

The Mech 5701

Chapter 5701 Support Mech Renaissance

Master Vayro Goldstein was an unusual mech designer. He had dedicated most of his life to designing auxiliary mechs.

This was rather odd as much like mech pilots, mech designers loved to create war machines that possessed the biggest guns or the flashiest armor. It was so satisfying to design a mech that could crush other opponents in a direct confrontation that people could do it over and over.

Instead of designing such powerful mechs, Master Goldstein instead made the unusual decision to specialize in support mechs of any kind. He had turned the craft of designing mechs that could amplify the combat performance of other combat assets into an art form.

His greatest strength was to design singular powerful support mechs that could provide useful assistance to a lot of mechs at once. Whether it was through exceptionally potent jamming or the ability to replenish the energy reserves of exhausted mechs over longer distances, his works had become a fixed addition to the mech roster of many RA mech units, particularly the larger ones dedicated to fighting the most arduous battles against the native aliens.

Although he became implicated by the downfall of the Polymath, he was way too good of a mech designer for the mechers to ostracize him. It was not as if he was an insider to the Star Designer's grand master plan to reform red humanity under her exclusive rule.

The knowledge and insights contained within his mind were extremely valuable. Even a casual conversation with Master Goldstein was easily worth millions if not hundreds of millions of MTA credits!

However, Ves was effectively able to obtain the guidance of this bright mind for free due to his high standing with the Red Association.

Ves might not like the mechers most of the time, but he had no qualms about taking advantage of this organization's many useful services.

"The state of auxiliary mechs is in the best place in five mech generations." Master Goldstein's projection explained as he pressed his fingers together while sitting behind his clean white desk. "Support functions are highly dependent on external factors such as viable technologies, resource availability and in certain cases pilot qualifications. While this is also the case for combat mechs, external factors play a much greater role in the breadth and reach of support mechs that can be designed."

"So you're saying that the introduction of hyper technology and E-technology has sparked renaissance in the support mech sector?"

"You can say that for every sector, Professor Larkinson, but that is indeed the message that I wished to convey. Phasewater technology has led to fantastic advancements in materials science, energy shield technology, faster-than-

light travel, spatial sciences and other related fields, yet in the decade that these possibilities became available, their impact on our society has been well below their potential."

"That's because phasewater is too damn scarce." Ves grumbled. "It's really hard to obtain enough of this substance to mass produce anything."

"Correct. The Hyper Generation is different from the Phasewater Generation due to how ubiquitous and abundant the new resources have become. Every mech designer worth their salt has been avidly researching and exploring all of the new technological possibilities that have become available with the change in environment. The mech industry has already made many strides into improving combat mechs, but I believe that support mechs can benefit much more. Do you know why I think this is the case?"

The Master clearly did not want to hear a shallow answer to his question. Ves thought carefully about what Goldstein had been steering towards all this time.

He suddenly made a connection that seemed very relevant to support mechs.

"E energy radiation."

"Continue." Master Goldstein made an encouraging gesture.

"The secret is E energy radiation." Ves became increasingly more certain in his answer. "One of the most persistent constraints of most auxiliary mechs is that they are only able to produce energy-dependent effects as much as their energy reserves allow. While it is true that more advanced first-class mechs can mitigate this problem somewhat by making use of support link technology, this feature is only viable for the most extensive range of standard mechs. There is no way to economically apply this high technology to second-class mechs and third-class mechs. This is the main reason why auxiliary mechs in those markets are not as strong relative to combat mechs. The arrival of E energy radiation changes that because space is no longer as barren as before. It can help to sustain useful effects without being limited by the power supply of a support mech."

"Precisely!" Master Goldstein grew more enthused when Ves brought up the correct subject. "E energy is a difficult resource to work with, but that does not stop clever and inventive mech designers such as us from devising new design applications that can effectively leverage it for our own purposes. Think about jamming fields that can be sustained over longer distances at reduced power consumption for an ECM mech. Think of scout mechs that can utilize E energy to make detailed observations on the disposition of an enemy force several light-minutes away. Think of repair nanites that can keep filling up the gaps of a damaged mech despite their notoriously limited energy supply."

All of this sounded fantastic, but Ves was not immediately swayed by all of these promising possibilities.

