

The Mech 5151

Chapter 5151 Interesting Students

Living mechs had become increasingly more prevalent in the middle zones where the Living Mech Corporation actively marketed its products.

The mech models that the general public happened to come into contact the most were not the popular Ferocious Piranha or the all-time classic Desolate Soldier.

It was the products that were most removed from the battlefield that tended to enter into the lives of ordinary citizens most frequently!

The humble Hymenoptera industrial mech and the incredibly useful Pacifier law enforcement mech sold the most and showed up in increasingly more colonies with every passing day.

Naturally, the Terrans had yet to make use of these bestsellers because they belonged to a completely different market.

While the students did not show any obvious signs of contempt or dismissal due to the fact that they had already studied their professor and his works in advance, Ves was still able to detect their inherent underestimation of second-class mechs.

It was hard for the superior Terrans who had lived among first-class multipurpose mechs for all of their years to take lesser mechs seriously!

While it was true that a single first-class mech could probably wipe out dozens if not hundreds of second-class mechs with relative ease, the Pacifier mech that entered the classroom was a bit different from normal machines.

As soon as the mech stopped a small distance away from the circle of 14 students, the entire crowd had grown silent for a time.

The Pacifier mech was nothing special on the surface. It was a recent copy that had only rolled off the production lines a few months ago. The unit had never been seriously used for its intended purpose so it hardly experienced any meaningful growth.

Nonetheless, the living mech exuded a faint aura that suggested that it possessed indescribable qualities that made it a little more special.

Those with spiritual potential were able to pick this considerably easier than those who were spiritually dull.

Unfortunately for Ves, the majority of his students had yet to activate their spiritual potential at this time, so a lot of the charm of the living mech flew past their immediate senses.

"Professor?" Polina Devonshire raised her voice first. "I have read many descriptions about the glows of your living mechs. Can this mech of yours demonstrate its glow to us? Its glow is its strongest selling point."

Ves smiled. "Glows are not a central component in this introductory course. It is a highly advanced application of living mechs that involves other disciplines that I am not authorized to teach or divulge. I will allow this living mech to briefly demonstrate its glow as it would hardly do to let you

all remain ignorant of this prominent feature. You are not expected to understand it or try to replicate it for your own work in any way. Miss Striker, please do the honors."

His research assistant was in charge of all of the living mechs imported by the Eden Institute. Alexa silently transmitted a command to the mech pilot who interfaced with the Pacifier mech.

Soon enough, the Pacifier slowly dialed up its glow from almost nothing to a progressively stronger effect!

Since the students were all sitting just a stone's throw away from the machine, they became exposed to Lufa's tranquility glow at a strong intensity!

The consequences immediately became noticeable. A lot of students became a lot less animated and their emotional fluctuations became a lot more dampened.

Nonetheless, compared to ordinary second-class citizens, the elite Terrans and foreign exchange students showed considerably greater resistance to the glow effects!

Their stronger mentalities and their cognitive augmentations all helped these students maintain their wits in a situation where the presence of Lufa demanded them to drain their emotions!

Though Ves still found it a bit difficult to examine the mental and spiritual conditions of his students by remote, the Hyper Chamber's realistic technology was so good that it helped a lot with improving his observations.

Compared to an ordinary Terran civilian like Klaus Robar-Fulton, the descendants of long-established clans like Ryan Shuku and Gabriel Sekkar were able to resist the Pacifier's glow a lot better!

Their mentalities were so strong and augmented that they were able to maintain their full awareness without looking as if they were struggling!

This contrasted a lot with the less well-prepared students who showed visible strain as they tried to resist the urge to lose their thoughts and emotions.

However, it did not look as if any of them completely allowed themselves to be pacified!

This suggested that a first-class adaptation of the Pacifier model might not sell as well in the upper zones. The people who lived in those regions were just superior in many ways that suppressive glows simply had much less of an effect on their minds.

The differences would become especially pronounced towards first-class mech pilots. These elite soldiers had all attended some of the best mech academies of human civilization. Their genetic aptitudes were also a lot higher on average, which enabled them to mentally anchor themselves to their mechs a lot better.

In short, Ves would probably have to lean a lot more on supportive glows if he wanted his products to get taken seriously in the upper zones.

"The glow of the Pacifier is categorized as suppressive, which means that their active effects are mainly meant to be used on hostiles in order to rob them of their violent impulses." He explained.

"That does not mean it is a weapon. It can also be used on yourself and other friendlies. Let me give you a brief demonstration."

One of the fun parts about living mechs was that he was still able to exert a certain degree of control over them no matter the distance.

Right now, Ves contacted Lufa and requested the design spirit to tweak the expression of his glow for this specific machine.

The Pacifier mech began to exude a different vibe, much to the surprise of many of his students.

This was not a documented feature of this product!

The Angel of Tranquility gradually demonstrated his Aspect of Healing!

The Terrans looked a lot less resistant towards the glow. While it tried to suppress their negative mental activity, it purposefully left a lot of room for their positive thoughts and emotions.

Experiencing the Aspect of Healing was like taking a gentle stimulant that had no discernable side effects! Anyone who accepted this effect would immediately feel more optimistic and invigorated!

Ves smirked even more as he silently commanded Lufa to switch to the Aspect of Rationality.

The Pacifier's glow made a more radical transition. The latest variation of the glow exerted the strongest possible suppression towards all emotions, but left all rational thinking activity untouched.

This effect provoked more extreme responses from the students!

Different from the Aspect of Healing, the Aspect of Rationality was especially compelling to intellectuals.

Over half of the students showed a visible reaction at this time!

They became incredibly engrossed in their newfound ability to rationally go over their recent lessons without their emotions getting in the way. It was a much more refreshing way to internalize all of the recent knowledge that they had learned!

Ves gave his students a full minute to enjoy this particular glow before he motioned Alexa to end this demonstration.

The pilot of the Pacifier gradually dialed down the glow until it no longer leaked outside of the machine.

The only noticeable aura after this adjustment was the inherent liveliness of a young second order living mech.

While it was not as obvious as a glow, Ves hoped that it would still provide his small class with a useful reference.

"Those last two glows are impressive, professor. Can we purchase this mech with those additional glows from your mech company?"

"I'm afraid not." Ves shook his head. "I think my company still sells an older second-class mech model that features the second glow, but we do not currently sell any mechs with the third glow."

"You should be able to sell a large amount of mechs with the third glow that is able to clear our thinking." Ryan Shuku spoke out. "The effect may be able to complement the special state of mind that rational mech designers must hold in order to do their work. Your glow can facilitate the

training of mech designers that have chosen to master this approach. It should also be able to help existing rational mech designers move much closer to the ideal state of absolute rationality."

The scion of the Shuku Ancient Clan raised a good business opportunity. Ves could definitely see how such a mech might be interesting to a lot of rational mech designers.

"I agree with your assessment, Mr. Shuku, but my mech company is not yet ready to enter the first-class mech market. It may take years or decades before we are ready to sell such a product. Any other questions?"

Gabriel Sekkar decided to ask a question this time.

"Many of your works are characterized by their ability to grow more powerful over time. Does the same apply to glows?"

"That is an astute observation, Mr. Sekkar. You are correct. Glows or rather the source of glows are by definition alive, so they can grow stronger and more effective. You might not know this, but the tranquility glow that the Pacifier is so famed for was not as strong and effective when it first appeared. Years have gone by since then, so many factors have contributed to its strengthening."

"If glows can become more powerful, is it also possible for the reverse to happen?" Gabriel asked another question.

"Yes. Just as people like you and I can become weaker in a couple of decades, the source of glows can also suffer setbacks that make them less effective. I suppose that this is one of the shortcomings of living mechs. Most of them will be able to grow stronger without any complications, but there are always possibilities that they can be led astray or lose much of their accumulated strengthening. I will touch upon this subject in greater detail in a future lesson."

The youngest student looked satisfied with the information that Ves provided.

Ves found Gabriel Sekkar to be rather interesting. He had a strong hunch that it was not a coincidence that this extremely intelligent double degree student happened to enroll for Introduction to Living Mech Design.

When Ves casually swept his gaze across the faces of all 14 students, he was able to confirm his initial observations.

Of the 14 students who attended this class, 2 of them already possess strong spiritual potential.

That did not mean that the other 12 were useless. They were still young and not even formal Novice Mech Designers as of yet. They still had plenty of time to develop spiritual potential after they truly started to work with mechs in a professional capacity.

In addition to that, constantly getting exposed to E energy radiation over a longer period of time should also promote their spiritual potential!

Nonetheless, compared to all of those late bloomers, Ves had much greater reasons to pay additional attention to the 2 exceptions!

Klaus Robar-Fulton was the least augmented among them, yet his spiritual potential was strong if not yet activated. He was like a dormant monster who had yet to show off his ferocity.

That made this ordinary Terran citizen a lot more interesting. Compared to the wealthier and more elite Terran scions, Ves felt it was a lot easier to hoodwink Klaus and bring him over to his side!

Still, as powerful as Klaus felt across the Hyper Chamber's connection, Gabriel Sekkar's spirituality was even stronger!

The heir to the Sekkar Clan was an anomaly!

Not only was his spirituality so noticeably strong, it was also activated!

This meant that Gabriel Sekkar was already able to actively make use of his strong spirituality to produce specific outcomes, whether consciously or unconsciously.

If that was not suspicious enough, his spirituality already started to take on a defined flavor. It hinted that Gabriel was in the process of developing a domain, though Ves was unable to identify it due to lack of proximity.

All of these clues caused Ves to make a remarkable conclusion about this young business and mech design student.

Gabriel Sekkar had already begun to practice a cultivation method.

Chapter 5152 The Importance Of E Energy

Much of the actual lesson content in the first lecture was not academically challenging. Ves did not hold this class in order to teach the nuts and bolts of mech design such as how to calculate loads or how to add as many plasma weapons to their mech as possible without causing it to explode.

The Eden Institute of Business & Technology already employed professors that could do a much better job at teaching those subjects than him. The school did not hire him based on his meager academic accomplishments, but because it wanted to enrich the vision of its students by exposing them to alternative perspectives.

This was exactly what Ves tried to do during the first lecture of his main passion. He could tell so many stories about living mechs that he could literally keep talking for an entire week!

It was a pity that the schedule and the attention span of his audience did not support such an endeavor. The more time he spent on unloading his own vision to his students, the greater the extent they became indoctrinated to regard mechs as living objects!

As it was, Ves had to keep it rather short in order to make sure he addressed all of the points of today's agenda. Introduction to Living Mech Design was not a heavy course, so he only had a limited amount of hours to make sure that his students comprehended the essence of these subjects by the time the semester came to an end.

One helpful circumstance that massively assisted his lesson plan was that Ves could openly speak about E energy radiation.

Now that the Red Two pretty much pulled the cat out of the bag in relation to psionic power, Ves had no compulsions about mentioning anything related to spirituality and spiritual energy.

He just had to remind himself to use the politically correct terminology to make sure he spoke in the same language as every other mech designer.

"Have any of you attended any classes related to E energy radiation?"

All 14 students shook their heads.

"Has the Eden Institute set up any classes related to this topic?"

