

## The Mech 5321

### Chapter 5321 The Senechai

The week-long tour deepened Ves' understanding of Terran space and culture.

Although the Terrans and the Devosans in particular weren't as wealthy or advanced as the mechers, the rulers of the New Constantinople System still possessed enough capital to make their superstate proud.

At least that was the case on the surface.

While the Devosans tried their best to project strength and class, Ves couldn't help but notice that he only got a cursory look at the local armed forces.

Even then, his tour guides only led him to the bases of the most elite and well-equipped mech unit stationed on the planet.

Perhaps Ves wouldn't have been able to notice these details if he possessed his old mindset, but now that he understood the greater truths, he became perceptive enough to spot the gaps.

The Devosans were highly perceptive and could analyze a lot from the behavior of their guests.

It was not difficult for the hosts to discover that the recently elevated tier 3 galactic citizen could not be fooled so easily.

This was why Master Laila Devos eventually invited Ves over to hold a brief but honest discussion at the end of the seventh day.

The two looked across the window of the floating restaurant. The city of Sandan remained bright and vibrant even as darkness settled in on this side of the planet.

"What do you think of our territory? Is your stay in the Terran Alliance to your liking?"

"The wealth and tech on display is impressive." Ves replied. "My second-class sensibilities can't help but take note of all of the extravagance around me. This is practically a small paradise in the Red Ocean. It is a pity that we live in the wrong time."

"What do you mean by that, professor?"

Ves waved his arm at the city before him. "While I am sure that your ancient clan has built up a lot of defenses, you could have done more to prepare this planet for war. So many valuable resources have been squandered to construct luxurious buildings. I understand that all of this attracts a lot of trade and commerce to this port system, but this will only form a greater attraction to the native aliens. If I was in your shoes, I would push to fortify and militarize this strategic star system as much as possible. Your ancient clan needs to go on a war footing."

The Master Mech Designer looked rueful. "Numerous people have voiced the same proposal, but it is not that simple for us to change tack. We are constrained by too many factors. These changes normally take place over years or decades. We are more concerned with upgrading and expanding our mech units."

In other words, there was not enough resources and political will to push through the difficult decisions needed to respond to the crisis.

Ves shook his head in disapproval. "The Age of Dawn is an age where warlords will become the dominant players of human society. It takes more than spending money to raise powerful enough mech units that can survive in an increasingly more hostile dwarf galaxy."

"I am aware. I have listened to your Frontier Wisdom lectures. We are open to other solutions."

This gave Ves to present a few proposals to test the willingness of the Devos Ancient Clan to do business with him and his clan.

It was not appropriate for Ves to offer a kinship network as this was a matter that the Terran Alliance preferred to address as a whole.

He couldn't offer anything related to companion spirits or the Carmine System because of the restrictions imposed by the Red Association.

That left Ves with few means to help the Devos Ancient Clan.

Nonetheless, he still possessed enough innovations to attract the Devosans.

Out of all of his suggestions, Master Laila indicated a bit of interest towards one of them in particular.

"Your training mechs have gained great appreciation in the middle zones." The woman spoke.

"While the unclear principles of your MSTS is of significant concern to us, I do not believe we have the luxury to let our caution hinder our efforts to improve our forces. How well is your MSTS able to simulate first-class combat?"

"Quite well." Ves confidently replied. "The realism of my MSTS is unequaled. This is not an idle boast. Everyone who experienced it in person has said as much. While we have yet to give any first-class mechs access to the MSTS, it is not difficult to fully simulate the performance of any standard mech model in a short amount of time."

The Master Mech Designer nodded in appreciation. "We have already collected a large amount of information on your training mechs and the special training system that you have invented for them, but we will need more than that to make a major decision. If you can supply us with additional information that is relevant to us, it is not impossible for us to conclude a business deal within three months."

Ves was waiting for this! He understood the value of his MSTS quite well. If he handled this negotiation well enough, then the resulting deal may serve as the first proper anchor of the Larkinson Clan in the upper zones!

He had a short but fruitful talk with the Master Mech Designer after he transmitted an information package that he had already prepared in advance.

Even though Ves strongly believed in the benefits provided by his MSTS, he could not guarantee whether the Devosans would be willing to adopt it in the end.

That was not a problem. Ves still had other ways to be of service to the Devos Ancient Clan, and that was before he had completed his promotion to a first-class mech designer!

After he finally concluded his evening talk with Master Laila, he retired for the evening in order to get ready for the next day.

When Ves woke up the next morning, the atmosphere around him had changed.

The Devos Ancient Clan had its turn with Ves. Now was the time that the Streon Ancient Clan was allowed to approach him next.

Due to the unfortunate incident related to the Ouroboros, General Axelar Streon had become persona non grata on New Constantinople VIII.

The Devosans didn't dare to let him or his potentially uncontrollable ace mech approach the surface of one of their most important planets!

This forced Ves and the Streons to schedule their introductory meeting off-world.

Holding the meeting on the Tarrasque seemed obvious, but neither side wanted to talk on a warship that was under the complete control of the Red Association.

This was why Ves agreed to meet on a small and relatively neutral space station that the Streons had rented for a period of time.

Before Ves arrived, the Larkinsons and the Streons had worked together to prepare for this important meeting.

While the Streons shouldered much of the responsibilities, the Larkinsons made sure not to let their counterparts dominate the setting.

The space station featured a large central hall that was spacious enough to fit plenty of mechs.

This was where the two sides agreed to host the initial introduction.

Banners that represented both the Larkinson Clan and the Streon Ancient Clan hung from above.

Living mechs hailing from the Larkinson Clan stood on the opposite side of an imposing row of first-class multipurpose mechs that belonged to the powerful Terran clan.

Two different delegations of people stood on opposite sides of each other. The staff of the Larkinson Clan was considerably smaller and less skilled than its Streon counterpart, but that couldn't be helped.

Even the heads of the respective staffs became glaringly obvious as they moved to the middle and shook each other's hands.

"It is an honor to meet with you in person, Senechai."

The considerably larger and older man responded with a modest smile. "We look forward to meeting with your talented patriarch. There is no need for you to call me by my title, Mr. Neumann. You may call me Benny."

That evoked a peculiar reaction from the Larkinson. Gavin did not possess perfect control over his expressions, so the elder who had served the Renewer of Terra for over a century picked up plenty of information during this brief interaction!

"It is best if we maintain proper decorum, Elder Smit." Gavin ultimately said. "Given the incident that occurred a week ago, it is not wise for us to deviate from established protocols."

The lifelong servant of General Axelar Streon shook his head.

"That may be true when we are among strangers or rivals, but I can assure you that the relationship between our clans will be different. Call me Benny."

"Very well... Benny." The much younger assistant squeezed out of his mouth.

Gavin Neumann had grown considerably since Ves initially hired him back in Cloudy Curtain. He worked diligently throughout the years and studied hard to keep up with the growing complexity of his work.

Even so, his third-class roots could only take him so far. Without extensive augmentations, there was no way he could serve as a competent assistant to a notable and highly influential first-class mech designer.

This was why Gavin had started to expand his staff and hire much more competent assistants that could undertake much of the actual work at this level.

Still, delegation could only take him so far. He would have to make use of an Ednet quota if he wanted to remain useful in his current capacity.

Compared to the relatively underwhelming personal assistant of the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, the man standing opposite to Gavin was entirely different!

As General Axelar Streon rose to prominence, the people around him benefited as well.

His chief bodyguard and assistant had long surpassed his prior rank and position as a retainer.

With the support of his patron, Benny Smit-Streon not only married into the Streon Ancient Clan, but also became one of its elders, enabling him to vote on its future direction!

As Axelar Streon grew more influential, it was his subordinates who became responsible for executing his vision.

Benny became so instrumental in taking charge of these affairs that he eventually became known as the Seneschal of the Streon Ancient Clan!

This archaic-sounding position did not exist to the ancient clan in the past, but Benny's contributions had been so large that the Streons created a new tradition just for him! This was the greatest honor of his life!

Even though Senechai Benny already amassed enough power and influence on his own to take up a more direct leadership position, he had never left General Axelar's side.

As far as the Senechai was concerned, he would always remain Axelar's assistant.

Gavin Neumann obviously did his homework. He admired the Senechai and dreamt of making the same attainments.

However, Gavin's confidence dropped when he considered his lack of qualifications. He was far worse than the Senechai back when the Terran was of the same age.

Could Gavin remain useful enough to Ves to stay in place, or would he get replaced by a more qualified assistant in the coming years because he couldn't keep up anymore?

He couldn't let that happen!

The comparison between himself and the Senechai did not depress him in the end. Instead, he acted like a Larkinson and developed the ambition to catch up and surpass his first-class counterpart!

The time had finally come for the meeting to commence.

Both sides just received a notification that Ves and General Axelar had teleported to their own sides on the space station.

The leader of the Streon Ancient Clan entered the central hall first.

He did not come by himself. The large double doors slid open in order to make way for the most powerful mech in the star system!

The Ouroboros by itself was a sight to behold, but now that it was being actively piloted, the black-and-white masterwork mech radiated strength and control!

The entire space station had already become enveloped by a large and powerful Saint Kingdom.

Nothing escaped the attention of General Axelar Streon. This was a necessity under the circumstances as neither side wanted to leave any opening for third parties to eavesdrop on their upcoming talk.

#### Chapter 5322 Title Bombs

Ves and the Larkinsons agreed to allow General Axelar Streon to pilot the Ouroboros during this formal meeting.

This incurred considerable risks, as they would place themselves at the mercy of the Streons.

Nonetheless, Ves pushed through with this because he trusted the Streon Ancient Clan not to abuse its power.

This was not a customary decision to him, but he had near-absolute confidence that he would never be in danger.

The Ouroboros was his own creation! Even if its growth had been stunted, the powerful second order living mech would rather fight against its own pilot than to cause any harm towards its progenitor!

With this circumstance as a guarantee, Ves would rather allow General Axelar to make use of his formidable Saint Kingdom to wipe out any bugs and prevent any means for other parties to listen in on their conversation.

Ves did not underestimate the formidable spying capabilities of the Red Association. It was worth it for him to put his trust in the Streons in this case.

Besides, General Axelar Streon had already made a solemn promise to treat the Larkinsons properly. The man who strongly yearned to become a god pilot would never joke around when it came to this kind of stuff!

The entire hall seemed to shake and vibrate in cadence to the footsteps of the Ouroboros.

The few staffers of the general maintained an impassive expression, but they all conveyed the pride of serving one of the foremost champions and leaders of the Terran Alliance!

Their attitudes weren't anything special. They had gone through similar routines many times.

It was the reactions and attitudes of the Larkinsons that drew a lot of admiration from the Streons. Although Gavin Neumann and his much more limited staff did not look that impressive, the years they spent among the Larkinsons had subjected them to many dangerous tests.

There was an edge and a core of strength to the Larkinson staffers that were more common among battle-tested troops.

Each of these Larkinson staffers possessed at least a decent amount of bravery, which was not a quality that was common among civilian Terrans!

While it was difficult to resist the strong mental influence of the Saint Kingdom of the Ouroboros, this was not the first time that the Larkinsons became subjected to this kind of pressure!

Although General Axelar Streon was far more powerful than any other monstrosity they faced in the past, the ace pilot clearly did not have any aggressive intentions in mind.

Besides, even if Axelar deliberately increased his suppression, the Golden Cat that quietly guarded over the Larkinsons would not remain impassive!

The Ouroboros strode forward until it had reached the other side of the hall.

Another set of double doors was situated on this side. It led to a more private and secure chamber where the principals of both sides could hold a proper discussion.

Once the powerful ace mech settled into place, the Senechai stepped forward and shouted so loudly that the entire chamber echoed with his thundering voice!

