

The Mech 5611

Chapter 5611 The Sober Prince

Anyone who listened to the discussion between Ves and Prince Casevir would definitely be taken aback at the outrageous statements made by the former!

Ves had removed all of his filters and readily badmouthed the eminent Star Emperor!

Not a single Rubarthan subject could ever bring themselves to say such dangerous words in front of one a Rubarthan prince, who served as an extension of His Majesty and the Rubarthan state as a whole!

Back in the Milky Way Galaxy, such speech was enough to ruin the life of the violator. Unless the offender in question resided in a place like the Greater Terran United Confederation, there were plenty of touchy Rubarthans who were more than willing to dispatch their secret assassinations to punish the culprit and deter others from questioning the greatness of their sovereign.

However, the circumstances were much different this time!

Barely a year had passed since the Age of Dawn had arrived. Many people such as Ves had already made a lot of progress in adapting to the new circumstances, but there were plenty of others who continually clung to the vestiges of the past for all kinds of irrational reasons.

As far as Ves was concerned, all of these silly Rubarthans had become so indoctrinated by their state and the institutions around them that they literally could not imagine the idea that the Star Emperor was in any way infallible!

How was this any different from treating him as a god?

No matter how good of a statesman and administrator he may be, no human being was perfect.

Just because he managed to restore much of the New Rubarth Empire's economy, social order and national pride did not mean he was good in other areas!

For example, Ves was pretty sure that the Star Emperor could not pilot a mech or design one for that matter.

The Rubarthans may be unable or unwilling to say it, but Ves was different.

He clearly observed many glaring deficiencies in the child-rearing attitude of the illustrious Rubarthan sovereign. Different from everyone else, Ves was not afraid to share his objections!

As the Impresario Prince's brain had utterly crashed from the overload of critique towards his great father, Ves assumed a triumphant attitude while he continued to pet Goldie's back.

"Nyaaaaa..." The ancestral spirit relaxed as she enjoyed the attention of her progenitor.

The Golden Cat wanted everyone to experience the warmth and love of being surrounded by family!

The confused and befuddled prince was such a pitiful man in her opinion. As storied as his lineage may be, what was the point of valuing his family relations when his relatives had never shown him much affection in the first place?

When everyone in the Imperial Rubarthan Household treated each other as rivals and tools, how could there still be room for love?

A house like this could not even be regarded as a family anymore!

Ves continued to loom over the physical projection of the devastated prince as his words hammered home his argument.

"What are you afraid of, Your Highness? The Rubarthan Pact has severed its fate from that of the New Rubarthan Empire. The unworthy bastard of a father that has claimed the title of Star Emperor has no way to extend his authority all the way over here. We have entered a new time, one where your colonial superstate has gained the right to choose its own course. The sooner you Rubarthans recognize that you are freed from living under the toil of that mass womanizer, the better."

The prince finally suppressed his inner turmoil to the point where he could supply a more cohesive response to Ves' incredibly inciting words.

"Your words may ring with an element of truth, but that does not mean that I should completely forsake my imperial heritage and embrace your upstart clan. Becoming a part of your band of misfits is utter madness. My brothers and sisters will not be able to tolerate my continued existence if I subordinate myself to you. I may not have any chance of winning the throne, but there are more advantages to retaining my position in the Imperial Rubarthan Household than defecting to another organization."

Ves inwardly sighed. The prince resisted the temptation to completely make a break from his troubled past and reset his life.

It was to be expected. What sort of person would give up all of the status and privileges afforded to a prince of a first-rate superstate so easily?

When Ves spontaneously invited Prince Casevir to embrace the Golden Cat and join the Larkinson Clan, he never really had a high expectation for success.

What Ves sought to accomplish was to break open the stupid prince's overly rigid mindset!

As long as a sufficiently powerful external shock completely tore apart the Impresario Prince's flawed and outdated assumptions, the man could finally begin to analyze his circumstances with a fresher and more open-minded perspective!

Ves only needed to make a single opening in order to secure substantial gains from this conservation.

"You won't remain a prince forever." He continued to argue. "The Star Emperor probably has a few centuries to go before he finally croaks, but his lifespan has become irrelevant now that the Rubarthan Pact has gone adrift. Sooner or later, the succession battle will be decided. That will be the moment where you and many of your siblings in the Red Ocean will be stripped of your princely titles. Since this is the case, why not make a head-start in this transition and distance yourself from your dysfunctional house on your own terms? It is better to take your fate in your own hands than to leave it up to those who never showed any care of you in the first place!"

As logical as this argument may sound, it was still a step too far to the reluctant prince.

"No more, professor. I have already gone too far by listening to you insult my great father. I am not naive enough to believe that you are wrong, but I am not reckless enough to step too far out of line. I am not an immature child that needs to be coddled. I am more than capable of addressing my own affairs with the Imperial Rubarthan Household."

The Prince rose up from his work seat and stood with renewed vigor and confidence.

Despite all of the outrageous words that Ves had spoken to him, Casevir did not look upset at all. Now that he managed to sober himself up in a speedy manner, he recognized that Ves was trying to do him a favor.

Perhaps the infamous Devil Tongue could have adopted a gentler approach, but the chances of failure were much greater in that case.

The prince was not actually stupid. He fully understood that shock value had its uses.

The Impresario Prince recognized that not a single Rubarthan could have helped him as effectively as this foreigner. Even if they recognized the root cause behind Casevir's lack of progress in his art journey, they could never muster up the courage to point out his severely flawed relationship with his great father!

Perhaps that was why his mother as well as all of the renowned and expensive art tutors in the past never really helped him as much as Professor Larkinson. They were too awed by the oppression of the Star Emperor to cast any blame towards him. The renowned artists could only try to steer the clueless Impresario Prince away from the Seventh in order to live a life well outside of the orbit of his great father.

"Nyaaa nyaaa nyaaa." The Golden Cat cutely sounded.

Ves grinned as he scratched the spiritual cat's chin. "Goldie says that the darkness that has been clouding your mind has begun to fade. That is good, Your Highness. As a cultivator, you need to pay careful attention to your mood and your emotions. Cultivation causes anything you think and feel to be amplified many times over. If you are afflicted with murderous tendencies, then you are more likely to give in to your violent impulses. If your mind is at peace, then you will be able to remain sober during crises. No matter what you practice, if you don't like what it is turning you into, then I suggest you switch to another method."

"Thank you for well-meaning advice." The prince graciously said. "I do not require any assistance on that part. I understand what you mean. I will need to ponder on your lessons. You have given me far too much to think about. I am not willing to follow all of your suggestions, but your intervention has given me the perspective I needed to find a new direction for my art."

The Impresario Prince looked around his atelier and grew increasingly more dissatisfied with his works, no matter whether they were old or new.

The varied pieces of paintings, carvings and sculptures all looked aesthetically pleasing in one way or another. The prince had mastered many skills and techniques to an astonishing degree, and it showed. None of his completed works exhibited any visible flaws.

Yet for all of his technical mastery, the Impresario Prince's inability to comprehend love had caused his vision and his art direction to go astray.

His works were barely different from the soulless 'art' generated by artificial intelligences!

If not for the fact that his art pieces could all claim to be made by a direct descendant of the Star Emperor, they would have gained far less recognition in the highly competitive art sector!

When Casevir examined the fruits of his labor in the last few months and years from a very different perspective than before, it was as if a fog had been lifted from his eyes.

The works which he previously took pride in now seemed so inadequate and full of flaws that he spontaneously gained the desire to burn it all down!

Of course, there was no way a prince like him would give into such a self-destructive urge, but the point remained.

The Impresario Prince needed to start over again.

Only by resetting his current art direction and going back to his starting point would he be able to revive his passion in this profession.

"Nyaaaa."

Seeing that Goldie had successfully made a difference, the energy manifestation rolled in Ves1 one last time before fading away.

The warmth that previously affected the prince across the encrypted connection no longer influenced his mental activity anymore.

Casevir immediately felt the difference. A part of him wanted to request Ves to call Goldie back, but that would be way too juvenile and embarrassing to him. He still had to uphold his dignity as a prince!

Instead, he wanted to end this call as soon as possible so that he could put his life on the right track.

"It is impossible for me to forsake my house and defect to your clan, but that does not mean that I am unwilling to associate with you and your Larkinsons." The Impresario Prince ultimately announced. "Your sage advice has given me more help than anything that I have received from my fellow Rubarthans in the last handful of decades. I am not a man who lacks gratitude. I shall personally approve the deal that you have originally proposed. I do care about diluting my current stock in Isthmus Manufacturing. If I can gain your friendship in exchange for this sacrifice, then I am more than willing to make this concession."

Ves tried his damn hardest not to expose his grin!

"Thank you very much, Your Highness! I would be glad to call you my friend. The fact that you are able to accept my words makes me optimistic about your future. You have proven to me that you are a true artist. So long as you are able to rediscover the love of your craft, I am certain that you will quickly be able to surpass your current level."

The two continued to exchange platitudes to each other, but Ves didn't really care anymore.

The only concern on his mind was the fact that he successfully managed to swindle 20 percent ownership of an extremely lucrative first-class mech manufacturer out of the prince!

The best part about this transaction was that Ves did not have to give up anything substantial in return!

The only measure he had to take in order to win this foolish prince over was to continuously hurl insults at his deadbeat father!

Chapter 5612 Incredibly Lucrative

The negotiations between the Larkinson Clan and Isthmus Manufacturing sped up by an enormous degree now that the ultimate decision-maker had issued his verdict.

After Ves managed to gain the assent of his new imperial 'friend', all of the obstacles that stood in the way of taking over a part of the renowned Rubarthan mech manufacturer had disappeared!

No matter what the CEO or the board of directors thought, none of them had the power or the courage to oppose this reckless and extreme initiative.

Prince Casevir did not even have to supervise the process in person. He only had to issue a few instructions to his staff in order to get the ball rolling.

All of the other institutional shareholders that easily could have formed a voting majority to reject the proposal did not say a peep in the end.

None of them wanted to get on the bad side of a Rubarthan prince without sufficient cause!

It helped that the deal was not as one-sided as it appeared on the surface.

Isthmus Manufacturing not only promised to become one of the biggest corporate partners of a rising superstar in the mech industry, but could also begin to capture market share and earn high profits right away by putting the fantastic new Fey Fianna model into production.

Perhaps it was not a bad idea at all to trade short-term gains in order to secure the cooperation of a mech designer that might one day return value many times over in the long run!

It was just that the heavy dilution of stock that they had 'voluntarily' approved tasted very bitter in their mouths.

Even if their stake in the massive company only dropped by a few percentage points, that already represented a loss in value of billions of MTA credits at the very least!

First-raters may be a lot wealthier than their lesser counterparts, but even they did not dare to mess around with such vast sums!

The Larkinsons did not care about the obvious ambivalence from the other side. The lawyers, the business executives, the process engineers and so on couldn't restrain their ecstatic smiles as they worked to facilitate this humongous deal.

Their clan was on the cusp of forging its largest corporate alliance yet! This was the first time in its short history that it had managed to secure a partnership with a much more powerful first-class corporation!

Once both sides signed the final contract, the Larkinson Clan ascent to first-class had become a foreordained conclusion!

Just the massive amount of dividends that the Larkinson Clan could earn from a company that had always been profitable despite its heavy capital expenditures was enough to uplift every Larkinson to a first-rater!