"Master Laila Devos has briefly spoken about this." Alexa Striker spoke up. "The Eden Institute has become part of a joint project that is uniting all of the higher technical institutions of the Terran Alliance. The overall goal is to pool all relevant research and discoveries together in order to form a foundational course on E energy radiation and its immediate implications for mechs. This is meant to ensure that every Terran mech design student and mech designer can quickly master what they urgently need to know."

Ves nodded in understanding. "A common base of understanding can promote a lot of innovation, especially in collaboration. The sooner you people master the common rules and traits of E energy radiation, the sooner you can try to exceed your rivals. This is a race for innovation. How long will it take for those people to publish their theories?"

"It won't be made available until the start of the next semester."

What the Terrans were doing was not unique. The Rubarthan Pact and the Red Two were probably hard at work in trying to do the same.

In fact, the Red Association was being the most generous of all by freely publishing much of its findings. The mechers also put a lot of effort into setting up a public forum where other independent researchers could freely contribute their results.

While this initiative helped a lot with raising red humanity's overall understanding of E energy radiation, it did not give the Terrans a chance to gain any competitive advantage over their rivals.

In order to prevent the Red Association from becoming the sole authority on all matters concerning E energy radiation, the Terran Alliance's academic community had to band together and produce its own results!

Given that systematic knowledge on E energy radiation wouldn't be made available for roughly half a year, Ves had little choice but to take a step ahead and share his insights about it in advance.

While tedious, the advantage of doing so was that he could ensure his students adopted his own perspective on spiritual energy!

"Living mechs are intrinsically related to E energy radiation." Ves began. "Mechs cannot be alive without E energy sustaining the invisible and intangible quality that grants them additional properties and enable them to develop their own consciousness, enable them to make autonomous decisions and help them grow stronger over time."

"Wait, professor. Does that mean that living mechs are controlled by self-learning and self-evolving AIs?"

"No." Ves shook his head. He reached down to his tool belt and pulled out his Hammer of Brilliance. "Let me give you an example. Look at this hammer. Can you feel its glow through the connection of my Hyper Chamber? Can you sense how it is a little bit more special than an ordinary alloy hammer? It is able to possess all of these traits despite the fact that it is solely made out of solid metal parts. That is because it is alive in a similar fashion to how my mechs are alive."

Although the Hyper Chamber was not that good at conveying the full majesty of the Hammer of Brilliance, the high-quality connection at least allowed a fraction of it to go through.

Even the students who did not possess any significant spiritual potential could still sense the difference between the hammer and any other ordinary object.

Ves calmly put his hammer back in its place. "E energy makes up for the building blocks of living mechs. When a mech designer shapes it with purpose, they can imbue their mechs and mech designs with additional attributes that are difficult to explain through normal science. You only need a little bit of it to design a functional living mech that possesses all of the basic traits of life."

He continued to explain his basic model of living mechs to his audience. All of his students were incredibly smart, so Ves did not have to repeat himself or worry too much that he moved too quickly.

The greatest challenge when it came to learning the essence of living mechs was to accept that it was possible in the first place.

In the past, Ves had to put a lot more effort into convincing people that mechs could be alive even though it sounded paradoxical.

Nowadays, Ves could attribute everything that sounded weird and counterintuitive to E energy. None of the 14 students showed any indication of rejection or disbelief because of the existence of this powerful factor.

"What is E energy exactly, professor?" Klaus asked with genuine curiosity. "What is it exactly made of and where does it come from? If E energy is so essential to living mechs, why have you been able to design them when E energy radiation is not available in the Milky Way?"

Ves directed an approving smile at the young man. "All good questions, Mr. Robar-Fulton. This is the skepticism and inquisitiveness that a mech designer should possess. While this is not a class on E energy radiation, I will try to explain it as best as I can. As far as I am aware of, there are actually two broad strains of E energy."

"Two?"

"Yes, two. There is E energy that is generated by a high energy environment such as Messier 87 that you can vaguely observe in the skies. You can ignore this for now as it is not a part of the basic model on living mechs. What truly enables living mechs to come into being and sustain themselves is the E energy radiation that is produced in small quantities by the mental activity of sentient living beings."

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What Ves just shared to his students sounded incredulous to most if not all of them. Aside from sketchy individuals who may have come into contact with cultivation before such as Gabriel Sekkar, it sounded rather crazy that the power of human thought could actually contribute to the strengthening of mechs!

"I am sure that many of you would like to see proof of this. If I was standing in front of you in person, I can easily do so, but since I'm teaching this class from remote, you will just have to take my word for it. There are higher dimensions than the known material ones where E energy radiation mainly resides. It is there where all of the interesting activity takes place. While I do not exactly know why, our higher thoughts and emotions can not only affect what is happening in that invisible

realm, but generate E energy that can be used for many purposes. The art of designing a living mech is to shape it into a specific energy foundation in relation to a mech before bringing it to life."

This time, not even Gabriel could hold in his curiosity anymore.

"Professor Larkinson, that sounds as if you are creating life out of nothing. How is that possible? It is impossible to make living organisms by putting together different materials. The only known process that can do so is through organic reproduction."

"What you have just mentioned is the greatest challenge to designing a living mech, Mr. Sekkar. It is the only condition that prevents many of my subordinates from replicating my work. The act of creating a living mech is... well, a miracle for a lack of a better word. It requires you to have a strong motivation and passion for making mechs alive. I will expand on this subject in a future lecture, but you should all be aware that the threshold is high. This introductory course can help you understand the essential theories and help you prepare for this endeavor as best as possible, but you will ultimately have to complete this journey by relying on your own effort."

"Does that mean we have to specialize in living mechs in order to gain the qualifications to design them?" Polina Devonshire asked.

"Not necessarily." Ves replied. "It certainly helps, but I have a couple of mech designers working in my department that are capable of designing basic living mechs despite possessing drastically different specializations. Their conditions are a little abnormal, so their approaches will not necessarily work for you. The most proper method to design living mechs is to become passionate about them to the point where you are willing to incorporate it into your design philosophy. Living mechs do not necessarily have to be your main focus, but it has to become a significant component of your creative vision."

The mech design students did not show any obvious indications whether they were interested in doing this. It was too early for them to make up their minds, and even if they held a notable interest in this capability, the Terrans were not in a hurry to express their stances.

The only exception was his own teaching assistant. Alexa Striker had already heard quite a bit about living mechs from Ves. She was also able to spend a significant amount of time on the living mechs imported by the Eden Institute.

Ves clapped his hands. "There is no need for any of you to make any definite decisions about your future. This course has only just begun, so there is still plenty of time for you to learn more and digest all of my lessons. Whether you are only here to broaden your horizons or truly come to love the endless possibilities that living mechs can add to your work, I will try to accommodate all of your needs."

The rest of the class ended in a fairly mundane fashion. Ves could still share plenty of exciting knowledge, but Ves reserved that for the future.

He ended his first lecture for this course with an optimistic message.

"The Age of Dawn is an exciting time for the mech industry. The existence of exotic radiation has not made mechs obsolete. It complements our work. Mechs that are especially active in their usage of E energy are able to derive greater benefits from the changing circumstances than others. I believe you have already witnessed how much stronger living mechs can be in my earlier lecture for my Frontier Wisdom course. E energy is at the heart of it all, and if you are willing to delve deeper

into designing living mechs, I will help you harness this powerful energy type so that you can empower your own mechs as well."

Chapter 5153 Initial Selection

Once his lecture came to an end, he assigned a bunch of assignments to his students.

He wanted them to write an essay on the phenomenon of X-Factor which could be considered as the precursor of living mechs.

Just like how Ves eventually excelled at designing living mechs by starting out with this more limited concept, he believed it would be helpful for his students to undergo a similar journey of exploration.

Of course, the Eden Institute imposed high demands and expectations on its students, so Ves had to drastically increase the difficulty and workload of this assignment!

It was challenging for Ves to keep all of these augmented brats sufficiently occupied! His initial lesson plan may have been rather challenging to keep up for high-performing second-class mech design students, but Alexa Striker told him that it was way too light for his current audience!

It was actually his teaching assistant who took the initiative to compose the bulk of all of the homework assignments.

She used to be a student in a similar university herself half a decade ago, so she knew exactly what it took to exercise the research and analytical capabilities of these growing inhuman monsters!

It all looked a bit too excessive to Ves, but this was what first-class educational institutions were like.

The additional studies might not make a huge difference in furthering one's understanding of living mechs, but it definitely helped with broadening the knowledge base of every mech design student!

If every course taught by the Eden Institute was like this, then it was no wonder that first-class mech designers were able to overpower second-class mech designers at the same level!

Most students left the classroom as the lecture came to an end. They all had busy schedules and could not afford to squander their time on idle chatter.

Ves was a little disappointed that none of them was willing to stick around a little longer in order to ask additional questions, but the school semester had just begun. There was plenty of time for him to plant his seeds into their minds during future lectures.

As long as one of those seeds took hold and bloomed, he would already be satisfied for having indoctrinated at least one gullible Terran student!

"Good performance." Alexa commented to Ves as he was about to leave. "This class was not as bombastic as your first one, but that is not what is expected from you. I think you can be more forthcoming about introducing subversive ideas to your students. Their tolerance for unusual and counterintuitive concepts is greater than you think. Your existing products already provide sufficient hard proof that your theories have real merit."

The hyper-realistic projection of Ves smiled at her. "I'm sure you are right, but a subject like this is still a part of a Class IX design philosophy. I would rather err on the side of caution than risk the possibility that my audience will get lost."

"That is understandable. Now that you have gotten to know your students in a personal capacity, is there any among them that has caught your interest for whatever reason?"

Ves nodded. "Two of them have indeed caught my eye. I would like you to dig a little deeper into the background and personal circumstances of Klaus Robar-Fulton and Gabriel Sekkar. I can't make a definite judgment on this, but as long as either of them are willing to make a serious commitment in this field, they have a good chance of developing the capacity to design a basic living mech."

His teaching assistant looked surprised!

"How are you able to determine that when you have only spoken to them for two hours?"

"Let's just say that I can feel it. Anyone who boasts a similar specialty can do the same."

"How can you perceive a person's qualifications when you are only able to study them through the projected interface of a Hyper Chamber?" Alexa asked as she started to look a little suspicious. "I do not believe the data transmitted by the relevant systems is extensive enough to enable you to perceive those variables."

Ves chuckled. "Technology can do way more than what they are initially designed to do. When you develop a greater understanding of the concepts of life and E energy, you wouldn't have to ask such a question. Every high-ranking mech designer has their own little tricks. Just take my word for it that those two fellows have greater promise than the rest. Can you share your own views on the two names that I have mentioned?"

"I do not have much to say about Klaus Robar-Fulton. There is not much to tell about him in the first place as he is a rather ordinary Terran citizen. His implants and genetic treatments are basic, and while he has attained relatively good results in his school despite this handicap, he does not have what it takes to attract the soliciting of headhunters like his friend Polina Devonshire. To be honest, if you did not mention his name, I would have never taken a second look at him. By any objective measure, he is mostly... average."

This did not surprise Ves. The student body of the Eden Institute was not representative of the larger Terran Alliance. It attracted a considerable proportion of young elites who were bound to occupy higher positions in their later careers.