"I hereby announce the arrival of the Renewer of Terra, the senior ace pilot, the High Marshal of the Terran Alliance, the General of the 1st Streon Mech Army, the Acting Patriarch of the Red Branch of the Streon Ancient Clan, the Founder and President of the New Terran Federation Movement, the honorary member of the Red Association, the vice leader of the Terran Faction, the vanquisher of Rubarthans, the crusher of alien lifeforms of both the Milky Way and the Red Ocean, the threefold solo mech champion of the Terran Confederation Games, the victor of the Twenty-sixth Battle of Tau Ceti and tier 2 galactic citizen! Axelar of the Streon Ancient Clan has chosen to welcome our honored guests from afar with the Ouroboros, his chosen steed!"

Trumpets sounded in the air as lights shone on the impressive living masterwork mech.

The Larkinson staffers had already collected quite a lot of information on the Ouroboros, but now that they were able to witness its majesty in person, they couldn't help but speculate how it was related to their patriarch.

Not even the most technologically illiterate Larkinson could be blind to the obvious connection between the Terran's obvious living traits and their patriarch's unique design style!

This cast a special light onto this meeting. It became a lot clearer now why their patriarch acquiesced so easily to some of the Streon Ancient Clan's proposals.

Another change occurred.

A subtle light shone on the entrance, causing a metal clad figure to shine a lighter brighter as he passed through the enormous double doors.

In fact, two metal figures had chosen to enter at this time.

Since General Axelar Streon entered this venue while riding his 'steed', Ves felt it was appropriate for him to wear his Unending Regalia rather than his dress uniform.

"Meow."

Lucky also accompanied him at this time, both as a mascot and as an extra pair of eyes.

Both of them actually made a profound impression to the Streons present in the central hall.

The gem cat was utterly unique. Lucky might not look that big, but those with discerning eyes understood how impressive it was to adapt a notoriously complicated archetech and utilize it to create a small and lifelike mechanical cat!

Such a technological marvel could only be asked for in first-class space. Only a few top figures possessed the competence and expertise to develop a cat made out of archemetal!

Ves himself did not look too shabby either. Much of the tech of the Unending alloy was only second-class, but the materials and design were clearly exceptional!

The combination of Unending alloy, which acted as a special form of hyper material, and Ves' distinctive design style resulted in a powerful form of synergy that caused the suit of combat armor to radiate the power of life!

If that was not enough, Ves also chose to loosen his restraint and radiate his own glow, thereby making it seem as if he was a deity that could create life out of nothing!

An ordinary audience might look at Ves and become impressed without any complicated thoughts. Few people understood the significance or the possibilities that Ves had at his disposal.

The Streons were different in this regard. From the staffers to the general himself, all of them had become incredibly familiar with the creation aspect of the Ouroboros.

They inferred a strange connection between this mech designer and the Ouroboros!

Even if none of them seriously thought that this 40-something year old mech designer had actually designed the original Ouroboros, they already began to entertain many possible ideas.

The most likely possibility was that Ves was the student of the man that secretly designed the Ouroboros.

Whatever the case, the Streons had met many mech designers in the past who could make a meaningful contribution to the Ouroboros, but Ves was definitely the closest one yet who could augment the creation side of the renowned ace mech!

The footsteps of the Unending Regalia did not produce nearly as much noise or shaking, but Ves built up his own form of momentum that made it difficult to ignore his approach.

Once Ves and Lucky stopped a healthy distance from the Ouroboros, there were a few entities who wanted him to come closer.

The eyes of the ace mech flashed a little brighter and spontaneously wanted to take a few steps closer, but under the iron-hard will of its pilot, the machine remained motionless and under control.

Gavin Neumann stepped forward and made his own announcement. His voice wasn't as loud or augmented as that of the Senechai, so he didn't even bother to imitate the older man. It was enough for him to do his job without stumbling over his syllables.

"I hereby announce the arrival of the Devil Tongue, the Senior Mech Designer, the eightfold masterwork mech designer, the founder and Patriarch of the Larkinson Clan, the founder and galactic pioneer of the Golden Skull Alliance, the founder of the Larkinson Mech Corporation, the founder of the Creation Association, the Founder of the Open Consortium, the honorary member of the Red Association, the voting delegate of the Survivalist Faction, the former associate of the Transhumanist Faction, the Supreme Son of the Hex Federation, the senior contributor of restricted technology, the vanquisher of Fridaymen, the destroyer of states, the punisher of dwarves, the crusher of native aliens, the breaker of alien battleships, the scourge of phase whales, the hunter of exobeasts and astral beasts, the defier of tyrants and tier 3 galactic citizen! Ves of the Larkinson Clan has chosen to enjoy the hospitality of our distinguished company with Lucky, his chosen mechanical companion!"

As Gavin struggled to recite the increasingly more silly-sounding titles with a firm and serious expression, Ves wanted to ask who the hell came up with this absurd ceremony!

While Ves had no problem with the first batch of titles, there was no need to embellish his record and pad his list of titles by inventing a dozen more!

He was already convinced that the Terrans invented this dumb protocol because too many of them never accomplished anything of actual significance in their lives. They needed a bit more support in order to retain their vanity.

Ves inwardly shook his head. The titles weren't important to him. Perhaps the Terrans might feel differently about this, which was why the Larkinsons played along.

Once the introductions had concluded, the double doors at the other side slowly slid open.

The Ouroboros slowly turned around first and steadily strode to the other chamber. The deck shook with every step, yet the powerful ace mech exuded total control and certainty with each and every movement.

Strangely enough, the Senechai separated from his staff and quietly followed after his liege.

Everyone else remained still until the ace mech exited the hall.

Only at this point did Ves step forward. Clad in armor, his pace was much slower, but no one expressed any impatience over his more human-like stride.

Lucky effortlessly kept up in the air. He even spiraled around in a playful fashion just so that he could break up the monotony.

As Ves passed by his personal assistant, the two exchanged glances with each other.

Outside of their expectations, Senechai Benny Smit had been allowed to enter the next chamber.

This showed that the loyal elder enjoyed the complete trust and confidence of General Axelar Streon.

Should Ves follow suit and extend his trust towards his own personal assistant?



If it was before, Ves would have never done such an unnecessary act. His upcoming talk had the potential to touch upon highly sensitive secrets, so it would be extremely irrational for him to bring Gavin along where he might learn explosive truths.

Yet... when Ves saw how his former Mastery host trusted his Benny on a complete and unconditional basis after all of these years, he felt ashamed for not following the same example.

Gavin had served Ves long enough to prove his loyalty and reliability. For years, he discharged his duties with diligence. He even accompanied Ves on all of the dangerous expeditions.

Aside from that, Gavin was also a part of the Larkinson Network since its inception. The Golden Cat was more than capable of monitoring the assistant and sounding the alarm if the man ever thought to leak any sensitive information.

Ves needed a real confidante by his side. It became more and more burdensome to keep so many secrets to himself.

It was at this point that despite calling his assistant Benny, he never actually treated Gavin like his namesake.

The obvious contrast in treatment and extension of trust shamed Ves to the point where he was forced to admit his mistakes.

No more.

From today onwards, Ves resolved to treat Gavin like an actual Benny!

"Come." Ves commanded as he jerked his head towards the other chamber. "You may listen."

That startled the other man. "Are you certain?"

"You deserve it after all of these years. If not now, then when? Just come with me already."

"Very well... boss."

Gavin couldn't help but sound grateful and even affectionate as he stepped behind Ves.

The distance between the two of them had only grown over the years as Ves kept more and more secrets from most of the Larkinsons.

While Ves showed a bit of willingness to share certain secrets with members of his inner circle, Gavin didn't appear to be a member of this very exclusive club.

That had always hurt him even though he understood the importance of minimizing leaks.

All of that had changed today. With this fateful decision, Gavin knew that he had bridged an important gap and earned a much greater degree of acknowledgement of his patriarch!

Gavin resolved to prove himself worthy of all of this trust. He did not entirely know how he could pull this off, but perhaps the famed Senechai of the Streon Ancient Clan could give him a few tips!

## Chapter 5323 Heavy Atmosphere

The central chamber was cylindrical in shape and occupied the center of the rented space station.

Enormous banners hung from metallic gray bulkheads. They depicted the colors and the symbols of the Terran Alliance, the Streon Ancient Clan as well as the Larkinson Clan.

The bright lights shining from above caused the Ouroboros and the armor-clad figure of Ves to look as if they were deities who had descended to the material realm.

What made this site especially solemn was the total silence.

Even though the commercial space station hadn't been built to the highest standards, it was still an intricate collection of powerful technologies. It was hard to dampen all of the noises produced by energy generators and other devices.

Nonetheless, the central chamber had been built in a way that generated total serenity in a natural manner. Ves did not even sense the subtle disturbances that betrayed the presence of an active anti-noise field.

The Ouroboros also remained silent. Its tech was so advanced compared to a typical second-class mech that its parts were on another level.

For example, the zero-point energy reactor that supplied seemingly endless energy from another dimension was virtually inexhaustible and uninteruptible!

Even if the Terran Alliance did not have access to as many high technologies as the Mech Trade Association, its foundation as a superstate was not for show. The Streons possessed enough strength and clout to gain access to such an impressive piece of peak technology.

A part of Ves felt incredibly proud and gratified to see the Ouroboros grow to such a strong machine.

Even if he hadn't touched it for over a century, it was still his work at heart!

Once he had created it, the Ouroboros lived its own life according to the whims of its battle partner.

Though its journey had been bumpy to the point of making plenty of mistakes, the Ouroboros had experienced much of the ups and downs that defined a rich and eventful life.

As Ves stood in front of the powerful masterwork ace mech that was equally coated in white and black, he was able to appreciate its growth and essence even more.

The biggest difference from his previous examination was that General Axelar Streon actively piloted his machine this time.

This filled in a lot of gaps that completed the ensemble between man and machine.

The Ouroboros and its lifelong partner had completely adapted to each other. It didn't matter if the two hadn't established a Blood Pact. Their continuous interaction and commitment to each other had forged a bond that was different but was much stronger in a few ways.

This was the kind of bond that Ves originally modeled the Blood Pact after!

The sheer depth of trust and affection that the living mech and its mech pilot expressed towards each other had already become strong enough to affect reality in profound ways.

While Ves was sure that General Axelar Streon hadn't formally initiated the Mech Body Merger Process, he and his living mech had already worked together so much that they already exhibited some of the traits of operation union.

It was amazing to see how extensively his 'child' had grown. Ves felt like a proud parent who reunited with his child after the latter had experienced an entire life.

Of course, Ves also felt a pang of pain in his heart for being absent during his creation's entire journey.

General Axelar and his living mech made so many mistakes in the past that could have easily been prevented or mitigated if they received proper guidance.

Seeing the Ouroboros grow to such an impressive point only to fall short due to the consequences it had incurred was extremely painful to Ves!

It was like seeing a masterful painting that could be revered and immortalized through the ages, only for it to get marred by a few ugly stripes left by a bunch of vandals!

All of his sensibilities as a mech designer screamed at him to do whatever it took to fix the Ouroboros and enable it to attain a higher degree of perfection and craftsmanship.

Ves could feel it. The factors that enabled the Ouroboros to grow to this point had brought it close to a grand work.

He had never seen a mech that was more transcendent and perfect than this exquisite machine.

The Grand Mender definitely earned much of the credit for bringing out the strengths of the Ouroboros in such a magnificent way, but the fact that it was an old and seasoned living mech definitely contributed a lot to its development!

Ves really couldn't allow his work to remain so blemished for the rest of its existence. If he did nothing in the face of the current state of the Ouroboros, then this would be an intolerable stain to his professionalism and a regret that would always haunt him for a long time!

