

The Mech 5621

Chapter 5621 Arachne 01

Ves may have made a lot of gains during his eventful trip, but his wife harvested a lot of gains as well!

As both of them settled down in their living room while they occasionally entertained their rambunctious children, Gloriana avidly described the exceptional qualities of her fantastic new cranial implant.

Words alone could not do her new implant justice. In order to demonstrate her new gains more directly, she projected a design suite and began to design the next iteration of the Dark Zephyr expert mech.

Compared to her previous self, Gloriana's design efficiency had reached a whole new level.

Tedious processes that previously took minutes to complete suddenly got done in a matter of seconds.

More difficult junctions where a mech designer needed to make use of a combination of ingenuity and a lot of puzzling no longer hindered Gloriana as much as before. Her comprehensive implant set functioned as a miniature supercomputer that was so perfectly synchronized to her brain that she was able to utilize various new tools to come up with the right solutions much faster than before!

Many tricky problems related to mech designs could never be solved by applying preset formulas.

They could only be resolved by engaging in a lot of trial and error.

The new Arachne 01 implant set consisted of multiple different modules that were embedded across her brain as well as her spinal cord.

By spreading them all out as opposed to concentrating them in a single place, the network of interconnected implants not only produced a much deeper fusion rate, but also activated more of Gloriana's nerves than before!

All of this led to an enormous boost in brain power that allowed her to notice and gather a lot more clues from every trial. Furthermore, Gloriana was also able to analyze and process the data much faster and more comprehensively than before, allowing her to narrow down the most optimal implementations in a fraction of the time.

"My implant is especially designed to help me interface with external processing banks." Gloriana boasted. "Let me show you how much of a difference that can make."

When she started to establish a connection to Diandi Base's AI core, she was able to offload a lot of heavy duty calculation and simulation work to nearby processing banks.

Although her new Arachne 01 implant set was not able to form a deep connection with all of those external sources of processing power, the integration was noticeably more optimized than what Ves could achieve with his mutated Archimedes Rubai bioimplant.

Compared to an old CEA bioimplant that had evolved in weird directions due to being affected by two instances of lightning tribulation, the Arachne 01 had the benefit of being meticulously designed to fulfill the core needs of Gloriana as a mech designer.

The implant set was not burdened by any redundant features or unnecessary clutter. The implant developers working for the Red Association had designed many cranial implants that specifically catered to the needs of first-class mech designers in the past. They already possessed a robust and extensive set of solutions that had been optimized over multiple generations.

Yet that was not enough to make the Arachne 01 special.

In the Age of Dawn, hyper technology had become the latest trend. Every industry experienced an upheaval as a lot of existing tech suddenly became outdated due to their lack of utilization of E energy.

The mech industry already managed to figure out a lot of clever and practical solutions. Other industries did not fall behind either. There were many clever and inventive scientists and developers who discovered simple methods to increase the performance of cranial implants or add new functions to them that could not be accomplished in the past.

The Arachne 01 was unique among all of the other cranial implants developed in the past because it was the first experimental product to specifically boost the performance of a companion spirit!

It was like arming Alexandria with a metaphorical set of equipment. The Arachne 01 did not improve her cultivation or intrinsic qualities, but it simply amplified all of the companion spirit's mental-related powers.

Considering that Alexandria's only major power was the ability to form a design network where multiple like-minded people could connect their minds to each other, this happened to be a perfect combination!

Of course, the fact that the pieces of Mentalist Crystal also had a definitely nurturing and amplifying effect on Gloriana's mind also happened to be a useful benefit.

"You cannot imagine what it is like to think while I am permanently under the influence of this new hyper material." Gloriana spoke as her head seemed to be surrounded by a near-invisible white halo. "Mech designers such as you and I rely so much on thinking to design our mechs. I cannot entirely explain how the E energy attracted by the Mentalist Crystal works, but the effects are so all-encompassing that it is as if I am under the effect of a second cranial implant."

The more she described the properties of this wonderful new hyper material, the more Ves developed a lot of greed towards Mentalist Crystals.

He had never heard of such an amazing treasure!

During his vacation on the surface of Ocanon VI, Ves had learned that when mutated beasts rapidly emerged and evolved due to unknown circumstances, the organic tissue that made up their bodies evolved into many different organic hyper materials.

It was as if they were all transforming into increasingly more powerful hyper biomechs.

Once a hunting team managed to fell such a powerful beast, they could harvest a lot of unique and colorful organic tissue that they could subsequently sell for a fortune to various biotech companies.

Though Ves had acquainted himself with a number of remarkable mutated beasts and the special organs that could be harvested from them, he had not encountered anything comparable to a so-called Mentalist Crystal up to this point.

Gloriana did not look surprised at that. "Mentalist Crystals only appear in the brains of mutated beasts that strongly seek to become smarter. This is rare as the competitive pressure in many untamed planets force exobeasts into improving their hard combat power. From what the mechers have told me, Mentalist Crystals have only been found sporadically among existing apex predators that do not feel threatened by the local fauna. Instead, they have become acquainted with humans and understood that it is their intelligence that makes them much more dangerous. As long as the pressure is strong enough, a lucky apex predator may develop a powerful mutation that is primarily oriented to improving their mental power."

That sounded weird, but plausible. Ves could not imagine how such a creature could emerge in a place like Ocanon VI. The hunting preserve produced so many mutated beasts that no existing apex predator would be able to relax!

It was extremely doubtful whether the planet that he had visited recently could produce a single mutated beast who developed a powerful yearning to improve its brainpower.

"What sort of abilities do these creatures possess?" Ves curiously asked.

"I have only heard descriptions. There are so few of them that it is difficult to make generalizations. In general, they not only become intelligent enough to rival a human scientist, but may also develop additional 'superpowers'. This can range from telekinesis to even more esoteric abilities such as telepathy and even divination! The last one has never been confirmed, though."

These purported set of abilities were much more bizarre than the abilities of other mutated beasts!

At least monsters such as the Azure Tornado Dragon mostly leveraged the power of well-known E energy attributes. They were much easier to figure out compared to a bizarre mutated beast that had somehow evolved into a brainiac.

"When I was in the care of the mechers, they even shared a theory that the original phase whales may have emerged through this fashion. It explains why a race of whales can become so smart and proficient in biotechnology when there are so few factors that promote the development of a complete civilization."

Ves could see how this theory may be right, but it was not his business to prove its validity.

"Let's get back to how the Mentalist Crystal boosts your functions." He said. "Can you bring out Alexandria and connect me to her design network for a moment? I want to experience the differences myself."

"Certainly."

"Maaaow."

A noticeably prouder and more vivid red companion spirit emerged from Gloriana's mind.

The cat soon proceeded to form a small design network that brought Ves and Gloriana a lot closer to each other.

He immediately felt the differences. Almost every aspect about the design network received a boost. It felt a lot more robust than before. The bandwidth had increased, allowing participants to transfer a lot more data to the minds of other people.

Alexandria had become a lot better at managing the network. She was able to help people filter out unnecessary thoughts. She was also able to channel a greater proportion of a person's emotions to other minds.

Though Ves was not able to appreciate the improvement in Alexandria's design network to the fullest at the moment, he looked forward to experiencing how much better it had become in the near future!

"The augmentation only truly comes into effect when my design network connects dozens of different minds together." Gloriana proudly explained as her companion spirit stopped her activity and pulled back. "This is why the phrase 'mech project leader' is added to its full name. I specifically requested an implant that can not only improve my individual design abilities, but also help me manage my subordinates better whenever I employ a design network. It is my companion spirit's greatest strength, and I believe it has much greater room for development."

"That is not a bad idea." Ves admitted.

Both Alexandria and Blinky possessed the ability to form design networks, but it was just a side benefit to the latter.

Blinky's main strengths rested in his Blinkyverse and his energy manipulation capabilities. His cultivation should primarily focus on these areas in order to deepen his specialization and make him much more useful in his existing roles. There was simply no time for the Star Cat to evolve his design network any further.

It was completely different for Alexandria. The Queen Cat did not really have any other abilities aside from her own version of a design network, but that left her free to specialize in her sole gimmick and elevate it to a much greater level in time!

"Is there anything else to the Arachne 01 that makes it special?" Ves asked.

"There is. As I have mentioned earlier, it does not consist of a single implant, but multiple smaller ones spread across my brain and spine. The core implants are buried deep within the center of my brain, but there are many more peripheral ones that are situated close to the exterior of my body. The peripheral implant modules can be selectively removed and replaced by upgraded models through simpler procedures. In short, I can continue to upgrade my implant set more easily in the future."

This was a much more advanced and high-tech implementation of a cranial implant. Ves had never even heard of it, which meant that it was either an innovative new approach or a product that was solely reserved for the people who ranked at the top!

Gloriana most certainly benefited enormously from receiving such an advanced implant set.

However, it was also clear that this experimental new product probably entailed a lot of risks.

This was probably the first cranial implant set that not only integrated pieces of Mentalist Crystal, but also sought to augment a companion spirit!

A lot could have gone wrong. The fact that Gloriana managed to return from Vulit in a healthy state did not mean that this was an assured outcome.

The implant developers essentially treated Gloriana as their test subject!

They just dazzled her with a lot of new and expensive technologies to divert her attention away from the considerable risks.

The fact that they genuinely wanted her to improve as much as possible helped to secure her cooperation.

Out of all of the mech designers of the Larkinson Clan, there was no one who wanted to catch up and surpass Ves more than his wife!

Chapter 5622 Prosperous Vulit

It took an entire hour for Gloriana to explain all of the dazzling functions of her new Arachne 01 cranial implant.

Of course, both of them took occasional pauses when their children acted fussy or demanded their attention.

To them, all of this talk about cranial implants was too far away for them. Their brains were still in a rapidly developing state, so it was highly unsuitable for them to obtain their own ones at this time.

Ves was also worried that hastily installation of cranial implants might mess up his children's development as partial primordial humans. Perhaps they could develop a level of cognitive power one day that could easily allow them to match the performance of cranial implants by themselves.

In any case, it was not until Gloriana completed her exhaustive explanation that she talked about what else she experienced while she was visiting the Vulit Central Star Node.

"When I was recovering from one of the precursor operations, I established contact with many new mech designers. Vulit attracts many second-class mech designers, each of whom have different ways to extend their stay in the central star node. Each of them are smart and insightful in their own ways. I managed to befriend several of them, especially after I have made use of my connection to the Mech Supremacist Faction."

"Did you learn anything good from exchanging with all of these mech designers?"

Gloriana smiled. "I did. I received invaluable feedback on some of my existing ideas. I have even received crucial inspiration that is helpful in the development of one of my new design solutions. I have managed to produce an important breakthrough with the help of the powerful capabilities of my Arachne 01.1 cannot wait to flesh it out and apply my latest innovation to one of our expert mechs!"

That certainly made Ves a lot more curious.

"Can you share your idea with me? What did you come up with that has made you so excited?"

"Be patient, Ves. This is not the time for me to share the results of my latest research. I will show you the results of my efforts once we embark on another expert mech design project. It will be much more helpful for you to understand the effects and the significance of my work when I have a real example on hand."

"Okay."

Ves could certainly wait a little longer. He was already happy with Gloriana with her new cranial implant. A useful new design application that was related to her specialization was icing on the cake as far as he was concerned.

"I see you have already begun to lay the groundwork in upgrading the Dark Zephyr." He remarked.

"The time has come to revise our first expert mech design." Gloriana stated in a more serious tone. "In the years after we have initially designed it, I have become more and more embarrassed by its crude and rudimentary design elements. The choices we made at the time are frankly embarrassing compared to how we have approached our later expert mech design projects. It is no wonder that the Dark Zephyr never turned into a masterwork mech. If we do not want to embarrass ourselves in a time where we are receiving much more public scrutiny than before, then we must address this issue. We should upgrade our other early expert mechs such as the Amaranto and the Riot, but Venerable Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson machine takes precedence."