"All of that sounds great, but that is based on the premise that you can convert E energy into electric energy. This is not an easy process, and even if work on it has produced a number of useful results, I doubt that E energy can replace the power reactors of entire mechs. The concentration of E energy in the environment is too dispersed to power anything too intensive."

"That is true." Goldstein sighed. "E energy radiation cannot be used to substitute the existing energy model for mechs. However, it is still a useful addition nonetheless. You are not entirely correct in your earlier assessment. Which mechs generate and consume the greatest amount of energy?"

"First-class multipurpose mechs."

"Which mechs consume the least amount of energy?"

"Third-class mechs."

"When you compare their energy levels to the state of E energy radiation, which sort of mechs benefit the most from the addition of the latter?"

Ves widened his eyes as he made another connection with the help of Master Goldstein.

"Third-class mechs stand to gain the greatest benefit from the availability of E energy radiation! Sure, they don't have access to better and more expensive hyper materials, but this is not a big deal. Many low to mid-grade hyper materials are so abundant in the Red Ocean that their bulk prices have already begun to hit rock bottom. Their attributes are not bad at all. As long as mech designers are able to leverage them effectively enough, their third-class mechs will be able to experience the most dramatic performance boost!"

E energy radiation was free and ubiquitous. Its concentration might not be high, but when utilized in certain ways that was not as dependent on existing mech systems, it could easily boost the performance of an auxiliary mech by as much as 100 or 200 percent!

Second-class mechs possessed much stronger power reactors that could sustain the operation of much more potent parts, so the difference that E energy radiation was much less. Ves loosely estimated that it could only boost the performance of an appropriately designed auxiliary mech by only 20 to 50 percent.

As for first-class mechs, their power reactors were so extravagant that E energy radiation could only play a minor assisting role at best. Its presence and absence wouldn't make a measurable difference in most functions.

However, this did not apply to every possible function.

"The true potential of E energy radiation in relation to support mechs does not lie with hyper technology in my opinion." Master Goldstein said. "Hyper technology is simply conventional technology that is augmented with hyper materials so that they can amplify their existing performance with E energy. This makes it so that hyper tech always shares a strong relationship with what our industry can already do. Azure energy shields and space suppressors of the most successful examples of existing tech that have become much more effective by producing effective synergies with E energy, but that does not change the fact that we are only doing what we have always done, but better."

"E-technology is different because it is not so heavily dependent on the available tech and materials." Ves stated.

"Yes. It makes sense that you understand this principle, especially given that you have developed so many E-technology solutions well before the start of the Age of Dawn. Your E-tech has become considerably more powerful after the Great Severing, is that correct?"

"That's an understatement. It is like moving from a desert to a well-hydrated forest."

"This is a clear indicator that the availability of E energy radiation has a much higher multiplier for E-technology. To support mech designers such as myself, this is a key interaction that compels us to direct more research in this exotic field with the hopes of developing a brand-new auxiliary mech that can provide powerful support without relying on expensive materials or significant

advancements in conventional technology. This is your home game, Professor Larkinson. You have an enormous head-start in this field, so you have greater promise in developing a new kind of support mech that can fulfill a need that has never been met so extensively in the past. What class of mechs are you planning to design?"

"Second-class." Ves answered. "It is my most familiar territory. I am aware now that I can design a much more effective third-class support mech, but that is not my focus at the moment."

"I see. Second-class support mechs tend to be more effective in electronic warfare relative to the other classes, but it is usually not cost-effective enough to engage in repair or replenishment functions. What role do you envision for your proposed auxiliary mech?"

"Electronic warfare." Ves replied. "More specifically, I am hoping to develop a special mech that can produce a smoke screen or a more exotic equivalent that can persistently obscure all friendly mechs within range from enemy detection. I have been inspired to explore this mech concept due to the existence of an ace pilot and ace mech that is able to produce this effect."

Ves explained the preliminary ideas he had on his mind. Master Goldstein listened patiently and fell in thought.

"I agree with you that if you are able to design these auxiliary mechs, you can make an enormous contribution to the war effort. I understand now why you desired to seek my consultation. The challenges that you have taken upon yourself are not easy to solve. Trying to convert the free-floating E energy in the environment into a 'smoke screen' that can effectively block the target acquisition of alien warships over an extended range is an ambitious goal to say the least. I do not have any readily available solutions. I may be able to refer you to a handful of other specialists that can assist you in this matter, but I expect that you will still have to do most of the heavy lifting yourself. Are you up to the task?"