As Ves became increasingly more upset about the defective state of the Ouroboros, a mature and masculine voice finally called out from the active machine.

"Professor Ves Larkinson. We have finally met. I have heard much about you from many different sources, my granddaughter included. None of the people that know you on a personal basis have described you as dull or average. Seeing you in the flesh confirms that their praises are not off the mark. You feel it, correct? You can feel the imbalance in my Ouroboros?"

Ves nodded. There was no way for him to lie or obfuscate this particular point. An ace pilot who was just as strong as the Mace of Retaliation possessed extremely keen intuition.

What made General Axelar even more difficult to deceive was that he was actively interfacing with his mech at the moment!

The Ouroboros massively amplified the strength and reach of his Saint Kingdom. Its hidden potential also came out, enabling Axelar to impose his will on his surroundings to a much more extensive degree.

Ves could clearly feel the general's enormous willpower descending on him, scrutinizing him from every angle.

He already experienced this sort of pressure from Emma.

Axelar's willpower clearly couldn't match up against the Destroyer of Worlds, but the difference here was that Ves had stepped in close proximity to the pilot while he was actively interfacing with his machine!

Right now, the famed Terran leader took advantage of his strength to evaluate the mech designer whose design philosophy resonated with the Ouroboros in a strong and obvious way!

Seconds passed by as both sides fell into silence.

They were still at an exploratory stage. Just as General Axelar was able to glean a lot of information from a mech designer that had approached the center of his mighty Saint Kingdom, Ves collected information about the pilot by making observations from a spiritual perspective.

Everything produced traces. The powerful Saint Kingdom was the most direct and honest manifestation of General Axelar's willpower. The ace pilot practically bared his entire heart and conviction to those who were capable of appreciating them such as Ves.

Lucky began to squirm in the air as General Axelar did not ignore him either. The Renewer of Terra had encountered a lot of amazing tech over his years, but there were many aspects about the gem cat that were indecipherable or completely obscured from his sight!

"Meow..."

Even so, Lucky was just a cat. The Ouroboros was far more impressive on a comprehensive basis, so Axelar felt no need to intensify his observations.

The pilot eventually broke the equilibrium that had settled in the chamber.

"Let us speak frankly with each other. Can your man over there be trusted?"

General Axelar clearly referred to the presence of Gavin Neumann.

Ever since the assistant entered this solemn chamber, he tried his best to remain stable, but he was not that good at doing so. The pressure emanating from the Ouroboros along with the highly sensitive nature of this meeting was threatening to overwhelm the poor man.

Ves briefly turned to Gavin. "He can be trusted. I am sure of that. He might not understand everything, but that may change in the future."

The Ouroboros minutely bent its head. "I can respect your decision and attitude. Very well. He may stay and listen regardless of what we say to each other today. You will not be able to undo this choice if you happen to regret it later."

"It's okay. I will deal with the consequences myself. By the way, isn't it time for you to show yourself?"

"Hmm. It is time."

The Ouroboros began to morph. Armor plating separated from each other as its chest folded open.

A suited and helmeted figure slowly floated into view.

Despite rising up from his piloting chair, the sophisticated neural interface of the Ouroboros clearly showed no trouble maintaining a wireless connection between the pilot and his active machine!

The helmet slowly folded away, revealing a face that had grown much older than Ves last interacted with the man in person.

Ves and his Mastery host stared directly at each other. An invisible weight seemed to press upon them. The critical point was approaching.

"You... are the true designer of the Ouroboros." General Axelar finally spoke the words that he had always wanted to say. "I used to be much more ignorant in the past. I bragged about designing this great machine without knowing that I was spreading falsehoods. It was only later on that it became clear that I could have never designed this unique work. It was not me who designed my only mech, but you, am I correct?"

Ves tried his best not to radiate any alarm or resignation. Even if Axelar threw out this accusation in his face, that did not mean the ace pilot could be certain whether this was true!

"I do not know how you managed to come to this conclusion." Ves coughed. "If you haven't already noticed, I was born 60 or so years before the design and creation of your ace mech. I think you should understand the logic of your statement."

This was as much as Ves was willing to say. He feared that might give away too many clues if he mentioned more details.

The formidable salt-and-pepper haired Terran began to frown. He turned towards his lifelong servant next.

"Benny, give me your analysis."

"With pleasure, Master Axelar." The robed elder responded.

The man began to activate various different projections.

Ves almost widened his eyes as he saw a bunch of familiar scenes!

The archival security footage displayed a much younger version of Axelar Streon moving and acting with purpose.

From issuing instructions to Benny to manipulating the auto designer program with increasingly greater familiarity, it turned out that the Streons had always stored this footage!

Benny then proceeded to project other scenes. These ones showed Axelar in his more regular state.

The footage depicted him in a state of heavy intoxication as well as the times when he was completely sober after winning the mech duel that had been the start of his turnaround.

A highly advanced analysis program that came online. It quickly began to pick apart the body language, the speech patterns and countless other different social data points.

"A hundred years ago, I observed radical changes in my charge. I initially suspected that he had been compromised by one of our many rivals." Benny spoke in a clear and factual tone. "I immediately alerted my superiors and observed Master Axelar with great care. I received orders to not intervene so long as he did not act detrimental to himself or our clan. It came as a surprise to all of us that Axelar not only showed clear signs of being controlled by another person, but that he also acted in a manner that is completely beneficial to him. This has drawn our curiosity and made us decide to observe further."

Ves completely froze as he realized that the Terrans were way too perceptive about this kind of stuff.

From the first few seconds since he wrestled control over Axelar body, he already set off a lot of alarms!

"After extensive examinations during and after this event, we concluded that Master Axelar was not controlled by another personality of himself. Our conclusions have led us to believe that an external third party took control over his body. The question then becomes who was responsible for making Master Axelar behave so differently. We spent many decades tracking down the possible culprit, but we have never found any match. While we did not stop this demanding search, we slowly lowered its priority until it became a routine background process. This nearly forgotten process produced an unexpected match."

Benny waved his hand once again.

A pit of dread settled in Ves' stomach as he already guessed what might show up next.

The projections showed much of the public footage of Ves over his career. From his starting years in the Bright Republic to his most recent public showings on New Constantinople VIII, the Streon Ancient Clan collected huge amount of data!

The same analysis program ran through this new set footage. It quickly produced clear matches between Ves' mannerisms and that of the younger Axelar during the brief period when he was controlled!

"The data does not lie." Benny spoke. "From the moment I studied your behavior in all of your footage, I recognized the familiarity. Seeing you here confirms our hypothesis. As impossible as it may sound, you are the original designer of the Ouroboros."

Ves stood frozen as the Senechai presented irrefutable evidence of his meddling!

Chapter 5324 Deep Secret

As Benny explained his analysis that led to a shocking and arguably impossible conclusion, the Larkinsons became stunned!

While Ves was aghast at how much the Streons had been able to figure out with the data that they had on hand, both Lucky and Gavin couldn't believe what they were hearing!

How could Ves design a mech a century ago when he wasn't even born at that time?!

In fact, his father hadn't been born at that time either!

When the Ouroboros first came to life, his grandfather Benjamin was probably in his diapers.

How could a mech designer who did not exist during this time possibly design a mech?

It made no sense!

Yet as Lucky and Gavin continued to listen to Benny's plain but compelling analysis, they began to entertain greater doubts.

The clues all fell into place. When they saw how the younger Axelar talk and move, even they would be forced to admit that the Terran mech pilot resembled Ves quite a bit at the time!

There were too many mannerisms and speech patterns that clearly deviated from that of a meticulously trained and educated scion of the Streon Ancient Clan. It was irrefutable that a different individual managed to take charge of his body.

The real challenge was to tie Ves to Axelar. It was not enough to make an accusation. The Streons needed to provide strong and incontrovertible proof that a mech designer had somehow done the impossible and designed a mech before he was born!

It turned out that this problem was not that difficult to solve.

"I have studied the footage of Master Axelar when he was compromised to the footage of you, professor." Benny spoke with total confidence. "The analysis that I have presented to you is only a fraction of all of the calculations and pattern matching that I have performed in my head. My brain is highly augmented and much more digitized than the norm. The evidence overwhelmingly points to the conclusion that should not be possible, yet is somehow true. Inviting you here so that I can observe you in person in closer proximity is the final proof that we have sought to finalize our judgment. If my confidence level was 95 percent before this day, then it is 99.99 percent at this moment."

Ves wanted to twitch, yet he feared that would only push that confidence level even higher.

He messed up big time!

He never really thought about it, but how could the Terrans possibly be blind enough to miss so many drastic deviations among themselves?

What was worse was that Axelar Streon was not an ordinary Terran. He was a scion of a Terran ancient clan, and that was a big deal!

The mechers weren't the only people who had a penchant for monitoring everything. The Terrans could be just as bad, and the Streons clearly kept a close eye on all of their descendants.

In fact, Axelar's chief body and assistant was the main person responsible for this duty! Benny Smit was specifically trained to spot this kind of suspicious activity!

Ves had not made it difficult for the Streons at all to detect that Axelar acted completely outside of his established pattern.

Perhaps the Streons had stationed an elite team of operatives nearby.

As long as Ves did anything that threatened Axelar's safety, Benny and the operatives would instantly move into action!

The Senechai was not finished his story.

After providing overwhelming proof that Ves' behavior matched that of Axelar during this life-changing incident, Benny proceeded to play a recording of the auto designer program.

Ves instantly recalled this old and simplistic design interface. It possessed many elements that closely resembled those of a professional design suite, but it had been horribly simplified to the point where it behaved like a building game.

The sight disgusted Ves. At least the auto designer program improved by the Polymath was much more attuned to the needs of proper mech designers.

As the recording of the auto designer program continued to run, the initial version of the Ouroboros slowly took shape before everyone's eyes.

"This is the second major piece of proof that ties you to this incident." The Senechai spoke. "The skills, style, design choices and approach towards the technology at the time are wholly inconsistent to Master Axelar's past usage of the auto designer program. Not only that, but the design approach is wholly inconsistent with that of a first-class mech designer. We have developed a strong suspicion that the true maker of the Ouroboros was either a third-class or second-class mech designer."

"There are many third and second-class mech designers." Ves retorted, though his pushback was likely in vain. "In addition, my design style and design philosophy may be rare, but you should know quite well that the mech community is too vast. It is not impossible for other mech designers to apply similar methods, especially when they are teacher and student."

"We have already considered the possibility that the designer of the Ouroboros is your teacher, but the previous evidence that we have shown has already made that unlikely." Benny shot back. "Aside from that, the design approach to the Ouroboros matches your early works disturbingly well. This is not only my conclusion, but that of a respected Master Mech Designer of our clan."

A new set of projections appeared that not only showcased direct visual comparisons between the Ouroboros and Ves' many mech designs, but also contained a lot of annotations of a highly knowledgeable expert!

Although Ves hadn't been completely stupid and designed the Ouroboros exactly according to his style, he recalled that he hadn't been as careful as he should have been at the time.

Ves never imagined that a sloppy auto designed hero mech would actually be appreciated to the extent that it had grown to become one of the most powerful and renowned mechs in Terran space!

This massive oversight was the root cause why he had not put up his guard. He worried about other problems and never thought about how the Terrans could use all of the evidence he left behind to wait an entire century just so that they could finally trace the culprit!

Ves admired the Streons for their enormous patience and their persistence.

At the same time, he would have preferred for the Ouroboros to get scrapped and the Streons to forget about what happened so that they could never arrive at this shocking conclusion!

As Ves quickly skimmed over all of the technical analysis of the similarities between the Ouroboros and his many existing products, he couldn't even bring himself to deny the truth at this point.