Of course, Ves and numerous Larkinsons did not lose their minds after securing this insanely lucrative windfall.

The 20 percent stake in Isthmus Manufacturing did not come without a lot of strings attached.

It was all well and good to rely on friendship and mutual trust to ensure that Ves fulfilled his promises, but deals on such a massive scale should always be secured in a formal contract.

This was the reason why the negotiators on both sides had to work all night to hammer all of the subtle nuances and complicated details that their leaders never bothered to think about.

Ves did not worry too much that his negotiation team would botch the results. The leading figures had already set the trend. The staffers could only fill in the gaps.

As the contract rapidly started to reach completion, Ves received another update from his personal assistant.

"The Rubarthans agree to let the Larkinson Clan to gain a total of 20 percent of all outstanding stock in Isthmus Manufacturing." Gavin reported with a slightly more restrained smile than before. "This doesn't prevent further stock dilution or other events from reducing our ownership, but on the flipside we can also buy additional shares in the stock market to increase our weight in the company."

Ves shook his head in disapproval. "That is far too expensive. Neither the Impresario Prince nor I want to diminish our voting rights in the company. It won't happen so long as both of us are opposed to this measure."

"You're probably right. What truly matters is the conditions that the Rubarthans have tacked on to the contract. You won't be able to hold onto all of those juicy shares without meeting your obligations to the company. For one, Isthmus Manufacturing has already bought out the commissions that you have originally agreed to fulfill to the Colonial Federation of Davute."

Ves did not look too surprised. "It's a shame that I cannot fulfill my original responsibilities to Davute, but I hope that my former client managed to get a huge payday out of this buyout."

"The deal the Davutans manage to secure with the Rubarthans is completely voluntary." Gavin assured. "Our local branch over there has heard rumors that President Yenames Clive managed to leverage his position to extract a lot of useful concessions from the Impresario Principality. Davute expects to gain access to a lot of technological support, favorable trade channels, apprenticeship programs and lots and lots of cash. This will ease the deficit of his state and strengthen its foundation a lot further down the line. Besides, the Davutans also managed to retain the right to produce and field the commissioned mechs themselves, so it is not as if they are actually losing anything meaningful."

"I see. That is a remarkable result. What conditions do we have to abide by in order to uphold the deal?"

"Aside from fulfilling the original commissions, you and your mech company are expected to regularly supply Isthmus Manufacturing with mech models that can guarantee high sales. There is room for the occasional dry spells, but if you no longer bother with designing any commercial mechs one day, it becomes difficult to justify your continued stake in the company. The good news is that the contract is not solely dependent on your output. The reason why our clan is the legal

entity that will hold all of the shares is to spread the benefits and obligations to our other mech designers. If Ketis or one of the other lead designers manage to design a bestseller by themselves, they can fulfill the contract obligations on our behalf."

That was rather clever. Though Ves felt it was a bit of a shame that he could not place all of those lucrative shares under his own name, it was better and more reassuring to let his clan take over this heavy responsibility.

As long as Ketis, Alexa and the other lead designers became good enough, Ves would gain the space to spend his time on other productive activities.

"What else is in the contract? What about the exclusivity terms?"

"Just as you have previously agreed, Isthmus Manufacturing gains the exclusive right to produce, distribute, sell and provide after-market services of all LMC products within the borders of the Rubarthan Pact. The Rubarthan company will be able to do all of this while paying lower rates for all of these rights. Our clan and mech company must agree to never initiate any direct mech-related business activities by ourselves or through any other business partners. The time limit of this exclusivity clause is 98 years."

"So the deal ends at 100 AOD?"

"Yup." Gavin replied.

"The rules set by the Red Association don't prevent third parties from licensing my commercial mechs and producing them in their own factories before selling them in the Rubarthan mech market." Ves remarked.

"The negotiators already thought about that, boss. The solution to that is the lowered fees that Isthmus has to pay to our mech company. Isthmus is effectively allowed to license our commercial mechs at a considerable discount. This allows them to drive out any competitors by starting aggressive price wars."

"I see."

The downside to that was that Isthmus paid a lot less fees to the Larkinson Clan, but it didn't really matter.

The latter already owned 20 percent of the former, so the Larkinsons still profited one way or another.

"Do we still get to keep the shares after the exclusivity deal has ended?" Ves asked.

"Do you even need to ask that question?" Gavin raised his eyebrow. "This entire agreement is based on the assumption that you will continue to design better and better mechs. If the Fey Fianna is just the start, then you are bound to design much more powerful and profitable products years to come. Isthmus Manufacturing will be able to earn such an enormous windfall from these expected sales that its earnings far surpasses the present market valuation of those shares! It is more than justified for us to retain our ownership in the company even if we don't supply any further commercial mech designs."

That made sense. Ves had no objections to this arrangement, and neither did the Rubarthans.

Gavin proceeded to explain other details, but none of them were significant enough to change the overall calculus of this enormous deal.

This was a clear win-win arrangement. Even if the Impresario Prince regretted his emotional decision to approve the deal a few days later, there was not enough of a reason to break the contract once it came into effect.

Ves looked forward to gaining access to the enormous production capacity of this big industrial player. Isthmus Manufacturing was not only capable of meeting the expected demand from the middle zones of the Rubarthan Pact, but it should also be able to export a lot of output to the Red Ocean Union!

The Fey Fianna and the Supremo Project would be the first two commercial mech lines to take advantage of the vastly improved access to better infrastructure!

All of the production bottlenecks that persistently plagued the LMC in the past would disappear once Isthmus got serious about retooling its production lines to churn out living mechs day and night.

In the future, Ves could also take advantage of the company's mature first-class production facilities to meet the needs of his future Rubarthan consumers.

The profitability of first-class mechs was much higher than any other second-class mech!

With all of this recent spate of good news, Ves grew concerned whether anything could threaten this lucrative arrangement.

"What are our risks?"

"Well, if the Impresario Prince turns against us for whatever reason, we won't be able to profit much longer. You need to make sure you stay on his good side."

"Understood. I will make sure that this will never be a cause for concern." Ves seriously promised.

Gavin's expression grew a lot more serious. "The contents of your private conversation with the 5733rd Prince hasn't spread, but that is no guarantee. I have been able to listen in, and I am sure that His Highness pulled in his own trusted advisers. Any of us present a possible security leak. Your words will instantly generate a huge amount of controversy and attract a lot of opposition to us if they leak to the public. Nefarious parties can also use the threat of leaking a sensitive recording to blackmail us. You have put us all in great jeopardy when you pursued a high-risk strategy."

Though Gavin was right to be concerned about the repercussions of this crazy gambit, Ves did not show any obvious concerns.

"Hehehe. Is that what is weighing on your mind? It won't be a problem even if it leaks. Blackmail can never work if the victim doesn't really mind the penalty for non-compliance. As far as I am concerned, the Rubarthans need a harsh dose of truth in order to adapt to the new age. They can be angry all they want, but that doesn't make my words any less right. Even if they want to do anything to me, they can't. I'm an honorary member of the Red Association. Isn't it normal for the mechers to bully the Rubarthans and get away with it? If that is not enough, I can always ask a favor from the Destroyer of Worlds. The word of a god pilot should be enough to squash any open discontent."

Chapter 5613 What Is Love?

Ever since the Impresario Prince had his entire mind blown by talking to the Devil Tongue, he had completely set aside his usual duties in order to deal with a more critical priority.

Instability reigned in the Rubarthan Pact. The losses in the frontline continued to escalate. The post-Great Severing economy still hadn't fully recovered from the crisis that started a year ago. The increasingly more tumultuous succession battle had begun to divide Rubarthans in several different camps.

None of these weighty matters occupied the prince's mind at this time. How could the very real problems of the first-rate colonial superstate possibly exceed the importance of his flawed art journey?

The Impresario Prince lived for his art!

His principality and all of his expansive holdings within Rubarthan space turned him into a wealthy and individual man, but none of them could directly improve his progression as an artist.

In fact, it was precisely because his progress as an artist had stalled that he sought to earn his great father's approval by supporting other creatives and building a media empire for himself!

Yet none of this seemed to make a difference. Even as Prince Casevir started to gain more control over the culture of Rubarthan society, he barely had any room to exercise his influence for fear of stepping on the toes of many other Rubarthan princes.

Unlike Casevir, his more powerful brothers and sisters easily possessed the ability to retaliate against him! Their hard power was much greater than his own! Soft power was not enough to defend against their tyrannical moves!

Becoming a patron of the arts was just a joke in his eyes. So long as his accomplishments did not attract the attention of the Star Emperor, then it was no different from wasted effort as far as he was concerned.

At least, that was his previous mindset.

Now that the prince looked back at his unceasing obsession with earning his great father's approval, he suddenly felt that this was the true joke all along.

"I'm a clown."

Shame and other complex feelings filled his heart. Prince Casevir tried so hard to justify his behavior, but whenever he did so, the poisonous arguments voiced by the Devil Tongue surged in his mind.

Professor Larkinson may have been abrasive when he confronted the issue, but his logic was still sound.

Prince Casevir was willing to admit that much. He did not want to replicate his more stupid and impulsive princes who refused to admit their own faults due to their overwhelming pride.

As one of the weaker and less successful descendants of the Seventh, Casevir was all too familiar with confronting his faults. He just never dared to designate his great father as the root of his problem!

"It is never too late to correct my course." He told himself.

Many artists failed again and again before they found their own path to success.

Of course, the harsh reality was that the frequency of this happening was too low. Far too many artists ended up muddling their way through life and never managed to break past their ceilings for the entirety of their careers.

Casevir believed he was different from these failed cases. His technical skills had earned universal praise. The best art-oriented augmentations combined with the best teachings that the Imperial Rubarthan Household could arrange had made him good enough to produce masterworks in theory.

He only needed to fix his mentality and form a healthier mindset in order for his renewed art career to experience the renaissance that he had always desired!

A chime sounded in the prince's personal atelier, causing him to regain his awareness.

Compared to just a day before, the entire place looked drastically different.

The prince had grown so disgusted at the sight of all of his flawed and deficient works that he had readily ordered his men to throw them into the incinerator!

If not for the fact that all of his sold and donated artworks already turned into other people's possessions, the Impresario Prince would have ordered to retrieve these pieces as well before erasing them from this plane of reality!

"Sir? Your shipment has arrived." The voice of one of his assistants transmitted into the chamber.

"We have just completed a deep inspection and found nothing wrong. We can transfer it to you right away if you wish."

"Please do. I have been waiting for this shipment for too many hours now. I am impatient to begin my quest for love."

It only took a few minutes for a bot to enter the private work room.

The bot deposited a single box that the prince impatiently took in his possession. Casevir examined the markings as well as the electronic data attached to the container and nodded in satisfaction.

"You are finally here." He said with a voice filled with impatience.

He pressed a single button, causing the box to unfold on his favorite work table

"Mieu... mieu... mieu..."

The infusion of light seemed to startle the relatively young and sensitive kitten.

The juvenile cat flailed his adorably small limbs as he struggled to climb out of the clean white blanket that served as his bed.

Prince Casevir couldn't help but soften his expression as he beheld the kitten for the first time.

He had never adopted any pets in his life. His life didn't seem to have any room for one. He had always filled his time with studies, work and initiatives to improve his standing in Rubarthan society.

Let alone adopting pets, the Rubarthan Prince never even thought about starting a family of his own! He had long assumed that love and romance only slowed him down!