He did not disagree with her argument. The other expert mechs had various powerful gimmicks and other advantages that enabled them to reluctantly keep up with the growing scope of battles.

The Dark Zephyr on the other hand had become a definite drag on Venerable Tusa.

While his cousin had developed a fantastic ability to completely bypass transphasic energy shields, thereby allowing his expert light skirmisher to destroy heavily defended warships without breaching their first line of defense, the mech did not complement this operation well enough.

This irritated Gloriana the most. The fit between Tusa and the Dark Zephyr continued to decrease over time. This was the opposite of what she aspired to make!

As such, she had grown particularly motivated to correct all of the perceived inadequacies of her first expert mech and bring it fully in line with the Hyper Generation.

"I just brought back 25 new Journeyman Mech Designers from the Bortele System." Ves remarked. "I am sure that a handful of them can provide a lot of technical support on how to better utilize specific mech systems. Their feedback and contributions will allow us to elevate the Dark Zephyr to a higher level."

"That is another reason why I believe the time is right. I shall have to inspect each and every Journeyman to ensure that you have made the right selection, but I would be happy to consult their opinions if they meet my expectations."

They talked a bit more on how to arrange all of the new Journeymen in the Design Department. It was clearly not appropriate anymore to call them all lead designers. Their status also needed to be lowered in order to reflect the changing circumstances in their workplace.

"Do you remember the Exemplar Plan that you instituted years ago?" Gloriana asked.

"Oh, that. I do. It's a profit-sharing plan that rewards the best performers in our Design Department."

"We can continue to make use of it as a means to distinguish our more capable Journeymen from the less capable ones. We can even expand it in order to add more granularity to the scheme later on, but for now it is enough to set our veterans apart from the rookies."

She was right. The original Exemplar Plan designated 8 of the best-performing mech designers as Exemplars. They had the right to receive 1 percent of the share of the dividends issued by the Living Mech Corporation.

It was essentially a way to give his best mech designers a share of the profits of the mech company without owning actual shares in the LMC.

Though Ves originally set it up so that he did not have to give away any of his precious shares, it worked well enough that no one issued a word of complaint.

There were way more benefits to working for the Larkinson Clan than earning money!

As Ves continued to rise in status and means, he gained increased access to all kinds of goodies that were ordinarily reserved for members of high society.

For example, there was no way that most of the existing lead designers could undergo EdNet training as the quotas were usually reserved for the mechers themselves!

The fact that Ves was able to give them access to an exclusive benefit like this was worth far more than earning thousands of MTA credits a year!

However, that did not mean that the dividends were useless. Ves knew that Ketis and Juliet had invested much of their earnings into strengthening the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters respectfully.

"I'll leave you in charge of this since you are willing to deal with it." Ves decided. "Just make sure that the new Journeymen know their place, while at the same time understand that there are still ways for them to climb up and gain more rights if they happen to excel. Once more of the old guard has managed to advance to the rank of Senior, we should strip the position of lead designer from Journeymen. After all, it is a bit dubious to entrust them with such a heavy responsibility now that the LMC has grown to this point."

Gloriana had plenty of questions of how Ves managed to hoodwink the Rubarthans into giving him 20 percent ownership of a mech company as massive as Isthmus Manufacturing, but that could wait. Both of them had plenty of time to get each other up to speed of what they had done when they were apart from each other.

"I agree, Ves. I will likely begin to introduce changes tomorrow morning. The Design Department needs to be in order before I am comfortable with resuming work on our mech design projects."

Once they completed their discussion on personnel-related issues, they turned their attention to a lighter subject.

"Did you spend a lot of time shopping while you were at Vulit?"

Gloriana immediately became more enthused. "There is so much prosperity in Vulit that it is incomparable to Davute. Many of the products there are not as good as the ones available on New Constantinople VIII, but the variety of goods is much greater! Vulit is not only a central hub for second-raters, but also the Red Two. Their material warehouses are particularly well-stocked. They have even begun to expand their wings in order to accommodate the emergence of many new hyper materials."

The mention of hyper materials certainly perked Ves up. One of his regrets during his stay in Borteles was that he was unable to browse and inspect all of the diverse goods for sale in the local material warehouses.

As a port system where a lot of human mech forces made a pitstop in order to dump their salvaged goods, a lot of alien junk became available for sale.

The native aliens were much slower to adapt to hyper technology, so many of their starships had yet to incorporate hyper materials in a systematic manner.

However, there were always exceptions and anomalies. Since a lot of alien starships were originally built elsewhere with different materials, they occasionally produced hyper materials with properties that were unfamiliar to red humanity.

Ves really wanted to take a look at those samples because the written descriptions and projected images did not do them justice.

Alas, Ves had to leave Bortele III, causing him to miss out on this opportunity.

He was happy that Gloriana did not experience this difficulty. She avidly highlighted numerous samples that had caught her interest in one way or another.

"The most hyper material that I have seen is so special that it is locked in a vault located on the underground floor of an auction house." Gloriana mentioned. "I had to leverage my connections in order to obtain permission to view it in person. The visit was worth it. From what I can tell, the value of this powerful new hyper material should be no less from a whole Mentalist Crystal."

That sounded interesting!

More powerful hyper materials could be used in so many different applications. They could make anything a lot stronger as long as they were correctly used.

"What is it, and what can it do?" Ves eagerly asked.

"It is a newly discovered hyper that was only known by its codename until recently. The hyper produced a strange fire that continually burned without any external input."

"It's... on fire?"

"In a manner of speaking." Gloriana answered. "It is a strange exotic. It clearly produces a real flame, but it does not actually produce a strong exothermic reaction. Instead, whenever it touches anything, it actually causes an object to lose heat and freeze until it has reached a temperature that is close to absolute zero."

"Wow! It can do that by itself without being put into a freeze weapon or whatever?"

She grinned. "Yes. It sounds amazing, does it not? Its freezing potential can be magnified by at least an order of magnitude if it is properly integrated in an appropriate weapon system. This is only one of the many wonders that I have discovered in Vulit. The prices for the rarer exotics and hypers are high, but they are all worth the expense."

"Oh? How much did the ice fire rock sell for eventually?"

"1,300,000 MTA credits." Gloriana succinctly answered.

"That is an astronomical sum for second-raters."

"It is not a particularly high sum for first-raters." Gloriana retorted. "There are still a few visitors to Vulit that possess the financial strength to raise the necessary funds."

"I guess you're right."

"By the way, are you curious to see what I have brought back from Vulit as your first gift?"

"I do admit that I have been wondering about this for a while now. Please do not tell me that you bought an expensive handbag for me, Gloriana."

"Of course not. I bought them for myself." His wife responded. "I know your tastes. Your gift is much more practical."

She called over a bot that carried a metal box with a decorative red ribbon wrapped around its surface.

Once the bot had reached the center of the room, the gift box automatically unwrapped and unfolded.

The present happened to be an icy blue rock that happened to produce a silent blue flame that was so chilling that it already started to lower the temperature in the room.

It took a few seconds for Ves to make the connection.

"What do you think, Ves? Are you happy with my gift to you? This hyper has so many useful applications."

"..."

Chapter 5623 Ice Fire Rock

Ves became speechless for a long time.

Was this gift valuable?

Undoubtedly.

The newly discovered hyper that had apparently been bestowed with the simple name of Ice Fire Rock was a rare manifestation of a medium energy environment.

Just as its name suggested, it had an affinity with the attribute of ice. Blinky could clearly perceive the energy vortex surrounding the rock that was constantly drawing in ice energy.

Ice was considered to be a derivative of water for whatever reason, so Ves possessed a slightly greater than average understanding of this attribute. The Oceancaller did not excel in this concept, but it was clearly familiar with this particular elemental expression.

Ves actually found the ice attribute to be a bit weird. It was a composite between the concepts of low temperature and water. He would have thought that the frost attribute should be more common in nature, but apparently everything had to be interpreted through the lens of the five classical elements as much as possible.

Whatever the case, ice was a fairly powerful element for cultivators to specialize in. It was a good way to apply the power of water in more pronounced effects.

Ice excelled in both offensive and defense. From causing bodies to lose so much heat at once that they turned into frozen popsicles to generating thick ice walls to block incoming attacks, wielders of ice naturally belonged on the battlefield.

However, ice had a lot of other uses as well. It could be used to keep people cool in a hot environment. It could also be used to forcibly stabilize overheating components. As long as the cultivator was clever enough, there were many ways to make use of ice outside combat!

The Ice Fire Rock did not simply freeze stuff, though.

A normal ice hyper would have simply cooled the temperature around it in a uniform manner.

The object that Gloriana obtained through an auction house deviated from this pattern by channeling its freezing power to anything that touched its odd blue flame.

Blue flames usually signified greater heat than regular orange flames, but this was different. The fire produced by the hyper did not generate anything that reminded Ves of warmth.

Instead, it continually drained the air it came into contact with of heat!

This was why the living room quickly became colder as the Ice Fire Rock appeared out of its enclosed container.

The advanced environmental regulation systems quickly became more active and pumped in additional heat in order to compensate for the inexplicable drop in temperature.

However, the room only became warmer for a brief moment of time before the Ice Fire Rock started to produce an even stronger flame!

It was as if the injection of additional heat affronted it on a personal level!

Ves and his children watched on with amazement as the larger and more violent flame became even more determined to suck out all the thermal energy from the room!

"Howl!"

Blinky carefully observed the strange hyper. The companion spirit was perceptive enough to obtain a clear view of the reaction promoted by the Ice Fire Rock.

Ves suddenly stiffened as he realized what was happening.

"The Ice Fire Rock is naturally converting conventional thermal energy into ice E energy!"

Gloriana proudly nodded. "Exactly! Did you think I would spend 1,300,000 MTA credits in vain? This properly alone turns the Ice Fire Rock into a valuable research object, especially for a so-called 'spiritual engineer' such as yourself. This rare new hyper contains a natural blueprint on how you can convert heat into E energy. As long as you are able to replicate it, you can generate artificial E energy with any potential power source!"

This was an amazing find. It instantly reminded Ves of his recent exchange with Master Ginevra Hubert-Colmain.

Such a rock undoubtedly fell right into her lap! Ves even had the impulse to call her right away and solicit her opinion on this odd hyper.

Ves felt a lot better about his wife's profligate expenditure. She might be a lot less conservative than him when it came to spending money, but she wasn't stupid. She was at least able to justify her purchases with logical arguments.

As the room's environmental control system continually started to work harder in order to return to the designated temperature, its programmed resistance seemed to incite the Ice Fire Rock into burning even harder!

The blue flames became twice as big as before as more heat was being drained from the surrounding air than ever!

Frosty condensation started to form on the floating bottom plate that held the rock. A real chill started to spread across the room as the Ice Fire Rock never seemed to run out of energy in its attempt to produce negative entropy.

"This hyper... is actually using heat to produce cold." Ves uttered. "What is amazing about this is that the process is so efficient that no excess heat is being generated at all. If there is, then it would just get fed back into the cycle to the point there is no waste anymore. The net result is that the process is nearly too percent efficient!"

Ves realized that the Ice Fire Rock was very aptly named because it actually made use of both ice and fire-attributed E energy to sustain its elegant operation!

It was a hyper that encapsulated the duality between two fairly opposing elements.

Normally, an attempt to forcibly combine ice and fire attributes together would either produce a violent explosion or cause the two to produce anti-synergy.

This did not happen in this case. The natural processes induced by this magical hyper effectively utilized the power of fire to grant the rock the ability to treat heat energy as input rather than output.

This was a miracle!

Anyone with a basic understanding of science and engineering easily understood that it was nearly impossible to attain too percent efficiency in any process.

