is not mandatory for us to design a living mech, then what will we actually gain from completing this course? How will absorbing your teachings improve our own work?"

"That is difficult to say." Ves honestly replied. "It depends on how much you agree with my philosophy and whether you choose to integrate any aspect of it in your own work approach. Generally speaking, you will be able to work with existing living mechs a lot better. You will roughly understand how they work, how they are produced, what it takes to take care of them and how to optimize their growth. Furthermore, you will also be able to form greater synergies if you ever collaborate with mech designers who specialize in this field."

This vague answer did not sound any different from what he had written in the course documents, so his answer failed to offer much clarification.

Ves inwardly shrugged.

"Let me continue with my lecture before you ask any further questions. While I am principally open to interruptions, I advise you to make careful use of this privilege. I believe I can answer many of your doubts once I have concluded this lesson. Miss Striker?"

"Yes, Professor?"

"Bring in the Pacifier. It is time to let my students experience what it is like to be in the presence of a real living mech."