Nonetheless, it was not healthy for the school to cater entirely to this specific market. The Eden Institute also had to fulfill a societal responsibility, so relatively poor and average students like Klaus received a chance to transform their lives as well.

The problem was that it took a lot more talent and results for ordinary citizens to successfully make this leap. The results attained by Klaus were just below the threshold that made it worthwhile for organizations to invest in his education in order to get another genius young mech designer in return.

While other organizations might disdain this kid, the same might not necessarily apply to Ves.

His vision was different from everyone else's. The early development of spiritual potential most certainly denoted that an individual possessed a particularly stronger talent towards any form of cultivation, which also encompassed mech design.

Ves' cognitive abilities were only a fraction as strong as that of the Terran student at the same age, yet he managed to advance to Senior in his forties!

While it was true that Ves relied on several advantages to speed up his progression, he could easily provide comparable benefits to Klaus if he chose to invest in this student.

Ves made a decision.

"It is far too soon to consider private tutoring and apprenticeships, but I would like you to monitor him more closely in the next few months. I want to obtain as much information as possible about Mr. Robar-Fulton. If there is truly an opportunity to build a closer relationship with him, then I am inclined to give him my support throughout his studies and initial entry in the market."

"You will have to convince him to accept you as his mentor." Alexa skeptically replied. "Your chances of doing so are not great. I am not questioning your ability to design mechs, but you are ultimately a second-class mech designer who is still far removed from our Terran society. Compared to other professors, you are unable to convey much benefits to him. You cannot assist in his advanced studies nor offer to pay for his tuition. Your current works and projects do not cover first-class multipurpose mechs at all, and that will not change in the near future. You do not have a strong and extensive network that can help him enter the mech industry with a running start. Do I need to mention any more, Professor Larkinson?"

Ves had a simple response to this description.

"All of that sounds great... if Klaus actually has a choice. He's a fourth-year mech design student who has yet to receive any attention from a professor or mech company as far as I am aware of. Once he graduates, his job prospects aren't all that great. I can offer him a better alternative if that is the case. Any solution is better than no solution."

"If you put it that way, then you may have a chance, but that is dependent on whether Mr. Robar-Fulton is willing to drop his pride and settle for a 'lesser' mentor. His reputation within the Terran mech industry will be tarnished if this happens. He may be treated as a failure and an outcast by associating himself with a 'lesser' mech designer."

That was indeed a serious problem, but only if Ves continued to remain 'inferior'.

"Let's leave the decision up to Klaus if I am ready to make the offer." He eventually said. "I see no need to push too hard on him. It is best if he is eager and willing to study my craft despite the difficulties that you have mentioned. This can serve as an excellent test of his commitment. Enough about him. What about Mr. Sekkar?"

Alexa frowned at the mention of this name. "I do not recommend you to associate yourself too closely with Gabriel Sekkar. He is not an average descendant of a clan. He is its leading offspring and heir. His entire life and career are already set by his parents and elders. He may have permission to choose his own specialization and mentors given that each individual has their own unique preferences in the field of mech design, an atypical young second-class Senior Mech Designer like you is most definitely not on his list."

That sounded rather excessive!

"It's that serious?"

"There is more to it than that, professor. The Sekkar Clan is deeply embedded in Terran society. While our isolation from the Greater Terran United Confederation has made many old entanglements irrelevant, the Sekkars are still surrounded by an elaborate network of allies, enemies and more complex relations. Rashly entering this web will expose you to powerful threats that you are not equipped to handle."

"I'm a tier 6 galactic citizen. That has to count for something, right?"

The young woman threw a contemptuous glance at him. "Higher tiers of galactic citizenship may be rare in the middle zones, but they are considerably more ubiquitous among the upper society of our Terran society. The more powerful clans and organizations are often helmed by higher tiered galactic citizens. While they are subject to a specific set of rules that imposes extensive constraints on what they can do to each other, they can still be frighteningly effective at plotting the downfall of those they regard as obstacles."

The machinations at the higher echelons of power were not comparable to the games that people played in second-rate or third-rate states. The stakes were higher and the ripple effects spread a lot further!

"If it is like this, then maybe it is best if I don't do anything extra with Gabriel Sekkar." Ves concluded.

His standing in the Terran Alliance was still too shaky. Ves did not want to risk his gradual infiltration of Terran society by getting tangled up into exceedingly dangerous affairs that did not matter to him in the slightest.

"Treat him as any intelligent student." Alexa advised him. "Be professional to him. That is all the Eden Institute and the Sekkar Clan asks of you. You can indulge him if he takes the initiative to ask more questions about living mechs, but you must always have a sense of proportion. You must constantly keep in mind that he belongs to the Sekkar Clan. He has no other choice in his life."

That sounded remarkably depressing to Ves. It prompted him to look back at his own clan. Did he treat his children in the same way?

When Ves shut down the Hyper Chamber's connection to the Eden Institute's campus, he thought a little more about this issue but eventually shoved it aside.

His children were all genuinely happy as far as he knew. They were doing just fine, and he wouldn't particularly mind if they chose to take a different course in their lives when they grew older.

"Let's prepare for tomorrow's class."

Chapter 5154 Advanced Manual Superfab Operation

The third and final class that Ves was scheduled to teach was Advanced Manual Superfab Operation.

Different from Frontier Wisdom and Introduction to Living Mech Design, it was a lot more practical in nature. The course description already made it clear that students needed to be prepared to complete a lot of manual work as opposed to standard book learning.

The subject of fabricating mechs attracted a lot more interest from the student body than living mechs. A hundred students had been enrolled in the course.

More had actually applied before the start of the semester, but Ves and the school administration wanted to limit the number in order to make the classes more manageable.

When Ves entered the Hyper Chamber and established a connection with the Eden Institute again, the chamber began to construct a completely different environment this time.

Cool metal walls made out of unknown but extremely resilient alloys surrounded Ves on all sides.

As a mech university, the Eden Institute encompassed a large number of mech workshops. A third of them were constantly in use during a typical working day, and that occupancy tended to increase by a lot at the end of a semester.

That was the time when fifth-year students had to complete their graduation projects and prove to the school that they were fully capable of designing complete first-class multipurpose mechs.

Fabricating a mech did not have to be so complicated for many Terran mech designers. If they wanted to, they could just press a single button in order to have a materializer produce a highly accurate physical copy of a mech that previously existed in theory.

Of course, those who truly wanted to produce a more superior mech knew that there were certain processes that materializers were unable to do well.

There was still a case for using more 'manual' production machines such as superfabs. This mostly had to do with the fact that more energetic and volatile first-class exotics needed to be processed in specific ways. This could make the resulting mech perform a little better or reduce its malfunction rate.

The fact that it was possible fabricate masterwork mechs with superfabs but not with materializers was proof that it was still worthwhile to master the manual fabrication process!

Ves learned from his teaching assistant that Terran mech designers generally undertook this work when they had progressed a lot further in their careers.

They already had to do a lot of learning in order to gain proficiency in all of the essential high technologies that made up a modern first-class mech.

Then they needed to devote a lot of time on additional studies in their specializations and areas of interests.

Powerful augmentations or not, a lot of Terran students were already pressed to their limits! How could they possibly spare so much attention to learning how to fabricate their own work by relying on an outdated production method that had already been phased out in the general mech industry?

An important distinction to make was that first-class mech fabrication was incomparably more difficult than second-class mech fabrication.

The greater the proportion of advanced tech, the more variables a mech designer had to take into account.

The higher the quality of materials, the easier it was to ruin a job due to misprocessing.

Ves already had a taste of this when he had begun to fabricate quasi-first-class mechs. The jump in difficulty was not small!

It made a lot of sense that first-class mech designers chose to skip this part about mech design entirely!

The only situations where superfabs may be utilized at greater frequencies was when Master Mech Designers wanted to attain the best possible result when producing a high-end machine.

At that point, Masters had become so smart and powerful that it became a lot easier for them to master the essentials of fabricating mechs with superfabs!

Nonetheless, Ves did not think this was a good approach towards the profession. He had always been a believer that the journey was more important than the destination.

A Master who never seriously fabricated a mech until he had reached the apex of his career could never internalize the charm of making a machine by hand. Such a figure was already set in his ways. The difficulty of fabricating masterwork mechs for them was doubtlessly a lot higher as a consequence!

As the students who enrolled for this new course started to enter the mech workshop, Ves remained silent and folded his hands behind his back.

He had chosen to wear a white lab coat as was traditional in this kind of setting.

The students also changed their smart clothing to a more protective configuration even though they all wore personal shield generators.

Compared to his previous class, the students who signed up for this course all came with greater and more defined purposes in mind.

They knew that Ves was most likely the best mech fabricator that they could learn from. He had done the impossible and fabricated over half-a-dozen masterwork mechs when he was still in the Journeyman stage.

This was incredibly relevant to this batch of ambitious fourth and fifth-year mech design students!

Sure, they could learn a lot about manual mech fabrication from a stuffy 300-year old Master Mech Designer, but the gap was too great in that case!

Ves on the other hand was not as far removed from these students. This meant that his tricks and approaches might actually lead to more apparent improvement to these young men and women!

He had taken the time to briefly survey the growing crowd in front of him. Each of them looked particularly more interested and motivated to learn from Ves this time.

He knew that there was also a greater proportion of higher performers among this crowd. They were more ambitious and capable compared to their peers, or else they wouldn't have chosen to invest their valuable time on mech fabrication so early in their careers!

Once the final student had arrived, Ves started the class on this interesting subject.

"Welcome to Advanced Manual Superfab Operation, though I prefer to call it Advanced Mech Fabrication because it encompasses more than operating a production machine. I am sure you have already read the documents on this course, so I won't repeat all of that basic information. If you are here, then that means that you have not only gained a basic proficiency in the operation of superfabs in another course, but have developed a yearning for more."

Ves grinned at his audience. He spotted a few familiar faces such as Klaus and Polina, but most of them were new to him. They all knew what they wanted from this course, so he wanted to do his best to meet their expectations.

"Throughout this course, I will teach you and guide you by imparting general theories, approaches and perhaps a couple of tricks that should help you raise the quality of your works. Much of my knowledge is not actually systematic. The reason why this is a practical course as opposed to a theoretical one is because it is not about learning new skills, but applying your existing ones better. What is the common description of mech design?"

"Mech design is both an art and a science." A quick-witted young woman spoke.

Ves nodded. "Correct. Most of your courses up until this point have placed a heavy emphasis on the science component of mech design. This is completely logical as you need to master the basic rules of the game in order to gain the qualifications to play it. However, if you want to become more than just an average participant, you will need to go beyond the basics. If you ever want to fabricate a masterwork mech by yourself, then you cannot allow the science aspect of your job to dictate your approach to fabrication. You need to bring back the art that you have pushed aside for so long if you want to make an actual artwork as opposed to an ordinary commodity."

This was a hard message to the students. This became evident as soon as their expressions and demeanors became more tempered.

First-class multipurpose mechs were vastly more complicated to design and fabricate due to the involvement of a lot of advanced tech and materials!

It was practically impossible for the students to stop thinking about convoluted scientific theories and complicated math whenever they did anything with mechs!

"How can we do that, professor?" Another student asked.