That was no longer the case.

From the moment he gazed at the black-furred kitten, his heart already began to melt. The warmth that had begun to slip through the gaps filled him with a sensation that he could only recognize as love and affection.

Laying his eyes on this precious and adorable kitten had a similar effect to coming into contact with the Golden Cat!

Of course, the ancestral spirit of the Larkinson Clan was much more powerful and impressive in any way. An ordinary flesh-and-blood cat could not compare against this radiant existence.

Fortunately, the prince did not mind the differences. He just wanted to obtain a cat for his own. Strength was not a criteria. The only factor that mattered to him was whether the cat was able to help him experience the feeling of love!

As Casevir carefully reached out and held the frightened kitten in his hands, his body heated up in a way that he had never experienced before!

Pure love started to flow from his heart!

"Mieu...! Mieu...!"

"Shhh. It is okay, my dear. Your new owner is here. I will take care of you from now on. You and I shall grow together for many years to come. Doesn't that sound exciting to you, my new pet?"

"Mieu..."

The helpless black designer kitten that he had ordered shortly after his latest meeting more than satisfied his expectations.

The Impresario Prince became overwhelmed by the release of all of the strange emotions that he had rarely experienced in the past!

The abundant surge of warm and fuzzy emotions produced strange reactions in his brain. His cool rationality suddenly took a backseat in order to make room for his new impulses!

For the first time in a long time, true inspiration had begun to visit his mind.

The prince began to come up with all sorts of new and fresh ideas on how he could commemorate this occasion.

From painting an image that utilized different colors to portray his changing emotions to reshaping metal into a stylized impression of this scene, Prince Casevir became delighted for the first time since he started to doubt himself.

This was because he personally confirmed that Professor Larkinson had been right!

The Impresario Prince truly needed to experience love in order to get back on the right track!

He became even more grateful towards the Devil Tongue. As his pleased and delighted eyes rested on his new kitten, he spontaneously came up with a name.

"Cara. Your name shall be Cara. As my Rubarthan Sentinel Cat, you shall stay by my side for the rest of my life. In turn, I shall attend to your needs and reciprocate all of the love that you have given to me. This is our contract. Do you agree?"

"Mieu..."

The prince had chosen to order this specific kitten with specific reasons in mind.

He ordered a kitten as opposed to an adult cat in order to experience what it was like to raise his own child.

Though he eventually intended to open his own heart and seek a real partner to share his life with, such affairs always took a lot of time to develop, especially for a man of high station such as himself.

Prince Casevir couldn't wait that long. His art reset was too important for him to get delayed by a number of years.

Although unusual, there was no rule that forbade him from adopting a cat right away.

He briefly struggled to choose which sort of cat he wanted to adopt. Ordinary house cats were beneath his status. This was why he directed his attention to various designer cats.

A Rubarthan Sentinel Cat was not an obvious choice. They were often associated with young girls as the cats were primarily designed to serve as their playmates as well as their animal protectors.

The designer breed had also become old-fashioned in the Age of Dawn. The company responsible for developing the product line had made sure to regularly update its gene template, but that did not stop Rubarthan Sentinel Cats from falling out of vogue.

The latest trend in the designer pet market was to develop a new category of pets whose genes were composed of an amalgamation of regular pet DNA and mutated beast DNA!

The goal of splicing and fusing all of these genes was to produce a superpet that was as docile as a modern cat but also developed the superpowers of one of the many mutated beasts that gained a lot of power from absorbing E energy radiation!

Though the results were incredibly mixed, even without mutations the designer pets still proved to excite their new owners!

Yet... a cat was all Casevir needed to experience true affection. He had known that the wife of the Devil Tongue had adopted a Rubarthan Sentinel Cat many years ago.

Since this breed was good enough to satisfy the Larkinsons, then it should surely be good enough to satisfy his own yearning for love!

He was glad that he was proven right. As Cara slowly started to grow comfortable in her new human's presence, Casevir continued to caress the black kitten's fur with more care and attention than when he applied the delicate brush strokes of his paintings.

"I love you, Cara."

"Mieu!"

"Ouch! Baby, don't hurt me! My finger is not your chew toy!"

As the Impresario Prince continued to coddle Cara as if she was the most precious gift of his life, his administration had worked quickly to finalize the biggest business deal in a long time!

The cooperation between the Larkinson Clan and Isthmus Manufacturing was pretty much set in stone. Ves had concluded the biggest deal by far at this point. There was little reason for him to stick around any longer.

After handling a few other miscellaneous affairs, Ves only awaited the conclusion of one more development before he was ready to depart from the Bortele System.

"Sir? The recruits have arrived. I have brought them outside your doorstep. Each of them are awaiting your summons." Alexa reported to her mentor after several days of absence.

"Are they any good?"

"I believe you will be pleasantly surprised. They are not as brilliant as you, but no Journeyman Mech Designer can make this claim. That aside, they are more competent in their own fields. The majority of them are direct disciples of many different Master Mech Designers, but I have made sure to emphasize that they will have to end their teacher-disciple relationships before they can join our clan."

"I see. Well, bring them in already."

Chapter 5614 Lead Designer Candidates

The Design Department of the Living Mech Corporation had grown enormously since its humble beginnings.

Starting from the time where Ves designed his mechs all on his lonesome back in Cloudy Curtain, the Design Department had slowly developed an extensive hierarchy as it continued to fill up with more and more personnel.

Granted, the vast majority of them consisted of young Novices and Apprentices who lacked any particular importance.

Low-ranking mech designers had their place, and Ves could easily name a dozen different names that had caught his attention over the years.

The issue was that their usefulness to him remained limited so long as they had yet to truly cross the extraordinary threshold.

Whether it was their knowledge base, their affinity to mechs or their ingenuity, they simply did not possess the ability to lead projects that could output mechs that satisfied the standards set by the Miracle Couple.

Only high-ranking mech designers could satisfy the needs of the Larkinson Army as well as the diverse range of customers of the Living Mech Corporation.

The Design Department currently employed 11 lead designers if Ves left himself out of the picture.

They brought enough design capacity to lead any small to medium mech company to prosperity!

However, all of them were currently Journeymen. It was not uncommon for mech designers of this rank to achieve commercial success, but their ability to penetrate the mech market was always limited due to the presence of so much competition.

The dominance of mainstream mechs made it far too difficult for Journeymen to compete directly.

Their only choices were to find a niche in a local market that was not being served by the big players, or to be inventive enough to design highly innovative mechs that could essentially create a new market all by themselves!

The incredibly harsh circumstances imposed by the mech market only allowed the very best Journeymen to establish a growing mech business.

These were the mech designers who not only possessed the skill and ingenuity to serve the market in very different ways than the general mech industry, but also possessed the finances, infrastructure, backing and other helpful factors to successfully convert their potential into real gains.

Ves was naturally one of the few success cases.

His living mechs brought value and fulfilled needs that everyone else did not even think about.

He had managed to design and sell bestsellers since his days as a third-class mech designer.

Now that he was on track to become a first-class mech designer, his latest products had already reached a stage where the combination of their intangible and tangible performance parameters had reached a height where they could actually challenge the dominance of mainstream mech models!

There was no denying that he was the driving force behind the LMC's meteoric rise. He was chiefly responsible for both the highly successful product reveal of the Fey Fianna line and the amazing market potential of the upcoming Supremo Project!

Yet the LMC's overwhelming reliance on its head designer also represented a vulnerability.

After spending so many years shouldering the business ambitions of the Larkinson Clan by himself, Ves grew tired of bearing sole responsibility of paying all of the bills.

This was why he supported the diversification of the Larkinson Clan's revenue streams as well as the development of all of his lead designers.

Each of them had the potential to rise above and excel in their own fields. Ves had always been careful about the selection of his external hires. They had to be young, talented and full of potential.

The upside to hiring them was that they were young and inexperienced enough for his teachings and indoctrination to take effect.

The downside was that it took a lot of them for them to realize their potential and live up to his expectations.

So far, only two mech designers had reached the level where they could partially take over the LMC's business and shoulder the Larkinson Clan's extensive financial burdens.

Though her range of output was a lot more limited, Ketis had risen up to become the best substitute for Ves. Her unique circumstances granted her advantages that enabled her to design swordsman mechs that had no equal.

Ves may have played an instrumental role in transforming her into a brilliant swordmaster and Journeyman Mech Designer, but her overwhelming passion, her unyielding work ethic and her raw talent enabled her to stand out from her peers.

Her rapid growth and rise came as an enormous relief to Ves. He knew that if he disappeared tomorrow, the LMC would still be able to earn enough revenue to support the current state of the clan.

Gloriana was also a mech designer who had grown a lot. Although she was unwilling to lead design projects centered around mass production mechs, her ability to turn every custom mech into a masterwork over time was worth a fortune!

Although the Larkinson Clan had yet to utilize her god body method on a wider scale, Ves knew that even first-raters were willing to pay a fortune to obtain a custom mech that could evolve into a masterwork after a time.

Alas, this was the extent of Larkinson mech designers who had grown strong enough to share his considerable burden.

The remaining 9 lead designers still needed years if not decades to come into their own. This was nothing unusual among Journeymen, but Ves was not sure whether red humanity would be able to last long enough to give the remaining Larkinson mech designers enough time for development.

Ves was most pleased with Juliet Stameross and Sara Voiken. Both of them specialized in mobility and defense. These were two basic but indispensable aspects for any mech design. It was no surprise that the two Journeymen managed to accumulate a lot of practical experience as a result.

Their workloads may be a lot heavier than their other colleagues, but their persistent efforts rapidly polished their design skills and allowed them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a wide variety of mechs!

The remaining Journeymen were not bad either, but they lacked the time, accumulation or opportunities to shoulder greater responsibilities in the near future.

This was why he encouraged them all to undergo EdNet training. The accelerated simulated learning program was exactly what they needed to speed up their progress and promote the quality of their work in a hurry.

It was partially because he had sent so many mech designers off for EdNet training that Ves had to put special emphasis into recruitment.

Ves had a habit of making decisions that primarily paid off in the long-term. This usually worked out well enough, but in this case it had hollowed out the Design Department in a time where the LMC needed to refresh and expand its current catalog of commercial mech models the most!

"I truly hope your batch of new recruits can address the acute manpower shortage in our Design Department." Ves spoke to Alexa as he rose up from his seat and awaited the arrival of the first candidate. "How many Journeymen did you manage to bring over this time?"

"25."

"WHAT?!"

"You underestimate how attractive you have become as an employer." Alexa smirked. "Aside from the qualities that you have long been known for, the events that recently took place on this planet have elevated your stature even further. The Fey Fianna is arguably the best second-class mech designed by a Senior. Countless mech designers want to learn from you and receive guidance on how to excel so quickly. The fact that every lead designer is entitled to receive a custom companion spirit from you is a powerful bonus."

"It's not so easy." Ves shook his head. "External help can only bring them so far. I can only increase their potential. It is up to them to do the hard work required to surpass most of their peers."

Alexa did not argue against that. "Even if you cannot help them as much as they wish, they can still take advantage of your rapid ascent. The attempted assassination attempt exposed your relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds. While no one knows how close you are to her, even a casual relationship should be enough to propel you to the top of the first-class mech industry within a century. This may be the last chance for second-class mech designers to hitch a ride aboard your shuttle."

That may be the real reason why Alexa experienced much less difficulties in bringing in a lot of qualified candidates.