Mech designers understood each other the best. The complications produced by the auto designer could not hide the definite connections between the Ouroboros and his other living mechs!

Benny even projected the only other serious hero mech that Ves had designed in his own name.

Ves took a few steps back as an enormous projection appeared right in front of him. The shape of a very familiar green expert mech rapidly took on definition.

Benny had projected an extremely detailed and properly scaled image of the Everchanger!



"According to our expert, your Everchanger has numerous traits in common with our Ouroboros. It can even be determined with a high degree of confidence that the design of the Ouroboros has preceded the design of the Everchanger. The latter contains numerous similar design elements that are more advanced and refined compared to its predecessor. We can conclude that you somehow inhabited Axelar's body before you designed an expert hero mech for your clan."

As Ves tried to muster up a response to this highly apt analysis, Gavin and Lucky already made their own judgments.

"Meow." Lucky betrayed Ves with his confirming nod.

Even a cat could see the similarities between the Ouroboros and the Everchanger!

Though Gavin possessed better sense than to issue his own response, he privately agreed with Lucky that the two living mechs were most likely designed by the same person.

General Axelar Streon himself issued his own verdict.

"I have piloted the Ouroboros over many years. I have grown familiar with almost every element and quirk of its original design. I believe it is not wrong for me to claim that I am your oldest client, Professor Larkinson. I know what I am looking at when I examine your famed 'living mechs'. It is easy enough for our clan to order a copy of every mech sold by your mech company. I already confirmed the relationship between my old machine and your more modern products."

The Ouroboros released a whistle noise.

Axelar smirked. "My steed can clearly recognize its own siblings. Even if your Pacifiers, your Ferocious Piranhas and your other living mechs are clearly more advanced, my Ouroboros is discerning enough to recognize they possess the same signature as its true designer. It is regretful that you did not see fit to bring your Everchanger with you. My machine is eager to meet with its little 'brother'."

Ves took several deep breaths as he tried to adjust his mentality.

He received so many shocks that his resistance had crumbled. The Senechai and the Renewer of Terra were simply too damn good at this. Ves didn't understand it at the time, but now that he had much greater exposure to first-raters, he knew that he had made far too many mistakes during that sloppy Mastery experience!

What happened today was the consequence of his own actions. Ves had no one else to blame but himself. Ignorance was no excuse for the fact that Ves foolishly intervened directly with the life of a prominent and carefully monitored first-rater.

Ves should have quit that Mastery experience as soon as it became clear he ended up in the mind of a heavy stimulant abuser!

So what if he squandered his points?

He could always earn more and save up for another Mastery experience next time!

Unfortunately, Ves had been so eager to earn his money's worth and salvage the disaster that he had befallen that he changed history forever, and not in an elegant way.

"Okay." Ves glumly said. "You got me. It is clear to me that you have already settled on the answer. Nothing I say can shake your conclusion. I might as well come out and say it. I... designed the Ouroboros. You... have been piloting one of my works all this time."

Though Ves did not like it that the worst-case scenario had occurred, a part of him felt... unburdened by this admission.

Every lie and every secret weighed down his heart.

Ves had always felt bad for deceiving Axelar and his assistant. What frustrated him more was that he could never take proper credit for designing the mech that had served his 'client' extremely well!

The significance of this relationship was huge to a mech designer like himself.

For example, Ves massively contributed to Irene Mox's incredible success. It was highly doubtful that she would have been able to advance to god pilot without the indispensable help of Emma.

The truth was that Ves did not feel much satisfaction or fulfillment for this particular accomplishment.

This was because he was a mech designer.

While it sounded rather strange, Ves actually took more pride and satisfaction in enabling General Axelar Streon to become a successful peak ace pilot.

This was because he had effectively done his job and provided his client with a highly suitable mech.

The Ouroboros was hardly the most ideal mech that Ves could have designed for Axelar, but it met his demands far better than any other fancy first-class multipurpose mech designed by his fellow Terrans!

Ultimately, the admission that Ves just made lightened his heart and eased his conscience.

He felt... more proud and in tune with his profession now that he no longer had to keep this secret to the people that cared the most about the Ouroboros.

Ves even held a bit of gratitude to the Streons for forcing him to admit this explosive truth.

Now, he needed to deal with the repercussions of this confrontation.

#### Chapter 5325 Lowered Barriers

The mood in the central chamber was no longer as heavy as before.

Now that the 'truth' had come out, much of the tension between the two sides had evaporated.

Ves no longer felt burdened by the need to keep this secret. The Streons finally obtained the resolution that they had been seeking since the creation of the Ouroboros.

The consequence of all of this was that the two parties instantly grew a lot closer. An important barrier had fallen.

Neither Ves nor Axelar were strangers to each other. They had already met a century ago. This made it so that the current meeting took on the air of a reunion rather than an introduction.

At this time, Ves had floated up so that he could casually sit down on the edge of the open ramp that led into the cockpit of the Ouroboros.

Lucky meanwhile gave in to his curiosity and flew around the exterior of the impressive ace mech.

The World Serpent System featured an extensive amount of fast-regenerating armor plating that was much more impressive than Rorach's Bone.

Lucky had never encountered such an amazing exotic alloy. If not for the fact that the Ouroboros was a living mech that already belonged to a top figure, the gem cat might not have been able to resist the urge to take a bite!

"Meow... meow..."

Gavin meanwhile hooked up with Benny and started to exchange stories and such. The who occupied the same positions in life, so it was easy for them to become familiar with each other.

Though Ves looked as if he needed a lot of time to process what had happened, he was actually studying the Ouroboros at a much closer proximity.

This was a precious opportunity for him to study a living mech of this caliber when it was being actively piloted.

Ves even sent out Blinky so that his companion spirit could examine the highly evolved spiritual design of the Ouroboros in greater detail!

While the living mech had become too perform for Blinky to get too close, it was not a problem for the Star Cat to make detailed observations at a healthy distance.

General Axelar did not mind all of the snooping. As far as he was concerned, Ves was merely studying his own work.

As Ves continually examined the state and operation of this deep and profound living mech, he turned his head and looked up at the floating general.

"I would have thought you would have asked how I managed to end up controlling your body in a completely different time period."

General Axelar smirked back at Ves. "Anyone would be curious to know the answer. We have formed many different guesses on how you managed to do it, but... this is not important to us. You have given us the answer that mattered the most to myself and the Ouroboros. I do not know what sort of forgotten alien technology or forbidden occult method you have employed to temporarily occupy my body, but it does not matter."

Ves found that difficult to believe. "Really?"

"There are many wonders in the cosmos. Trust me. I have witnessed stranger and more impossible feats throughout my career. As one of the martial leaders of the Terran Alliance as well as the much larger Greater Terran United Confederation, I have been privy to many secrets, far more than a man of your station can know. What you have been able to do is amazing alright, but I assume that you cannot displace yourself in time on an unrestricted basis. It would have been better for everyone if you could travel just a single decade back in the past and warn our society about the Great Severing, but since you have not done so, your manipulation of time must be subject to great restrictions."

That...was an interesting suggestion. Could Ves do it? Could he travel back in time and warn important people about the Great Severing?

Perhaps he could, but if his revelations were so destructive that it could destroy the timeline to the present day, then Ves might not be able to make this happen!

There had to be restrictions to this kind of stuff. He had a feeling that the Mech Designer System already did most of the work of preventing Ves from screwing up the entire timeline.

If Ves insisted on pushing the boundaries and played with forces that he shouldn't be able to control, then the System might employ other safeguards to preserve the correct future.

Perhaps he should put this assumption to the test. It wouldn't take too long before the Time Gate became accessible once again.

"I cannot even pretend to know how it works." Ves admitted to the older man. "I don't think red humanity should look back into the past for solutions. It is better to solve our problems by working towards a better future."

"Well said! Those are my thoughts as well, professor. There is no need for us to fixate on the past and measures on how to get there. As a soldier, I would much rather put my trust in more dependable tools and war weapons. My duty is to defend my ancient clan and superstate by eliminating any opposition with the help of my Ouroboros."

This was the attitude that an ace pilot should have. Instead of constantly looking for cheats or shortcuts, a true champion should fearlessly confront his adversaries!

Anyway, Ves could feel Axelar sincerity on this issue. The ace pilot genuinely did not care to pry into this greater secret.

The Terran leader could sense Ves' apprehension easily enough. It was not his purpose to discomfit the only mech designer who understood his ace mech's most important property.

Axelar's true goal was to solve all of the obstacles that prevented him from undergoing the greatest apotheosis of his life!

Compared to talking about strange and esoteric stuff like time travel, the only subject that truly interested a pilot like him was the improvement of his long-time machine!

"Have you seen enough?" Axelar asked.

Ves hesitated for a moment. "There is a lot of extremely advanced high technology stuffed in this mech frame. Each of them have a different impact on your living mech, including the aspects that affect its personality and growth trajectory."

"What is your point, professor?"

"My ability to control the variables that make up the Ouroboros is... limited. For example, let's talk about its craftsmanship. The Grand Mender has done an excellent job at elevating its quality to that of an upper-level masterwork mech. It is difficult to improve it any further, but it is trivially easy for me to regress its quality. I can make minor changes without too much trouble, but if I want to make a more serious attempt at solving the root of your ace mech's problems, then I need to be more hands on. This carries too many risks. As a Senior Mech Designer, I am not fully qualified to work on mechs this powerful."

That was not what General Axelar wanted to hear. The ace pilot frowned as he crossed his arms.

"The Grand Mender told me a similar story. She can do much to turn my Ouroboros into a resilient ace mech, but if I want to help it reach a higher state of existence, she is unable to solve the imbalance between creation and destruction."

Ves found it good that General Axelar possessed a clear and sober understanding of the flawed state of his machine.

The more Axelar recognized this problem, the more important it became to gain the cooperation of Ves!

"Do you want to hear a brief breakdown of my current thoughts?"

"Feel free to share your opinion, professor."

"Well, I don't think I need to go over all of your mistakes. You were ignorant to the property and the needs of your living mech back then. The consequence of all of this is that the Ouroboros has truly lost its balance. I have been able to see that you have been trying to compensate for this. The World Serpent System is admittedly an excellent addition, but it is far from enough to solve the true root of the problem."

"Why is it not enough?"

"By itself, the World Serpent System is the wrong medicine for your Ouroboros." Ves explained. "It stands for the wrong kind of creation. What it really needs is a reinforcement based on the power of life or creation. The armor system... doesn't entirely fit into this picture."

"Then what should we have done instead, professor?"

"Attain balance in a more direct manner. I coated the Ouroboros where one side is black and the other side is black. It represents the duality of my work and the synergies of both sides working together. A more thematic solution is to design two separate armor systems, one based on regeneration and one based on counterattacks or whatever. You can apply them on the left and right sides to match the dichotomy between creation and destruction."

General Axelar didn't know what to say. "Even I am aware that this is technologically different to develop, especially for an ace mech as strong as mine. Do you have a more practical solution? I have a hunch that you are not without other options."

Ves slowly nodded. "If I can tamper with the intangible design of your Ouroboros, it is possible for me to reform and reset certain stuff that can help your living machine return to a semblance of its old balance. The issue is that I probably don't have the strength to enact these changes. Due to its age and constant exposure to your feedback, your living mech's less tangible aspects have grown far too strong for me to control. I might not be able to get close enough. Even if I do, I may not be able to exert myself to implement the changes that I could have applied with ease on my younger living mechs."

The pilot rubbed his suited palm against the side of his cockpit. The Ouroboros was listening as well. The living mech was just as desperate for a solution if not more!

"What do you need to do to put you in a better position to repair my Ouroboros?"