Wheels would turn forever and mechs would never produce any heat when they started to exert themselves if the opposite was the case.

Every single move and process inevitably generated waste energy which usually came in the form of heat, which was usually difficult to recycle into more useful applications.

This was why heatsinks were always necessary in any power-hungry device. The more energy they consumed, the hotter they became!

There was no way to prevent this from happening through conventional means. It became an increasingly more limiting factor when mechs became more powerful and sophisticated.

Third-class mechs usually worried the least about this problem. Their power reactors were the weakest of all and could not support the operation of overly demanding mech parts. They could get away with utilizing cheap but inferior heatsinks to keep the machine relatively functional for a time.

Second-class mechs started to juggle with this problem a lot more. Energy weapons and flight systems were the main culprits of rapid heat build-up. Their heat management systems needed to be a lot more effective in order to prevent the machines from melting from the inside, and that usually required the use of much more powerful and expensive heatsinks.

It was also why Ves had never abandoned his use of luminar crystal technology!

The alien tech may be weird and indecipherable in many ways, but its greatest strength was that it was remarkably efficient when it came to producing energy beams.

Luminar crystal weapons generated less waste heat than conventional energy weapons, which meant that it imposed a lighter burden to the heat management systems. This granted many advantages to his mechs, such as being able to fire more powerful energy beams without worrying about overheating!

Ves already started to come up with many different ideas on how to make use of this Ice Fire Rock.

He first wanted to study its operation and see if he could artificially replicate it in whole or in part. Just being able to create a device that could directly convert heat into E energy was invaluable in itself!

It did not matter if the imitation device could produce all kinds of E energy or just ice E energy. Ves could make lots of use of this reaction in either case!

Gloriana smiled more and more as she saw that her husband became fascinated by this wonderful gift.

Her obvious pleasure reminded Ves of the cost to obtain this expensive treasure.

"Wait a minute." Ves suddenly said. "According to our schedules, you probably attended the auction in Vulit well before I started making gains in Bortele. You spent a lot of money in a time when the Larkinson Clan's financial position was much weaker. The LMC's sales have begun to nosedive because we haven't brought our existing product lines to the new mech generation. Our only major source of income is the revenue obtained from selling all of the salvage from the Trailblazer Expedition, but much of that money is already reserved for investments related to strengthening our fleet and setting up a lot of new branches. Our cash is being drained almost as quickly as it is pouring into our accounts. How can you possibly pull 1.3 million MTA credits out of nowhere? Even if we had that much money floating in one of our accounts, I am pretty sure I set a limit and an alert."

His wife looked at him as if he was stupid.

"Poor Ves. We are no longer paupers. When you became a tier 3 galactic citizen and moved to this planet, our net worth has already become higher than ever! The value of this first-class base with its materializer and all of its other first-class instruments is already astronomical. This does not even take into account the worth of all of our other assets, from the Spirit of Bentheim to all of our intellectual property. If it is necessary, we can selectively sell them in a hurry in order to raise a large amount of cash, but that is completely unnecessary. We can just use our net worth to expand our credit line."

"You mean..."

"Do you remember the Yem-Tar Trade and Commerce Bank?" She grinned. "We have been using its banking services for years. The Great Severing caused severe disruptions to the entire banking sector, which made it a lot more difficult to borrow large sums of money because everyone's assets and liabilities had become split between two different galaxies. The turmoil has ended by now. Yem-Tar has a good understanding of our finances, so I hardly encountered any delays when I requested it to expand our line of credit. From what I have been able to gather, the bank isn't worried at all how much money a tier 3 galactic citizen wants to borrow. They always have ways of

paying back their debts. In fact, it is more favorable for the bank to continually collect interest payments from all of its well-heeled clients. "

That was certainly true. Tier 3 galactic citizens were bigshots without exception. None of them reached such a high position without working hard enough to rise above their peers.

However, Ves was still uncomfortable with loosening his previous spending limits.

He suddenly narrowed his eyes in suspicion. Given his wife's proclivities, she definitely purchased way more than this interesting gift!

"How much money did you actually spend during your trip to Vulit?"

Gloriana crossed her arms. "It is not much compared to our current financial strength. There is no need for you to worry about it. If I knew that you had managed to become a large shareholder of Isthmus Manufacturing, I wouldn't have been so restrained in my spending! It is not every day that I can visit a location as prosperous as the Vulit Central Star Node."

"How. Much?"

"Around 517 million MTA credits."

"What?!"

"Our credit limit at the time was much higher than that! You should thank me for being frugal under the circumstances!"

"How much interest does Yem-Tar charge?"

"Its APR for our credit line is currently set at 8.9 APR."

"Damn it Gloriana! That means we have to pay 46 million MTA credits on paying off the interest alone! That is wasted money that could have been spent on more useful investments, such as refurbishing our combat carriers or building new mech factories! What the hell did you spend all of this money for, anyway?!"

"Handbags, perfumes, toys..."

Chapter 5624 The Price of Status

Ves almost wanted to faint when he heard how much money his wife had spent during her visit to Vulit.

517 million MTA credits!

It hadn't been too long ago when the entire Larkinson Clan struggled to earn over 10,000 MTA credits.

The entire expeditionary fleet at that time was burning through at least 5000 MTA credits on an annual basis just to maintain its operations!

Even though his circumstances had improved drastically since the start of the Age of Dawn, that did not mean that Ves was eager to open up his wallet and spend like there was no tomorrow!

The numbers continually ran through his mind as if they were weights.

His expressions changed multiple times as he thought about how much of a burden his wife's extravagant spending imposed on his finances.

The worst part about all of this was that Gloriana did not even see anything wrong with this behavior!

"You are not adapting quickly enough to our new situation." Gloriana admonished him. "We are no longer the second-raters of before. Both of us have worked hard to elevate our clan and promote to first-raters. From the moment you returned from the Survivalist conference as an honorary member of the Red Association, you have already completed this transformation. It may take time for your mech design skills to catch up to this level, but you have effectively entered first-class society in advance."

"What is your point, Gloriana?"

"You have become the latest star in high society. Your recent actions and accomplishments have attracted the interest of many Terrans, Rubarthans, mechers and fleeters. All of these elites have an enormous amount of wealth at their disposal, and they show that in the way they dress and the friends they cultivate. Right now, both of us have resided on New Constantinople VIII for months, yet we hardly went out to shop and purchase clothing and other articles that reflect our new status."

"It's unnecessary and premature." Ves responded with a frown. "Until our income has reached the required standard, it is way too soon to spend money on all of that expensive crap. Besides, a lot of the stuff in those luxury shops are way too overpriced. What practical difference does it make if my outfit is made by a second-class or first-class fashion house? Sure, the materials and the refinement of the latter are definitely superior, but they are just smart clothing in the end! Aside from being tougher and offering more conveniences, their main function is just to cover up our bodies. There is no need for us to spend millions of MTA credits on them, especially at this junction!"

His wife shook her head as if she was a mother who was confronting a stubborn child.

"You are being too short-sighted, Ves. You need to grasp the right opportunities. Good impressions are vital to navigating first-class communities. Our goal is to integrate into them. The best way to do that is to play by their rules. Do you know how much first-raters look down on lesser humans? It is much more difficult for us to gain acceptance from other first-raters if we continually present ourselves as second-raters! The way we think, the way we dress and the way we treat ourselves are all repulsive to every first-rater that we have interacted with! The least we can do is to adapt to the local culture and give them one less reason to ridicule us behind our backs."

Though Gloriana made a reasonable argument, it all sounded like an attempt to excuse her profligate behavior.

"I can understand your point, but your spending level crosses the line." Ves spoke. "I don't object to taking on debt. I know enough about business and finance that increasing our leverage can lead to much greater returns in the future. The problem I have is that your behavior likely won't yield the fantastic returns that you imagine. The reason why so many first-raters respect me and value my friendship these days is because of the concrete benefits that I can provide to them. That is the real reason why we are qualified to consort with the top of red humanity."

"That may be true, but if you continue to dress and act like a pauper, then far too many people will never take you seriously!"

"I bet that if I wore dirty rags taken from a random third-class rural settlement, people such as Jovy Armalon and the Impresario Prince would still be glad to work with me! However, if I am unable to exercise enough financial discipline and pile up so much debt that I cannot even meet the interest payments anymore, I have no doubt my 'friends' will turn into sharks and devour me whole!"

His wife sighed. "I do not disagree with you, but we cannot continually rely on your breakthrough successes to maintain the prestige of our clan. What if you have lost your brilliance one day? What if you are attacked by a cosmopolitan assassin and become braindead? Anything can happen that can cause our clan to lose its most important pillar. If that happens, it will be up to me and the rest to support the current status of our clan. By that time, it becomes more important to blend in and abide by the rules than ever. If my children and I can present ourselves as wealthy first-raters, it becomes much easier to maintain the respect and awe of our existing relations."

Ves pressed his lips into a line. "You are putting way too much emphasis on external appearances. Profit is the true driving force of our society. I don't think the Terrans and the Rubarthans care a single fart about our fashion budget. They care about whether they can still get their living mechs and other products from us. From the moment we can no longer supply those goods, that is when our clan is truly in trouble."

The two were completely different people in this regard. Both of them came from very different backgrounds and could not agree on this matter.

Ves let out a tired sigh. "Ugh. How can you buy so much expensive crap in Vulit? Isn't it supposed to be a second-class hub? These products are way too overpriced!"

"Not for the mechers and the fleeters." Gloriana responded with a grin. "I visited the second-class shopping streets at first, but I quickly became dissatisfied with the products on offer. I decided to transfer to a different planet in the star system that is mainly occupied by the mechers. The luxury shopping streets and malls over there are much more fitting to our new circumstances. I have taken the liberty to completely replace both of our wardrobes as well as that of our children. Furthermore, I have bought a spate of first-class luxury items to further project our success. I also bought first-class toys in order to help our children adopt the mindset of a first-rater before it is too late. I will not have our offspring present themselves as inferior second-raters any longer!"

His wife had an obsession with status. Though Ves found it important as well, their cultural norms were too different!

As a former direct descendant of the Wodin Dynasty, Gloriana grew up in a relatively harsh and demanding environment where every Hexer constantly expected the women around them to demonstrate their supremacy over boys.

They were women, so they were superior!

There was no virtue in restraint in Hexer society. The strong hierarchy and sharp divisions among the Hexers had made it more important than ever for them to show their precise status through their outward appearances.

This was an alien mindset to Ves!

Though Ves was willing to invest considerable sums into making himself look good, he always had maintained a sense of proportion when it came to this. An extravagant coat worth a million MTA credits was not as valuable as an entire mech division as far as he was concerned!

Ves lowered his head in pain. "Show me what you bought. Let's start with the handbags since they are the most useless."

"Handbags are not useless! They are essential accessories, especially to women such as myself!"

Gloriana proceeded to project the appearances of all of her new handbags.

Naturally, the amount of money she spent on them caused them to be a lot more remarkable than their second-class counterparts.

"Each of the new handbags are products of innovation. They are all embedded with high-grade hyper materials that can bestow a range of useful functions, such as blocking strong winds or purifying the air of undesirable scents. Each of them are no cheaper than 20 million MTA credits, and I have bought 6 in total. I have already retired my old collection of handbags because they are no different from trash bags in my eyes!"

Her previous set of expensive handbags were not bad at all! They were perfectly serviceable as containers, and they were all made with precious materials such as puelmer leather!

Ves sighed yet again. "What is done is done. I really don't want to see you spend this money again."

"Why not? We have become even wealthier than before! As soon as I heard about the alliance you forged with the Rubarthans, I knew that we have become much richer than before! Spending hundreds of millions of MTA credits should no longer be a burden to you. The dividends that you can earn from owning a fifth of Isthmus Manufacturing can increase our line of credit by one or maybe two orders of magnitude."