"I understand. Since we have so many names to go through, we should start right away. Do you intend for me to recruit all of them, or do you expect me to filter out a few of your candidates?"

"I have tried my best to make a careful selection based on the needs of our clan and your personal preferences." The former Terran mech designer said in a professional tone. "In theory, all 25 candidates should be able to earn your approval. However, your judgment is different from mine. It should not impact our plan too much if you reject a part or even half of the potential recruits that I have selected."

"Hmmm..." Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin. "In that case, it is best if I hold the candidates to a higher standard."

He had several ways to do this. He retrieved the Larkinson Mandate and placed it on his office desk for easy access. He also primed Blinky to take a deep look at the spiritualities of his candidates.

"Bring in the first one."

A young man came in. He looked to be in his early thirties, but possessed a sense of confidence and poise that spoke of superior upbringing.

"Name?"

"Viktor MacMillan." The man answered in a crisp accent.

"Design philosophy?"

"Class III. Close-Surface Energy Shield Systems."

Oh?

Ves immediately developed a greater interest in this candidate. The Design Department had long been lacking in defensive specialists, especially ones who possessed particularly strong attainments in the development of energy shield generators.

While Sara Voiken and Beatrice Hendrix both excelled in designing powerful armor systems, this was not enough to satisfy people's needs anymore.

The rapid advancement in energy shield technology in the last two mech generations had caused them to become a lot more practical than in the past.

They had always been known as energy-hungry gadgets, but never delivered a satisfying degree of protection until fairly recently.

The rise of phasewater technology and hyper technology had rapidly turned energy shield generators from a luxury to a necessity for many second-class mechs!

It was high time the Design Department hired an actual energy shield specialist.

Ves currently wondered whether Viktor was the only candidate that possessed this kind of specialization.

After he sent a silent transmission to Alexa, she discreetly replied through the same channel.

There was another candidate who specialized in energy shield systems. That came as a relief to Ves. The Design Department truly needed all of the help that it could get to elevate the energy shields of all Larkinson mechs to a higher standard.

Right now, Ves was wondering what made Viktor MacMillan's work special.

"Please summarize your design philosophy." Ves commanded.

"I specialize in developing energy shield generators that can project shaped energy shields that can take on much more complex shapes than usual." Victor quickly explained while maintaining his confidence. "This allows my energy shields to follow the contours of a mech much more closely. Dynamic monitoring and rapid adjustments can prevent the energy shields from colliding with the limbs of the mechs and continue to provide effective protection at a considerably lower burden due to lack of wasted coverage."

"Interesting. What else makes your energy shield systems more effective than others?"

"The efficiency of my energy shields can be brought to another level by activating one of my proprietary software programs that can dynamically regulate the activation of my energy shields, thereby reducing the strain to the energy shield generator and energy reserves of the mech by over 70 percent. It is not completely foolproof, but it can activate energy shields fast enough to block over 95 percent of incoming attacks."

Chapter 5615 Viktor MacMillan

It did not take much time for Ves to understand the gist of Viktor MacMillan's strengths as a mech designer.

The man studied at an elite mech design university and managed to demonstrate enough talent and other qualities to become apprenticed to a Master Mech Designer.

Once he started to receive special tutelage, his progress took off. He rapidly increased his understanding of all of the necessary fields related to energy shield systems.

More than that, Viktor MacMillan also learned many of the well-established design solutions of his Master, thereby enabling him to immediately design mechs with a mature set of defenses!

However, just because he inherited the design philosophy of his Master did not mean he was resting on the laurels of his elders. Years after he set out on his own and emigrated to the Red Ocean, he had been working to increase the efficiency of his master's signature invention even further.

MacMillan did not have the scientific and technological accumulation to substantially improve the core mechanisms of close-surface energy shield systems.

This was why he diverted to improving the control systems instead.

Most mechs with energy shield generators tended to activate them whenever they were about to enter into a dangerous situation where attacks could come at any time.

While energy shields tended to expend energy a lot more rapidly when resisting incoming attacks, they also strained the power reactor even when they were running idle.

That was a considerable waste, especially if a battle dragged out over time.

Keeping an energy shield generator running even when they weren't necessary at the time also wore out a lot of components and increased the heat buildup of a machine.

All in all, if there was a way to keep them inactive during all of the times when the mech did not actively face any dangerous pressure, then that would do much to extend their presence in the field!

"Let me get this straight." Ves said as he analyzed what he heard. "The close-surface energy shield system is your Master's work, while the dynamic energy shield activation system is your own solution. Is this correct?"

Viktor curtly nodded. "That is so, but I have not dedicated all of my later years to developing the latter. I am still dedicated to improving my Master's work in my own way. I have mainly been doing this by adapting phasewater technology and more recently hyper technology to close-surface energy shield systems. Once I have grasped both new fields to a strong degree, I hope to develop a new category of energy defense that can offer comparable protection to azure energy shields but at a much greater efficiency."

Ves asked a few more questions related to Viktor's most recent mech designs and design solutions. It quickly became clear that the candidate was primarily focused on increasing efficiency and reducing waste.

These were good goals to strive for, because energy shield systems generally imposed a heavy burden on a mech, particularly second-class and third class ones.

The value of his design philosophy was a bit lower when applied to first-class mechs because they no longer struggled to sustain the operation of a hungry energy shield generator.

Even so, efficiency never lost its usefulness.

"How is the performance of the dynamic energy shield activation system that you have developed in extreme situations and edge cases? Can it maintain the same 95 percent block rate when the mech is targeted by energy weapons?"

"My proprietary software cannot achieve this success rate when it is being attacked by energy weapons." Viktor MacMillan plainly admitted. "My activation system is most effective at efficiently blocking physical projectiles. Their velocities are much slower than the speed of light, so there is always enough lead time for my energy shield to rise to full power from a special standby state. Laser beams travel at the speed of light, so it is impossible to react after the energy weapons have opened fire. My system heavily depends on sensor input or external data feeds to carefully monitor the actions of opposing mechs and warships. There are usually indications when they are about to open fire. Even exotic alien weapons with strange operation rules can be deciphered by the adaptive learning component of my software after gathering enough observation data."

That sounded fairly useful, but Ves still felt this was a gimmick that any decent high-ranking mech designer could come up with. They just didn't bother to do so because they had better things to do with their time.

So far, Ves' impression of Viktor MacMillan was not entirely good. The man had yet to develop any truly strong or original design solutions by himself.

However, his foundation was strong and he still had plenty of time to refine his specialization in the future.

"How large are your energy shield generators?" Ves questioned. "Can they be small enough to fit inside a light mech?"

"The efficiency of my energy shield systems has made them much more suitable to be mounted into smaller and lighter mechs. Their energy shields can last up to three times longer due to all of the energy saving measures that I have implemented." Viktor proudly answered.

That meant that Viktor MacMillan was an efficiency-oriented mech designer. He mainly sought to improve his mechs by making his systems cheaper, less demanding and more long-lasting.

This did not mean he ignored the need to improve the hard defensive parameters of his energy shield systems, but he did not obsess over it like other specialists.

This made Viktor a lot more suited to work on lighter and more limited mech designs. Larger and heavier mechs possessed a lot of capacity for everything. Efficiency was not that big of a deal. Instead, they pursued greater power even if they generated more waste!

All in all, Viktor was a good addition to the Design Department. His work was already relevant to the LMC's many second-class mech models, which meant he could be put to work almost right away.

"Before we proceed, do you have any questions about the job that you are applying for? I am sure that Miss Streon here has already given you plenty of answers, but she is a fairly recent hire so she doesn't know everything."

Viktor MacMillan was not shy about asking questions.

"I have heard from your disciple that each lead designer has the opportunity to obtain an EdNet quota and undergo an accelerated deep learning training program that entirely takes place in virtual reality. How can I earn this benefit?"

Well, the man certainly had a definite goal in mind. Ves was not surprised that a Journeyman like him developed a strong desire for this rare reward. There were few second-class employers who would ever think about allocating their rare and precious quotas to unrelated mech designers.

"Our clan has accrued over a dozen permanent EdNet quotas, and we will earn more in time." Ves calmly answered. "Currently, anyone can redeem this quota after earning enough Larkinson merits, which you can earn by making any sort of contribution to our clan. It is not difficult to earn Larkinson merits by performing your normal duties, but if you want to get a head-start and outpace your peers, you will need to work harder and be more inventive in your solutions."

"How many merits must I earn in order to secure a quota?"

"The redemption price of an EdNet quota is affected by supply and demand. There are many Larkinsons who are yearning to undergo up to 20 years of focused learning in order to be promoted to first-raters. However, mech designers play an especially important role in our clan. They have priority on any quota. As long as you are decent enough, you should be able to redeem this reward within 10 or so years provided that you have not spent your Larkinson merits on other attractive rewards."

This was reasonable. Ves wanted to hire a lot of Journeymen in order to expand the Design Department's pipeline for second-class mech designs.

If he made it too easy for these mech designers to earn an EdNet quota, he wouldn't be able to get any use out of them in the short term!

While it was possible for first-class mech designers to go back to designing second-class mech designs, the Journeymen still needed to put in the hard work and prove their dedication to the Larkinson Clan before he was willing to lend them a hand.

"I have heard that the lead designers of the Design Department are able to receive one of your impressive companion spirits for free. Is that true, professor?"

Ves nodded. "That is true. This benefit should ordinarily be redeemed for Larkinson merits, but our manpower shortage in the Design Department is so great that I am willing to suspend the requirements and grant people companion spirits upfront. You can consider it as prepayment for all of the services that you will render in the future."

"It is an investment and not so much a welcome gift." Viktor said.

"That's pretty much correct. Companion spirits can open up a lot of possibilities for mech designers. They can also help you speed up your understanding of hyper technology and work around our proprietary design solutions a lot better. I can guarantee you that you will become a much better mech designer once you acquire a helpful and supportive companion spirit."

This was everything that Viktor MacMillan needed to hear. He was completely sold. No other second-class or first-class mech company was willing to provide comparable benefits to their Journeymen!

Seeing that both sides were happy with each other, Ves held up the Larkinson Mandate and gestured Viktor to come close and place his palm on the purple and golden book cover.

"I hope that you have prepared yourself for this, because you will only receive one chance. Please make your oath and pledge your loyalty to the Larkinson Clan."

Viktor did not appear to have any strong attachments to other organizations, because Goldie approved of his joining without issue.

A spiritual connection seamlessly formed between the two. From today onwards, Viktor MacMillan had become the latest member of the Larkinson Clan!

"That... proceeded faster than I expected." Viktor said with evident relief as he started to get acclimated to all of the additional sensory information fed by the Larkinson Network. "Thank you for taking me in, professor. I am grateful that you have accepted me into your fold. I am eager to start my work on your mech design projects."

"There is no hurry for the time being. You are not yet familiar with the Larkinson Clan. You will need to spend at least a couple of weeks to understand how we operate before we are ready to assign you to a mech design project. In the meantime, you should already gain access to our extensive internal library. If you do not have any ongoing assignments, I highly recommend you take advantage of our learning resources. I have written a few guides on hyper technology that should be of considerable interest."

"I shall read them right away."

Ves soon dismissed the eager new Larkinson mech designer.

"Good find, Alexa. I hope that the rest are at least comparable in quality." He commented after Viktor left. "1 down, 24 more to go. This is going to be a long day."