Ves smiled a bit. He had an entire week to think over the dire state of his old work. He did not spend all of that time in vain.

"There are three possible answers that I can think of. The most direct one is for me to break through to Master Mech Designer. I am not sure if I will become strong enough to work on your Ouroboros, but it will at least put me in a better position."

Axelar immediately shook his head. "Rejected. The time it takes for you to realize your design philosophy can probably be measured in decades."

"The second answer is to weaken your Ouroboros. If you are willing to throw away decades worth of growth and accumulation, I can excise many of the intangible aspects that bias your machine toward destruction. If done well enough, it will bring your machine back into balance, but it may also revert your living mech to a weaker and earlier state."

"Also unacceptable. These years of growth represent the records and memories of our service over the years. My Ouroboros will become unrecognizable if I allow you to lobotomize it. I would rather leave it stuck in its current state than to lose my friend."

Ves was gratified to hear that Axelar truly loved his living mech.

"The third solution should be more palatable to your ears, but the difficulty of making it happen is not low. Since my strength is not enough, I can make use of an external variable to force the Ouroboros to accept my changes. This is extremely dangerous as I won't be able to exert a high degree of control over the process. However, as long as it works, I will effectively be able to apply much greater power. This should be more than enough to reform the Ouroboros."

"Hmmm. This is the best suggestion that I have heard." Axelar spoke in thought. "It is clear that success and failure hinges on this external variable. Do you need to borrow the power of the Grand Mender?"

"Not exactly. The truth is that I will likely have to borrow the power of a different entity."

"Who?"

"Have you heard of the existence known as Gaia?"

## Chapter 5326 Upgrade Problems

As Ves held a frank and open discussion with General Axelar Streon about the Ouroboros, the distance between the two had shrunk.

This was the power of secrets.

Holding secrets could alienate people from each other.

Sharing secrets with other people could also bring them closer together.

The latter occurred this time. Though Ves still paid a huge amount of attention to what he was willing to divulge and what he wanted to keep for himself, it was undeniable that he extended a lot of trust towards a Terran that he technically only met for the first time today.

Any outsider would become gobsmacked if they saw Ves getting along with a top-ranking Terran leader shortly after they met each other. Even if the Terrans valued the benefits Ves could bring to the table, they wouldn't show so much deference for fear of weakening their bargaining position!

The Devos Ancient Clan adopted a much more common approach. Time was precious, but time could also be utilized to make more observations and come up with better plans. The Devosans weren't too much in a hurry to conclude a deal with Ves right away.

Axelar was different. He not only recognized an opportunity to solve the root of his living mech's problem, but also intrinsically trusted Ves right away due to their 'special' history with each other.

This essentially allowed Ves and Axelar to sidestep their lack of familiarity, the gap in background and the gap in status and become friends right away!

Since Ves was willing to regard his former Mastery host as a friend who was worthy of trust, he did not hold back in explaining his outline for a possible solution.

"I am not sure if you understand the difficulty of altering the Ouroboros, so let me explain it to you with an analogy."

He waved his hand and projected an image of a generic shuttle.

"Let's say this is the initial version of the Ouroboros. This shuttle is rather basic and decent, but it doesn't do much more than transporting people from A to B. The only good point is that it is completely of my own design. That means that I possess a high understanding of how it is put together and what I need to alter in order to alter its performance in a targeted manner."

General Axelar looked bemused as he floated right behind where Ves was seated.

"People rarely equate my Ouroboros to an ordinary shuttle, but I can already see where you may be going with this. You are saying that once you have made and delivered the shuttle, it passed through the hands of many other designers until it has changed into a vessel that is completely different from your original layout, is that correct?"

"Partially. The basic essence has been preserved, but everything around it has become unrecognizable to me. I don't own these upgrades and additions, and I don't have the slightest clue how they work,"

Ves began to skillfully manipulate the projected image. It started to undergo a 100-year journey of continuous upgrades and expansions.

Initially, the changes were relatively small and tame. The thrusters had been replaced by larger and more powerful ones. The energy shield generator had been updated by a newer model. The contours of the shuttle became a little more streamlined.

However, every half generation or so, the shuttle became subjected to a major overhaul and revision.

In order to represent the jump from a standard mech to an expert mech, Ves no longer adhered to the limitations of a shuttle and directly upgraded it into an armed corvette!

This was a massive transformation, and one that made little sense under ordinary circumstances.

Turning a relatively modest personnel shuttle into a fully fledged starship that could traverse the stars represented an enormous leap!

However, even though the construction had been changed from inside and out, it still retained the vestiges of the original shuttle. The corvette still retained the color scheme, the themes and most importantly the living traits.

The projected vessel continued to evolve according to this pattern. Every year or so, the small warship gained better guns, stronger armor and other iterative upgrades.

Then, the corvette suddenly transformed into a destroyer one day, skipping right past the frigate ship class!

The destroyer became a light cruiser. The light cruiser became a heavy cruiser. The heavy cruiser became a battlecruiser.

Now, the mighty warship that had become over 6 kilometers long only needed to undergo one more leap in order to become a fully qualified battleship.

This also happened to be the most expensive and difficult overhaul by far!

A battlecruiser might look big, but her ability to withstand damage was not that great.

A true battleship according to the standards set by the fleeters was that she could resist almost as much damage as she could inflict!

Her entire hull and structure had to consist of the hardest and toughest defensive alloys that humanity could produce.

The vessel also needed to be equipped with the toughest energy shields and possess enough resistance against ECM, spatial effects and more exotic attack methods to remain impervious even when she was struck by weapons of mass destruction!

It was impossible for ordinary states to construct a proper battleship. Even the Terrans and the Rubarthans would have to make major sacrifices to construct such a vessel, not that they had a chance to do so when they were subjected to the taboo against warships.

This was a decent if not completely fitting way to denote the enormous difficulty of turning a peak ace mech into a machine that possessed the qualifications to become a god mech.

"Do you understand now, general?"

"I believe so." General Axelar furrowed his brows. "The transformation from a battlecruiser into a battleship is too much for a man who is only qualified to design a shuttle or a small starship at best. A project of this scope and magnitude is far too great for you to handle by yourself. I suppose we can involve a more qualified designer such as the Grand Mender to do the heavy lifting, but according to you, she does not have the power to solve the fundamental problem of my ship."

"Soliciting the aid of a highly competent Star Designer that you can trust will definitely be necessary." Ves told the other man. "There is no one better who is qualified to design the sheer amount of highly sophisticated technical transformations needed to turn a battlecruiser into a battleship. The true challenge lies in correcting the imbalance between creation and destruction that falls outside of the scope of physical parts."

"And this is where you have hit a wall." Axelar said as he crossed his arms.

"Pretty much. You need a specialist in this field, just like how ETL drives and superdrives can only be worked on by certain engineers. While I have mastered enough theory to roughly figure out what we must do, I do not have the strength or qualifications to make these crucial changes. We can solve this problem in many ways, but the one I am thinking about right now is to bring in a



specialized 'drive engineer' who should be able to address this issue in a certain manner. That entity is Gaia."

As a bonafide Terran, General Axelar was quite familiar with the legends and the descriptions of this ancient myth.

"Gaia is a mother goddess of humanity's distant past. She or other variations with different names are commonly depicted in old mythologies to deify Old Earth or merely the lands beneath their feet." The Terran leader said.

Ves responded with a restrained smile. "I know what you are thinking, general. What does this myth have to do with the Ouroboros or mechs in general? It is not easy for me to explain it all to you, but I can tell you that a powerful entity that bears the name Gaia may actually be of assistance to you and your machine. I think it is best for me to show you this in person. Do you have a set of tools around here that I can use to build something quick?"

"We can give you access to a materializer."

"Thanks, but I would rather work with my hands."

It was not a challenge at all for Axelar to arrange the teleportation of a high-tech workbench.

Ves instantly got to work. He briefly familiarized himself with the advanced tools and only used a fraction of their functions to quickly carve a piece of exotic wood into an image of Gaia.

Perhaps due to how well this meeting had turned out, the positive emotions that influenced Ves caused him to work particularly well.

The carved and polished wooden totem that depicted the mother goddess according to his last impression of her possessed a lot of charm.

Anyone who held it would feel the strong vitality contained within the living object. Gaia's presence completely spread through the hand-sized wooden object to the point that it might be easy to fool some people into thinking that it was the actual goddess!

Unfortunately, Ves did not manage to gain enough inspiration to turn it into a masterwork, but he was already happy enough that the totem managed to get close enough.

When Ves returned to the entrance of the cockpit and handed over the totem, the peak ace pilot keenly sensed the unusual traits contained within this unusual object.

"Many people have praised your craftsmanship, and I see it is not undeserved." Axelar commented. "Even so, your ability to tie a goddess of unsurpassed power into such a small object in a short amount of time is unprecedented. So this is Gaia?"

Ves nodded. "She is the embodiment of life and Old Earth. She also has strong relations to the power of creation. If we enact a plan to restore the imbalance in your Ouroboros by relying on brute force, we need a large amount of high-quality energy that is related to the power of creation. Gaia is the best collaborator that I can think of. The issue is that she is not like the other entities that I know. We need to convince her to lend her assistance."

"I see."

Axelar was smart. Not only that, but Ves remained deep within the ace pilot's Saint Kingdom all of this time. This meant that he could pick up on plenty of clues that had yet to be voiced.

The Terran leader understood that it would likely be difficult to gain Gaia's cooperation.

This was fine. Axelar did not fear these sorts of difficulties. What he truly feared was the inability to come up with any viable solutions!

So long as working with this foreign but powerful entity resulted in the desired gains, General Axelar was not afraid of making serious concessions!

"How do I make contact with Gaia?"

"Just call to her." Ves gestured to his latest handicraft. "I made this totem just to give you a convenient channel for you to communicate with her. Do keep in mind that Gaia is really powerful despite not having reached her prime condition. Don't try to play any games with her. Also, try and modulate your Saint Kingdom so that you don't make an aggressive impression."

After giving Axelar a whole list of warnings of instructions, the ace pilot finally attempted to make first contact with this 'Gaia',

The nascent but already powerful True God responded instantly.

In one moment, the central chamber was dominated by the active Saint Kingdom projected from the Ouroboros.

In the next moment, the totem flew out of Axelar's hands even as it began to glow with power.

As the carved wooden object floated a dozen meters away from the open cockpit, it began to release powerful energies that reminded everyone nearby of life!

Those energies did not spread uncontrollably but remained tightly contained as they slowly morphed into a feminine silhouette.

The Mother of Earth had descended on this location!

With a body that was seemingly made out of dirt and hair that resembled the branches of a tree, the manifestation of Gaia stared imperiously at the Terran ace pilot who requested an audience!

Compared to the last time Ves made contact with his former design spirit, Gaia had acquired a bit more humanity than before.

She had grown rapidly ever since the Age of Dawn had commenced!

As her glowing eyes swept across Ves, General Axelar and most notably the Ouroboros, she finally spoke her first words by directly vibrating the surrounding air molecules with her precise control over her own power.

"I know you, Terran. Speak."

Chapter 5327 Forceful Or Gentle

Ves hadn't really kept track of what Gaia was doing these days.

It couldn't be helped. Gaia was not one for small talk and she rarely had contact with the Larkinson Clan. Not even the other design spirits managed to strike a friendship with the powerful entity.

Though Ves had never really communicated with Gaia in depth, he had developed a pretty good idea how she had been doing all of this time.

From the moment of her birth, Gaia had spent a huge amount of time to absorb the massive influx of energy from her potent relationships with Old Earth and the huge amount of worshipers that revered the origin of the human race.

Her rapid growth forced Gaia to remain dormant most of the time in order to adapt, transform and master the rapid influx of power!