"ENOUGH! WE ARE NOT TAKING ON MORE DEBT!" Ves insisted! "If I had the cash, I would have paid off the 517 million MTA credits that we owe to Yem-Tar immediately! Unfortunately, the next dividend payment isn't happening anytime soon, which means that we will have to pay off millions of MTA credits in interest payments in the meantime!"

"That is no longer a burden to the current state of our clan."

"That is not true! Our clan is expanding in scope with each passing day. There are many places that need a lot of money in order to bring them to our level. The Larkinson Biotech Institute, the T Institute and the Premier Branch are just a few of the places that need an astronomical amount of investment to bring them up to first-class standards. All of the millions of MTA credits that we spend on interest payments means less money for more productive investments."

"I do not understand why you treat our debt as if it is a dangerous burden." Gloriana frowned. "As I have mentioned before, we can fully meet the interest payments, if not in the present time, then in the future. Yem-Tar is primarily owned by the mechers, so our bank will not make it difficult for us if we have temporarily run out of liquidity."

"You fool! That just means we have given the mechers a lot of leverage! They will insist that we do stuff for them in order to repay our debt!"

"We can always spend the many MTA merits that we have earned so far."

"That is even more wasteful!"

Ves could not stand the thought of squandering lots of money on servicing debt. It might be a little more acceptable if Gloriana spent much of the 517 million MTA credits on more useful goods such as the Ice Fire Rock, but that was not the case!

He eventually decided to pay the debt as soon as the clan received its first dividend payment.

Together with the money earned from selling all of the production licenses for his new Fey Fianna models, he should be able to get rid of this burden as soon as possible.

He hated the fact that he could not spend all of that money on more practical investments.

The latest assassination attempt caused him to prioritize his security a lot more. He intended to upgrade the defensive facilities of Diandi Base and acquire expensive materials to upgrade his Unending Regalia.

All of those plans had to be delayed due to this unexpected circumstance!

Though Ves could have chosen to go in the opposite direction and increase his leverage, he felt it was completely unnecessary for him to do so at this time.

Chapter 5625 Missing Out

Ves got a good look at all of the extravagant stuff that his wife had bought during her visit to Vult.

As they both started to put their children to bed, Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine all changed into their soft and exquisitely patterned pajamas made out of the hairs of a calamity beast and hugged their masterwork-quality dolls as they went to sleep.

All of these items happened to be hyper products. They attracted E energies with attributes related to concepts such as growth, health, calm, dreams and happiness.

They all had a definite effect on the little brats. They fell asleep a lot faster and seemed to enjoy their slumber a lot more.

Ves objected a little less to Gloriana's spending after witnessing these effects.

She then dragged him over to their new wardrobe. She had completely set aside his old outfits and replaced them with newer and more refined versions.

His wife even approached a tailoring house and commissioned the creation of new Larkinson uniforms!

"From tomorrow onwards, you will present yourself as a true first-rater." Gloriana said. "Do not underestimate the effect of wearing these clothes. It will become easier for you to project authority and command people's respect. The less you remind them of your humble past, the more you will be able to blend in with our new peers."

Ves did not bother to argue with her anymore. He did not think it was necessary to spend so much money on extravagantly expensive outfits, but it was already too late now that they were in his closet.

"Whatever."

Ves and his wife sat down and began to resume their talk.

Lucky and Clixie had settled nearby and already began to lick each other's faces.

"Meow..."

"Miaow..."

Gloriana still had much to say about what she witnessed during her stay in Vulit.

"Cultivation has become more present in people's lives." She said. "The core star systems controlled by the Red Two are much further ahead compared to other locations in this regard. The contrast is particularly striking in the communities occupied by the mechers. My companion spirit has noticed that more and more people who are not already mech pilots or mech designers have begun to cultivate different methods that have begun to strengthen them and improve their connection to different attributes."

Ves looked intrigued. "Is that so? I guess that might be the Transhumanists taking the lead. I'm not sure about the origin and the purpose of these methods. Do you have a clue?"

"No. Not much time has passed since they have started to practice their new methods, so there is not enough progress to deduce what they are trying to work towards. Their actions show that we cannot be complacent about this. You need to spend time and supply proper cultivation methods to every clansman and companion spirit. I am still waiting for you to supply an improved method for Alexandria."

"I haven't forgotten." Ves lied. "I will present one to you after I have settled down again. Companion spirits are constantly growing by themselves as they are innately capable of natural cultivation. They also adapt remarkably well to different circumstances. You can make sure that Alexandria continues to grow in a favorable direction by frequently employing her design network."

His wife did not take this seriously. "Even I know that deliberate intervention is always better than letting nature take its course. At least the mechers are actively taking their future in their own hands."

They talked a bit more about what Gloriana had managed to observe during her visit to Vulit.

"By the way, what about the fleeters?" He asked. "Vulit should be occupied by them as well. Have you taken a good look at the members of the Red Fleet?"

Gloriana's expression turned doubtful. "I did not frequent any areas where the fleeters are widely present. They tend to stick to their warships most of the time. The few fleeters that I have met have given me an odd impression."

"Have they become cultivators?"

"No." She shook her head. "I am not sensitive or knowledgeable as you in this field of expertise, but I can still discern the differences, especially after I have seen many mechers. The fleeters are not engaging in any form of cultivation as far as I am aware of, but their spiritualities are... different."

"How so? Shouldn't they be cultivators if this is the case?"

"It is difficult for me to describe what I have witnessed because I do not understand it myself. The fleeters... are giving me the impression that they are still individually weak and human, but they are not as easy to challenge as before. I cannot explain why, but this is what I instinctively felt. I suggest you take a look at them yourself. To be honest, I feel even more alienated by them than before."

"That sounds... worrisome."

The fleeters were definitely up to something. It was impossible for them to give ground to the mechers all of the time.

Their biggest problem was that they were ideologically opposed to the very concept of cultivation. They believed in the supremacy of technology and opposed any initiative that caused people to lose their own humanity in the pursuit of power.

This was why Ves found it rather strange that Gloriana felt alienated by the fleeters.

Either the snobbish spaceborn bastards had made a complete U-turn, or Gloriana had misinterpreted her observations.

Ves would have to take a look at the fleeters himself, but it was quite difficult to encounter them in person.

This was not a high priority issue to Ves. It should be the Red Association and the first-rate superstates who should truly be worried about the Red Fleet!

After Gloriana finally completed her explanation on what she had experienced during her visit to Vulit, the conversation finally turned to Ves.

Her eyes grew sharper as Gloriana could not hide her obvious interest in her husband's antics.

"You have done remarkably well in my absence. I have already learned about much of what you have done. Let us start from the beginning. You attempted to fabricate the first production copy of the newly completed Fey Fianna model. For whatever reason, all of the recordings and data logs have disappeared from our internal database. I only have eye witness testimonies to go on, and they are hardly complete. I am told that only you and your young new disciple were responsible for a dramatic fabrication run that ended with the descent of a cataclysmic lightning bolt. I do not know what happened, but it is not difficult for me to observe that your fabrication run has not delivered any concrete results."

The attempted creation of the Elemental Lord was still a sore spot to Ves. He did not really want to bring up bad memories, but he knew his wife would continue to nag him until he gave her a proper explanation.

"It's... difficult for me to explain, Gloriana. I made a lot of mistakes. Let's do this, then. Activate Alexandria's design network and connect our minds together. I will just transfer the key moments of what I have done from my perspective to you. This is the fastest way for me to bring you up to speed."

Though Ves was not exactly eager to present his enormous failure to his wife, it might be useful to obtain her feedback. She was still a good mech designer. Her advice might help him make the redo of the Elemental Lord even stronger when he was ready to reprise this bold attempt!

"Maoow."

When the design network became active once again, Ves shoved his pre-prepared package of memories through the spiritual connections.

As Gloriana rapidly processed the memories with the help of her advanced Arachne 01 cranial implant set, her emotions swung many times all of a sudden!

Ves had already disconnected himself from the design network to spare him from his wife's emotional reactions.

Her expression and the fluctuations of her spirituality showed that she had lost much of her calm all of a sudden!

"You... you actually tried to make a grand work?" She asked with an expression that looked both amazed and horrified!

"I only learned about that in hindsight." Ves responded. "It turns out that there are good reasons why only highly accomplished Master Mech Designers and Star Designers are able to make them. I really do not have the qualifications to make one right now. It is only now that I have experienced the enormous gap between masterworks and grand works."

"THAT DOES NOT CHANGE THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE ALREADY APPROACHED THE THRESHOLD OF A GRAND WORK! THIS IS TOO SOON! YOU ARE STILL A SENIOR! HOW DID YOU DO IT, VES?!"

Gloriana became so obsessed with what Ves had accidentally done at the time that her hands had grabbed his throat and tried to shake him back and forth!

Naturally, her gesture was completely useless. His true body was far too dense and strong to get shaken by her in this manner.

Ves gently pried her delicate hands away from his neck. "Calm down, honey. One of the reasons why I transferred my memories directly to you is so that you can get most of the answers that you want. I got struck by inspiration when I started my fabrication run. This is not the false inspiration that can be induced by hitting myself with my Hammer of Brilliance. This is a genuine moment of serendipity, and it has changed my life forever."

Gloriana frowned as she continually ran through the memories. The perspective from Ves was not complete, but it still gave her a decent understanding of all of the hyperactive ideas that were running through his mind at the time.

It was impossible for her to comprehend the specific processes employed by her crazy husband.

This was because even he did not fully understand what he was doing and why he made certain steps over the course of his work!

He had surrendered himself nearly entirely to his own intuition and gut feeling!

This caused him to complete many processes that had no clear basis in logic or theory!

She grew increasingly more frustrated when she realized that Ves' memories held little reference value to her. There was no way for her to learn any tricks that could help her raise the quality of her work and get closer to the threshold of a grand work.

The fundamental reason why this was the case was because they were too different from each other.

If Gloriana wanted to create a brilliant work on her own one day, then she needed to get inspired herself and create an unprecedentedly powerful work by relying on her own ingenuity!

Once she realized this, she no longer felt as jealous and upset with Ves as before.

Even if she happened to be present during this amazing fabrication run, her gains wouldn't have been much better due to the enormous differences between their work.

Still, she could have made other gains if she was present at the time. She still remained upset at the fact that Ves had randomly gone off to make a mech that had the potential to become a grand work shortly after she left for Vulit!

"You may have ultimately failed, but you learned many lessons from this attempt." Gloriana eventually said as she pressed her palm against his chest. "You should be proud of this accomplishment. I hope I will be present next time you do this, because I will not let you run wild to this extent again!"

A competitive fire surged in her mind. Gloriana had become frightened by how her husband had taken such a massive step forward without her. She needed to step up her game if she wanted to remain as his equal!

Her thoughts went back to the Dark Zephyr Mark II Project and the other upgrade projects. The next iterations of her old expert mechs will be the vehicles that should enable her to realize her latest advancements!

Chapter 5626 Useful Feedback

Gloriana expressed continuous amazement at what Ves experienced after he departed from New Constantinople VIII.

She had already heard a part of what Ves had done on Ocanon VI by questioning their children. Yet even she did not know that her husband harvested the complete spirituality of the Azure Tornado Dragon!

As her beloved, Gloriana clearly understood the significance of this move.

"Are you thinking about turning it into your latest design spirit?"

"Maybe." Ves said as he continued to cuddle with his wife as they gazed at a projected view of exotic alien vistas. "I need to be more careful about this. My collection of design spirits is already considerable, and I haven't even made full use out of all of them. Expanding it further will make it harder for me to manage them all. There is nothing actually stopping them from cutting off their connections to my mech designs and splitting off to go elsewhere."