"Good question." Ves grinned. "The answer is a bit complicated. You need to master your craft extremely well. If your knowledge and skills are not up to standard, then you will not even be able to get past the starting point. You also need to find and develop your own style. Just as with musicians, anyone can play the right notes of an instrument with enough skill, but it takes passion and vision to play it with style and flair. What this course aims to do is to help you play the superfab like a rockstar and add your own unique charms to your mechs!"

His words reignited the eagerness and motivation of his students!

Although Advanced Manual Superfab Operation would definitely demand a lot out of each of them, the potential rewards were great!

As long as they were able to fabricate their elaborate first-class multipurpose mechs with greater skill, then they would obtain a small but unquestionable advantage over their competitors!

After speaking a bit more about the importance of channeling their artistic senses as opposed to filling their heads with numbers, Ves decided to give them a more direct taste of excellent craftsmanship.

"Please raise your hands if you have ever seen a masterwork mech in person."

Over half of the students did so. While masterwork mechs were generally rare, it was still possible for most people to be able to witness them with their own eyes if they visited a mech exhibition hall like the Chance Bay Masterwork Gallery.

"Who among you have been able to touch a masterwork mech with your own hands?"

A lot of hands dropped all of a sudden. Only 8 students enjoyed this particular privilege.

Ves found that to be regretful. This was why he intended to do something about this inadequacy.

"Well, don't fret if you haven't been able to raise your arms. Today is your lucky day, because today you will be able to touch an actual masterwork mech, if only in a reduced form."

It was at this time that Alexa Striker came back after retrieving a secure container.

The assistant proceeded to unlock the container before carefully lifting up a mech figurine based on the Valkyrie Redeemer model.

What caught every student's attention was that this was not an ordinary scale model. It was an actual masterwork, which was unimaginable to these would-be mech designers who were still too far away from creating their own sublime works of art!

Ves had fabricated it with the help of the Hammer of Brilliance years ago. He never really had a use for this little toy aside from putting it on his trophy case. Since he did not have any better use for it, he thought that he might as well use it as a teaching aid for this advanced course.

Alexa carefully passed the miniature to the student standing on the far left. The clever Terrans did not need to be told that they should only take a few seconds to enjoy the exquisite work up close before passing it on to their neighbor.

"What do you think?" Ves smiled at his enraptured audience. "Can you feel the personal touches that I put into the work? Are you able to appreciate the stylistic choices that I have made? Do not look at this masterwork from a technical perspective. Look at it as if you are looking at a painting or a sculpture. Mechs are tools, but they are not limited to that classification. They can be artworks as well, and the proof is literally in your hands."

He saw that each student who got their hands on it treated the masterwork miniature as a genuine treasure.

He wondered how these Terrans would react if they heard that his children occasionally took it and used it to play silly little games!

Chapter 5155 Heartfelt Work

Ves loved to share his passion with other people.

He had tried to teach his craft to the assistant mech designers of the Design Department on many occasions. Each time he did so, he came away with disappointment.

The Novices and Apprentices were not all that bad. The Design Department had always upheld standards that constantly rose over time as Ves and his lead designers continually designed more and more sophisticated mechs.

It was inevitable for mech designers who used to be third-raters gradually failed to keep up with the growing requirements imposed by the department.

Over the years, a lot of third-raters who used to come from states like the Bright Republic and the Sentinel Kingdom had been forced to transfer to other departments because of reaching their limits too soon.

Ves found it rather regretful that these early loyalists who contributed a lot to the early development of his clan and mech company ultimately had to be pushed away.

There was no other choice, though. Ves and his highly motivated Journeymen could not allow their work to get dragged down by incompetent help.

It was not as if the clan had given these low-ranking mech designers enough chances.

Aside from giving them easy access to the Larkinson Clan's growing internal library, the Larkinson Biotech Institute constantly offered every clansmen increasingly better and more powerful implants to help them perform better.

If these mech designers still couldn't complete their assignments after receiving all of this support, then Ves had no qualms about setting them aside.

It was easy enough to hire more competent replacements to fill up the gaps again.

Still, as Ves continued to speak in front of his attentive audience of Terran mech design students, he gained a considerably better impression of how quickly these eager kids absorbed new knowledge!

Unlike his previous two courses, Advanced Manual Superfab Operation did include a fair amount of technical knowledge.

Ves already had extensive experience with working a first-class superfab, so he was able to instill a lot of handy little tricks and operations that could measurably improve the quality of a work and a mech in particular.

A considerable amount of his lesson content involved a lot of different disciplines. Ves was able to cope with it because he already had several Senior-level Skills, but he was afraid his students wouldn't be able to grasp the full rules of his methods.

The actual situation turned out to be a lot more favorable than he expected. Though Alexa had already assured him that his audience would be able to keep up just fine, it gratified him to see each and every one of them demonstrate their ability to apply his rules and guidelines.

Since this was a practical course, it was not enough to dump a lot of information into everyone's heads.

This was why each of them had spread out across the available space in the mech workshop so that they could have enough space to operate a physical projection of a simulated superfab interface.

There was no need to project a complete superfab for everyone. Ves just wanted them to replicate the methods that he demonstrated as best as possible.

This was also a good opportunity for him to observe and judge the actual fabrication skills of his students.

"Impressive." Alexa Striker spoke as she stood at the side of Ves' projection. "Their foundations are all solid. None of their records have conflated their skills. What is more notable is that it does not

appear that any of them are holding back. It is not uncommon for students to hide their full abilities in a class."

"Why would they do that?" Ves furrowed his brows for a moment.

"These would-be mech designers are classmates for now, but it will only take a year or two before they graduate. There is a possibility that they may become colleagues in the future, but it is much more likely for them to become competitors. Any hidden advantage can be used to defy other people's expectations and attain a drastically better outcome."

Ves understood the value of possessing trump cards quite well. He just did not expect it to be worthwhile for these young men and women to scheme so much when they had yet to complete their graduation projects.

Then again, the stakes were much higher at their level. Ves never had to deal with these kind of pernicious games back when he studied at the Rittersberg University of Technology back in the Bright Republic.

It could also be that he was not really good enough back then to attract the attention of the top employers.

"Well, whatever the case, I think you are right in this instance." Ves spoke with a smile. "Even by remote, I can feel the passion and motivation radiating from their active bodies. They have become fully engaged in my class."

"I do not blame them. It was not too long ago that they held an actual masterwork product in their hands. The figurine may be just a toy, but it has greatly inspired them. They either want to replicate some of the charm of your work, or seek to push their skills to a greater height in order to win your approval. None of the students want to miss this chance to take a considerable step closer to making their own masterwork mechs in the future."

Ves stopped a short distance away from Klaus Robar-Fulton.

The fourth-year mech design student showed a decent grasp of basic fabrication skills, but he was too slow to pick up the more advanced operations that he just learned.

It disappointed Ves a bit that Klaus did not appear to possess much talent or ability in this aspect.

Alexa knew that her professor had developed interest towards the young man.

"Klaus is struggling not because he is inherently deficient in fabrication, but because he lacks practice. Much of his time is spent on studying all of the theories that he is required to know in all of his classes. It is actually commendable that he has managed to free enough time in his schedule to attend a class on superfab mech fabrication. He has likely chosen to do so in the hopes of differentiating himself from his other competitors."

Ves crossed his arms. "He probably shouldn't have bothered. I am not faulting him for his decision to learn how to make a mech by making use of more affordable equipment, but it is not worth it if it comes at the cost of causing his theoretical foundation to fall behind."

His teaching assistant raised her eyebrow. "Did you not tell your students earlier that they should place as much emphasis on the art of mech design as they do in the science of their discipline?"

"That is correct. I think I also mentioned that it is always necessary to learn how to play the game properly before you think about how to break the rules to your advantage. Mech designers must master their craft well enough in order to free up enough mental capacity for the more esoteric aspects of mech fabrication. If their brains cannot keep up with their work, they will have no room to allow their hearts to run wild."

"I see. That is an insightful remark."

"How are your own fabrication skills?"

"They are most definitely superior to the skills displayed by Mr. Robar-Fulton. I can assure you of that at least, professor."

"That is a rather low bar to compare yourself with, Miss Alexa."

The teaching assistant smiled at him. "Do not dismiss Mr. Robar-Fulton's fabrication skills so soon. He has not displayed any exceptional talent in this field, but he is not inept in it either. He is still a blank slate for the most part. You should be able to train him in person to ensure his skills are up to par if you choose to do so. He can attain much better results as long as he is given enough time and expert guidance."

That was correct, Ves supposed. It was not all that bad if Klaus lacked talent in fabrication. The more essential requirement to becoming a good mech designer was to design a completely working machine.

So long as the design was in place, other people could easily take over the responsibility of producing the mechs.

Ves moved on to observing the adjacent mech design student.

Polina Devonshire demonstrated a far better grasp of the basics. She also picked up on his teachings faster as well.

"Her circumstances are better than that of her friend." Alexa commented. "Her greater natural intellect and her superior augmentations have done wonders to speed up her learning. I am not able to judge whether she possesses any inherent talent in fabrication."

Ves briefly observed a few seconds longer before shaking his head. "Polina's foundation is considerably more solid. She won't be lacking for work in a manufacturing complex. My problem is that there is not much else to see beyond this point. She has done little to explore the charm of creating products by hand. She lacks creative vision or the ability to imbue it into her own work. It makes little difference whether you replace her with an AL"

"I see. That sounds disappointing."

"It's okay. This is not an inherent problem. Polina is still relatively young. Advanced Manual Superfab Operation is precisely geared towards mech design students like her. My curriculum will open her eyes to all of the factors that her previous teachers neglected to teach."

It remained to be seen if Polina would be able to bloom in this aspect. It didn't really matter too much to Ves. He already learned that the woman had already signed a contract that would compel

her to work for another organization immediately after she graduated. It was impossible for him to lay his own claim on this future mech designer.

Minutes later, Ves almost froze when he observed the skills demonstrated by a fifth-year student.

Her fabrication skills were solid, but that was not exceptional among many other clever Terran students.

What caused Ves to develop a considerably greater interest towards her ongoing practice was her style!

Unlike her other overworked peers, she consciously attempted to move beyond the basics and attempted to add real personality to her ongoing work!

Doing so increased the difficulty of her operations, but she displayed so much passion that the added challenges did not hinder her from realizing her own vision!

"Kelly McAfee." Alexa mentioned her name. "She is the daughter of an established architect who was brought over from the Terran Confederation to shape the cities of tomorrow. With that sort of background, it should not be a surprise that she has already developed her own artistic vision."

Ves nodded in agreement. "I can sense it in the lines and shapes of her work. It is expressly geared towards shaping the perception and evoking the emotions to those that see her work. She probably designs her mechs as if they are monuments. I should know since it is an aspect of my design style as well."

Unfortunately for Ves, Kelly McAfee had also been headhunted by a Terran mech company. There was no chance of taking her under his wing.

This was fine. Ves did not expect to be able to build up an immediate following now that he had started to teach at the Eden Institute.

His own background and reputation were still too underdeveloped for him to expand his presence in the Terran mech community.

He needed to be more patient and focus on taking baby steps.

As long as he taught students like Kelly McAfee well, other people would eventually be able to notice how good he was at teaching.

As his tutelage became more valued, Ves would gain more recognition and gradually open up new doors that were currently closed to a foreigner like himself.