Ves continued to bring in the candidates one by one. Each of them possessed different backgrounds and origins. Their specializations also differed a lot from each other.

However, they also possessed a few common traits that made them highly desirable to Ves.

None of them were older than 40.

None of them developed any low-value design philosophies.

None of them possessed any obvious personality disorders.

What Ves cared about the most was that almost all of them were young Journeymen who used to be direct disciples of various Master Mech Designers.

The key was that their Masters had all been left behind in the Milky Way Galaxy!

This meant that all of this high-quality stock was much less dependent on any other existing forces.

It shouldn't take much effort for the Larkinsons to instill a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to the clan!

Chapter 5616 Harry Haikkonen

After Ves interviewed the sixth candidate, he had already started to lose interest in the particulars of the candidates.

Prior to this day, Ves treated every lead designer as a treasure and a high-value investment. Each of them deserved to receive his personal attention because of their importance and their scarcity.

Now that the Design Department was about to welcome a lot of new Journeyman Mech Designers at once, they should no longer be as scarce as before!

As such, Ves already felt it was not worth his time to befriend and familiarize himself with every individual lead designer.

"Should we even call them lead designers by this time?"

It may be wise for Ves to reorganize the Design Department and add additional layers to the hierarchy. It would be stupid to contend with 30 so-called lead designers at the same time!

In any case, Alexa Streon had done a good job at selecting these applicants. Ves had yet to find a single reason to object to their entry into the clan, so it was highly likely that all 25 of them would become Larkinsons by the end of the day!

Since this was the case, Ves should take advantage of his high position to delegate the management of all of the individual Journeymen to a trusted mech designer.

This would leave Ves free to focus on his own projects.

If any of the new recruits managed to excel and stand out from the pack, Ves might have reason to pay renewed attention to them. So long as they became as good as the likes of Gloriana and Ketis, Ves was more than willing to elevate their status in the clan!

However, much like Viktor MacMillan, the new recruits had yet to develop sufficiently enough to shoulder the burdens of the Larkinson Clan by themselves.

If they did manage to reach this esteemed height, then there was no need for them to apply to Ves. They were already qualified enough to start their own successful mech company!

As the Journeymen continued to enter the office and present themselves to their latest employer, Ves found out that over half of them previously worked in other respectable mech companies based in the Bortele System.

However, once they learned that the Larkinson Clan was looking to recruit new Journeymen, they quit their jobs as soon as possible and sent their applications right away!

They took considerable risks to join the Larkinson Clan. If their applications got rejected for any reason, then they had to look for an entirely different job.

While mech designers of their caliber should always be able to find employment, the hassle and the disruptions to their lives were still considerable!

Only one other mech designer managed to arouse a greater degree of interest than normal.

"Name?"

"Harry Haikkonen." A tall, straight-backed mech designer wearing a clean gray business suit responded.

"Design philosophy?"

"I inherited my Class II design philosophy from my Master. It is called Precision Focus Laser Weapon Systems."

Ves immediately perked up when he learned that the tall Journeymen specialized in energy weapons!

"Interesting." He said with a smile. "So your mastery of laser beam weapons is particularly high?"

The man slightly relaxed his posture and started to express his passion. "That is correct, sir. Laser weapons are one of the basic and most fundamental weapons of our civilization since the Age of Stars. Humanity has come in touch with many powerful weapon systems since that time. There are many advantages to using positron weapons, plasma weapons and Destroyer weapons, but despite the growing competition, the most simple and basic laser weapons have never lost their relevance."

It was so interesting for Ves to meet a fellow connoisseur of laser weapons. He immediately understood where Harry Haikkonen was coming from. After all, his luminar crystal weapons also made heavy use of laser beams.

"Laser weapons are versatile, efficient, scaleable, economical and most importantly effective at much longer ranges since their output travels at the speed of light."

"Exactly, professor!" Harry's eyes lit up. "Laser weapons may not be the most powerful choice available to our customers, but they are most effective in spaceborn battles due to their ability to strike at targets that are beyond the range of other weapon systems. However, their effectiveness at closer ranges are not as good. This is where my design philosophy comes in. It is a means to dramatically increase the effective damage inflicted by laser beams at close to medium range."

"Wait, what? Shouldn't precision focus laser weapon systems be oriented around designing armaments that can attain greater accuracies at longer ranges?"

"That is a common misunderstanding. While I am capable of designing precision rifles that are optimized for sniping enemies at longer ranges, my main body of work is different. Many of the mechs that I have designed have all subverted the conventional rule of thumbs when it comes to machines armed with laser weapons. They are still threatening at range, but they are even better when they dogfight their opponents. This is because of the special focusing crystals that I have added to the weapons."

Ves grew more and more interested in Harry Haikkonen. He truly thought that a design philosophy that included the word 'precision' should have been oriented towards marksman mechs, but it turned out that the energy weapon specialist primarily designed mechs that were not afraid of brawling enemies up close!

"What is special about your focusing crystals?"

"I am glad you asked, professor." Harry grinned. "As you know, every laser weapon uses a focusing crystal to even out the laser beam that emerges from the weapon barrel. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the focusing crystals are shaped to straighten the beams as much as possible. The goal is to attain a perfectly straight beam that can maintain perfection cohesion at a theoretically infinite range. This is impossible to attain in practice as the imperfections of the focusing crystal as well as other flaws prevent the laser beams from dispersing across longer distances."

Trying to make energy weapons fire perfectly straight beams was as difficult as telling a person to walk a perfectly straight line for several kilometers on a completely flat and featureless plain.

While Ves heard of high-tech solutions that enabled certain models of first-class multipurpose mechs to achieve this exceptional result, the cost was so prohibitive that it was completely unaffordable for second-class mechs!

As Harry talked, Ves already started to get an inkling of what precision focus laser weapon systems actually meant.

"So your weapons are different? They don't fire perfectly straight laser beams?"

"Yes. That is correct! The focusing crystals of my laser weapons are deliberately more convex in shape than is necessary to produce straight laser beams. Every time my laser weapon opens fire, it unleashes a laser beam that narrows in width until all of the energy of the attack converges on a single point in space! This is the coordinate where all of the power of the weapon discharge is concentrated to the greatest degree possible! Any adversary that is struck by a precisely focused beam will suffer much greater damage than getting hit by a straight and less concentrated laser beam!"

Alexa had already grown familiar with Harry's design philosophy, but this was completely new to Ves!

He readily understood the advantages of being able to land precisely focused laser beams onto a target.

The concentration of damage was much greater, which effectively meant that it became a lot easier to pierce through armor!

Laser beam weapons generally possessed fairly poor penetration power because it was far too easy to disperse their firepower over a much wider surface area.

However, if rifleman mechs started to fire more precisely focused energy beams, the concentration of so much firepower in a tiny surface area would dramatically produce a greater impact on any solid matter!

Even energy shields would find it difficult to withstand these attacks. It was much easier for energy barriers to resist attacks that were more evenly spread across their surface. Highly concentrated attacks induced much greater strain on the energy shield generators as they struggled to resist a spike of outside pressure.

Still, as much as precision focus weapons sounded better than more conventional energy beams, they still possessed one overwhelming flaw.

"As far as I recall, energy weapons that fire converging energy beams have never managed to catch on due to the difficulty of attaining perfect focus on targets, especially fast-moving ones." Ves pointed out. "The advantage of conventional laser weapons is that straight beams are just as deadly at point-blank range and at longer ranges. So long as they strike the target, the mech pilots can be assured that their attacks have dealt consistent and predictable damage. This is not the case if energy beams are only able to attain their optimal damage potential in 3 dimensions rather than 2. The failure rate must be high."

"It is not as bleak as you think." Harry said in a familiar fashion. He must have met many doubtful mech designers over the course of his career. "My Master has worked hard to reduce the limitations of this approach. The key component is the focusing crystal. It is not a pure crystalline object, but it is also organic. This results in a focusing crystal that can increase or decrease its convexity very quickly with minimal lag time."

Ves nodded in understanding. "That indeed sounds useful. The faster the focusing crystal can change the distance where the laser beam converges all of its power to a point in space, the more applicable it becomes. However, this shouldn't be enough. The focusing crystal must concentrate the energy beam at the precise position of a mech in a very small window of time. That requires a lot of data and prediction."

Harry already had an answer for that as well.

"This is why all of my ranged mechs are paired with the accompanying software and hardware adjustments." The Journeyman offered his prepared response. "My mechs should ideally be mounted with special weapon systems that can precisely track and observe the coordinates and movement of enemy mechs and other targets. The mech's software should be able to process this data as quickly as possible so that the focusing crystal can reach the right level of convexity to deliver a perfectly focused laser beam attack at a designated target."

All of this sounded incredibly complicated. Multiple different mech systems had to work together in order to produce the desired results. If just a single link in the chain faltered for whatever reason, the mech could forget about landing precisely focused beams!

"How consistently are your mechs able to achieve perfectly focused hits?"

"It is quite high. Qualified hits happen at roughly 80 percent of the time against most mechs and starfighters. Light mechs and more mobile starfighters are more difficult to pin down, especially when there is heavy jamming, but effective focus can still be attained 30 percent of every hit. You should know that faster targets are usually less protected, so a concentrated laser beam attack can penetrate their defenses much better than more conventional attacks. It is not impossible to cripple an opposing light mech with only a single salvo."

That certainly sounded impressive, but Ves reserved his judgment. There had to be other complications to this quirky weapon system.

"What if the mech is unable to fire or land perfectly focused laser beams? Any laser beam that has missed perfect focus and has already dispersed over a distance is unable to inflict much damage to an enemy target. Getting hit by a dispersed energy beam is not much different from getting illuminated by a spotlight."

Harry did not look concerned at all. "Rest assured that my laser weapons are all equipped to deal with this contingency, professor. My organic focusing crystals can be reset to their neutral states. This means that they function no differently from ordinary focusing crystals that are solely capable of producing straight energy beams. This should be more than enough to preserve the combat effectiveness of my ranged mechs."

5617 Vast Increase in Net Worth

Ves became delighted with the new batch of mech designers. Alexa Streon had proven her competence and usefulness in an excellent manner by making an incredibly thoughtful selection that closely matched his own intentions.

Each of the new recruits easily satisfied his minimum expectations. Many of them brought additional extras to the table, such as the ability to independently develop custom mech systems.

With all of the range of specializations that this large group of Journeymen introduced to the Design Department, it became theoretically possible to design a mech completely in-house without relying on any third-party licenses!

Of course, it was far too slow and inefficient for the Larkinsons to invent the wheel themselves all of the time when there were perfectly serviceable licenses available on the open market.

It was still better to have those specialists around than not. Ves knew it would make a massive difference in all of his mech design projects going forward if he was able to consult the expert opinions on essential parts and systems such as sensors arrays, gauss weapons, power reactors, light mechs and etcetera.

He already had a good taste of that when he collaborated with Master Decimus Horst on the Supremo Project. Not only was the academic Master a font of wisdom in the field of heavy artillery mechs, but he was also able to utilize his extensive network of contacts among his peers in Davute

to obtain high-level technical support, but he could also gain a lot of direction just by exchanging ideas with a diverse range of experts.

In short, the addition of so many confident and motivated Journeymen was bound to enrich the Design Department and significantly raise the quality of all of the output going forward!

The only headache that Ves had to deal with was the need to manage all of the strong personalities that had joined the clan all of a sudden.