That surprised his wife. "You have been making use of them all this time without binding them with contracts or restraints?"

"That's not how I work." Ves responded. "Each of them are either my creations or my partners. It is not right to treat them like slaves. Doing this will more than likely incur a backlash as they can withdraw their support or even tamper with the mechs that they are overseeing. Our relationships have always been based on trust and mutual interest. Besides, the design spirits previously did not have any good alternatives because the old galaxy is a low-energy environment. The imaginary realm over there is completely barren and filled with corrosive energies."

"The Age of Dawn has changed that." His wife quickly deduced. "Unlike before, your design spirits can sustain themselves even when they no longer have access to the spiritual feedback of so many mech pilots."

Ves nodded. "The power balance between me and my design spirits has become a lot less lopsided than before. Fortunately, all of our existing design spirits have spent years growing stronger with my assistance. They are unlikely to leave due to inertia. The same cannot be said for any new creations. They will grow up in an environment where I am not the only choice for sustained growth. Coercing them to work for me is not a reliable means of maintaining control. Life always finds a way. I can use as many means as possible to bind them to me, but they only need to succeed once to break out and take revenge."

He and his wife fell silent for a minute as they mulled over these considerations. Design spirits played a vital role in the success of the Larkinson Clan. The loss of any of them would plunge the value of certain mech lines and initiate a crisis of trust among the LMC's customers.

While Ves did not think that any of his current stable of design spirits would maliciously break off all relations without notifying him in advance, he needed to be prepared for any contingency.

"If this is the case, then maybe it is better to be less restrained about making additional design spirits." Gloriana suggested. "You are still holding back because this is your old habit, but we are not living in the Age of Mechs anymore. Now that we have entered the Age of Dawn, E energy and mutated beasts have become particularly abundant. I believe you should be able to find and harvest the spiritualities of enough powerful creatures to make substitutes for many of your current design spirits. You don't have to use them right away. You can store the spare ingredients and only bring them out if you need to obtain a replacement for one of your lost design spirits."

That was actually a good suggestion. Gloriana reminded Ves that he was no longer stuck in the past where it took a huge amount of effort to find powerful mutated beasts and high-quality spiritual ingredients.

The quantity of mutated beasts had skyrocketed, and so had their variety. It no longer became implausible for Ves to obtain a mutated beast that possessed rare and exceptional domains such as space or even devouring.

Of course, the demand for mutated beasts with these particular talents was still high. Not just Ves, but many other researchers hungered for creatures that possessed amazing 'superpowers'!

Fortunately for Ves, his recent visit to Ocanon VI had given him a clear understanding of the modern hunting community.

He had seen plenty of hunting teams return from their latest trips with dead or living mutated beasts among their spoils.

A large number of biotech institutions paid handsome rewards for the retrieval of all manner of powerful and exotic mutated beasts.

There was no need for Ves to visit Ocanon VI or any other hunting planet in person. He could just instruct his clan to issue commission and wait for the hunting community to fulfill them. The higher the price, the shorter the wait!

The price for the capture and shipment of living mutated beasts may be high for second-class organizations, but it was completely trivial to the current Larkinson Clan!

Ves had never visited any first-class hunting planets. He had heard amazing stories about the mutated beasts that grew up and evolved on planets that were filled with higher quantities of exotics and hypers.

However, there was no requirement for strength for his design spirits. Ves managed to create Ylvaine from a centuries-old discarded nutrient wrapper.

The true value of spiritual ingredients lay in the rarity of their spiritual attributes and the application of power of the mutated beasts.

The former determined the starting point while the latter gave his design spirits clear directions on how to develop their abilities going forward.

Beasts found on a second-class hunting planet such as the Azure Tornado Dragon and the Giant Stone Eater more than satisfied Ves' needs.

He formed a new plan based on the strategy suggested by his wife.

"I intend to make design spirits that correspond to each of the five classical elements. They are just too ubiquitous for me to ignore." He eventually decided. "I will also make other design spirits based on very powerful or useful attributes such as destruction."

"Destruction? How?"

"Ah, let me tell you about my gains in Bortele."

Ves proceeded to summarize what he managed to accomplish during his trip to the port system.

From turning the Fey Fianna line into an overnight success to meeting with the Destroyer of Worlds in person after getting rescued by her, Gloriana's eyes increasingly widened after she heard his side of the story.

"So the rumors are true?!"

"I'm sure that a lot of them are exaggerated, but it is true that I managed to forge a friendship with Her Divinity." Ves smiled with pride. "I even managed to obtain a powerful spiritual fragment from her. Would you like to see?"

He briefly summoned the Novastella statue from his System Space. His wife grew stunned as she held the dense metal statue with utmost respect and care.

The sculpture depicting Emma radiated the power of destruction. Gloriana clearly found it difficult to withstand the passive glow and soon had to give it back to her husband to prevent greater harm.

Once Ves put the remarkable container back into his System Space, his wife needed a minute to think over all of the implications of what she learned. Her new Arachne 01 granted her a formidable amount of processing power and helped her contemplate the ramifications much more extensively than before.

Her expression grew a lot more serious. "It is no wonder that the Terrans treated us much differently upon my return. My children and I have clearly sensed that a barrier has formed with the locals."

"It doesn't help that I managed to hook up with the Impresario Prince as well. I don't know what you heard from the media, but it is true that our clan now owns a 20 percent stake in Isthmus Manufacturing. While this deal comes with many strings attached, the shares are all real."

Ves spent a bit more time on explaining his new relationships with the Rubarthans. He left out a few crucial details such as how he first became acquainted with the Destroyer of Worlds, but his wife was clever enough to infer that other extraordinary factors were at play.

She knew that her husband likely had good reasons to hold back certain pieces of information. There was no need for her to pry any further. The information that she already received was enough to keep her preoccupied for a while.

"This changes everything." Gloriana said as an ambitious spark lit up in her eyes. "Our clan can speed up its growth now that our clan has become a greater force in high society. The Terrans resent the Rubarthans and would hate to see you move into the orbit of their archrivals. In fact, they probably consider your latest moves to be a betrayal of their trust. You chose to travel to the Terran Alliance first, so the Devos Ancient Clan likely thought that becoming your ally and partner was a foregone conclusion."

Ves shrugged. "I always told the Terrans that I never intended to get in bed with them. They might secretly hope that they can 'convert' me to their side, but that will never happen. Our clan will always remain independent and neutral within human society. This is the best way to ensure that our mechs will be able to get sold to the widest possible audience."

Though he did not agree with all of the policies of the Red Association, he resonated with the need to serve red humanity as a whole. All of the petty divisions that turned humans against each other was child's play. Getting involved in these intra-human disputes would only make it difficult for Ves to fulfill his role as a mech designer who wanted to cater to the entire mech market!

"You have always wanted to build up a fleet of first-class starships, correct? This is the time to make use of our advantages to demand these concessions. We can play the Terrans and the Rubarthans against each other." Gloriana suggested a dangerous game. "The Devos Ancient Clan will soon attempt to form an extensive agreement with you that can act as a counterweight against your newly established partnership with the Impresario Prince. The Terrans will be so desperate to obtain your support that they may be willing to pass on one of their first-class starships to you. Seize this opportunity to build the fleet that you have always dreamed about."

This was a bold and risky gambit, but it had a decent chance of succeeding!

Even if the Devos Ancient Clan was not able to spare any of its capital ships, it should still be able to donate a handful of first-class combat carriers.

That would already make Ves happy because he knew how much more powerful an individual first-class multipurpose mech could be. Quality trumped quantity, so even a handful of combat carriers was enough to guarantee enough self-protection ability in a confrontation against the major alien races of the Red Ocean.

"I'll need to flesh out this idea further with Gavin and the Foreign Affairs Ministry." Ves decided. "I think it is worth a try. We will likely have to forgo other lucrative gains. First-class starships have become an even more valuable form of hard currency than phasewater in the current climate."

If Ves had to make a choice between 20 percent ownership in Isthmus Manufacturing or a couple of first-class fleet carriers, he would choose the latter anytime!

The former might be a fantastic long-term investment in times of relative stability, but how long would that last?

The latter would definitely increase his ability to survive and make fantastic gains through conquest and plunder!

Of course, there was no inherent contradiction between the two. It was best if Ves could obtain both at the same time. The best way for organizations such as the Larkinson Clan to get ahead was to combine strong finances with abundant martial strength!

Chapter 5627 Domineering Names

Now that Ves had returned to New Constantinople VIII, a new phase in his life had begun.

The release of the Fey Fianna line continued to produce massive ripple effects. Many people held such high regard for the presentation of the revolutionary new hyper drone mechs that they continually rewatched the footage over and over again.

Demand continued to increase over time, making it more and more difficult for the Living Mech Corporation to manage customer expectations.

Fortunately, it did not take long for the Living Mech Corporation and the Isthmus Manufacturing to issue a joint statement where they announced their massive cooperation!

A lot of senior figures had already learned about this development in advance, but once the rest of the public became informed about this dramatic event, people's opinions towards Ves and his mech company rose even higher!

"Professor Larkinson is getting chummy with both the Terrans and the Rubarthans. Not many mech designers can get away with that. It will be interesting to see whether he can keep up his balancing act."

"The Larkinsons have become rich! How are these second-raters able to convince the Rubarthans to give them a fifth of a mech company as large as Isthmus Manufacturing? It doesn't make sense! Don't tell me that any tier 3 galactic citizen can obtain all of those shares with the same ease. The other shareholders of Isthmus Manufacturing are not charities. They collectively gave away trillions of MTA credits worth of stock! What did Professor Larkinson promise to do in return?"

"Isthmus Manufacturing has already announced a new plan to retool many of its second-class production lines so that they will soon pump out Fey Fiannas en masse. The buyers hailing from the Rubarthan Pact are so lucky. They will be able to get their hands on these powerful new mechs first!"

"Hey, at least all of that Rubarthan mech production will shorten the waiting list. I was originally scheduled to receive my order 7 months from today. With luck, that will soon be cut down in half."

A lot of customers reacted to the news with delight and optimism. They had a strong interest in the success of the Fey Fianna. The fact that such a large and reputable Rubarthan mech company chose to partner with the Larkinsons to expand the production of living mechs added a lot of legitimacy and certainly to this much-hyped mech line.

More importantly than that, Isthmus Manufacturing had a huge amount of mech factories at its disposal.

Even if only a part of them allocated their production capacity to the Fey Fianna, that could already increase the monthly output of living mechs by five to ten times depending on the Rubarthan company's commitment!

This assuaged a lot of concerns about the LMC's ability to fulfill its astronomical amount of orders.

In fact, a lot of potential customers that previously turned away because they worried too much about the enormous delays in production and delivery had changed their minds.

They reluctantly placed their orders with the expectation that it should take no longer than half a year for them to receive their amazingly powerful and technologically advanced drone mechs.

Ves chuckled when he saw that the latest announcement sparked a second wave of orders.

"It seems that the credibility of Isthmus Manufacturing is really high. Everyone has total confidence that our new partner should be able to make up for any shortfall in production. It is rather disappointing to see how little faith people have in our own company's production capacity."

"You don't have to feel sorry for yourself, boss." Gavin assuaged Ves. "Isthmus is centuries old and has a strong foundation in the old galaxy. The LMC only rose up in less than two decades. When you look back at our history, it is amazing to see how far we have come since we started out on Cloudy Curtain. The version of you back then probably would have never imagined that you would have been able to design a mech that went on to become a mainstream mech model in so little time."

His assistant was right. Ves had made so much progress that he had exceeded all of his expectations. He and his clan grew far too quickly, making it so that they lacked the time to address all of the flaws and inconsistencies that emerged as of late.

This was far from the first time that Ves encountered this problem. The fact of the matter was that the Larkinson Clan changed so much in so little time that its foundation had become dangerously unstable.