This was just the start. He still needed to prove himself by teaching these brats how to fabricate a mech with style. This was going to be a long journey.

Chapter 5156 Practical Homework

As his first Advanced Manual Superfab Operation came to an end, Ves gained a good understanding of the state of his students.

Few of them were as bad or unpracticed as Klaus Robar-Fulton.

The average proficiencies displayed by all of the Terran mech design students fully satisfied Ves. He was confident in his ability to transform each of them into part-time artists who knew how to elevate their mechs into good quality works rather than standard fare.

Ves found rather perplexing that the wealthy Terrans did not prioritize good craftsmanship so much, at least when it came to mechs.

He expected a society that was mainly dominated by long-lasting clans and organization to pursue quality over quantity.

However, as materializers continued to penetrate more and more aspects of their industries, there were fewer opportunities for notable artisans to practice their crafts and earn renown for their artistic skills.

The traditional art scene was doing well. Wealthy Terrans were still willing to pay millions of MTA credits to obtain a transcendent piece of art to decorate their opulent mansions.

It was not that important for mechs to display any remarkable artistic expression from its maker. The Terrans mainly wanted these complicated and important war machines to function exactly according to their theoretical specifications. They did not want their machines to exhibit any anomalies as their sheer complexity meant that a lot more factors could go wrong than normal.

Ves did not fully agree with this mindset, but then again he was not a Terran.

For now, he just hoped that this batch of too students would one day be able to go out and express their craftsmanship without restraint. The mech industry could definitely benefit from having a little more personality.

As the first class of this course came to an end, Ves ended this session by assigning homework to all of his students.

"Each of you have the foundation to turn a superfab into a tool that can be used to express your art and vision. There is still a long way to go before you can consistently elevate the quality of your work. If you cannot elevate the quality of your work to a point where you can justify the additional time and effort spent into its production, then your craftsmanship is still not up to par."

A superfab had been relegated to a niche production method to the Terrans. Much of their industrial infrastructure was based on the use of expensive materializers. This meant that it was hard for any mech designer to justify the decision to go back into the past and resort to a less efficient method of mech fabrication.

Ves did not know whether all of his students could improve to the point of being able to turn their craftsmanship into a selling point, but he was willing to do his best to make this happen!

"Now I am sure that you are wondering how you can improve your craftsmanship since it is not up to par. There are many ways to do that, but my personal suggestion is to start out small and slowly work your way up to turning your mechs into art."

His highly accurate physical projection approached Alexa and lifted up the masterwork mech figurine.

"I believe that each of you are capable of fabricating a small facsimile mech like this. Compared to a full-sized machine, it only takes a fraction of the time to produce a work of this size. What I want you to do before our next practical class is to take your time in an available workshop and craft your own mech figurine. Do your best to incorporate the lessons that I have taught to you today."

This homework assignment triggered various reactions from the crowd. The students were not accustomed to spending their time on such an activity. They were learning to become mech designers, not toy makers!

"My assistant should have already transmitted a document that sets the requirements and restrictions of this assignment." Ves continued. "You will be granted permission to draw from a stock of ordinary materials without cost. You are also expected to complete your own works with the use of manual tools and superfabs at lower automation settings. Don't try to cheat. It is the height of foolishness to present a work that is not your own in front of a masterwork mech designer. Any questions?"

One Terran immediately raised his arm. "Professor, are we expected to create a functional mech figurine? Must it be realistic enough to fly around and fire actual weapons?"

Ves shook his head. "That is not necessary. You can use my own model as a reference to the degree of realism that you should pursue. Just focus on creating a small-scale visual representation of a real mech design. It's the look that matters. You should simplify the internals and the functional parts as much as you think is adequate and within your skillset. You will have to use your own judgment."

"What mech designs are we permitted to adapt for this assignment?"

"Any first-class multipurpose mech design will do." Ves shrugged. "Each of you have spent at least four solid years learning how to design such a machine. I am sure that you have designed a couple of basic designs in your previous courses or in your free time perhaps. It doesn't matter if your prior work is inferior in terms of performance or refinement. What matters is that it is a genuine representation of your work and vision. If you do not have a mech design of your own for whatever reason, you can contact my assistant."

Ves wanted these students to start with their own designs because it would be easier for them to express their own personality through their craft. Not only that, but the resulting mech figurines would be able to tell him a lot more about the skills and other traits of his students.

After answering a few more questions, Ves dismissed the students.

"Remember that I will be away on a conference for the next week. This should give you plenty of time to craft a fairly realistic mech figurine of your own. The better you are able to express your own creativity, the closer you are to elevating your craftsmanship to a degree where you can pass this course. Your subsequent assignments will only become more and more difficult, so do your best to get off on a good start."

This was probably the most difficult course out of the three that Ves currently taught. He was willing to be more tolerant in the other courses that he taught, but this one was truly geared towards the more advanced students.

Each of these kids were only a few steps away from graduation. If they could not measure up to his raised standards, then they probably did not deserve to complete their studies so soon!

Once the students exited the mech workshop so that they could catch up to their next classes, Alexa returned after carefully storing away the masterwork mech figurine.

"Would you like us to send back this treasure now that it has served its purpose?"

Ves shook his head. "Don't bother. Just keep it around so that I can make use of it again in front of another batch of students. It may seem valuable to you, but if I really wanted to, I can probably make another small masterwork if I truly put effort into making one." "Has your craftsmanship become that good?"

"Hehe, I have a lot of tricks up my sleeve. My craftsmanship has improved by a massive extent compared to when I was still a Journeyman. It's a shame that I can't display my latest masterwork expert mech to you due to security reasons. I am sure that an Apprentice such as yourself would be able to appreciate its craftsmanship."

The young assistant genuinely looked regretful for missing such an opportunity.

The two proceeded to discuss their plans for the next two weeks.

The conference held by the Survivalist Faction loomed big over their heads. Ves would remain out of contact entirely for the duration of this event, which meant that Alexa Striker had to become responsible for handling any issues brought up by the students who enrolled in his courses.

Ves made sure to provide Alexa with enough documentation and explanations to represent him in his absence.

It helped a lot that she was apparently a skilled Apprentice Mech Designer with a decent amount of work experience.

"The Eden Institute of Business & Technology maintains high standards." She explained to Ves. "Mech designers who work in the academic sector normally have an extensive grasp of theory."

"I see. It is good that you are so proficient in the basics. You don't need to do your best to ask every single question. My lesson content is not too difficult so far, so if these fellows cannot work out their solutions within the limits that I have set, then they deserve to fail."

Alexa smiled at that but did not comment on it any further.

She instead chose to talk about a different topic.

"How good is your relationship with the Red Association?"

"Pretty good, I think." He said. "I have a working relationship with two of its factions. I'm not sure what the other mechers think of me, but I have done far more to contribute towards humanity than most other mech designers. I earned that tier 6 citizenship."

"Do you expect to improve your cooperation with the Survivalists and the Red Association even more during this upcoming conference?"

Ves grinned and nodded. "That is what I am hoping for. I am preparing to present a lot of unique works of mine that may attract their interest. The Survivalists are most certainly planning to make big moves. I hope that my contributions, however meager they may be, might become a part of their action plan to save red humanity from extinction."

Ordinary second-class Seniors would never be daring enough to make this claim, but Ves was different. He had already done it before back when he was a Journeyman.

Now that he had advanced to Senior and received a crash course on cultivation science from his mother, he had become much better equipped to develop new solutions that could drastically improve people's lives!

"I wish you good luck. Professor Larkinson." Alexa Striker wished him well before adding a warning. "I hope that you will maintain a healthy degree of skepticism towards their claims and offers. The Red Association is no longer able to protect the territories that it is obliged to protect under its own mandate. As the war between red humanity and the native aliens continues to escalate, the mechers will not hesitate to abandon entire zones and pull back their defensive lines in order to preserve their own core assets and personnel to the best possible extent. They will become less generous in other areas as well. The time where the Mech Trade Association can be relied upon to keep the peace in human space has passed."

To be honest, Ves had lost his confidence in the MTA's ability and willingness to protect human space a long time ago. The entire Sand War was an enormous tragedy that should have never happened if the mechers were actually serious at doing their jobs!

He knew what Alexa was trying to do. She was playing the role of a good little Terran.

"I am not that easy to hoodwink." Ves reassured her. "Don't forget that I am teaching an entirely course about this subject. While it is true that I am seeking greater cooperation with the Red Association, I am also doing my best to minimize my obligations. I am not a mecher and I would like that to remain this way. I don't agree with all of the decisions that the mechers have made, and that will not change once I attend the upcoming conference."

Ves pursued cooperation rather than subservience.

Chapter 5157 Diplomatic Goals

Now that Ves had concluded his first week of classes, he felt quite assured in his ability to maintain his professorship after this trial period.

The Terrans were not as unreasonable as he thought. They respected him and his accomplishments and did not engage in any malicious acts.

Ves was most impressed by their overall learning ability. Their implants and genetic optimization treatments were so good that it was no wonder that Alexa used the term high humans to describe the Terran population!

The more he interacted with the Terrans, the more he felt attracted to become a part of their society.

Sure, Ves knew quite well that he was getting a distorted impression of actual Terran society because most of his contacts were students who had yet to undertake any serious responsibilities. Actual Terran society was a lot more cutthroat and also a lot more difficult to promote as the established clans held a tight grip on their power.

The Terrans did not actually reject the rise of genuine talents, though. The rebellion that led to the rise of the New Rubarth Empire had taught this arrogant group a painful lesson about managing their underprivileged citizens.

What Ves also liked about the Terrans was that they did not obey a single central authority. Power was divided over many ancient clans, each of whom ruled their own territories with great autonomy but nonetheless united into a single common banner when it came to external affairs.

What this meant was that all of the clans and major players essentially kept each other in check. Not a single among them could afford to overreach and try to take sole charge of the Terran Alliance.

The reality of all of this division was that the ancient clans all had to learn how to get along with each other and form a consensus on many contentious affairs.

This probably led to the continued perception that the Greater Terran United Confederation was overly conservative and falling increasingly more behind on the latest trends.

This was a fair assessment, especially when it was directly compared to the much more dynamic and decisive New Rubarth Empire.

However, the Terran ancient clans never made any serious mistakes either in more modern times. They only enacted the changes that the majority of their clans truly felt necessary to implement, and it would often be just the good ones.

The Terrans possessed the oldest heritage of modern humanity. They existed as a single defined population group for many millennia. They prized stability and continuity over short-term greed.

Was it possible for the Larkinson Clan to become a part of the Terran Alliance one day?

This did not sound as ridiculous to his ears as it should. His clan was still growing rapidly on the basis of its expeditionary gains as well as the constant advancements made by Ves.

So long as either conditions remained valid, the Larkinson Clan would inevitably be able to promote to a first-class organization and become qualified to operate in the upper zones!

Though Ves had always taken it for granted that his clan would continue to hang around in the loose and scattered territories governed by the Red Ocean Union, his responsibility as a clan leader compelled him to consider the alternatives as well.

The Eden Institute gave him a solid entry into the Terran Alliance, which was exactly what he set out to obtain when he worked to get employed by this university.