Due to special reasons, high-ranking mech designers enjoyed an eminent status within the Larkinson Clan.

Sure, expert pilots such as Commander Casella Ingvar and more recently Venerable Benjamin Larkinson received a lot of respect from the rank-and-file.

However, the Larkinson Clan had been set up from the ground up as an organization where its military branches strictly answered to its civilian administration and not the other way around. Nobody knew whether this structure could be maintained in the long run, but for now the strong leadership exercised by Ves, Gloriana and Ketis had already set the pattern that the leading mech designers possessed the strongest voice in the clan.

That needed to change.

While Ves was more than willing to entrust the likes of Juliet Stameris and Sara Voiken with greater responsibility, the latest batch of Journeymen had yet to prove themselves in any way. It would be too unreasonable to give them actual control over an important arm of the clan.

Ves continued to struggle over how he should reorganize the Design Department as he prepared to depart from the Borte System.

There was no need for him to do any further publicity or relations management. Much of the LMC's product catalog was still outdated and badly needed to get refreshed, but its sales were doing better than ever due to all of the Fey Fiannas getting sold!

It went without saying that the modest amount of inventory that the LMC's manufacturing complexes managed to produce in the past few weeks had already been wiped out in an instant! What was even more ridiculous was that the fixed customers of the LMC who managed to gain priority over their orders immediately proceeded to resell their new mechs on the second-hand market again.

The brand-new Fey Fiannas hadn't even been pulled out from their large shipping containers before they got sold to rich customers who readily paid 5 to 10 times the market price just so that they did not have to wait for many months to finally receive their new hyper drone mechs! What these people did not know was that the Living Mech Corporation had finally solved its persistent lack of production capacity.

Hours before Ves was scheduled to teleport back to the Bluejay Fleet, he and his staff paid a visit to the local branch headquarters of Isthmus Manufacturing.

As a large mech producer that was highly active in both the first-class and second-class mech market, the big company also possessed a substantial footprint on Borte III.

It was here that Ves and his entourage received a warm welcome!

Banners of both the Larkinson Clan, the Living Mech Corporation and many other Rubathan symbols hung from the high ceiling of an elaborately decorated ceremonial hall.

Many executives, managers and VIP customers of Isthmus Manufacturing attended the important occasion while dressed in their best formal wear.

Everyone briefly fell silent and waited with baited breath as Ves took an autopen and 'signed' a materialized version of the extensive contract that had just been finalized in the early morning!

The physical projection of the Impresario Prince appeared in the ceremonial hall as well. He had no need to make use of an autopen and simply used his exquisite calligraphy skill to produce a dazzling signature!

Ves minutely widened his eyes as he saw Prince Casevir deliver a small performance in public. Compared to the depressed and despondent artist that Ves met the first time, the Impresario Prince of today exuded a much more optimistic demeanor!

While the Rubathan prince certainly knew how to present himself in public, Ves was pretty sure he could still discern whether a person was faking it or not. There were plenty of signs that the Impresario Prince had genuinely managed to turn his life around.

This happened way too quickly!

Ves expected that a tortured soul like the Impresario Prince would take many months to get over his lifelong obsession over his father and start living for himself for a change.

Yet barely a few days had gone by, and he already started to present himself as a man who had successfully managed to reinvent himself!

Even though this was just the start of his turning point, the fact that he had managed to make the first and most crucial step of all was incredibly significant!

As long as he persisted in this new course, Prince Casevir was bound to utilize his impressive skills and his accumulated experience into producing a new wave of art that truly reflected his passion!

After he had signed the contract with an impressive flourish, the Rubathan prince directed a sincere smile at Ves.

Many people who witnessed this important occasion wondered how Ves managed to develop such a tight relationship with the 5733rd Prince.

The two did not share any direct relations with each other before this week. Yet now that they came together, Ves and Casevir readily conveyed the impression that they had already become good friends and allies!

Now that the Larkinson Clan had obtained a heavy chunk of Isthmus Manufacturing, Ves had officially made an entry into Rubathan high society!

It didn't matter that he had yet to step foot inside the Rubathan Pact. His prior relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds and his recently instituted partnership with Isthmus Manufacturing caused his voice to gain real weight among the Rubarthans!

Isthmus Manufacturing had not even introduced the Supremo Project yet. After it had managed to gain ownership over this commissioned mech design, the company's entire top management team began to work day and night to formulate the biggest marketing campaign to date!

A heavy artillery mech that actually possessed the ability to channel a fraction of the power of a Rubarthan god pilot deserved no less!

Though the potential sales potential of the Supremo Project was even greater than the Fey Fianna line, it took a lot of set up in order to roll it out properly.

Not only were heavy mechs a lot more troublesome to fabricate in most standard mech factories, their typical clientele also expected to receive much more extensive service for these specialty products.

In short, it would probably take at least a month for Isthmus Manufacturing to be able to introduce the Supremo Product to the public in a hurry.

Word about the Supremo Project had not yet spread to this level, so much of the discussion that took place after the signing ceremony centered around how the Larkinsons intended to make use of their new 20 percent stake in their massive company.

The physical projection of the Impresario Prince did not disappear right away. The prince instead chose to linger a bit longer so that he could speak directly to Ves. "Congratulations, Professor Larkinson. The net worth of your clan has increased by over a trillion MTA credits. If you are ever short on cash, selling just a fraction of your shares should readily solve your liquidity problems."

Ves chuckled as he held a thin glass of an imported blue wine made from hybrid alien grapes. "We will never sell those shares if we can help it. Besides, this really isn't about the money" "Oh? Are you that dismissive about the windfall that you have managed to secure for your clan?" "Money is just a number to me these days. The true currency in the new frontier is control over resources and hard assets. I do not believe that you are blind to this fundamental truth, Your

Highness."

Prince Casevir responded with a knowing smile. "You already know how to play the game. The stake that you have just obtained will serve as your foothold in the Rubarthan Pact. Don't forget that the headquarters of Isthmus Manufacturing is located in my principality. If you and your clan are finally ready to enter the Rubarthan Pact, I am more than willing to host your presence."

"I shall take your offer into account, Your Highness."

This was a clear invitation from the Impresario Prince to deepen their relationship even further. Ves was not entirely comfortable with that idea. He did not want to become overly reliant on a single prince in order to maintain his standing within the Rubarthan Pact.

There were still numerous opportunities for Ves to forge connections with Casevir's other siblings such as the renowned Inferno Spear Prince.

partner turned his back on the

It was always better to secure more redundancies in case Larkinsons all of a sudden! This was why Ves did not feel enthused about setting up shop in the Impresario Principality.

Perhaps Casevir managed to read Ves' true intentions, because he quickly switched the topic.

"What are your immediate plans?"

"I intend to return to the Terran Alliance and continue to teach my classes and design new mechs. At the same time, I am working to promote to a first-class mech designer at a speedy pace."

"I hope you will be able to design first-class mechs as quickly as possible. Prince Casevir sincerely spoke. "I have studied all of your works, professor. Your expert mechs are clearly a step above your standard mech models. It is clear your art and your vision are increasingly being constrained by the practical limitations of second-class mechs. I believe that the freedom of choice of first-class mechs will allow you to truly unleash your creative vision upon our society!" "I'm not sure whether I will roll out a first-class mech design of my own that quickly." Ves skeptically replied. "I have received a lot of advice on how it is better to dip my toes in the first-class mech market by collaborating with mech designers that have already established themselves in this sector. I intend to follow this suggestion and spend a number of years working and learning alongside my peers."

"That is a prudent decision. I can refer you to a dozen Rubarthan Masters who you can approach for cooperation. They may even be interested in collaborating with you on designing more immediate second-class mechs. Isthmus Manufacturing is quite impressed with your most recent collaborative work. It shows that you can deliver excellent results whenever you collaborate with a knowledgeable and experienced partner."

In other words, Isthmus already had thoughts about how Ves should fulfill the next commission.

Chapter 5618 Departure from Bortele

Ves experienced a lot of different emotions now that he was about to depart from Bortele III.

His stay was too short. He did not spend any time on exploring any of the cities that had been erected as of late in order to service the forces that made use of the strategic hub.

However, time was short, and he could no longer treat his security as casual as before.

"Goodbye, Bortele."

"Meow..." Lucky echoed as he rested in Ves' arms.

The gem cat had partially recovered from his most recent heavy exertion. The cat still looked drained and damaged, but he at least had to be up and about again.

A few moments later, Alexa and the 25 Journeymen Mech Designers that had recently joined the clan also arrived.

Ves nodded at a couple of them, but otherwise maintained a certain degree of distance to the new recruits.

He was way too busy to get to know each of these new mech designers in person. He understood a lot better now why leaders always hid themselves in their ivory towers. They just couldn't be bothered to familiarize themselves with all of their subordinates.

It became even more important to institute a more sophisticated hierarchy in the Design Department. So far, Alexa was performing supervisor with admirable competence.

She may be an Apprentice Mech Designer who had yet to formally establish her design philosophy, but her impeccable training, her and her close relationship with Ves caused all of the other proud and accomplished second-raters to bow their heads in her presence. Ves felt awfully tempted to put her in charge of managing the Design Department, but that was a waste of her talents.

She was a mech designer first and foremost! More importantly, she had reached a stage in her career where she needed to invest as possible in her core work in order to stoke her passion and form the initial seed of her design philosophy. He did not want her to suffer delays because of unnecessary entanglements.

"Is everyone ready to depart?"

"Yes, sir." Alexa reported like a prim and proper junior assistant. "I have made it clear to all of them that they will be journeying with Constantinople VIII shortly after they have been brought into the clan. They have packed all of the luggage that they intend to bring downstairs. They have also sold or entrusted all of the assets that they cannot bring along to the local branch of our clan."

"Good. It is unlikely that we will return here. The focus of our clan will shift increasingly more to our Premier Branch and our first-still remain involved in the world of second-raters, but it is my hope that every lead designer in the Design Department will earn enough to undergo EdNet training and promote to a first-class mech designer in time."

The mention of this promotion channel perked up a lot of eager mech designers. This was one of the most compelling reasons why they left their old jobs and apply to work for Ves!

Not even the requirement to make a lifelong commitment to the Larkinson Clan could stop them from grasping this opportunity to second-class mech community that they originally called home!

Many third-raters and second-raters dreamt of becoming as wealthy and pampered as the Terrans and the Rubarthans.

Though the Larkinsons had yet to reach this height, it was well on track to become a sizable first-class power!

Ves and Alexa exchanged a few more words before everyone received an alert.

Soon enough, the entire group disappeared from the surface of Bortele III and reappeared in one of the teleportation chambers of the "Welcome aboard our warship." A mecher officer greeted the new arrivals, most of whom looked in wonder at all of the advanced technologies that they could observe. "We have arranged suitable accommodation for all of you. We have also opened a limited section library that you can access in order to supplement your knowledge base, courtesy of Professor Larkinson. I must ask you to control ' you remain a guest aboard our fine vessel. As resplendent as her interior may appear, she is still a vessel built for battle."

As the mechers began to settle all of the new guests, Ves briefly chatted with Alexa and Gavin before following another officer to a first compartment at the upper decks.

As the Tarrasque and the other warships of the Bluejay Fleet began to fly to the nearest Lagrange point in order to exit the star system once again.

"What's up?" Ves casually asked as he sat down next to the bar where Jovy just downed a drink. "By the way, did the interrogation contain any juicy information?"