What the Larkinsons needed the most was another period of stable and steady development. That was the only way to sustain the momentum of the clan while at the same time grant enough breathing room for everyone to consolidate their new gains.

Ves was more than willing to oblige. He and many other people were waiting for the Red War to enter the next phase.

Once the Red Two completed the ambitious conversion of the greater beyonder gate, humanity would enter a new era of violence and plunder!

That reminded Ves of all of the work that he needed to do in order to prepare his clan for the exciting deep strike operations that were set to begin in a few years.

"Has Isthmus Manufacturing given us an updated timeline on when it intends to introduce the Supremo Project?"

Gavin shook his head. "The Rubarthan company has yet to give us an update on it. The new heavy artillery mech has shaken so many people who have witnessed the performance of the test versions that they do not want to waste this opportunity to completely push Isthmus to the forefront of the second-class mech industry."

"Do they need my help?"

"No." Gavin shook his head. "No offense, boss, but you have a habit of sucking up all of the attention. That is not what Isthmus wants. The company wants to strengthen its own brand name among its customer base in the Rubarthan Pact and the Red Ocean Union. Its executives are more than confident that they can do a good job of marketing your new commercial heavy artillery mech without relying on your characteristic flamboyant stage performances."

His assistant made it sound as if Ves was an overly dramatic attention seeker. He was not that bad! Still, he could see where Isthmus was coming from. The Rubarthans did not want to be reduced to supporting characters in this new partnership. Otherwise, it would only be a matter of time before they became his vassals.

"By the way, the Marketing Department of our new business partner has mulled over a proper name for the Supremo Project. For various reasons, the marketing executives are not particularly enthused about calling it the Supremo. It makes your heavy artillery mech sound like a child's toy. They want to give the upcoming product a more dignified name, particularly because it is tied to one of their eminent god pilots."

Ves personally thought it was not a bad idea to stick to calling it the Supremo. It was a fairly short but distinct name that could easily become another valuable addition to the mech community's lexicon.

However, now that Isthmus Manufacturing had taken over the original commissions, the Rubarthans had the right to set the final names.

"I take it the Rubarthans have already come up with their own alternatives."

"They came up with three different suggestions as a matter of fact. They are currently trying to finalize their choice. You can make your own recommendation, but Isthmus cannot guarantee that it will follow suit."

Ves didn't care too much about that. "What are the proposed names?"

"The names in contention are as follows: the Kitty Howl, the Ultimatum and the Godhammer."

"...You're serious?"

"I am only conveying what I have received from our new channels with Isthmus Manufacturing." Gavin confirmed.

None of the three names sounded normal for a mass production model!

The Kitty Howl was clearly the silliest of the three suggestions. It was a clear reference to Emma and the Destroyer of Worlds. It was a deliberately understated name that produced an ironic contrast to the awesome power of the actual living heavy artillery mech.

The Ultimatum sounded a lot more domineering. It was the name that resonated with him the most. He actually found himself liking it over Supremo because it just sounded so awesome. It also had a much closer association with doomsday weapons.

As for the Godhammer... Ves did not like all of the associations it evoked. It sounded just as impressive as the Ultimatum, but it did so in a different fashion. His upcoming product would

definitely be unable to maintain a low profile if the Rubarthans claimed that the new heavy artillery mech could strike down enemies with the the power of a god pilot.

All in all, the three proposed names all had their good points. Ves wouldn't feel too dissatisfied if any of them got selected in the end.

"Tell the Rubarthans that I strongly recommend they go with the Ultimatum. The Supremo Project is so powerful in its current iteration that its realspace performance should already speak for itself. There is no need to tarnish the model with all kinds of silly and over-the-top associations. Ultimatum is a clean and simple enough word that conveys just the right dominance to complement our product."

Gavin nodded in understanding. "I shall convey your words to our new partner."

"Is there any business that I need to know about?"

"Nothing further with the Rubarthans, no, but the Terrans are eager to speed up their negotiations with you. The Devos Ancient Clan invites you to its palace that is located in the capital city of Sandan to hold formal talks."

Ves grinned. He had been waiting for this. The Devosans were finally ready to get off their lazy butts.

"Have the Devosans made any indication of what they seek from our clan?"

"Well, they are still interested in acquiring a kinship network for the Terran Alliance as a whole. Your most recent assassination attempt has actually spooked a lot of people, especially other high-tier galactic citizens. Each of them have bounties on their heads by virtue of their status. The thought that any trusted human by their side could turn against them at any moment is scaring them out of their wits. They think that connecting everyone to an exclusive kinship network should give them a powerful means to monitor and guarantee everyone's loyalties."

That made a lot of sense. The Red Cabal had inadvertently helped to expand Ves' business.

He would never thank the aliens, of course.

"I see." Ves responded. "Please tell the Terrans that I cannot give assurances that my kinship networks can detect hidden double agents. If Master Quan had been able to lurk within human society for so long without drawing any suspicion, then his ability to partition and camouflage his mind is top-notch. Even I cannot guarantee that a kinship network can overcome these exceptional means."

"It should at least raise the threshold of treachery by an enormous margin. That should be enough to give these troubled VIPs peace of mind."

Ves was fine with that as long as nobody cast any blame on him if the kinship network happened to fail.

"Are the Devosans planning to do other business?"

"Most certainly. They will definitely seek to bind you in a deal that is similar to your arrangement with Isthmus Manufacturing. As long as you agree to design a few mechs for the Terrans, you can ask for heavy concessions in return."

Ves smirked at that. "This should be a fine occasion for me to ask for a couple of first-class starships."

The Devos Ancient Clan was not in a good position at the moment. Its territory was located a bit too close to the frontlines, and its mech armies were a lot weaker than the bigger ancient clans.

If not for the fact that Ves had yet to earn the qualifications to design a first-class mech, he would have been able to exploit these conditions a lot better!

Chapter 5628 Alexaa's Design Philosophy

Ves held a lot of expectations towards his upcoming meeting with the Terrans, but any deal he made with them was ultimately secondary to his own works.

The Fey Fianna, the Supremo Project and the Transcendent Punisher Mark III were only the first of many living mechs that Ves intended to design during the new mech generation.

Many more previously successful mech lines deserved to be turned into more modern hyper mechs.

When Ves entered the main design studio of Diandi Base, he stood in front of a lot of new faces.

The 25 Journeymen Mech Designers who agreed to join the Larkinson Clan all looked eager and motivated to start their new careers.

Hundreds of assistant mech designers stood further in the rear. Many of them had been brought over from the expeditionary fleet, but Alexa had also recruited a batch of other talented Apprentice Mech Designers that were more than happy to work for the Larkinsons in exchange for an opportunity to complete a leap in class.

Alexa Streon and Gloriana Wodin-Larkinson stood on opposite sides of the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan.

The former Terran consciously stepped backward in order to avoid the association that she was competing with Gloriana.

Nonetheless, Gloriana openly frowned at Alexa. Her intuition told her that the younger woman had become closer to Ves in the last month. The two had become a lot more comfortable in each other's presence.

Not only that, but Gloriana also sensed other clues about Alexa that put the mother on edge.

Fortunately, she was professional enough to keep her temper in check and focus on the more immediate priority.

"Welcome to the Larkinson Clan." Ves greeted the new arrivals. "Here, you will begin your new journey as a Larkinson. Each of you have been thoroughly vetted and tested, so I have no doubt that you will be able to find your place in my Design Department. I cannot promise you that you will be able to remain in the Premier Branch on a permanent basis, but I can promise you that each of you will have a fair shot at earning an EdNet quota. We will track every contribution you make."

No one doubted Ves' words. His credibility was high, and they had already heard from numerous other Larkinsons how well the Larkinson Clan treated its lead designers.

Ves continued his speech. "The harder you work, the more Larkinson merits you can earn, yet grunt labor can only get you so far. The faster you improve, the sooner you can undertake greater

responsibilities, allowing you to earn more merits per project. One of the most surefire ways to advance your position in my Design Department is to come up with ingenious design solutions that provide clear benefits to our products. I did not hire you for your solid design skills and extensive knowledge base alone. I hired you because I see the seed of greatness in you all. The more you are able to break out of your shells and attain brilliance, the more our clan will go all-out to support your ambitions. The only requirement is that you succeed!"

To be honest, Ves did not expect many of his new Journeymen to stand out in the next few years.

The probability of achieving critical success was too low. Even if the foundation of all of these former direct disciples was a lot better on average, their usefulness may never exceed a certain threshold if they lacked the ambition and determination to conduct more radical research.

Ves did not have much respect for mech designers who played it safe. Even if they were able to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer, their design solutions were probably so marginal that hardly any customer could appreciate the differences.

The second-class Journeymen gathered before him were all clever enough to understand Ves' underlying message. The Design Department set up a structure where playing it safe and making steady contributions was not the best way to earn the most Larkinson merits.

The Living Mech Corporation did not have an invincible market position. Its old product lines were losing popularity at a much faster rate than the product lines of bigger and more reputable companies such as SKL Mech Industries.

The LMC had always relied on product differentiation to catch up to the competition. Now that the Larkinsons had begun to compete across the entire second-class mech market of red humanity, Ves could no longer shoulder his growing responsibilities alone.

He needed the help of many more lead designers!

However, Ves admittedly did not look forward to managing each of them in person. This was why he had decisively thrown the ball at his wife.

Unlike him, Gloriana was more than eager to take charge of all of the personnel in the Design Department.

She took a step forward at this time, causing everyone's attention to switch to the well-dressed woman.

Ves had chosen to go to work while wearing a new first-class patriarch uniform. It had been customized by an engineering team led by a master tailor from Vult. Their combined efforts resulted in a work that might not have turned into a masterwork, but came awfully close to reaching that level of quality.

Much of the reason why his outfit cost so much was due to its exceptional materials and expansive amounts of miniaturized tech.

Though the extra comfort and amenities most certainly made a difference in his daily life, he was already fine with wearing his previous outfits.

Gloriana did not think so, however. The way she dressed and presented herself was indicative of that. She had chosen to wear a red patterned suit over a white lab coat that not only offered excellent protection against accidents, but also made her look bigger and more imposing!

"Do not think you have become Larkinsons just because you have adopted our family name." She spoke to the crowd. "Before you are ready to take part in design projects centered around upgrading our existing Larkinson models, you must first learn how our current living mechs work. More importantly, you must also familiarize yourself with the Larkinsons who pilot all of the mechs designed in-house. It is not wise to send you on an extended work visit to our famous expeditionary fleet, so you will roam through our ships in virtual reality instead. The Larkinsons over there may only be able to talk to physical projections of yourselves, but that should be sufficient for you to develop better relations with your fellow clansmen."

This was anything but ideal, but it was the best they could do under the circumstances.

Gloriana proceeded to explain what she had in mind once the new Journeymen completed their acclimation process.

"Once you have a clear understanding of our mechs as well as how they are being used by our own troops, you will be put in charge over one or several concurrent upgrade projects. We plan to extend a large amount of trust to you all by putting a number of you in charge of individual projects. However, my husband will also be involved in order to ensure that the living mechs retain their most important qualities. He will not be able to allocate much time for each and every upgrade process, but he can ensure that the next iterations of our existing mech models will not regress as living mechs."

No matter how much Ves limited his involvement in all of the upgrade projects, it was still a massive burden for him to keep up with them all, especially if they were being worked on at the same time.

It couldn't be helped. The LMC's customers had shown a lot of patience, but they were not willing to wait forever in order to obtain adequate hyper mech versions of their existing products.

"I expect each of you to work hard and do your best to completely refresh all of our current mech models to the latest generation." Gloriana spoke with greater force. "We must complete all of the necessary upgrades within 2 years! Each upgraded mech must be no worse than the Fey Fianna in terms of qualities, resource utilization and cost efficiency. If each of you are the geniuses that we think you are, then this should be a guaranteed outcome. Do not fail in your assignments!"