"The only major power that I don't have any relations with is the Rubarthan Pact."

This was a deficiency that was hard to make up. After all, anyone who accessed his record could clearly learn that he had begun to do business with the Terrans!

For many centuries, it had long been a tradition for people and organizations to pick which side they were on. They were either allowed to associate with the Terrans or the Rubarthans, but never both.

Only an exceedingly small group of exceptions could get away with doing business with both at the same time.

Even if Ves was able to place his Larkinson Clan into this exclusive group, he might not choose to do so because it would inevitably cause his growing relationship with the Terrans to deteriorate!

"Did I already pick my side from the moment I chose to accept a job over at the Eden Institute?"

This was a rather troubling circumstance, but if Ves was being honest, he would have made the same decision if he traveled back in time.

There was no use worrying about this matter further. He needed to look towards his more immediate needs.

Ves checked his schedule. A Red Association ship or fleet was scheduled to arrive a few days later.

The new arrivals intended to come to the Corellix System in order to fulfill multiple objectives.

They intended to survey the battlefield and all of the debris in order to calculate the exact amount of MTA merits the Golden Skull Alliance had earned in the last battle.

They brought the first batch of supplies and troops to reinforce the vulnerable colony on Corellix III and begin the process of transforming it into a serious fortification.

They also brought a ship that would quickly take Ves to the planet that hosted the conference.

Ves was growing more and more excited!

In order to make sure that he could make as much gains as possible when he began to hobnob with the Survivalists, he made sure to devote his time on checking the valuable goods he intended to take along.

He had big plans in mind for the upcoming conference. From exhibiting the latest version of his companion spirit fruit trees to presenting his current attainments in the Carmine System in front of a secret panel, he had a great opportunity to earn a huge amount of contributions so long as he won over his audience!

"I wish I could come along with you." Gloriana said as Ves as both of them sat in the living space of their grand stateroom. "We can form additional connections if I am able to attend the conference as well."

Ves softly patted the back of her slender hand. "I'm afraid I can't bring you along. The Survivalists have made it clear that they only want their gathering to consist of people they trust. The decisions they intend to make over there will likely decide their influential policies going forward."

As Ves continued to explain what he had been told to expect from this upcoming event, their children relieved the tension built up after another day of intensive studies by keeping themselves entertained.

Marvaine was off to the side fiddling with his Mekanos. He had made little progress in increasing their sophistication so far, but Ves was happy with how his son was eager to explore many different mech types and configurations.

Aurelia and Andraste frequently giggled as they watched a drama show centered around girls at a boarding school.

Lucky did not take the initiative to snuggle with someone this time. The cat was in a weary state and needed to recover from his earlier ordeal inside the archship.

"Meow..."

Both Clixie and Goldie kept him company by licking his textured metal exterior and crawling all over his transformed shape.

"Nyaa nyaa nyaa~"

"Miaow miaow~"

"The Carmine System plays an important role in our development strategy." Gloriana said as she pressed closer next to her husband. "Are you confident that the Survivalists will recognize its potential and offer greater support?"

Ves shrugged. "I have no idea. It depends on how busy they are and the identities of the mech designers on the secret panel. I think there is a good chance that I will be fine. I'm not sure whether the mechs will buy into all of the rosy projections about the greater benefits that the Carmine System can bring, but I have solid proof that it is possible to substantially increase the effective performance of existing mech pilots. That alone is worth a lot for certain groups of soldiers."

The tradeoff was serious. Once a mech pilot lost his bonded mech, there was probably no way to continue his fighting career.

In a time where red humanity was under siege, this downside was either inconsequential or a serious limitation.

Gloriana believed that her husband deserved more recognition for his work, and that was when Ves was not authorized to tell her that the Carmine System could potentially give non-potentates the ability to pilot mechs!

"I am of the opinion that the Carmine System may be especially interesting for senior ace pilots who are close to beginning the Mech Body Merger Process. You only need to be given an opportunity to install your work on an existing ace mech."

"That is not going to happen anytime soon. The strategic value of senior ace pilots and their mechs are far too great. Only Star Designers and the very best Master Mech Designers are permitted to work on them. Perhaps the Survivalists will acknowledge the possibility that I can help in this matter, but I would have to refine the Carmine System a lot further. It is foolish to rely on a highly experimental product to influence the future of a senior ace pilot. What if my invention leads to a fatal accident? I will never be able to bear the consequences of my mistakes."

His innovations were not always free from risk and danger. Ves still had a poor understanding of the long-term consequences of using the Carmine System.

Though neither Venerable Jannzi nor his grandfather exhibited any serious health or behavior problems that could be traced back to their interactions with their Carmine mechs, that might change over time.

Ves also had little idea how effective his Carmine System would be when used by ordinary mech pilots.

All of this lack of data weakened his case and surrounded his work with a large cloud of uncertainty.

Gloriana understood this quite well, so she gave him another piece of advice.

"I think it is better if you put more emphasis on your more concrete and mature offerings. Those companion spirit fruit trees of yours are especially promising in my opinion. The Red Association should have already spent enough time to verify the initial utility of companion spirits, correct?"

Ves nodded. "I have been out of contact with Jovy Armalon for a long time, but he should have definitely given his fellow mechers an extensive demonstration on how his companion spirit has enriched his life and career. As long as he is available and willing to back me up on this, I think I have a good chance of propagating this invention."

"What if the mechers try to take over your fruit trees?" She asked another pertinent question. "Will you agree to surrender your trees and the knowledge that is necessary to grow them if they ask for your work?"

Ves briefly grimaced. "That is a distinctly possible outcome. I won't like it, but I don't object to it. Let them have it if they really want my companion spirit fruit trees."

"What?! Why would you be willing to surrender one of our most strategic inventions so easily?"

"We can't purely think about ourselves anymore, honey. We need to think about the greater good of our own society. Red humanity is under assault and needs all of the help that it can get to become stronger. Companion spirits can help many people adapt to the Age of Dawn. Besides, the greatest reward that the Survivalists can offer is not the MTA merits that they are willing to award me, but the huge amount of reputation and name recognition that I will gain as companion spirit fruits become more and more available. I can cooperate with the Terrans a lot more extensively and obtain much more support from the mechers if that happens."

The Larkinson Clan could not tackle all of their future challenges by itself. The Larkinsons needed to make more friends and win over additional partners. Ves believed he could make a lot of progress on this front in the coming years.

Chapter 5158 Future Support

"Do you have to leave again, papa?" Aurelia asked as she sat on her father's lap.

"I do. I will only be gone for a week, though. I also have other ways to remain in contact even if I am far away." Ves reassured his girl as he kissed her head. "In the meantime, your mother and your great-grandfather will keep you company. I am sure that Benjamin will be happy to share his tales with you. He might not be as old as the geezers of other clans, but he has experienced a lot over his life. You have never stepped foot on the Bright Republic, right?"

The growing girl nodded. "I hear so many stories about it from the other original Larkinsons. It is only a small third-rate state that is located on the edge of the Milky Way Galaxy. Everything I hear about the old family is too... simple compared to what we have in our clan."

"Not everyone can cope with change as well as everyone, Aurelia. Even I yearn for a return to the relative safety and simplicity of the Bright Republic of old. Larkinsons such as myself weren't as powerful and wealthy as we are today, but we also did not bear excessive risks and dangers that could wipe out all of our lives after suffering a single setback. We did not throw ourselves into battle against professional military mech forces, phase whales and alien warships just so that we can climb our way up instead of remaining stuck at our current height."

Different from Ves and many of the adults of the clan, children such as Aurelia did not experience another life.

The only time period where she truly enjoyed relative peace was back when the Larkinson Clan settled in the Davute System for five years, but even that had always been regarded as a temporary break.

Ves had set up the Larkinson Clan to become an active and ambitious organization from the start. It had taken way too many risks in pursuit of greater rewards than it could normally obtain.

While everything worked out more or less, Ves felt the need to tone it down as his organization grew enormously in scope and power.

That was not to say that he wanted to quit the current strategy entirely. His clan still had a long way to go before it gained enough power to decide its own destiny.

He just felt that the time for youthful recklessness has passed. Ves already experienced a lot and was growing older with each passing year.

When enough years had passed for Ves to pass off his clan leader position to his daughter, he preferred it a lot more if Aurelia pursued a steadier development strategy.

This was why Ves originally wanted to create a lot more branches of his clan. This would spread the risk and expose only small parts of his clan to various dangers at a time.

This would have worked out well in a future where the Big Two steadily encroached on the territories of the indigenous alien races. With the greater beyonder gate constantly channeling large batches of starships, mechs, colonists and resources, the conquest of the Red Ocean should have been set in stone.

That was until the aliens pulled a fast one on the humans. With this crucial source of manpower, combat assets and resources taken away from the isolated humans in the dwarf galaxy, the entirety of their occupied space came under threat!

Ves no longer felt it made sense to invest so heavily into expanding the reach of his clan. The aliens were bringing more and more forces to bear with each passing month. The raiding fleets recently defeated by the Golden Skull Alliance hardly made a single dent in the total amount of enemy forces coming to wipe out the extragalactic invaders.

The increased buildup in defenses across every star sector did not reassure him in the slightest.

Ves had become involved in enough wars to know that the higher ups just treated all of those fortified star systems as speed bumps. They were all meant to buy time and make the enemy bleed rather than stop the enemy invasion entirely.

In this time of unprecedented turmoil and danger, scattering his clan sounded like a foolish endeavor. Ves predicted that a lot of branches set up in contentious regions like the Torald Middle Zone would get toppled within years.

The Krakatoa and Magair Middle Zones could fall as well depending on how poorly red humanity developed new technologies to counter the native aliens.

The only star systems that had a higher chance of surviving until the end were those closest to Bridgehead One and the Vulit Central Star Node. Both were located at the edge of the dwarf galaxy and had been colonized first.

Unfortunately, it was far too late for pioneers like himself to buy property in these heavily defended star systems. The first movers had already claimed all of the available territories for sale and fiercely rejected new arrivals.

It just so happened that times like these were moments where putting the foundation of his clan in a roving fleet paid off. It might not be possible for his clan to occupy any fixed territories in the rear of human-occupied space, but it was not a problem to bring back a fleet.

In any case, space was unimaginably big and fast. There was no way to run out of real estate in deep space. A star system could easily accommodate every single human or alien starship in the Red Ocean and still have lots of room to spare!

He looked down at his own daughter. He had put a lot of hopes and expectations on her. It might not be fair for him to do so, but someone had to take over his mantle. Aurelia did not show any rejection towards the prospect of taking over his clan in the future, at least for the time being.

"If you were in charge of the clan a few decades from now, what would you do?" He asked.

Aurelia's cute young face scrunched up in thought. "I am not certain. Our clan is changing so fast that it will be entirely different from now. What if you have already turned it into a strong and independent first-rate virtual state?"

Ves chortled. "I think you are overestimating my capabilities a little. It takes an unimaginable amount of wealth, power, support and accumulation to start a legitimate first-rate state. With the native aliens putting us all under siege, access to resources will only become more constrained. All of the existing first-class powers will fight tooth and nail to preserve their dwindling advantages."

His girl actually disagreed with his assessment.