"I am told that Master Quan has been remarkably... informative above the inner workings of the Cosmopolitan Movement, particula cell." Jovy replied in a steady voice. "As a 300-year old Master who has likely held treacherous thoughts towards the current humar knows more about his own organization than the low-ranking members that we have occasionally caught before. It is normally diff our advanced technologies and interrogation methods from his encrypted and booby-trapped mind, but we have managed to circun obstacles by borrowing the power of a God Kingdom."

Reality no longer followed all of the rules within the willpower-saturated domain field of a god pilot.

No matter how clever or sensitive Master Quan might have been when he designed his own elaborate security measures, god pilots (tyrannically powerful will to negate the activation of all of these safeguards!

Once that happened, virtually every memory of the old cosmopolitan became accessible to the Red Association!

The intelligence coup was so significant that Master Quan had already been away in secret. There were many suitable secret locatior contents in his mind could be extracted and digitized!

"Have you managed to find a lot of names of possible traitors?"

"We did." Jovy responded with a vicious grin. "Master Quan knows too much. He is one of the highest-ranking members of the Indi he not only knows many of the identities of his subordinates, but he is also personally acquainted with the other cell leaders. More i he has made sporadic contact with high-ranking cosmopolitans who belong to other cells. As long as we are able to confirm that th< the latter, we can repeat our earlier action and capture a new batch of cosmopolitans who belong to different cells!"

"Clever. I feel a lot more reassured now that you guys are being serious about uprooting all of the human traitors that have infiltrab sickens me to think that there are so many high-placed humans in our society that are capable of abusing their positions to advanci subversive organization."

The Indigo Cell already attempted to claim the very lucrative bounty on his head. Even if the Red Association managed to sweep it ai other secretive cells across human space that would definitely escape the looming purge!

So long as these cosmopolitans kept their heads down, they would be able to escape the wave of persecutions that were undoubtedly The rewards announced by the Red Cabal ensured that the cosmopolitans would continue to think about claiming Ves' head!

However, the successful capture of high-ranking cosmopolitans and the rooting out of many cells should degrade the ability for the about in human space.

Once many of their fellow cosmopolitans got exposed and caught, the remainder who managed to escape the witch hunt should defi point where they buried themselves deeply for a time!

This should give Ves at least a few years of buffer time.

"So are there any notable figures among the people who are now suspected of believing in the ideals of the Cosmopolitan Movement "I am not privy to that information." Jovy replied. "I am a mech designer. I am not a member of one of our intelligence department! other channels to gain a rough understanding of what may happen. The stability of red humanity is still fragile, so a mass wave of

a we need. We have to employ a quiet strategy to slowly remove and interrogate the suspected traitors without tipping off the other c< This sounded like an extremely difficult operation. The rewards were great, but the mechers had to do everything right in order to ii Cosmopolitan Movement.

It was too bad that Ves clearly did not have the right to obtain insider information about this big operation.

He already imagined the possibilities. The most exciting way for the mechers to deal a serious blow to the Cosmopolitan Movement suspected traitors with body doubles!

Tearing down the dangerous cells from the inside sounded so delightful to Ves!

"If you can't tell me about any specific plans relating to the cosmopolitans, can you at least share more general information about t their sight set on my head, after all. It is really annoying that I know almost nothing about them. It doesn't help that you guys alwa any information about the Cosmopolitan Movement."

"There are good reasons for that, Ves. I do agree with you that you deserve to know more about them. What do you want to know in "How big is the movement?"

"No one can provide you with an accurate answer to this question." Jovy shook his head. "The decentralized structure adopted by tJ it impossible to obtain a complete headcount. We have always made estimates in the past. The interrogation of Master Quan has rec revise our estimates upwards. We currently believe that there are 5 to 10 million people in the Red Ocean who hold cosmopolitan syi "What?! That much?!"

10 million was only a tiny fraction of the total population of red humanity, but it still represented a formidable group if they all join "It is not as exaggerated as you think. Not all of them are of great significance to the movement, Ves. Many of them are relatives of different cells. The truly dangerous cosmopolitans are the core members. They do not confine their activities to remaining undercox valuable information. There should be roughly hundreds of thousands of cadre who are truly willing and able to commit sabotage, a other risky actions."

Ves grimaced. He did not look forward to living in a society with hundreds of thousands of fanatics who were crazy enough to target "What about their spread?" He asked. "I'm sure that they have managed to infiltrate every state, but what about the Red Two? Have whether there are hidden cosmopolitans among the Red Association and the Red Fleet?"

"I cannot say anything about the Red Fleet. As for the Association... there are most certainly people with cosmopolitan sympathies e Jovy sounded almost defeated when he made this admission.

Ves did not blame the mechers. No organization was perfect. The cosmopolitans excelled at infiltration. They definitely prioritized t hidden agents in the most powerful organizations of humanity.

A part of Ves wanted to ask whether the Xenotechnician was among the group of suspects, but he did not dare to follow through wit It was too dangerous for him to question the loyalties of a Star Designer!

Chapter 5619 Need More Hulls

As the Bluejay Fleet continued to journey back to New Constantinople VIII, Ves busied himself with checking up on his projects and developments.

For example, Ves received an update on the matter of Vulcanites sending their Novice Mech Designers to him in order to benefit from "The Eternal Vulcan Empire is based further away, so it will take time for the Novices to arrive in the New Constantinople System." "The Vulcanites expect a lot from you. They hope that at least two or three of the young dwarven mech designers will be able to see the end of their stay. As long as you can satisfy this demand, we will gain ownership of a serviceable first-class fleet carrier. The Vulcans refit the ship to fit our needs."

"I really hope those dwarven Novices are competent enough," Ves said. "I can't guarantee any results. I can only try and do my best to obtain additional first-class ships from other parties. We can't rely on the Vulcanites alone to fulfill our first-class ship needs. They to give us another ship after they have given up a strategic fleet carrier."

The value of first-class starships was too great. Everyone needed more of them. The more first-class hulls under their control, the sweeter the ongoing storm!

Gavin had his own ideas on how to address this issue. "Our position has improved by a lot compared to before. The success of the Ft relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds and our newly obtained stake in Isthmus Manufacturing has elevated our reputation and J level. It should be possible for us to approach major parties and trade their shipbuilding services for other major favors."

He was right. Ever since Ves got promoted to a tier 3 galactic citizen, he already had the option to cooperate with other groups on that. However, his background and backing were still too thin for him to establish a stronger bargaining position. He would have to make do to obtain even a single first-class hull.

This time was different. The deal he had made with the Vulcanites might be affected by other factors, but the fact that he was able to teach obligation for outright ownership of a first-class fleet carrier was a definite sign that people really started to take him seriously. Ves felt much more confident in his ability to negotiate much more lucrative deals with major players.

"I have been thinking about forming new deals with the Terrans and the Rubarthans respectively," Ves spoke. "I don't entirely trust but it is undeniable that he carries a certain amount of weight in the Rubarthan Pact. He can definitely arrange a shipyard to build a carrier or fleet carrier for us. The only concern is what we need to pay in exchange for this expensive deal."

Gavin grimaced when he thought about the prices of those vessels.

"The price of a proper first-class warship fluctuates widely depending on the volume, the chosen materials and the chosen modules you are fine with buying a first-class combat carrier on the cheap, you are still looking at a hull that costs at least a billion MTA credits beginning to end."

A first-class combat carrier was so much more expensive than a second-class equivalent that it wasn't even funny!

A billion MTA credits!

That was an unimaginable sum to Ves in the past!

It was surprising how quickly his horizons had widened. It might not be possible for the LMC to earn a billion MTA credits in profit of the Fey Fianna and Supremo Projects, but it was only a matter of time before his partnership with Isthmus Manufacturing gave V This was because Isthmus Manufacturing earned revenue from selling other mech lines, including first-class ones!

The profits of selling first-class mechs was always high, particularly if they were mainstream models that were always in demand.

This was one of the real benefits of gaining a whopping 20 percent stake in the Rubarthan mech company.

The Larkinson Clan could effectively earn a hefty share of profits from business activities that were not related to any of its living m Of course, the Rubathans weren't stupid. They made sure to demand that Ves continued to supply Isthmus with commercial mech d in order to retain the right to own all of those shares.

The entire deal was structured in a way that effectively turned Ves into a retainer of the Rubarthans and more specifically the Impre Ves provides his services by designing living mechs. He received a huge amount of payment and possibly other benefits for his effor Right now, Ves wondered whether he should leverage this new relationship to ask for a first-class starship.

"First-class starships should be in short supply in the Rubarthan Pact as well, right?"

"That goes without saying. It should theoretically be possible for you to order a starship from them, but the rules of supply and den replied.

"Hmmm."

"I have a suggestion."

"Please tell me your thoughts."

"Ordering the construction of a new first-class starship is a massive undertaking. The Rubarthans will be highly reluctant to spend starship production capacity to fulfill our demands. Instead of going for a new starship, we can ask them to upgrade one of our exist happen to have a very suitable hull that has recently been refurbished for this precise eventuality."

"The Spirit of Bentheim!" Ves gasped.

"Yes!" Gavin grinned. "The mechers have already reinvented it as a quasi-first-class starship. I am not an expert on all of the techn what I have heard, it only takes a relatively short time in a shipyard in order to upgrade our factory ship into a true first-class vesse The most difficult and time-consuming changes had already been made. The entire hull and internal structure had been upgraded t only reluctantly.

Completing the first-class upgrade process was as simple as replacing the remaining second-class systems with first-class equivalence Bentheim was highly modular, the replacement process should not pose too many hindrances.

The biggest concern was whether the Spirit of Bentheim remained safe and reliable after acquiring a lot of really powerful modules 1 performance difference was so high that a lot of new problems were bound to emerge!

Even so, it was still worth it for the Larkinson Clan to upgrade its factory ship!

"There is no need to hurry." Ves quickly said as a few other thoughts crossed his mind. "The rise of hyper technology is revolutions industry as well. It is best to wait a few years for the rapid pace of innovation to slow. By then, the shipbuilding sector should be abl powerful upgrade solutions than before."

"The more elaborate the upgrades, the longer it takes to complete all of the upgrades." Gavin frowned. "If you have a need of the Sp best to start its refit process sooner rather than later."

His personal assistant made a good point. Ves had great plans for the next decade.

Once the greater beyonder gate opened up, the era of warlords would begin in truth!

That was the time where many different human powers would compete against each other for supremacy!

It would be a lot more convenient if the Spirit of Bentheim became available for the riskiest and most lucrative missions.

"I'll think about it." Ves eventually said. "It may be possible for us to apply certain upgrades ourselves. The Diligent Ovenbird grant shipbuilding capabilities. As long as we implement all of the simpler upgrades ourselves, it will take a lot less time and effort for a n to implement the remaining upgrades."

He even thought about applying this approach to other Larkinson ships, but he quickly dismissed this option.

Ships such as the Vivacious Wai and the Dragon's Den were second-class starships from top to bottom. Upgrading them to first-clai require a complete rebuild.

A shipyard might as well construct a brand-new first-class capital ship if that was the case!

Ves and Gavin talked about other possible opportunities to acquire additional first-class starships.

"Don't forget about the Terrans." Gavin reminded Ves. "Now that we have formed strong relationships with the Rubarthans, the Te anxious about deepening their own relationship with you. You should take advantage of their desperation and see if you can add a fi two in your negotiations with them. The Devos Ancient Clan is currently in a tight spot, but there are several larger Terran clans the to build a starship for our clan."