After that, Gloriana began to explain more detailed rules. She also addressed every new recruit in person.

Ves turned around and walked away. There was no need for him to stick around while his wife established her authority.

He had a more pressing matter to deal with at the moment.

As Ves entered a smaller and more secure design room, Alexa Streon arrived shortly afterwards and thoughtfully closed the door.

"Are you sure you are ready?" He asked as he faced his latest protege. "This is a life-changing decision. Once you have settled on your design philosophy, you can no longer change your mind."

Your base will be set. The most you can do to alter the expression of your work is to make radical detours, but that obviously has its limits."

The young woman who had always dressed herself in high-quality professional wear took a deep breath before she gave a measured response.

"I have already made my choice during our stay in Bortele. I have spent the entire return trip to New Constantinople questioning my judgment and considering the alternatives. I have not wavered in my decision. I am absolutely certain that I have found my direction."

Ves could hear and sense her strong conviction. She had truly made a careful choice.

"That is good. It is not a disaster if you end up making a bad choice. What is fatal to mech designers such as ourselves is regretting the decisions you have already made. I believe that any design philosophy can produce groundbreaking works as long as you work hard enough. That said, a more optimal starting point can save you decades if not centuries of struggle. What is the design philosophy that you have chosen for yourself?"

This was the big moment that both of them had been waiting for. Alexa swelled with pride as she explained her reasoning.

"As you know, I originally sought you out because I became inspired by your living mechs. It had always been my dream and my ambition to design a mech comparable to the Ouroboros. My grandfather always gushes about his unique machine, and has always expressed his regret that he is unable to find its original maker. I want to be the mech designer who improves his machine. I am cognizant that my chances of doing so are slim and that you may be able to do a better job, but I will still work hard in order to service the needs of the next generation of mechs and mech pilots."

That was a healthy mindset. If Alexa wanted to gain the qualifications to upgrade the Ouroboros herself, then she needed to work hard for at least 50 to 100 years in order to become powerful enough to work on such an important project.

That took way too long!

Red humanity needed to go all-out into strengthening itself in the next half-century. It was impossible for Alexa to put her selfish needs over the survival of their entire civilization.

"I am highly encouraged by your mindset. Your dedication to the people we serve is an admirable quality. Now what is the design philosophy that you have chosen to settle upon?"

Alexa did not open her mouth right away, but took the time to summon her companion spirit.

"Myah~! Myah~!"

Maia appeared and started to fly a few circles around the young lady before settling on her shoulder. The predominantly white spiritual ragdoll cat looked particularly energetic at this hour.

"Every living mech is born in a workshop or a factory." She started to explain. "When they are complete, they eventually get shipped to their buyers where they are promptly being put to use without too much regard for their own feelings. Do not misunderstand. I do not think that living mechs are being mistreated, but you have to admit that they are not receiving the sort of systematic guidance and nurturing that humans such as ourselves direct towards our children. As a father, you should be well aware of the value of upbringing."

Ves narrowed his eyes. He already started to have an inkling of what Alexa was working towards.

"Goon."

"Living mechs have turned from products into living, sentient beings that are already capable of forming their own societies. The issue is that their unusual creation leaves them without the complete family structures that constitute most proper societies. Every mech is made in a factory. They do not have any fathers or mothers, and they cannot exercise any form of procreation. The closest thing to a parent they have is you, but you are more of a distant ancestor than anything. These are severe shortcomings in my view. If the Ouroboros received proper nurturing from any parents, it may not have held back my grandfather as much."

That was not entirely certain, but Ves understood Alexa's general sentiment. The Ouroboros indeed got stuck in a bottleneck due to the many deficiencies that remained unaddressed for a century.

"Then..."

Alexa began to smile. "Your suspicions are correct. What I aim to accomplish is to create a new paradigm of living mechs that brings them closer to naturally evolved organic life! Procreation lies at the center of my new design philosophy. Simply put, I want to create a mechanism for existing living mechs to get together and donate a part of their power and possibly their knowledge into a special seed. This seed can be retrieved by humans and be sent to a mech factory to form the basis of a new living mech that essentially represents the child of the previous two living machines!"

"What?!"

Ves had never thought about this before! Who would be so silly to create an actual procreation mechanism for his living mechs?!

Alexa did not care for his astonishment. She continued to channel more passion as she elaborated on her idea and ambition!

"As long as the new offspring can serve in the same unit as its parents, the young living mech can undergo much more rapid growth by receiving proper guidance and nurturing from its parent mechs. Over time, entire living mech families and dynasties may form around inheritances that have accumulated over multiple generations, enabling them to develop into more powerful and unique directions that perfectly addresses one of the fatal weaknesses of your design philosophy. Your living mechs always require a large amount of time to grow into their power. My design philosophy seeks to compress this growth period so that every young living mech can grow into maturity in a fraction of the time!"

This was a ground-breaking model of living mechs that could ignite a lot of controversy if Alexa shared it with the wrong people!

Ves never expected that his disciple would have the guts to develop his living mechs in this dangerous direction!

If she succeeded in realizing her vision, then living mechs would take a massive step forward into becoming a self-sustaining sentient race.

Anyone who paranoid about AIs taking over would definitely suffer a heart attack if they saw Alexa's idea come to life!

Chapter 5629 Activating Potential

5629 Activating Potential

From the moment an Apprentice Mech Designer met all of the requirements and became ready to advance to the next rank, he or she needed to commit to a singular design philosophy.

Miss Alexa, formerly of the Streon Ancient Clan, possessed a thorough understanding of what she needed to do in order to advance to the next rank. Her extensive studies had given her an exhaustive academic and anecdotal knowledge about what enabled Apprentices to surpass the extraordinary threshold and gain entry into the real world of mech design.

The most essential requirement that mech designers had to meet was that they needed to possess the qualifications to ascend to a higher rank.

Ves called it spiritual potential. The MTA and the first-rate superstates used to call it psionic potential. Ancients referred to it as spiritual roots, immortal soul or another mystical name.

Whatever the case, many ambitious mech designers who had demonstrated great effort and talent tragically never received a chance to realize their design philosophies.

During the Age of Mechs, many people who had dedicated their entire lives to designing mechs never managed to get past this hurdle.

This was not a problem for Alexa. She had managed to escape this awful fate and developed the potential required to not only become a high-ranking mech designer, but potentially get started in other extraordinary professions as well.

Yet potential was not enough. Mech designers also had to form a design philosophy that was worth pursuing.

Whether it was due to the rules set by the Kingdom of Mechs or the restrictions set by more universal laws, mech designers that did not exhibit any originality could not advance to the rank of Journeyman.

The requirement was very clear. It was okay for Novices and Apprentices to apply what they had learned from their teachers without too much thought about making it better.

Yet those who aspired to do better had to demonstrate at a fairly early stage that they possessed the capacity to engage in original research and make certain accomplishments in their chosen field.

The mech industry exploded since the start of the Age of Mechs due to the successive accumulation of new and original technological innovations.

Every high-ranking mech designer that rose up from the ranks contributed a new collection of original and valuable technological advancements to the entire body of mech design.

Yet all of that explosive development also made life more difficult for many mech designers of the younger generation!

The more time passed by, the more mech designers had managed to exhaust the research potential of many common scientific fields and subjects.

All of the low-hanging fruits had already been plucked by a huge number of predecessors. This significantly increased the burden of up-and-coming mech designers. They needed to research more

exotic and difficult topics in order to break new ground and earn the right to advance to Journeyman.

This burden was too great to bear for the average person.

People could be taught how to design a mech according to existing methods and formulas, but it was harder to turn them into a researcher with the ability to engage in original research.

Not everyone was cut out to be a trailblazer, especially in a time where countless mech designers had already done so in the past.

This was one of the reasons why mech design universities enrolled so many students every year.

Every higher up in the mech industry knew that most mech design graduates were hopeless, yet they supported widespread teaching anyway.

This was because pumping up the numbers was the only way to increase the number of people who possessed both spiritual potential and the capacity to conduct original research!

It was like playing the lottery. The chances of winning a prize by purchasing a single ticket was miniscule.

The stupidest way to increase the chances of winning was to buy lots of lottery tickets.

As long as the quantity of tickets was high enough, the purchaser was bound to win prizes!

Of course, this analogy did not entirely make sense because the yield was too low to justify the expenditure.

The calculus was different in the mech industry. Even if raising millions of mech designers could only produce Master Mech Designer in the end, it was still worth it because the contributions of the latter were so valuable that it more than made up for all of the previous expenditures!

Of course, it was not as if all of the mech designers who fell short of advancing to Journeyman or Master were useless.

Novices and Apprentices did not have to lead design projects themselves in order to contribute to society.

They could assist more successful mech designers in their work.

They could supervise mech factories and solve different problems on the spot.

They could also utilize their excellent engineering skills to use in a different capacity such as developing mech parts or entering into a different tech sector entirely!

Humanity was so dependent on technology that there were always jobs for mech designers.

Yet that did not change the fact that many people who dreamed of becoming the next big Star Designer never managed to make it past the first major threshold.

At least that was the case during the Age of Mechs.

The Age of Dawn introduced a sweeping set of changes that appeared to change the equation.

The proportion of mech designers advancing to the rank of Journeyman Mech Designer went up each month.

What was remarkable was that this rate continued to increase over time! There was no sign that this pass rate was dropping anytime soon!

This had little to do with Alexa, though. She already knew that she possessed the potential to break through. She even possessed the confidence that she was smart and flexible enough to engage in any original research of her choosing.

Mech designers as privileged as her no longer had any reason to worry about the failure rate.

What they were truly invested in was selecting the most valuable and useful design philosophy possible.

Elite first-class mech designers tended to be a lot more luxurious in this regard, both because they were much better versed in a diverse range of high technologies, but also because they disdained the more plebeian specializations typically adopted by second-raters and third-raters!

The descendants of the Terran ancient clans had always been raised with the expectations that they would put themselves at the forefront of their respective fields.

The young scions who had been raised to become mech designers enjoyed the best conditions, so they had a lot more to prove than others!

Strictly speaking, Alexa Streon-Larkinson no longer had to bear this heavy expectation. She had formally severed her ties with the Streon Ancient Clan. There was no obligation for her to pay back all of the money and resources invested in her upbringing.

Yet Alexa did not feel relieved at all. Her pressure had actually become even greater than before!

The main reason why Ves brought her into the clan was because she possessed the potential to inherit the mantle of living mechs and develop it in another direction!

How could she relax when the specter of disappointment constantly loomed over her shoulders with each passing day she spent as a low-ranking mech designer?

Alexa respected her new mentor enormously. She did not want to let him down and prove that he had misjudged his decision to take her on as his disciple.

Ves hadn't actually taught Alexa all that much. Aside from teaching her the essential of living mech design and letting her work by his side for a time, she had to cover a lot of ground herself.

This was not a sign of neglect. Ves knew Alexa's circumstances well enough that she only needed direction at the beginning. She was more than smart and productive enough to complete the rest of her journey by herself.

It was also the reason why Alexa had taken her time to formulate her design philosophy. She needed to go through many twists and turns and discover the various pros and cons of different choices by herself.

Only she could make the choice that would determine the future of her mech design career.

After an exhaustive period where she had spent much of her free time on thinking about how he could bring her mentor's work to the next level, she had eventually settled her mind on extending the range of capabilities of living mechs in a special manner.

As Ves tried to process the explosive implications of Alexa's shocking announcement, the woman in question passionately explained her rationale.

"Your living mechs are fantastic. They are new and unprecedented. They elevate mechs beyond the means of existing mech designers. For the first time that I can think of, mechs have acquired some of the traits of actual living beings. Their developing sapience means that every machine of your design has the potential to grow alongside their mech pilots and become as powerful as the Ouroboros one day. Yet..."