It was not until she had crossed an important threshold later on that Gaia surpassed a critical junction and became an actual True God!

Though Ves felt awfully ambivalent about it, Gaia was probably his most strongest creation to this date.

After all, Ves essentially created a True God from scratch!

Gaia was an accident of various coincidences and unique circumstances. It was unclear how much power she absorbed over the short years of her existence. It also remained unclear how much she became affected by the pollution from recklessly absorbing a titanic amount of spiritual feedback derived from an immense amount of people.

The Red Ocean's abrupt displacement to Messier Sy's galactic neighborhood had actually been a blessing in disguise for Gaia.

If the rapidly grown True God continued to remain in close proximity to the Milky Way and Old Earth, then she would have continued to get affected by a huge amount of external factors.

Would she still be able to retain her current personality under this onslaught, or would she get completely subsumed by all of the messy Terran thoughts?

All Ves knew was that Gaia should have been able to gain a huge amount of relief after getting displaced to this new environment.

She was not only able to catch her metaphorical breath and properly consolidate her growth, but she also became disconnected from an old planet that carried so much weight and history that it threatened to dominate her instead of the other way around!

The much lower population of humans in the Red Ocean combined with gaining access to a lot of relatively harmless and neutral E energy radiation allowed Gaia to strengthen herself without incurring as much sequelae as before!

This was a gamechanger to Gaia. Ves guessed that she had taken advantage of the much more favorable circumstances to stabilize her condition and gain much-needed cohesion.

This was why her ability to communicate had improved much better than before.

Unfortunately, Gaia was still stuck with the price of her incredibly fast rise to power.

His period talks with Cynthia along with learning from other sources had given Ves a better insight on the nature of True Gods.

The most important information was related to the huge differences between True Gods.

Their cultivation methods and their journeys all played a huge role in how they ended up after they became a post-divinity entity.

Out of all of the True Gods that Ves knew of, Gaia's foundation was by far the worst!

Her rapid promotion was both a blessing and a curse. Though it put her head and shoulders above other design spirits such as Qilanxo and Lufa, her foundation had never been as solid as theirs.

If the foundations of the other design spirits resembled that of a low but rock solid bunker that could easily support a lot of weight from above, Gaia's foundation resembled that of a rickety wooden tower that had already been stressed to the limit!

A single heavy blow from another True God would probably be enough to shatter Gaia's fragile foundation.

What was worse was that Gaia's ability to grow further had also been severely compromised.

Ves found it rather ironic that a True God that embodied the power of life actually possessed the worst life state out of all of her kind!

This was an extremely crucial deduction for Ves. It suggested to him that Gaia was not all-powerful to the point where she no longer had to care about the whims of humans. She possessed strong wants and needs that were probably difficult to fulfill.

So long as this was the case, then Gaia should be open to negotiation.

Perhaps this was why Gaia appeared so readily when called by General Axelar Streon.

Even though it must have been uncomfortable for her to extend her presence deep inside the domain field of a powerful ace pilot, she still took the initiative to present herself in a more approachable fashion!

Ves made a lot of guesses in his mind, but he did not dare to act too presumptuously. His familiarity with Gaia was too poor. What if she was mentally unstable? What if she was far too prone to anger?

It was better for General Axelar Streon to take the lead.

Despite the fact that he was primarily a mech pilot, Axelar had met with plenty of foreign and powerful dignitaries in the past.

The man clearly sensed the strength of the opposing entity, so he assumed a proper posture and made a short but respectful bow.

"Well met. I am Axelar of the Streon Ancient Clan. Professor Ves Larkinson here has stated that you may be able to assist us in helping the Ouroboros unlock its full potential. Do you understand what is wrong with my mech and do you know how you can remedy its shortcomings?"

Axelar's words and attitude made it clear that he wanted to address Gaia as a stranger who he considered to be his equal. He did not act subservient to her, but he did not try to lord himself over him either. He dispensed with much of the human formality and rituals because they were likely to produce greater misunderstandings.

In short, he believed the best way to address this strange entity was to be polite but direct.

Gaia had already swept the Ouroboros with her own senses before she spoke with a voice that was fairly soft but possessed a vast undercurrent.

"I understand what you seek. This mech is different. What you ask of me is possible, but not ideal. Your living machine has organically grown to this point. This is its truest state. To deviate from it is to reject the course of nature. If you insist on restoring a balance that has already been lost, then you can choose from gentle means or forceful means. Trying to inject the power of creation that does not belong to you or your machine is a disservice to you both. It can restore a balance on the surface, but as long as the root remains the same, it will never be able to persist. You will not be able to gain what you seek."

General Axelar frowned. He could understand the meaning of her words well enough, but he lacked the expertise to understand the situation well enough.

Ves was different in this regard. "I understand. General, it seems that my proposed solution likely won't yield the desired result. We can borrow Gaia's strength, but if we directly try to integrate it into the Ouroboros, then we will only be addressing the symptoms, not the causes. Balance is not just about forming an equal amount of creation and destruction. What is also important is that the two forces maintain a stable equilibrium. If the second condition cannot be met, then the Ouroboros will go out of whack almost immediately."

"Thank you for your explanation, professor. I can see now why that may be the case. Can Gaia assist us in another capacity, or do we need to solve the problem by ourselves?"

"That is not necessarily the case." Ves shook his head. "Gaia has just mentioned that we can employ gentler means to attain the same result. She has already given us a direction on how to do so. We can't borrow her power to restore the balance directly, but we can leverage her help to strengthen your living mech's own capabilities in this regard. The most practical solution is to strengthen the creation aspect of the Ouroboros."

That was a logical answer, but if it was that easy to do so, then Axelar and the Streon Ancient Clan would have done this a long time ago! Not even the help of the Grand Mender herself had been enough to balance out the ace hero mech's propensity towards destruction!

Ves began to consider various ideas. He could designate Gaia as the design spirit of the Ouroboros, but that was far from enough.

If he wanted the Ouroboros to get serious about engaging its creation aspect, then it needed to incorporate parts, modules and mech systems that actively did so! Ves would have to design or at least get involved in the process in person in order to make this happen!

"This is too difficult for me." Ves admitted to Axelar. "I am not qualified to materially work on a mech as sophisticated as the Ouroboros. The World Serpent System is unlike any armor system that I have ever seen up close, and the Genesis Rifle will likely blow up and destroy this entire space station if I remove the wrong component."

General Axelar frowned. "Is it not possible for you to collaborate with the Grand Mender?"

"The disparity of strength between the two of us is too great." Ves replied while shaking his head. "Even if the Grand Mender restrains her power to the utmost, I still won't be able to impart as much of myself onto my work as I wish. That is pretty clear given how much her design philosophy occupies the current iteration of the Ouroboros. Perhaps I will have a better chance if I advance to Master Mech Designer, but that will take way too long."

It seemed as if they had become stuck. While Axelar was happy to hear that there were possible solutions, none of them were easy or practical.

Gaia chose to speak at this time.

"There is no need to resort to these measures to restore the balance that you yearn so much for. Your mech is stunted but also filled with strength. It already has most of the nutrients that are necessary to undergo a metamorphosis."

That caused Ves to look at the True God with suspicion. An entity as powerful as her did not communicate without aim.

"Do you have any suggestions?"

The floating manifestation smiled.

"Creation and destruction are already present in nature. Linking your Ouroboros to this process may give it the blueprint necessary to restore its own balance."

"And I suppose you already have a choice in mind?"

Gaia's presence intensified. "I propose a transaction. I must bond myself to a planet that can represent the planet Earth in this galaxy. The requirements for this planet are strict. Assist in the search for this planet. Once it has been identified, you must destroy its inhuman ecosystem before terraforming it into a replica of humanity's cradle. Involving your mech in this entire process will grant it the enlightenment it needs to form its own balance."

That... was an esoteric proposal. Both Ves and Axelar understood the logic of it, but it sounded so strange and convoluted that neither of them could determine whether it could actually work.

Still, it sounded like a realistic enough solution that it may be worthwhile for them to pursue.

"Let me get this straight." Ves said. "In order for the Ouroboros to return to a proper balance, you want it to actively get involved in the terraforming of an alien planet. It sounds rather... simple."

General Axelar looked increasingly more hopeful as he thought about this proposal.

"No. It makes sense. Think of the name and symbolism of your old work. Its name represents the cycle of life and death. To destroy an alien planet so that we can create a human planet is what the Ouroboros should do! The order should not matter so long as we put equal weight on both activities. I can think of no better way to deepen our comprehension and connection to the forces of creation and destruction!"

## Chapter 5328 The Importance Of A Planet

There was a light at the end of the tunnel.

The tunnel might be awfully long, but at least General Axelar and the Ouroboros found a way to get out of it. This was massive progress as far as they were concerned!

As the Terran leader began to ask for further clarification from Gaia, Ves grew more suspicious.

Logically speaking, Gaia and the Terrans were natural allies. They both cared a lot about their roots to Old Earth.

Gaia could even be regarded as a product of the collective thoughts of the Terrans.

However, Ves did not automatically assume that Gaia prioritized the interests of the Terrans. Only her own interests mattered.

Even if Gaia had developed a dependency on the Terrans, that did not necessarily mean she had to care for each of them. Her proposal might sound innocent enough, but Ves did not think it was that simple.

"Let me ask you a question, Gaia." He spoke up again. "What are the most important requirements to turn a planet into a new version of Earth? I very much doubt that the Ouroboros can undergo a full cycle of destruction and rebirth with a random rock floating in space."

What was the catch?

Gaia shifted her head towards Ves. "The nutrients created from the destruction of an alien planet must be sufficient enough to fertilize the creation of Earth in this galaxy. A lifeless rock or one that only contains primitive life is sufficient. In order to mirror a planet that has spawned a successful space faring race, you must select another planet with similar conditions. It should preferably be the home planet of a civilized and highly developed alien race that is close to equal in strength to the humans in this galaxy." ,1 i>

This single condition alone was too harsh!

Neither Ves, General Axelar, the Ouroboros or even Lucky thought that it would be easy to satisfy this insane condition!

There were many races in the Red Ocean, but few of them possessed the capital to compete against red humanity even when the latter was cut off from the Milky Way.

This almost certainly meant that if Axelar and the Ouroboros wanted to find the planet of their dreams, they would have to invade the core territories of an alien race and commit genocide on the latter's home planet!

That was the easy part.

Destruction was not enough. It had to be paired with creation, which meant that the invading human forces had to stick around and do their utmost to terraform the globe that had just been cleansed of alien life!

Even if the Terrans utilized their best and most powerful terraforming technologies, the transformation of an entire planet could not be completed in a short amount of time!

Depending on how many resources and assets that the Streons could muster for this suicidal operation, their forces would at least have to stick around for an entire year!

However, the story did not end there. In order for the new Earth to live up to its name, it had to be permanently populated by billions of human citizens.

Only after satisfying all of these cumbersome conditions would the Ouroboros hopefully be inspired to undergo a fundamental transformation.

This meant that red humanity had to stick around and hold an extremely sensitive star system for many years if not decades!

Even after the Ouroboros successfully restored its balance and enabled Axelar to make his ultimate breakthrough, the new Terran god pilot would likely remain obligated to defend red humanity's new home planet against every possible threat!

Both Ves and General Axelar were clever enough to realize that the real winner of this arrangement would be Gaia.

Axelar did not appear to have any strong feelings for Old Earth. If he did, then he would have agreed to help Gaia realize her ambitious goal.

"Are there any other requirements?" Ves asked.

"There are other helpful criteria." The powerful entity spoke. "The planet must ideally be orbiting a G-type main-sequence star. The planet should possess comparable mass and ground composition as Old Earth. The planet should be orbited by a moon that is comparable to Luna."