That was certainly a viable option, but it was questionable whether the Larkinsons could gain more than one or two first-class hulk "This is too slow." Ves voiced his dissatisfaction. "What about second-hand starships? It should be much easier and faster for us to previously owned hulls."

"Don't get your hopes up, Ves. We are far from the only ones who have this idea. The best starships tend to be traded directly betwe organizations. The remaining second-hand starships in good condition are actually being put on auction as of late. The seller wants amount of profit possible, and auctions are always effective at driving up the price."

Ves immediately lost his mood when he heard that. The Larkinson Clan should be able meet the requirements to attend these exclus whether it could win a bid was another matter!

"I see. Please pay attention to these auctions and tell me if one is starting in the near future. I might want to take a look and see hox willing to pay for a used first-class starship. I take it that lots of other goods get sold during these auctions as well."

"I presume that is the case. Alexa Streon can probably tell you more about them. I don't advise you to participate in an auction too soon to build a war chest first. If you attend one too soon, you might get distracted and depressed by how much money you need to earn in anything good."

Ves did not quite agree with this argument. He felt it was better to gather intelligence in advance so that he knew what to expect when he next time.

He suddenly came up with another idea. "If these high-level auctions center around putting rare and highly desirable goods up for sale, I should be able to earn at least a part of the necessary funds!"

Of course, this was easier said than done. Ves was sure that he could earn a lot of MTA credits from selling the opportunity to obtain but the Red Association restricted him from handing out this reward to outsiders.

Without this obvious solution, it would take a lot more effort for Ves to come up with goods that could sell for hundreds of millions. Gavin was clearly skeptical about this idea. "It will take more than a masterwork mech or art piece to raise the necessary funds. The items in these auctions are not stupid. They are not willing to squander exorbitant amounts of money on second-class luxury products. So the most desired goods are those that can directly increase people's chances of surviving the Red War."

Chapter 5620 Massive Upgrade

"I'm back!"

The journey back to New Constantinople VIII did not last long at all. The superdrives of the warships of the Bluejay Fleet had shrunk transit times to such an enormous extent that travel became a lot more convenient in the new frontier.

Of course, only the major powers had access to this luxury. The phasewater and the advanced technologies required to develop and construct superdrives was beyond the capabilities of smaller groups.

Not even the Larkinson Clan possessed the technological background to produce them in-house!

It was not as if the Larkinsons wanted to address this shortcoming, but there was no justification to invest in a sector that was already being dominated by many established market leaders.

Though Ves had enough confidence that his innovative mechs could compete against some of the best of what the mech industry could offer, he and his fellow Larkinsons had no such thoughts when it came to the shipbuilding sector and its related industries.

In the past, Ves did not even dare to think about investing in a notoriously high-capital industry such as shipbuilding, but this time was different.

The gains he had made during his visit to Bortele III were too rich.

Not only did he secure a massive new source of income for the Larkinson Clan, his reputation and his connections increased by a whole new level!

This was crucially important to Ves because it opened up a lot of doors. The Larkinson Clan had finally gained the qualifications to become a serious shipbuilder.

However, the threshold to build first-class starships was much higher than building second-class starships!

Ves did not really value the latter because second-class starships were too fragile. They might be serviceable when deployed against the fleets dispatched by the poor and exploited minor races of the Red Ocean, but they could easily be demolished by any serious fleet that hailed from one of the major races!

Humans may be willing to play by the rules, but the aliens had no reason to do so! There was no barrier stopping the major alien warfleets from detouring through the middle zones so that they could smash apart a lot of underpowered mech forces!

Of course, forcing confrontations in space was difficult. As long as the human mech forces received enough advance warning, they could usually slip away before they got intercepted.

This was not a truly safe course of option, though. Ves worried about the survival of the expeditionary fleet every day.

The presence of numerous powerful ace pilots from the other members of the Golden Skull Alliance granted them at least a measure of protection against powerful warships, but that was not a total substitute to fielding a proper force of first-class assets.

Ves inwardly shook his head. It would take a lot of time and a lot of investment to get to this point. He needed to take this step-by-step and make a lot of incremental advances before his clan could put up a fair fight against any major alien warfleet.

As Ves and Alexa led the latest batch of Journeyman Mech Designers out of the teleportation chamber of Diandi Base, everyone got a good look of the interior of Diandi Base.

The first-class outpost might not be luxurious by the standards of the Terrans, but it was absolutely awe inspiring to the second-raters who had entered the Upper Zones for the first time!

"The alloys that make up that wall are more expensive than an entire second-class mech regiment, no, mech division!"

"That security turret might look simple, but it can launch plasma bolts that can melt through an entire second-class heavy mech with a single hit."

"How much does the Red Association value our new patriarch? The mechers have dispatched so many mechs and security forces to defend this site!"

Ves smiled as the new Journeymen became awed by the conditions of the Premier Branch.

He found it a bit unfortunate that the Larkinsons hadn't been able to station enough clansmen to truly bring Diandi Base to life. This made it a lot more difficult for the new recruits to fully assimilate into the Larkinson Clan.

Ves already had a few solutions in mind that should address this particular concern.

All of that could wait for later. First, he just wanted to settle down now that he returned to the closest thing he had to home!

"Papaaaaaaa!"

"You're back, papa!"

"Miaow miaow!"

It did not take long for the children to hear that their father had returned to New Constantinople VIII.

Soon enough, three different munchkins crowded around their father and pleaded for hugs and kisses.

"Hahaha! Calm down, little fellows. There is more than enough time for us to cuddle with each other."

It had only been a few weeks since Ves had split up with his children after departing from Ocanon VI, but this seemed like an eternity to the latter!

Even Clixie missed Ves and Lucky's company. The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat wearing a prominent golden collar affectionately brushed her body up against Lucky's archemetal body.

"Miaow miaow miaow."

"Meow meow..."

"Miaow?"

"Meow meow meow!"

"Miaow!"

As the cats and kids made all kinds of happy noises, a single clearing of the throat immediately caused them all to regain their composure.

A woman stepped into view.

Dressed in a luxurious and fashionable cross between a red coat and a black business suit, Gloriana Wodin looked like she had returned from the Vulit Central Star Node as a reinvented woman.

The sheer superiority radiating from her caused her to stand out from any other mech designer!

Aside from Ves, no one present was able to match her strong presence.

Gloriana smirked when she saw that her entry produced the intended effect. She clearly wanted to put up a show for her audience. It was best to show all of the newly recruited Journeymen from Borteale III who was in charge of them when they started to take up their duties.

"You have returned, and so have I." She said.

Ves already began to smell her intoxicating flowery scent. Though it was completely new to his senses, he enjoyed the pleasing associations that it inspired.

"Both of us have made a lot of gains on our trips." Ves smiled.

Husband and wife embraced each other after a long time of separation. Each of them had changed so much.

Gloriana had missed the creation of the Elemental Lord, did not get acquainted with all of the mutated beasts of Ocanon VI and had no involvement with anything that took place on the surface of Borteale III.

At the same time, Ves had little clue what Gloriana had been doing when she and Saintess Ulrika Vraken made a special trip to the Vulit Central Star Node.

It had been a long time since Ves last visited the Red Two's major strategic hub for second-class immigrants.

The star system had already been highly developed at the time. The mechers and the fleeters had developed it even further, enabling its occupied satellites to reach a level of prosperity that could rival the main star systems of the old galaxy!

Gloriana had done much more than replace her old second-class cranial implant for a superior first-class product while she visited one of the centers of human civilization.

Not only was there a huge amount of shopping opportunities, but entire communities of mech designers had sprung up as well.

A visiting mech designer could harvest massive gains as long as he or she had enough money and reputation!

Still, the main purpose to visiting Vulit was for Gloriana to complete the biggest upgrade of her life.

The old Erestal-015 bioimplant that the Wodin Dynasty originally arranged for her had served her well for a long time. It significantly sped up her learning and also contained a lot of handy processes that enabled her to design her mechs with greater speed and rigor.

She wouldn't have been able to advance to the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer so quickly without this crucial aid!

Now, her visit to a specialized implant development company had enabled her to replace this old and outdated implant with a cutting-edge model that was top notch in many measures!

The favor that Ves originally secured during the Survivalist conference granted Gloriana a chance to get the best of what the mechers could obtain at this time!

The value of this opportunity was intimately high. Neither Ves nor Gloriana dared to produce a concrete estimate because they were afraid of figuring out this sum!

Nonetheless, the performance and the features of Gloriana's new cranial implant must be extraordinarily great because Ves could immediately tell the difference when he came close!

As husband and wife ended their hug, Ves looked astonished when he sensed the newfound strength in Gloriana's head.

"Honey... you..."

"Let us hold this discussion elsewhere." The invigorated female mech designer suggested.

"That is a good idea."

Ves was incredibly curious about what sort of improvements his wife had gained that caused her mind to reach such an extraordinary state.

He quickly turned around and issues a few orders to Alexa and Gavin to arrange the new Journeymen.

After that, Ves and his immediate family all went back to the central building and entered their penthouse apartment in order to enjoy a private moment.

"Hihihi!"

"I missed you, Lucky!"

"Meow!"

"I want a hug, papa."

"Miaow miaow."

Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine missed their father so much that they refused to leave his side.

Ves helplessly embraced and cuddled with his children on the couch as he tried to hold a conversation with his wife.

"I brought back gifts from Vulit that should be of interest to you." Gloriana began to speak as she elegantly sat down in her own seat. "You cannot imagine how its planets are thriving. It is a paradise for any mech designer that is looking to obtain inspiration and advanced technological boutique products."

"I came back from Bortele III with a few gifts as well, but all of that can wait for the time being. Right now, I want to know about your cranial implant. Why is your mind so much stronger than before?"

Gloriana grinned. "This is one of the brand-new functions of my new implant. It is a true cutting-edge experimental product. All of the months spent in developing it and customizing it according to my conditions paid off. It is not only perfectly tailored to my brain and spinal cord, but it is also designed to augment my companion spirit as well!"

"What?!" Ves almost jumped out of his seat, causing him to startle his kids. "Has the development of cranial implants already begun to experiment with augmenting companion spirits?"

"Yes. The method may be rudimentary for the time being, but the effect can still be strong as long as the cranial implant is impregnated with a powerful hyper material. The Arachne 01 Distributed Mech Project Leader First-Class Cranial Implant Set that has replaced my old Erestal-015 bioimplant is laced with a unique high-grade hyper material that especially boosts all mental activity."

That was a mouthful of a name. It clearly indicated that Gloriana's new augmentation did not consist of a single implant, but a collection of multiple ones that were probably spread throughout her brain and body.

This was so much more elaborate than Ves was familiar with, but the effect should be especially great as a result!

"What sort of hyper material did the implant development company utilize?" Ves asked. "I have encountered this effect before."

"That is because my Arachne 01 implant set is laced with small pieces of a single Mentalist Crystal. This is a recently discovered hyper material that is very rare, so much so that the Red Association only has a dozen or so in their possession at this time. They can only be found in the brains of abnormally intelligent mutated beasts that have demonstrated unusual mind powers in the past. The mechers have discovered that these Mentalist Crystals have many stimulating effects on human minds, but that is not all. The new hyper material also happens to improve the performance of Alexandria's design network!"