"I already have a few ideas in mind." Ves said with a confident smile. "I can't guarantee that it will work out, but I am not entirely hopeless."

"Oh? Pray tell me your idea."

Ves had been thinking about this specific proposal for a while now. It was not an entirely reliable solution, but he would be happy as long as it did the job.

"It's not actually a proper solution. Instead of developing the E-technology myself, I can cheat by borrowing the capabilities of other powerful entities. I am thinking about taking advantage of the glows of my existing design spirits or simply acquiring a new one that can produce the effect that I desire. There are so many exotic and diverse mutated beasts out there that one of them should be good at blocking the sight of dangerous predators. As long as I have found the right design spirit and glow, everything else will be easy to solve!"

Chapter 5702 Crazy Survivalists

Design spirits.

That was Ves' brilliant idea.

Well, to call it brilliant was a stretch, but he was quite confident he could make it work.

Master Vayro Goldstein certainly had his own opinions on this subject. He did not exactly radiate approval when he heard Ves' proposal.

Design spirits had always been difficult for other mech designers to accept. They were not pieces of reproducible technologies, but living entities that were unique and difficult to control.

The fact that most of them did not possess a tangible and physical presence in the material realm frustrated many people's attempts to get a grip on these spiritual entities! They could neither get a hold of design spirits or make their own. The only way to make use of their power was to negotiate with them, but how can that be done when they had already established an excellent mutually beneficial cooperation with Ves?

"I do not think it is difficult for you to deduce that the Red Association does not fully approve of your extensive use and reliance on your so-called design spirits." The projection of the bald Master Mech Designer said. "Our Association is primarily invested in the advancement of sciences, the development of technologies and the creation of new innovations that can rise above individuals. Class IX design philosophies are known to have great hindrances in this aspect, but at least you have begun to pass on the basic principles of living mech design to others. You have yet to do so with design spirits, and we suspect that you have no intention of passing on their secrets anytime soon."

Ves awkwardly smiled back. "It is not impossible for others to create their own design spirits and attach them to their own mech designs somehow. So long as you have developed a design philosophy similar to mine and have a companion spirit that can perceive and manipulate E energy to a much greater extent than ordinary humans, you should already theoretically possess the ability to imitate my work. In fact, I can still figure out a way to make design spirits without relying on my design philosophy or companion spirit. I created my first one very early in my career. If a young Apprentice Mech Designer can do it, then you can do it as well."

The RA Master Mech Designer leaned forward on his desk and directed a pointed stare at his younger professional.

"I cannot. Believe me, I have tried, and so have others including the Polymath herself. If the embodiment of the universal concept of Truth in this dwarf galaxy cannot replicate this ability of yours, then that puts your statement into question. Are we that incompetent or have you left out an essential variable in your story?"

This conversation did not go in the direction that Ves desired. The Master was putting him in a difficult position.

Red Association possessed an eternal hunger for technologies that could make mechs stronger and better.

Nobody could deny the effectiveness of design spirits in enhancing the effective performance of mechs, even if they only worked indirectly through influencing the pilots.

Was it any surprise that the mechers wanted the secrets to their creation and application in their own mech design projects?

Ves had always known that the mechers would not tolerate the fact that he enjoyed a complete monopoly on them. Each day that passed where the majority of mechs did not have access to design

spirits was another day that a lot more mech pilots died because their performance wasn't good enough.

Master Goldstein did not need to mention these consequences, because Ves was already clever enough to receive the underlying message.

This was why Ves did not like this situation at all. The Survivalist was essentially using moral kidnapping to persuade Ves to 'voluntarily' hand over his trade secrets relating to design spirits.

What was egregious about this tactic was that it was working. Ves genuinely started to feel guilty about keeping such a powerful benefit to himself.

He knew that a lot of mechs designed by many other people throughout the new frontier would definitely perform a lot better. This would have a substantial effect on the Red War. The ripple effects of this move could save the lives of billions if not trillions of people within years.

All he would have to do was to sacrifice his monopoly on design spirits.

It seemed that talking to Master Goldstein was not such a good idea after all. The Survivalist acted on the interests of the survival of his race and did not hesitate to break the unspoken accord that existed between Ves and the Association for many years.