That narrowed the eligible choices far too much!

"I doubt that there is any planet in the Red Ocean that satisfies all of these requirements." Ves mildly said.

"The conditions do not have to be valid at the beginning. A planet may be different at the beginning, but this is not a hindrance as long as it can be made into the image of Old Earth through terraforming. A moon can be created or towed from another location. All of these are profound acts of creation that will further your mech's connection to this force. Do you understand?"

That... made life a lot easier for General Axelar. He no longer thought that this suggestion was ridiculous. It was merely incredibly difficult.

"Has anyone identified a suitable planet as of yet?" Ves asked. "I know that a lot of your worshipers have joined forces in order to found a new version of Earth in this dwarf galaxy."

"They have found several matches." Gaia replied. "They have started their search by examining the home planets of the more powerful races of this dwarf galaxy. Several of them are acceptable, but they are located too far away from human space. For example, the home planet of the orven race is the most ideal candidate due to the resemblance between humanity and this race."

The orven home planet was located thousands of light-years away!

Trying to capture it and hold it on a permanent basis was impossible!

The only realistic way to fulfill Gaia's goal was to steadily gain more ground in the ongoing war.

Once humanity's front lines advanced close enough to the star system where orvens originally came from, the Terrans could make a forceful push and safely take it over without overextending themselves!

How long would it take to make this happen?

Given how badly red humanity was outnumbered at the moment, it would be a fantasy to expect linefighters to steadily beat back the aliens and conquer more territories.

It was much more likely for the opposite to happen!



Even if the best-case scenario occurred, it would still take an unknown amount of decades before red humanity could commence a serious takeover of the orven home planet.

This took way too long!

Both Ves and Axelar grew pensive.

"Wait. Does the orven home planet have to remain in its current star system, or is it okay for us to displace it to a completely different star system?"

"The planet of its origin does not have to remain constant." Gaia steadily replied. "If you have the technology and the means to transport an entire terrestrial planet to another system, then you may do so. You must take care that the destination resembles the Sol System to a greater degree."

Axelar gained a lot more hope! "Does this also have to do with the forces of creation and destruction?"

"Taking a planet away from its origin can be seen as an act of destruction. Moving it to another star system can be seen as an act of creation. All is perfectly balanced, as all things should be." Gaia solemnly spoke.

That made this mission a lot more realistic!

Holding an Earth candidate over the long term while being situated far away from friendly human space was impossible. Not even Axelar could justify such a suicidal mission. He would rather remain stuck as an ace pilot for the rest of his life than drive millions of Terrans to their doom!

It would be a different story if General Axelar Streon and his forces only had to invade an alien star system, wipe out all life on a home planet, and find a way to teleport it all the way back into human space!

"Wait." Ves jerked. "General, does your superstate have the technology to teleport an entire planet across a distance of hundreds if not thousands of light-years?"

"I cannot give you the answer." The powerful pilot shook his head. "Humanity in the Milky Way possesses this ability. The Big Two have been able to move entire stars from one star system to another. Humanity is much weaker in our current galaxy. We have lost access to the services of a great majority of Star Designers and god pilots. We may not have the means to teleport a single planet from one star system to another. I will have to make an inquiry through my own channels, but I anticipate that a readily available solution is not available."

That disappointed Ves. "If that is the case, then you may have to make a device that can make this happen."

Axelar concurred. "There are rumors that particularly phase lords are able to teleport entire planets under their own power. This means that it should be viable to produce the same effect through technological means. I fear that the conditions to make this possible is an enormous ordeal in itself. Not only must I convince a Star Designer to embark on a grand design, but I must also secure an enormous amount of funding, phasewater and other resources to make this superdevice,"

If the demands were too great, then it might not be worth it to go through all of this trouble.

While red humanity certainly needed all of the god pilots that it could get, the sacrifices had to be worth it in order for this ludicrous operation to make sense!

Ves stared back at Gaia. So far, this mission primarily benefited a non-human spiritual entity that was highly invested in repairing her incredibly frail foundation.

The fact that Axelar and the Ouroboros might benefit from this effort was more of a side effect than anything else.

There had to be a safer and much less extravagant way to balance out the power of creation and destruction of the Ouroboros.

It was a pity that Ves was unable to come up with any better alternative. Perhaps he needed to spend more time on this, but if he didn't get any new ideas, then fulfilling Gaia's goal may be the only realistic opportunity that Axelar had left to transform his ace mech!

Gaia withdrew her presence shortly afterwards. She had delivered her desired message. Now it was up to Axelar and the Terrans to decide whether they were willing to cooperate with her insanely ambitious scheme.

Ves felt rather bad for Axelar and the Ouroboros.

It shouldn't have been so difficult to solve a single problem, but Ves was too weak to offer any easier alternatives.

"We can continue to look for a more practical alternative." Ves suggested.

General Axelar remained silent for a few seconds.

"I will welcome any plan that allows my mech to unlock its potential without making too many sacrifices, but... the proposal issued by Gaia may be our best chance to transform our lives. There is much that you do not know about god pilots, Professor Larkinson. There is a popular theory that in order to attain this level of power, we must perform deeds that only gods can accomplish. These deeds must be legendary and affect as many lives as possible. Invading alien space, razing the home planet of the orven race before displacing it back to friendly space most definitely satisfies this requirement! The more I think about it, the more my heart and soul is convinced that this is the deed that can propel me to godhood!"

The Ouroboros echoed this sentiment by letting out a supporting noise!

Both pilot and mech were aligned on this issue!

Rather than to go through the tedious and frustrating process of reforming the Terran Alliance, the pair would rather invade the heart of alien space and rob the home planet of one of the 13 major races of the Red Ocean!

Ves almost couldn't believe how quickly Axelar lost his initial doubts and embraced this ludicrous fantasy!

Chapter 5329 Deeds Of Legend

The essence of a god pilot was to acquire the traits that were typically associated with gods!

How could a god remain completely obscure and unknown?

How could a god gain so much power but never actually make use of it in any major capacity?

How could a god receive so much admiration and worship when he had never actually proven himself deserving of this respect?

According to many mech pilots including those that had bridged the ultimate gap, a pilot who yearned to become a god must go out of his way to perform a godlike deed!

It was easy enough for a god pilot to exert the might of a deity. They had power in spades.

However, it was a different story when it came to ace pilots!

As powerful as Saints could be, their willpower could only grow up to a certain limit. Once they hit a limit, there was nothing that peak ace pilots could do to promote the magnitude of their resonance strength.

They fell short of obtaining the power of an actual god.

This infamous bottleneck had frustrated many heroes and champions in the past.

The General Axelar Streon and the Mace of Retaliation were just two among many who stood on the wrong side of a wide and desolate canyon.

If they attempted to reach the other side by performing an ordinary jump, then they would almost certainly fall short and plunge to their deaths!

How could they possibly reach their destination under the circumstances?

Many different theories had emerged. Humanity still understood too little about this deep and profound issue, but numerous advancements had emerged through a combination of clever deduction as well as trial and error.

"This is how the Mech Merger Body Process originally came to be. It is a systematic recipe that helps ace pilots transform into god pilots one step at a time." Axelar Streon generously revealed a secret that was only shared to a tiny minority of people. "Before the mech community came up with it, god pilot candidates simply stepped on the road to no return and tried to complete the processes of operation union, domain field union, corporeal union and total union in quick succession."

Ves reacted with shock when he heard this. "What?! That... that's dangerous! How could they possibly survive such an insanely demanding course of action?"

Trying to complete all four phases of the infamous Mech Body Merger Process sounded as insane as designing and constructing a complete battleship in the span of a few hours!

General Axelar gazed up in genuine admiration. "This is why all of us look up to the earliest and oldest god pilots. They have all managed to make the jump from ace pilot to god pilot in a single session. The risks they took at the time were astounding, and so was their potential. There is a theory that they all managed to sublimate their willpower and shatter the barriers of reality that held them back because they went all-out in trying to complete deeds that are worthy of legend."

This was a theory that Ves only heard hints of. His lower rank and lack of contact with the upper layers of society had limited his exposure to this kind of stuff.

Now that he had risen far enough that he was now on speaking terms with a genuine god pilot candidate, Ves could finally lift the fog that hid the essence of the mech piloting profession!

The crucial information provided by Axelar filled a lot of holes in his personal understanding of mech pilots. Ves immediately became engrossed by all of the answers and inferences he had derived from this conversation!

"I understand!" Ves spoke. "It is not necessarily the goal that matters, but the process of trying to reach it. By setting a seemingly impossible challenge for yourself, you will attempt to do your utmost to make it happen. The more difficult the challenge, the more potential you attempt to squeeze out of yourself. The high stakes and all of the expectations that other people set on you serves to increase the pressure that you are subjected to. All of this can help you push past a critical point and break through the limit of your power!"

Axelar smiled. "I believe the nature of the deed itself is also important, but you are correct that the process of fulfilling it is indispensable. Think about the ancient myths and timeless historical deeds of the human race. Those that manage to exist to this day all deserve to become an active part of our contemporary civilization because they are still leagues ahead of what ordinary people can do. To become a god is to be an inspiration to people. Mech designers such as yourself usually accomplish this by creating a work that only a god can make. Mech pilots such as myself must exert our martial might to the limit and beyond to do the same."

The general's words briefly reminded Ves of his speculative grand designs.

When Ves had been struck by inspiration and came up with the idea of developing a phase lord god machine, he intuitively thought that a project as massive and ambitious as this would be enough to trigger his advancement to a Star Designer!

That was because he was convinced that the scope, difficulty and results of this grand design could never be completed by a typical Master Mech Designer!

Only an entity comparable to a god was qualified to complete such an awe-inspiring project!

Though Ves didn't entirely feel comfortable about using the terminology of 'god' and such to describe this topic, he wasn't as bothered by it as he used to. There was no explicitly religious component to this discussion. Axelar only yearned to gain the power of a god. He didn't care about all of the other baggage that came with this loaded term.

"I guess it makes sense." Ves spoke. "A lot of god pilots had performed astounding deeds that broke the limit of what ace pilots can accomplish under their own power. The Light of Sol for example accelerated his mech in realspace without relying on warp drives and managed to travel at the speed of light. The Chosen Human simply became a god pilot at the age of 75, thereby setting a record that has never been surpassed. The Fist of Defiance struck down a leader of the Seven Apex Races whose strength was comparable to a god mech with a single punch. The Destroyer of Worlds shattered a heavily defended fortress planet with a single shot from the main cannon of her mech."

Whether the goal was important or not, it made sense that all of the pressure that the candidates subjected themselves to played a major part in motivating them to succeed!

Axelar suddenly grinned in amusement. "Would you like to know another secret, professor?"

How could Ves ever say no to this offer? He nodded his head without any hesitation!

"After the Age of Conquest had come to an end, humanity entered a recovery process that lasted for over four centuries. To be honest, our civilization has already returned to the peak that we managed

to attain during the heyday of the Age of Conquest. Yet despite possessing the power to do so, we never took the initiative to resume the great conquest and conquer the other half of the Milky Way Galaxy. There are many reasons why we held ourselves back from finishing the job. For example, the Big Two feared that we would start to turn on ourselves once we have eliminated every alien neighbor that poses a threat to us. However, the reason that matters the most to us is to provide god candidates such as ourselves valid targets to test ourselves against."

Ves widened his eyes!

This was a conspiracy!

"Humanity has been treating the Seven Apex Races as cattle to be farmed? Aren't people afraid that those aliens will secretly build up their strength and make a comeback one day?"