The female mech designer grew a little more subdued when she thought about her grandfather's mech.

"I have grown up under the shadow of my grandfather and his unique mech for many years. I am all too familiar with their pains and struggles. Not only has it taken most of a baseline human's lifetime for the Ouroboros to become the famous ace mech that it is known for today, but it has been impossible for anyone to replicate this miracle of mechanical creation. I... don't want other mech pilots and owners to experience the same trials and tribulations."

Ves' expression turned serious as well. He could feel the earnest pain and emotion in her voice.

Alexa did not settle on her design philosophy on a random whim. She chose this direction due to a burning need to resolve a problem that no other mech designer at the time had been able to solve.

If the problems related to the Ouroboros could have been solved a lot sooner, then there was clearly no need for Alexa to go down this route!

Yet it was exactly because her grandfather's subsequent advancement had long been constrained by the inadequacies of his Ouroboros that drove Alexa into developing the ultimate solutions for these problems.

As far as she was concerned, not even Ves was fully capable of solving the problems that had long plagued his grandfather and the other members of her former ancient clan!

"One of the defining characteristics of your works is that they are all born with fantastic potential. No other mechs have shown such an amazing capacity for growth and evolution as yours." Alexa said in an appreciative tone. "Yet you invest so much time and attention into potential alone that you are not paying enough attention to the actual process of growth. It takes so much time for living mechs to realize enough of their potential that there are too many factors that can go wrong in the meantime. What I seek is to make this journey shorter, smoother and less prone to error."

"By making it so that living mechs can come together and produce children?" Ves asked in a slightly baffled tone. "I can understand your logic, but there are many problems associated with your goal of enabling mechs to procreate. Have you even designed a mech that can independently conduct this process without active human intervention?"

"In fact, I did. I designed two different first-class living mechs that can conceivably procreate on a completely independent basis."

Alexa activated two different projections that showed off the mechs that she had designed during her free time in the past few months.

One of them was clearly a smart metal mech.

This was probably the easiest way to design a mech that could independently reproduce.

As long as it had access to enough nanites or raw materials, it could produce the physical shell of the 'offspring' mech with low logistical requirements!

The second one was a lot more complicated. It was a true classical metallic mech.

In order to grant the power of sexual reproduction to this mechanical product, Alexa split this work into a male and female variant.

When Ves saw this mind-boggling living mech design, his mind went blank.

He had never contemplated such a pair of mechs before!

Chapter 5630 Project S1

In order for Apprentice Mech Designers to advance to the next rank, it was not enough for them to settle on an original design philosophy and conduct successful research.

The people who designed mechs for a living did not call themselves scientists or researchers for good reason.

The approach, mindset and work processes were substantially different, though there was also a lot of overlap.

However, any mech designer that wanted to formulate a design philosophy and realize it could not get away by conducting research alone.

They needed to apply their theories and inventions into actual mech designs and prove that their work had practical value!

A mech designer whose research capabilities was stronger than their design ability often did not go far in their careers. They lacked the love and comprehension for mechs that enabled them to break the conventional standards and improve them in a way that had never been done before.

The same was true for the opposite. Mech designers who excelled at designing mechs yet found it difficult to conduct original research were unlikely to advance to the rank of Master. They actually had to be ingenious and rigorous enough to understand deep knowledge and be able to innovate beyond the current capabilities of their civilization.

In short, good mech designers had to excel in both areas. As a first-class mech designer who attended one of the oldest and most exclusive universities located on Old Earth, there was no question Alexa's ability to design first-

class multipurpose mechs!

In order to design the mechs that represented her chosen design philosophy for the first time, Alexa did not have to design mechs according to first-class standards.

She could have settled for second-class mechs that she had grown increasingly more familiar with as she assisted Ves in his work.

It would have made her design projects a lot cheaper and easier to complete.

Yet she chose to implement her design philosophy into true first-class mech designs because they were her root and her original area of expertise.

Of course, there was no need for her to pull out all the stops and design a fully featured first-class multipurpose mech.

She had settled for designing fairly basic first-class mechs that were not that complicated, enabling her to avoid any excessive bloat.

This allowed Alexa to invest much of her attention into designing and fleshing out the novel procreation mechanisms that she had devised but never really implemented in full up to this point.

The result was two radical mech designs that Ves would have never thought about designing in his life!

Ves possessed an active mind and tended to come up with the craziest ideas at times. Whacky ideas such as the Elemental Lord showed that he was more than used to taking unusual detours in his work, if only to satisfy his curiosity and his need to create unprecedented works.

Yet there were many areas that Ves did not dare to touch or simply didn't care about.

Procreation was a topic that he admittedly never showed much interest in. As far as he was concerned, every living mech was born in a factory or workshop, and that was it. He never thought that there was anything wrong with this production process. Wasn't it logical that living mechs started out in the same way as conventional mechs?

Obviously, Alexa Streon did not think so. She recognized a major shortcoming in Ves' paradigms and sought to plug a hole that he had overlooked!

As Ves studied the two mech designs, he could clearly discern that the smart metal mech came first.

This was easy to figure out as it was a lot easier for Alexa to implement her idea when mechs came in a much more malleable form.

Although Ves was not able to study all of the intricacies of a mech that completely consisted of nanomachines due to how much of their functions were tied in their programming, he could still feel that it was made with procreation as a core feature from its inception.

"Project S1 is the initial mech that I have designed to translate my chosen design philosophy in a concrete form. I believe that it is the first design that meets the standard of a living mech. It is 100 percent made out of first-class Terran-developed smart metal, which means that it is expensive and lacking in rigidity. Project S1 nonetheless makes up for that with flexibility. Similar to your Bright Warrior model, my smart metal mech functions as a humanoid machine that can alter its configuration on demand to wield a variety of handheld and mounted external weapon systems."

The younger mech designer demonstrated what she meant by manipulating the projection that showed the smart metal mech.

The initial form of Project S1 looked like a generic unarmed mech. It soon bulked up and wielded a sword. It then slimmed down and wielded a plasma rifle. The smart metal mech then proceeded to acquire more mass and integrate a lot of laser weapons into its mech frame, allowing it to fight like a hybrid mech.

There were no limits to what the Project S1 could turn into. It could embody both humanoid and beast mech types, though Alexa had locked her mech design to solely humanoid mech configurations in order to limit the complexity of her project.

On the surface, Ves figured out that the overall point of Project S1 was to deliver a smart metal mech that could accommodate any mech pilot, no matter whether they specialized in melee or ranged combat.

Although Project S1 did not promise stellar performance when wielding any weapon, it at least guaranteed a minimum degree of combat effectiveness when it adopted the form of any common humanoid mech archetype.

"This is like a super-expensive version of my old Bright Warrior concept." Ves remarked as he grew fascinated with this seemingly simple mech concept. "Yet unlike my Bright Warrior, there is greater depth to it that I cannot fully deduce just by studying it. I can feel that there is a much greater goal and ambition behind your first true living mech design."

Alexa smiled with pride. "Good observation. Project S1 is not just designed with the present in mind. It serves as the heart of a larger framework that is based on the concept of inheritance. The first-generation copies of Project S1 all start out as blank slates in mech production facilities. When they are delivered to their customers, they will get used in the configurations that match the skills of the mech pilots and the needs of their owners. Each smart metal mech will grow, learn and develop on an individual basis from that point."

Ves nodded in understanding. This sounded no different from the growth trajectory of ordinary living mechs. This was not the extent of Alexa's expansive scheme.

"As the Project S1's are being put to use, they will experience setbacks and losses. Whether their defeats can be attributed to their qualities or not, the process of survival of the fittest will filter out the weaker and less adapted smart metal mechs. After five or ten years of active fighting, only the strongest and most well-adapted Project S1's will remain standing. They have not experienced substantial growth in their respective mech archetypes, but have also proven to be stronger than their less fortunate counterparts. If you have to choose the parents that are tasked with passing on their secrets to the next generation, the survivors among the first-generation living mechs are the most suitable candidates."

Her scheme mirrored the generational development of organic races. Natural selection was a universal process that took place on any life-bearing planet.

Natural selection contained the word 'natural' because it was able to come about without any deliberate intervention.

That made Alexa's idea so subversive. By transplanting the process of natural selection to the framework of living mechs, she essentially brought her products closer to nature!

"How does your Project S1 produce the next generation, exactly?" Ves inquired. "Can they generate the second generation of their mech model through parthenogenesis, or do you require your smart metal mechs to engage in a mechanical form of sexual reproduction?"

"Theoretically, Project S1 can do both, but I have decided to restrict it to the latter, sir. This is a principle that I have deliberately adopted because parthenogenesis is too selfish and solitary to match my ambition. By demanding that my living mechs can only procreate if at least two of them

come together to produce a single offspring, I can encourage the formation of more complex social structures."

"Complex social structures." Ves repeated the phrase. "You mean families. You want second-generation mechs to be raised by both a daddy mech and a mommy mech, is that correct?"

His disciple nodded. "It is a much more desirable social unit than a single parent and a single child. Two parents who care about their offspring will be able to teach a wider range of lessons. Any mistakes or bad habits acquired by one parent mech will not be blindly passed on to the next generation."

"Have you thought about applying a more communal child raising model?"

"I did, but that may lead to unexpected consequences. It is best not to be overambitious. The initial family unit should be identical to a typical human family structure. The commonalities between the two will make it much easier to promote mutual understanding between the living mechs and their human owners and mech pilots."

That was extremely important, as humans tended to get freaked out whenever their complex machinery behaved in a bizarre or inscrutable fashion!

"Continue." Ves said. "I have the feeling that this is not the extent of your new framework."

"The process of procreation is never meant to end in two or three generations." Alexa emphasized. "Let us assume that my Project S1 model will remain usable and relevant for many years. As the original Project S1's continue to get used, they will constantly grow and eventually procreate when they have reached a mature stage. The second-generation smart metal mechs that are born from the originals will grow up faster and become much better prepared to confront the challenges that their 'parents' have experienced. It is conceivable that their growth trajectories are considerably better. Once they are ready to reproduce, the third-generation living mechs will not only be able to benefit from the gains of the second-generation living mechs, but also acquire a part of the inheritance passed on by their 'grandparents'!"

Ves widened his eyes. He finally understood what Alexa was truly trying to create.

A couple of reproduction cycles was not enough to produce dramatic results. Yet as long as they continued to take place over a longer stretch of years, the growing number of Project S1's would have accrued so much collective strength and knowledge that the 20th or 30th generation of living mechs would enjoy much better starting and growth conditions than their distant ancestors!

A second-generation Project S1 might start out 20 percent stronger than the first-generation copy of the smart mech model.

A fiftieth-generation Project S1 could start out 300 percent stronger than the originals that started their lineage!

This intricate process of growth, procreation, accumulation and inheritance reminded Ves of one enormous concept.

He looked at Alexa with an astonished expression. "If these reproduction cycles continue to take place over decades and centuries, then a huge web of family relations and inheritances will form. This can lead to the formation of larger and much more complicated social structures!"

"That is exactly what I am aiming for! Only with a larger and more complex social structure will subsequent generations of living mechs be able to inherit the gifts and wisdom of their elders even when their family units have broken down. Combat mechs live a violent life. It is inevitable for parents to fall. This is not a complete loss as the child mech should have already inherited a part of their spiritual strength and talents. The responsibility for raising the child mechs can be left to the grandparents, more distantly related living mechs or dedicated teacher mechs. In short, the chain of inheritance will remain unbroken as long as the living mechs grow numerous enough to form their own dynasties, and eventually an overarching civilization!"

A civilization built by living mechs alone!

Alexa certainly did not hold back in her ambition!