What a devious fellow.

Ves was even clever enough to recognize that there was another layer to this inquiry.

This was a test.

How altruistic was he really?

To what extent was he willing to surrender his personal advantages in order to make a major contribution to the Red Association?

Was he 'loyal' enough to the Association, or would he turn his back on the mechers from the moment they started having a tough time?

All of these considerations and more swirled in his mind as he tried to use all of his processing power to analyze every angle of this situation.

There were so many implications to each decision that he could remain stuck for hours. Ves did not have that much time. He needed to supply a more immediate response or else his silence would serve as a telling answer in itself.

Since Ves was not able to make a clear and rational decision based on thorough, well-founded arguments, he decided to fall back to his old habits and let his gut reaction dictate his response.

"Design spirits... are powerful, but they can also be prone to abuse." Ves slowly replied. "I have always taken good care of my design spirits, but I am afraid that others might not be as attentive in managing their relationships with their own design spirits. They can also be dangerous, either overtly or covertly. I do not believe that most mech designers have the ability or the vigilance to properly monitor and control their own design spirits."

"You can leave that concern to us. Regulating technologies is one of our primary mandates." Master Goldstein smoothly replied. "We are not incapable of dealing with entities that have no bodies. We are just unfamiliar with the unconventional methods that you have pioneered."

"I get it, but unleashing design spirits to a larger group of people is like handing them weapons of mass destruction. Sure, they can use powerful forces to create an amazing power reactor, but they can also develop deadly superweapons that can annihilate entire cities."

The Master Mech Designer sighed. "We are not ignorant of the dangers. We do harbor many concerns about the uncontrolled proliferation of dangerous spirits that may go rogue and cause great harm to our society one day. However, you should know quite well that red humanity is in a precarious state at this time. The Red War may have just begun in earnest, but our estimation of its future trajectory is not optimistic. If we want to win this conflict, we must make corrective actions sooner rather than later. This is precisely the time where you break the glass and pull the emergency lever. No matter what accidents might befall us when we have chosen to take desperate measures, these outcomes are still better than total extinction."

The older man's argument reminded Ves of Professor Loban's description of the Survivalist Faction.

During times of peace and prosperity, the Survivalists behaved as the guardians of the current orders. They opposed radical measures for fear of threatening the prevailing order.

During times of death and woe, the Survivalists went through a complete transformation. They became more radical and proactive than they had in centuries as they were willing to do whatever it took to guarantee the continuation of the human race!

Ves began to question whether it was wise of him to continue to remain so chummy with the Survivalists.

Each and every member prioritized the overall interests of humanity as a collective above their own personal interests.

He had gotten that sense from them since he started to befriend Master Moira Willix many years prior.

Even the Polymath, for all of her twisted ideas, only sought to stage a coup and forcibly crown herself as the empress of red humanity in the belief that her direct rule was the most beneficial course of action for the entire collective!

Ves liked the Transhumanists because they were crazy in an obvious way. Their motives were simple and clear. They just wanted to shed their weak human forms and turn themselves into powerful mechs with as much of their original human minds intact as possible. He could work with that easily enough.

The Survivalists on the other hand exhibited a much more difficult variation of crazy. They were extremists when it came to the survival of the human race and could be just as fanatical as a Compact cultist whenever a topic was even tangentially related to their overarching goal!

If there was one lesson that Ves had learned about the Survivalists, it was that they either saw people as allies or enemies to their ultimate cause.

The Polymath may have behaved abnormally when she successfully cut off the Red Kingdom and almost established her dominion over red humanity, but her attitude was actually a lot more reflective of the mechers than most outsiders realized.

Ves could not forget all of the approving faces among the delegates during the end of the Survivalist conference.

The way that the Polymath was willing to become an enemy to every other Starr Designer and god pilot also reflected how extensively the Survivalists were willing to go against anyone who stood in their way.

Given all of these factors, Ves found it difficult to resist the pressure exerted by the projection of the friendly Master Mech Designer.

"There are multiple categories of design spirits." Ves decided to explain. "There are ones that I created through methods that I cannot fully explain. They are products derived from my talent and are probably incredibly difficult to replicate. There are also design spirits that are powerful entities or used to be back when they were alive. They may have physical bodies as is the case with Arnold, or they may not have one, which is the case for most of my design spirits. I suppose I can teach you the basics of how to turn an powerful person or beast into a design spirit."