General Axelar shrugged. "Even I am not fully privy to the considerations of the people who rank above my head. I am still a tier 2 galactic citizen. The higher your galactic citizenship tier, the more you will come across these kinds of secrets. To be honest, I shouldn't have told you this information, but I personally believe this point is moot considering that we have become permanently separated from the Milky Way. I shared it with you in order to open your horizons and let you know the efforts we have made to grant a stage for god pilot candidates to perform."

In this regard, the situation in the Milky Way and the Red Ocean were similar.

The biggest difference was that the urgency to beat up the aliens was not so great in the former galaxy.

Setting back the indigenous aliens was a matter of life and death in the Red Ocean! The stakes were so much higher because there weren't hundreds of thousands battleships and a hundred or so god pilots collectively holding back red humanity's external enemies!

Ves began to understand the significance of deeds to pilots that wanted to shed the last vestiges of their mortality.

"How do these deeds play into the Mech Body Merger Process, exactly?" He asked.

"When we step onto the road of no return, we cannot reach our destination by taking a leisurely walk." Axelar patiently explained. "We must sprint from beginning to end and exert the utmost of our potential as we try to make it to our destination before we crash. The Mech Body Merger Process is split up into four phases, which means that we can complete them step by step. The problem is that barring the Chosen Human, few if any other god pilot has managed to complete all four phases by relying on their normal efforts alone. They need a powerful push, and deeds can make this happen. Typically, a god pilot candidate will seek to complete four appropriate challenges in sequence. Every successful deed can provide us with the impetus we need to complete an important phase."

That... was a much more manageable way to complete this life-threatening transformation process. It was quite brilliant in that it enabled the pilot to take his time and reach his goal by making more measured steps.

"What if the ace pilot fails in one of the four challenges?"

"Death is almost certain." Axelar gravely spoke. "This is no joke, Professor Larkinson. Success is the only way forward. A single weakness or mistake can doom our attempt at attaining godhood. This is why every ace pilot like myself must set our affairs in order, have no regrets about anything and maximize all of the conditions that we can control."

That was harsh, but fair. Ves understood that this was the price that any would-be god pilot had to pay.

Their combat power was unprecedented according to Cynthia, but the threshold needed to reach their level was also the highest out of all of the True God variations!

Now that Ves understood the context of deeds, he thought back on the original topic.

"So how does Gaia's suggestion fit in this framework?"

General Axelar couldn't help but grow enthused again.

"Think about it, professor. No ordinary pilot can lead an invasion of an alien home system that is located deep behind enemy lines. No ordinary pilot can destroy the surface of that alien race's home planet. No ordinary pilot can organize a heist on a cosmic scale. No ordinary pilot can lead the effort to terraform the stolen planet into a new homeworld for red humanity. The scope and difficulty of this deed surpasses that of most other accomplishments. This deed is only comparable to the mythical feats accomplished by the earlier generations of god pilots! If my expectations are correct, completing this planetary theft and conversion operation will be enough to blaze through all four phases of the Mech Body Merger Process at once!"

In other words, General Axelar Streon finally saw hope of becoming a god pilot in one fell swoop!

#### Chapter 5330 Long Overdue Updates

Ves did not have the right to make decisions on behalf of a peak ace pilot.

If General Axelar Streon wanted to stake all of his chances on a single throw of the dice, then that was his decision.

He understood the pros and cons of every possible approach quite well.

He knew that there were good reasons why most pilots like him embraced the more modern approach of going the four phases of the Mech Body Merger Process in four measured steps.

However, Axelar willingly threw aside this reliable option and embraced the suggestion made by Gaia without hesitation!

"To become a god, you must have the heart of a god." The powerful pilot lectured to the mech designer. "If a challenge resonates with you, then how can you live with yourself by rejecting it? This may sound idiotic to you, but every pilot will agree with me when they hear my words. Besides, the significance of this proposal goes far beyond my own advancement. Think of the impact on society if I succeed. If we have successfully stolen an alien homeworld and converted it into a copy of Old Earth, how do you think this will affect both red humanity and the native aliens?"

If Axelar and his Terran troops actually managed to pull off this grand heist, then the consequences would be massive!

Regardless if it resulted in the ascension of a new god pilot, Ves could already predict that red humanity would gain an enormous boost of confidence from winning a huge and unforgettable victory.

This was extremely important as it was conceivable that the upcoming intensification of the war would lead to massive losses over time.

If the aliens made good use of their advantage in numbers and made consistent gains by waging a war of attrition, then the morale of red humanity would steadily sink.

The more human forces got defeated and the more human colonies succumbed to alien invasions, the more people lost hope.

A single heroic effort could turn this trend around!

The daring planetary heist might not hurt the orven warmaking potential too much, but it undoubtedly represented a psychological coup against the aliens!

Many more people would become inspired by General Axelar's great success and regain the hope that they so desperately needed to fight for a better future!

On the other hand, the aliens would also suffer a severe blow, the orvens most of all if their home planet had been targeted.

Losing such a critically symbolic asset would definitely cause their morale to plunge!

It would show that red humanity was not to be trifled with and that it would cost them greatly if they persisted in the war.

The heavy blow might even spark discord between the different alien races. If cracks started to form in their relationships, then additional pressure might cause the aliens to cooperate less sincerely with each other, causing them to weaken even further.

Axelar Streon would be able to earn most of the credit for making all of this happen. His contribution to red humanity would become so great that he would become one of the greatest leaders of this new age!

Ves understood now why Axelar had become so fixated in Gaia's plan despite the fact that she could gain a lot of benefits while doing relatively little in return.

On the surface, the deal seemed lopsided.

On a deeper level, both sides got what they wanted out of this deal. Whether one party got ahead of the other was immaterial so long as they both became satisfied in the end.

"If you settle for this course of action, you will have to cooperate with Gaia from beginning to end. Are you sure you want to do this, general?"

The ace pilot nodded in determination. "I am certain. Do not be concerned. I am not naive. I will take the appropriate precautions, though I do not expect that they will be necessary. I have taken her measure. More than that, her gains are contingent on my own gains. If this planetary heist fails, the Terran Alliance is unlikely to embark on this effort again."

"I wish you good luck, then."

The meeting slowly came to a close after that. They had already talked long enough. General Axelar was eager to put his ambitious new plan together while Ves had to take on other obligations.

Before Ves bid goodbye, he wanted to take care of one important job.

He did not forget about the Ouroboros. The powerful ace mech possessed many shortcomings, but not all of them were deep-rooted to the point where Ves couldn't directly affect anymore.

"I can't make any major revisions on your living mech, but I can update its living traits." Ves said. "You can consider it as a long overdue software update. All of my current living mechs are operating on version 3.0, while the 'software' of your Ouroboros is still stuck on a mutated edition of version 1.0. By bringing your old machine up to date, I can not only plug a lot of easy gaps in its living operation, but I can also lift the ceiling that has held back its evolution all of the time. I expect that it can become a third order living mech in a short amount of time, which has massive implications for your machine."

He gave his former Mastery host a quick rundown of all of the beneficial changes that he could impart with relatively little effort.

He planned to impart a modified version of the Lesser and Greater Larkinson Metal Guardian Mantra into the Ouroboros. This would enable the machine to cultivate and grow stronger at a much faster pace. The modifications he applied would even let the living mech absorb more creation energy on its own accord, though the efficiency of this process should not be great due to various limitations.

Ves also intended to remove all of the barriers that prevented the Ouroboros from becoming a higher order life form. Once the Ouroboros evolved into a third order living mech, it would finally become a fully sentient life form that could cooperate with Axelar on an entirely different level.

In addition to that, Ves also intended to designate Gaia as the old machine's design spirit. This would give the Ouroboros another way to gradually reverse its current trend towards destruction while receiving additional guidance and supervision.

The changes that Ves intended to apply to the Ouroboros were a bit more than that, but he didn't bother to explain these minor details to Axelar.

The Terran leader looked both impressed and confused. "They do not sound like minor changes to me. If your words are true, then my Ouroboros will soon be able to complete a major metamorphosis that will increase its capabilities by leaps and bounds!"

"That is true, but from my perspective I am only bringing the Ouroboros up to the level of my other high-ranking living mechs. This is not a feat that deserves any distinction."

"I am already grateful for this. I will not let you work in vain. You shall have the friendship and gratitude of the Streon Ancient Clan, though it is best if we do not expose too much of cooperation to the public. We cannot let too many people know of my intention of completing a great deed."

Ves frowned. "The Terran Alliance is only being presided over by a single god pilot at the moment. Red humanity urgently needs more protectors. Are there actually people that hate you so much that they will seek to ruin your chance in spite of the damage it will do to our civilization?"



"Do not underestimate the selfishness of other humans, professor. It has happened enough times during the Age of Mechs. The urgency is much greater under the current circumstances, but we are still mostly the same people as before. I cannot rule out that the Rubarthans, the mechers or even other Terrans will take actions to suppress my plan. You should be able to discern their possible motives, so I shall not elaborate on them. While my plan cannot remain hidden forever, the longer it takes before it becomes exposed, the greater the certainty that I will be able to start the operation without suffering from too much interference."

Ves' heart had sunk when he heard this. He didn't really care about the power balance between the major human groups. If the Terrans became stronger by welcoming another god pilot, then that was good for red humanity as well!

Rather than try to sabotage each other, these silly groups were better off if they put more effort into nurturing their own god pilots!

Fortunately, Ves did not have to deal with all of this stuff. His only responsibility aside from introducing Gaia was to do whatever he could to fix the Ouroboros. Axelar and his people could deal with everything else!

Ves began to work. He entered the cockpit and started to manipulate the strong spiritual design with great care.

This was not a simple job. Ves had to employ the help of Blinky to push through the powerful design spirit's defenses and apply targeted changes.

It was not easy to apply changes in this case as Ves could only make peripheral changes.

He felt multiple times that if he attempted to alter a more sensitive part of the Ouroboros' spiritual foundation, he would trigger a defense mechanism that would boot him away!

Fortunately, Ves figured out plenty of ways to circumvent these adverse conditions. A qualified engineer or mech designer could always run rings around fixed processes so long as they possessed enough expertise.

It still took two hours to apply most of the upgrades that he wanted to impart. The minor revision was a success as far as he was concerned.

"I haven't fully been able to bring your Ouroboros up to standard." Ves carefully told the eager-looking general. "I think you should already be able to sense the various changes that I have made, but you should know that they are only a fraction as strong as they should. This is because I was forced to 'graft' many of my additions to the periphery of your mech. I hadn't been able to implement serious changes to its root."

"Will this lead to any issues?"

"Maybe. The main point is that the living properties of the Ouroboros won't be as strong as they should be for a machine of this caliber. Let me give you an example. Theoretically, your ace mech should have turned into a third order living mech by now. Instead, it appears that it will only be able to attain this state in a few weeks."

"Will these delays persist?"

"I am not sure." Ves shrugged. "My guess is that your Ouroboros will probably grow at a much slower pace. This may actually be better for your particular machine. Your living mech has built up an enormous accumulation, so much so that your partner cannot digest at once."

General Axelar looked a lot less upset after hearing this. "It is strange to hear that my Ouroboros is weak and incapable of enduring too much pressure, but I feel you may be right."

It was good for Ves to gain confirmation.

"Growth should never be rushed if possible. It may be better to drag out the transformation process so that your mech can gradually grow into the most living mech in the present time. I can assure you that I am pretty sure your Ouroboros will gradually reach its new peak in a few years. That should give you enough time to prepare for your hoisting operation."

The two talked a bit more about various issues related to living mechs. Ves wanted to keep track of the growth of the Ouroboros if possible, but this would be difficult when General Axelar had to return to the territory of the Streon Ancient Clan.

Still, Ves did not think the Ouroboros would need any adjustments or corrections after he applied his changes.

If anything serious happened, Axelar could always return so that Ves could perform another checkup on his living mech.