"Many of those groups will fail and collapse because of their inability to adjust to rapid changes. This has always been the case in humanity's extensive past. Smaller organizations that are able to adapt better will have an opportunity to fill in the gaps. This is the survival of the fittest on an interorganizational level."

There were times when Ves lamented that his daughter had grown so smart and knowledgeable so quickly. He would have rather dealt with a naive and innocent girl instead!

"Let's not talk about that any further. It is not yet your turn to solve all of these difficult problems. You still need to finish your schooling. How are you doing in your studies?"

"I am doing well, papa. I have received better grades and studied many more books since the Great Severing. Mana in particular is growing faster with the help of exotic radiation. She can effectively help me complete my studies faster."

The white spiritual kitten in question emerged from her head and began to posture around in the air.

"Mew mew mew!"

Blinky flew out of Ves' head and tackled the kitten in a hug. "Mrow!"

"Meeew!"

As the two companion spirits fooled around, Ves could indeed feel that Mana's development had made significant advances since his last serious examination of the young companion spirit.

Even though Mana lacked a proper cultivation method like the one he developed for Blinky, her natural cultivation still sped up her growth speed by several times!

It shouldn't be a surprise that Mana had grown extensively enough to function as a proper incarnation. Aurelia was able to use her to augment her schooling in a similar fashion to how Ves employed his cyborg leg and Veronica to get a lot more design work done.

This was yet another advantage of companion spirits that he should emphasize in the upcoming conference!

Seeing how smart and capable Mana had grown since her birth, Ves began to reevaluate his daughter's future trajectory.

"The future belongs to the capable, Aurelia. The more skills you acquire, the easier it is for you to take advantage of lucrative opportunities. Take myself for example. I literally built our clan into a regional powerhouse out of nothing by relying on my excellence in mech design. Since you are able to spare the time for it, I think you should also focus on acquiring a hobby or a craft that can help you create more added value."

Much of Aurelia's current and future lesson plan encompassed all kinds of management, business, cultural, sociological and governance-related subjects. This was meant to prep her to become the best possible leader of the Larkinson Clan once she completed her essential studies.

However, Ves did not particularly hold a good opinion towards pure politicians and bureaucrats.

The ones that Ves met throughout his life were often way too elitist and far removed from the lives and circumstances of the common citizens.

He felt it would help a lot if these people had other jobs aside from making decisions in their ivory towers all day.

There was no guarantee that such professionals necessarily made for good leaders. The so-called Supreme Sage of the Life Research Association was a clear example of how being incredibly clever in one field did not necessarily translate to being a good steward of an entire state.

Nonetheless, Ves felt it was best if the Larkinson Clan was led by a figure who at least shared a similar advantage to himself.

Aurelia fell into thought. "Mama has put me into many different classes. I have learned how to dance, sing, compose poems and draw sketches."

"I know. You're quite talented in each of these arts." Ves grinned and hugged his daughter a little tighter. "However, these are not your hobbies in the truest sense of the word. I have never seen you channel a lot of passion in your artworks. I think you are mostly doing all of this in order to meet your mother's expectations towards you, right?"

His girl nodded. "I love to make mama happy. Is that wrong?"

"It's not necessarily wrong, my dear." Ves shook his head. "It is just that I think it is better if you divert your time on practicing an art or hobby for yourself rather than other people. Find your

passion. Devote yourself to it. It would be better if Mana can play an important assisting role in your craft. I have managed to accomplish a lot with the help of Blinky, so I hope you can gain advantages that others cannot match. This can truly help you develop a competence that you can use to support our clan in my absence."

Aurelia grew more concerned. "Are you going away, papa?!"

"Ah, no. I have no intention of abandoning you and our fellow Larkinsons. It is just that nobody knows where we will end up in the future. There comes a point in time when the Larkinson Clan should not rely on a single pillar anymore to maintain its position of power. Right now, everyone is counting on me to sustain the clan, and that is not healthy in the long run. I want you as well as your brother and sister to work together to prop up our clan with whatever skills you have. Leadership and management skills alone won't be enough to make that happen. So let me ask you this. What do you want to become aside from a leader?"

His daughter struggled to find her answer.

Chapter 5159 Aurelia's Hobby

Seeing that his clever daughter had become stumped by his inquiry, Ves did not hurry up to rush her. He also struggled over this issue for a long time, so he knew what it was like to find a hobby that he could devote himself towards.

Even now, Ves had never really found another hobby outside of his work. Perhaps he was able to find enjoyment whenever he worked on an off-beat project that was not directly related to mechs, but these moments were few and far in between.

There was just so much work for him to do. He did not mind his high workload at all because mech design was his passion and his love.

He did not want his firstborn daughter to develop a strong passion towards scheming and plotting overly complicated machinations. That was how other politicians and administrators tended to lose sight of their original responsibilities.

"Have you thought of any good ideas as of yet, Aurelia?"

His girl shook her head, causing her braided black hair to fling in a cute manner.

"No. Can you help me with this, papa?"

"Sure. Let's start with examining your companion spirit, shall we? Mana is a partial reflection of yourself. Her advantages are yours as well. It would be great if the two of you can compliment each other and make attainments that other kids like you cannot possibly match. If you are able to break into the upper echelon of your profession, you will be able to help our clan grow stronger even if I am not around anymore."

"Mrow mrow-"

While Ves spoke to his daughter, his companion spirit easily picked up Mana by the scruff of her neck and dragged the kitten closer.

"Mew-"

The differences in strength and development between the two companion spirits was massive. Blinky had particularly grown a lot stronger ever since he started to practice his Imaginary Universe Method.

While the Blinkyverse was still in a relatively poor shape after expending so much accumulated energy in the previous battle, its foundation was still intact. It would not take too long before it returned to its old state and continued to form a complete imaginary planet.

Mana was much weaker but also a lot simpler in comparison. Her head and eyes glowed a little brighter than the rest of her spiritual form. This indicated that she had managed to activate the buried potential of multiple organs, granting her an immediate affinity towards light and purity.

Aurelia could do a lot with these attributes.

She could become a singer that could soothe the minds of her listeners.

She could become a proselytizer that promised salvation to a lost flock of people.

She could become a director of entertainment shows.

Ves did not approve of these choices, though. They were either too mundane, too troublesome or too time-consuming.

He wanted his daughter to find a way to channel her passion in a more relaxed and healthy pursuit. It also needed to be valued by a community in order for it to become a viable commercial activity.

He began to think about whether she could imbue Mana's attributes into her works. Perhaps she might be able to use it as a form of creation cultivation. If her works provided solid benefits to people beyond their artistic qualities, she might be able to build up a lot of reputation and earn more money as a consequence!

"I know a lot about different arts and crafts." He told his daughter. "Even if I don't have much personal experience myself, Vulcan can get you started in nearly anything. We can hire tutors if you decide to choose a different kind of hobby. What matters is that you spend your time on an activity that you genuinely enjoy. Don't worry too much about making the wrong choice. You can always switch to doing something else if you find no more enjoyment in your current hobby. Life is about exploration. Everything you do will enrich your life one way or another. Listen to your heart. What does it tell you? What would you rather like to become if you were not born into the Larkinson Clan?"

The girl on his lap closed her eyes and tried to do what he suggested.

"Mew..."

Mana had also closed her cute little eyes while Blinky licked her pristine white fur.

It took a minute or so before Aurelia opened her eyes again. "I think I have found a possible answer."

"And what is that, my dear?"

"I want to train cats!"

"That's great to hear, Aurelia! So you want... to train cats?"

The eager girl nodded. "Let me show you what I mean. Clixie! Lucky! Can you come over, please?"

The two pets had been lounging on a nearby couch for a while. Upon hearing Aurelia's call, both of them raised themselves from their comfortable perch and moved closer with their tails raised in the air.

"Meow meow."

"Miaow--"

"How are you doing, Lucky? Have you recovered yet?" Aurelia asked with concern as she picked up the gem cat and examined his transformed body.

"Meow meow meow."

"I hope you recover quickly. It's no fun to stay sick for long!" She said before she put down Lucky in order to grasp the other cat. "How are you doing? Have you learned any new tricks as of late?"

"Miaow miaow miaow!"

Clixie grew oddly enthusiastic all of a sudden. The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat turned to face Lucky before she started to rub her jeweled collar with her paw.

"Meow...?"

Lucky started to have a bad feeling about this. Just as he was about to phase through the deck for safety's sake, the other cat had already made her move!

"MIAOW!"

A small cone of purifying light escaped from her maw and began to cleanse Lucky's unsuspecting body!

"MEEEOOW!"

The unexpected move completely took Lucky by surprise!

The gem cat jumped into the air and quickly inspected his own metallic body for any damage.

Nothing looked amiss. His newly obtained archemetal construction did not deteriorate in any way.

In fact, it was the opposite. Although the differences were small, Lucky grew amazed when he noticed that his joints felt smoother and that the internal stresses induced by overloading his body had faded to a small extent!

"Meow...?"

"Miaow." Clixie smugly responded as she planted her rear onto the deck. "Miaow miaow."

"Mew---"

Mana managed to escape from the clutches of Blinky and pressed up against Clixie. The two began to cuddle.

The relationship between the two cats was not normal.

Ves had already known that Clixie liked to hang out with Aurelia the most. He did not find it too surprising that they became so close that they developed a direct spiritual bond with each other.

What he did not expect was that this bond was able to do more than increase their intimacy.

Clixie had actually channeled a part of Mana's power as well as her own in that brief instance!

Although her technique was rough and not that strong, she had still displayed a capability that was similar to a cultivation spell!

The furry cat managed to do all of this without learning any formal cultivation techniques!

"Hihihi! Good job, Clixie!" Aurelia clapped her hands in delight.

At this time, Ves was no longer as casual as before. He examined his daughter, her companion spirit and Clixie with much greater scrutiny than before.

He made several new observations now that they were close and interacting with each other beyond a physical or emotional level.

The biggest finding almost shocked him to the core!

He found out that Aurelia had somehow been able to engage in a form of deity cultivation without really knowing anything about cultivation science!

The reason why she was able to do so had a lot to do with all of her blessings and gifts. Her abnormally strong spirituality and spiritually sensitive body had brought her a lot closer to the original state of a primordial human than other children.

While there were many advantages to this, one of the potential dangers was that gifted people like Aurelia were already capable of distorting reality without intended to do so! This could potentially lead to a lot of accidents if their whims took a darker turn!

What Aurelia ended up doing was not as concerning. Her studies along with her intimacy with Clixie caused her to subconsciously develop a spiritual bond that actually looked quite familiar.

The simple explanation was that Aurelia had turned herself into a design spirit!

A design spirit for cats!

This was quite absurd, but it made sense considering what she experienced in her life up to this point.

Aurelia had often been told that she was destined to become a leader, and her studies only reinforced that further.

She was also a Larkinson who inherited a strong liking for cats, not just Clixie.

Both of these traits combined into an expression that caused her to become a patron of cats, if only a prototypical one.

What Aurelia had been able to do was not that impressive, but this was just the start.

What would happen if she grew stronger? What would happen if exotic radiation had boosted everyone's strength?

Her deity cultivation was bound to produce more dramatic results by that time!

"There's also you." He said as he shifted his attention towards Clixie.

"Miaow?"