That predictably triggered a pleased expression from Master Goldstein.

"This would be a marvelous contribution, Ves. Do not be concerned. I will personally ensure that you will be appropriately rewarded for your gift of knowledge. I am even at your disposal if you wish to obtain my input when you embark on the design of your ambitious support mech."

"Not so fast, Master. Receiving a lesson on how to turn an existing entity into a design spirit doesn't necessarily mean you can contract them for this purpose and begin to add their glows to your mech designs right away. There is another condition that you must satisfy before you can make this happen."

"What is the matter?" Master Goldstein frowned.

"My assumptions may be incorrect, but as far as I know, a design spirit can only effectively be attached to a living mech design. The reason why is... complicated, but the simplest description I can give you is that according to my own theories, I am actually forming a contract between two living existences."

"Is that so? Then that reduces the value of your gift. Its usage may remain severely restricted in the foreseeable future as the amount of people who are willing and able to design living mechs are too few and far in between."

Master Golstein looked deflated when he heard this caveat. He did not think that Ves was lying about this, so it seemed that there was no way to make design spirits universal, at least for the time being.

Chapter 5703 The Trouble With Class IX Design Philosophies

Ves took the initiative to explain some of his views and theories on living mechs and design spirits.

He had never really attempted to attach a design spirit to a mech design that was not alive, but he did not need to because he could already predict the outcome.

He was pretty sure that design spirits could not attach themselves to mechs that were not alive.

Although he did not really figure it out back when he first became inspired to use them in this fashion, his current understanding allowed him to understand a bit more of the inner workings of the forces he had been dealing with for years.

The relationship between a living mech and a design spirit was similar to the relationship between a Larkinson and the Golden Cat.

The fact that an ancestral spirit like Goldie was able to form highly similar connections between both humans and living mechs strengthened this theory.

The biggest difference was that design spirits were unable to propagate their glows through humans, at least not normally.

This suggested to Ves that the relationship between a design spirit and a living mech was deeper and more intimate. It touched upon more profound concepts that he did not understand, let alone identify.

How exciting.

There were still plenty of mysteries related to design spirits that Ves could explore. That did not stop him from making use of them as long as his existing methods worked.

It was a pity that he was not able to help the mechers as much as they wished.

"I would like to verify your statement." Master Goldstein said and projected a first-class support mech design. "Please attempt to attach a design spirit of your choosing to this work of mine."

Ves stared at the Master for a moment before he shrugged. "Sure thing. I need to study your work for a bit. I need to get a feel for its conceptual existence."

He did just that. The schematic displayed a highly sophisticated mech that possessed limited fighting capabilities because it was packed with support- oriented functions.

Ves actually found that he was able to understand more of the tech and principles than he would have a few months ago. All of the focused studies on first-class mech design were beginning to pay off as machines of this caliber were no longer as indecipherable as in the past.

Of course, a first-class mech designed for the RA's combat forces was much more advanced and higher-end than a typical product on the market. There were many little areas where details and technical specifications had been blacked out in order to deprive Ves from learning about these details.

While Ves could use the surrounding parts to deduce what was missing in these empty voids, there was little point in speculating on this. He just needed to get a basic understanding of this mech design.

He understood that this was actually a pretty valuable opportunity to study a large part of the design of an excellent first-class support mech that was good enough to be employed by the Red Association!

Vayro Goldstein already bestowed Ves a lot of trust by exposing so many design specifications for a mech design that was bound to play an important role for the mechers.

The mech design could not escape the multipurpose leanings of high-end mech design. It possessed a lot of different modules that contained all kinds of handy features.

It possessed a stealth system.

It was able to repair itself and other mechs.

It came equipped with an expansive ECM module that was particularly good at jamming large areas in space.

It was equipped with a minidrive that enabled it to travel to other nearby star systems in a reasonable time frame.

It was able to fabricate equipment by drawing on locally sourced materials.

All of these functions sounded useful when just one of them was outfitted on a mech, but combining them all in a single support mech turned it into an infinitely useful machine that would remain relevant no matter the situation!

That was a common characteristic among all multipurpose mechs, as Ves had learned over the course of his studies. They did not have to fulfill every single role that existed, but they needed to possess a good enough selection of different functions to avoid turning into deadweight at any moment on the battlefield.