The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat was a biologically impressive creature, but she was originally not supposed to be gifted in a spiritual capacity.

That had slowly changed over the years, but Ves mainly chalked that up to her constant exposure to spiritual phenomena in the Larkinson Clan.

Now, he was able to see that Clixie had gained a lot of benefits from her active relationship with Aurelia!

Clixie had become an unintentional contract cultivator. She did not appear to possess any talent in cultivation, but she acquired extraordinary power by borrowing it from other sources!

What a mess.

This was the consequence of gaining power without knowing how to exert control over it. Ves became reminded of his mother's warning about how it was far too easy for people to suffer from cultivation deviation if they got too sloppy.

Fortunately, neither Aurelia nor Clixie were prone to doing this. They only acted what was natural to them, so their crude and unsophisticated methods did not entail much risk.

He decided to set his daughter straight after he came back from the conference. It would be a lot better if she practiced a proper cultivation method as opposed to channeling her power without proper awareness of what she was doing.

"Aurelia?"

"Yes, papa?"

"Do you truly like to play with cats?"

The girl nodded. "I do! They're so cute, and they all like me as well. It doesn't take much to befriend them and have them follow my instructions."

Ves thought for a moment. "Would you like to turn it into a more serious hobby? We could have you train cats more seriously if you want. Once they have completed whatever training that you have set, you can sell them or gift them to other people that appreciate these kinds of pets. Does that sound fun to you, sweetie?"

Her eyes sparkled in a way that Ves had rarely seen from his daughter in the past.

"Ido! Ido!"

Aurelia genuinely developed an interest in this side occupation!

Although she found singing and dancing to be fun as well, nothing delighted her more than to spend her time with loving and attentive cats!

"You can try to be more serious about training cats, then." Ves said as he kissed his daughter's cheek. "Let's see whether you will continue to hold your interest in this activity in the months and years to come. Pets have always been an indispensable addition to human civilization. If you are able to excel as a cat trainer, you can build an entire army of superpowered cats!"

"Miaow!"

"Meow..."

"Mrow."

"Mew!"

Chapter 5160 We Meet Again

Aurelia had a lot of talent for training cats as long as she was being serious about it. Her conditions were a lot more favorable than anyone else, so it was unthinkable for her to fail in this endeavor!

As far as Ves was concerned, training cats was a rather odd but valid occupation. There was always a demand for pets. Wealthy families particularly liked to pair their descendants with strong designer beasts that were especially configured to serve as companions as well as protectors.

Rubarthan Sentinel Cats such as Clixie traditionally fulfilled this niche, but times had changed.

The transition to the Age of Dawn meant that entirely new kinds of threats might emerge that were difficult to defend against!

For example, it was very much possible that malevolent cultivators or hostile spiritual entities might try to assassinate the members of a powerful family!

While Ves believed that red humanity would be able to develop a lot of countermeasures against such attacks, it didn't hurt to have more options.

A strong and loyal cat that was trained in fighting against these difficult threats could make a real difference!

If Aurelia truly made attainments in this field, then she would have no trouble earning her keep even if she lost the backing of her clan.

What Ves also valued was that it was a way for Aurelia to cultivate in a manner that fit her inclinations well. The more cats she trained, the more she was able to derive benefits from all of these felines, especially if they grew stronger over time.

Although Ves had a lot of misgivings towards deity cultivation, he still prized it for its strengths.

If he had a choice, he did not want Aurelia to practice a more dangerous or risky form of cultivation. Training cats was one of the most harmless choices imaginable.

While Ves was not certain whether it could make Aurelia stronger than other cultivators, she should at least be able to enjoy a more fulfilling life.

With that in mind, he gave her a brief lesson on safety before encouraging her to see if she could teach tricks to other cats.

He also gave a reminder to Goldie to supervise Aurelia's efforts.

"Don't let her do anything that looks dangerous, alright?"

"Nyaaaaa."

Ves went to bed that night with cats dominating his thoughts. He felt oddly proud and silly at what Aurelia had managed to accomplish by herself.

Was this what her talent in cultivation had led to? Perhaps in ancient times, his daughter might actually be able to pass off as the goddess of cats, but right now he just found the entire situation to be absurd.

Once he woke up the next day, he was finally able to put most of the matters concerning Aurelia aside.

He put a greater effort into dressing himself up than usual. He also checked to make sure that his clan knew what to do in his temporary absence.

Ves did not actually separate himself from the fleet entirely. He already deposited his cyborg leg in a locked and guarded section of his design lab.

This way, his leg would not only be able to prevent his ongoing design projects from falling behind too much, but he could also take charge of his clan in case of an emergency!

His connection to the small secondary brain integrated in his cyborg leg was strong. Most forms of jamming and signal blocking could do nothing to cut it off. This allowed him to look forward to attending the conference without worrying about the situation back home.

"They're coming, sir."

A solitary Red Association destroyer arrived first. The modern superdrive-equipped starship zipped rapidly towards Corellix III and stopped in high orbit of the planet.

The vessel subsequently generated a portal that enabled several more first-class starships to enter the star system in an instant!

The arriving flotilla was not too big or extensive. It only comprised a handful of cruisers and a dozen smaller ship classes.

Despite the lack of numbers and tonnage, the modest task force was more than powerful enough to fend off most raiding fleets, especially if they deployed their modest contingent of first-class multipurpose mechs!

A handful of relatively large and voluminous cargo vessels emerged out of the portal as well.

These vessels brought an important batch of prefab construction modules used to build the beginnings of a land fortress.

The colony on the planet would become a lot more secure once the Red Association completed this single structure.

At the very least, the colonists could evacuate inside of its extremely powerful titan shield and wait a long time for reinforcements to come to the rescue.

One small frigate broke off from orbit and warp traveled over to the central debris site where the expeditionary fleet had settled down.

The mechers had finally come to Ves.

Ves had already packed up all of his luggage and goods for this trip. He had filled up an entire standard container with working examples of companion spirit fruit trees and other useful goodies.

The Larkinson Biotech Institute had carefully put each individual tree inside their own climate-controlled boxes that ensured that they would not starve and die off while in transit.

As Ves received a notification about an imminent teleportation event, he quickly turned to his wife, children, grandfather and cats and waved them goodbye.

"I won't be gone for long. Take care of my clan while I am gone."

"Do your best to impress the Survivalists." Gloriana said with an expectant expression.

"Meow..." Lucky yawned.

"Miaow miaow."

"Goodbye, papa!"

Ves wouldn't really be 'gone' per se, but he felt it was better not to tell them that he had left his cyborg leg behind. His clan needed to be able to take care of its own affairs when he was absent for any reason.

As he took one more look at his family, he wished he could bring at least one of them with him. The conference organized by the Survivalists was a great place for people to expand their horizons and get into contact with a lot of powerful and influential mechers.

The security demands were too high, though. Any location that gathered so many important mech designers and other notable individuals became a sensitive site. Enemies could inflict catastrophic damage to the Survivalist Faction and the Red Association if they were able to attack it in any way!

Although the Survivalists put a lot of effort into ramping up the security of the occasion, there was no reason for them to take unnecessary risks.

Ves wasn't even allowed to bring a single pet for that reason!

Seconds later, he could feel the characteristic effect of getting materially disassembled before reforming in another set of coordinates!

His body vibrated a bit as he tried to shake off the uncomfortable feeling of getting teleported away.

Once he regained his composure, he took in the environment. He noticed that he had entered a white and well-lit lounge compartment that was tastefully decorated with lively green plants.

They were literally lively.

Ves actually felt a little freaked out at how the seemingly normal plants moved their branches around and behaved as actively as animals!

"Ah, do not mind the decoration, my friend. The captain of this frigate added them to the interior as a personal touch."

Any ordinary human would find the animated plants to be unnerving at first, but Ves quickly relaxed once he saw that they were not actually sentient and intelligent.

So long as these plants were just moving by instinct, they were unlikely to go out of control.

Ves moved forward and sat down at a backless white padded bench.

Opposite to his position, Jovy Armalon smiled back as he sat on his own bench.

"It has not been long since we have last met and spoken in person." The tall and thin Senior Mech Designer spoke with a delighted smile. "Not much time has passed since then, but much has changed in between."

Ves had always been wondering about that. He gazed at Jovy with undisguised suspicion on his face.

"Did you manage to pick up what the phase whales were plotting in advance?"

"Hahaha. That is amusing. You overestimate my capabilities. The new companion spirit that you have gifted me does have a limited ability to glean future trends, but the Great Severing is too great in scope. The wonderful companion spirit that you have gifted me is not strong enough."

"Can I see it again? I'm curious to see how it has grown. You can take a look at my own companion spirit."

"Let us bring them out." Jovy enthusiastically agreed.

"Mrow."

"Zsss."

Two completely different looking companion spirits emerged from their heads and stopped in front of each other.

The Eye of Providence had been doing well under Jovy's care. The mechers must have studied it a lot, but they did not behave improperly and mess around with his work.

Jovy and his companion spirit must have gone through a number of interesting experiences, because the Eye of Providence had actually grown and developed more than expected.

The companion spirit still fell within a reasonable range of growth and development. It had not grown excessively strong nor showed any artificial signs of weakness.

The only problem that Ves had with the Eye of Providence was that it looked unnerving!

It was pretty much a spiritual manifestation of a floating fleshy human eyeball. The iris was purple and glowed depending on how intensively the spiritual entity tried to observe anything.

"Your Eye looks healthy." Ves issued his judgment. "I can see that you have brought it along to observe a good number of interesting sights. That is good. Anything that can stimulate your spirit will help it grow faster."

Jovy did not look surprised. "That concurs with my own feelings and the assessment of other experts. The Association has taken good care of my companion spirit and I. As their concerns about its potential dangers and limitations have lessened, I can tell you that a small number of mechers in the know have expressed interest in obtaining their own companion spirits. The amount of interest would have been greater if more people had become aware of what you have invented."

They chatted a bit more about what the Red Association had done to test and verify the Eye of Providence's capabilities.

Just like many other recipients of companion spirits, Jovy eventually found out that he could multitask and work on multiple design projects at the same time.

This benefit alone was incredibly valuable to mech designers below the rank of Master!

However, the evaluation of the mechers towards companion spirits had recently increased even more as Messier 87's light shone on the Red Ocean.

The Eye of Providence could perceive and interact with E energy radiation a lot better than Jovy himself!

The spiritual entity was literally able to act as his third eye, granting Jovy an undeniable advantage in any research project related to this important phenomenon.

Not only that, but the Eye of Providence also increased Jovy's E energy absorption rate!

The spiritual eyeball's natural cultivation process always fed back to Jovy, enabling him to speed up his spiritual development and make his mech designs a little more effective as a result!

"Under normal circumstances, Our Association is not inclined to hasten the introduction of new innovations." Jovy told Ves. "We are not living under normal circumstances anymore. A group of supporters have emerged that intends to push for the fast and admittedly reckless adoption of companion spirits throughout our organization and ultimately the general public. The premise to making this happen is your ability to automate and increase the scale of granting these useful companion spirits to human individuals."

Ves did not expect the Survivalists to move so quickly, but he welcomed this development!

"Our work on this project is not completely done, but the initial solution that I have been preparing to present to your bosses should be able to do the job. Is that good enough of an answer?"