Ves just found it interesting that even first-class support mech followed this principle, if in a different fashion than their direct combat equivalents.

However, as handy as the aforementioned functions looked when they were all grouped together in the same mech design, there was one primary feature that stood out above the rest. It was the entire reason why Master Goldstein designed this new mech in the first place.

It was a brand new system that was unlike anything he had seen before. Though he did not know how it worked, he was able to deduce its function by looking at certain clues.

The selection of hyper materials was a clear giveaway.

"Paranis Alloy, named after the individual who invented it." Goldstein helpfully explained. "It is an alloy that blends several hyper and exotic materials together to produce a synergistic effect. The key hyper materials used to form it are classified, but I can tell you that they are based on the space and negation attributes. According to numerous lab tests, Paranis Alloy is capable of projecting a narrow energy beam that can negate transphasic effects across vast distances. Depending on the power of the system utilizing this new material, the device can not only negate all of the transphasic properties of an alien warship, but also lock her down in material space, preventing the enemy vessel from fleeing by utilizing warp travel."

"What... is the range of this device."

"Hundreds of thousands of kilometers. Up to a light-second under ideal conditions."

"What?! Really?!"

"Yes, but it will be difficult to maintain a sustained lock at those extreme distances." Master Goldstein admitted. "There needs to be friendly assets in the vicinity of the target that can provide real-time targeting data to my support mech."

"All of those signals still have to travel back and forth somehow. That causes a lot of lag."

"That is true, but there are technological solutions that can minimize this problem."

"That still doesn't entirely eliminate the problem." Ves claimed. "Your support mech will miss its target sooner or later. At these distances, even a slight deviation can cause its negation beam or whatever you call it to go thousands of kilometers off-mark."

"That is why this support mech is not designed to operate on its own. It is designed to be employed as a squad or in larger numbers for the express purpose of preventing alien warships from escaping the battlefield. Intrasystem travel is one of the prevailing advantages of our alien adversaries. Their original warp drives may lack our more efficient FTL capabilities, but they are still superior when it comes to traveling in realspace. The puelmers and the other major alien races utilize the most advanced native warp drives that are built with larger quantities of phasewater. That makes many of their warships faster than many of our ship classes."

That sounded annoying. The aliens could effectively cut their losses and run with any warship that was not already trapped. This enabled them to save more warships and bring back valuable combat experiences that could be used to teach other alien forces how to put up a better fight in the future.

Ves took a few more minutes to study the overall design before he completed his examination.

"Okay, I understand the gist of this mech design. I will make my attempt now. This won't take long."

It felt strange to make this attempt on a mech design that he had not worked on, but he just pretended that it was one of his usual products and followed all of the right steps out of routine.

For all of the functions of this unnamed mech design, its primary purpose was to interdict the warp travel capabilities of enemy warships at extreme range. It relied heavily on spatial manipulation to do so, which meant that the Phase King was the most appropriate choice for this occasion.

Try as he might, he could not embed the Phase King in the design.

Just as he suspected, much of the reason was because he had not worked on this powerful first-class support mech design. Ves possessed a tenuous grasp on it, so how could the Phase King do any better?

The fact that it was not alive did not help either.

"It isn't working." Ves shook his head. "Believe me, I tried my best. This mech design is really good, but I haven't worked on it at all. The way I usually work is that I already have a design spirit in mind when I first start to work on a mech design. By continuing to hold this thought as I work, the mech design's connection to the chosen design spirit continually grows stronger as I near completion."

"Which means that it is not possible to attach a design spirit to a mech design unless you are personally involved in the design process." Master Goldstein concluded. "Well, that is... disappointing. It is not feasible to have you work on every mech that is being designed throughout the new frontier. It is already unacceptable that you provide this benefit to a select number of mechs designed by us. What we seek is a universal method that can be understood, deciphered and taught on a systematic basis. Your solution falls short of this standard, Ves."

Ves shrugged. "It should be possible for other mech designers to do what I can do once they learn how to design living mechs. I am pretty sure that my wife Gloriana, Alexia Streon and maybe Ketis can do this by themselves already. I have also taught living mech design to several batches of Terran mech design students who have enrolled in my course. They may be able to do this as well eventually, though they will need to receive additional lessons."

Master Goldstein crossed his arms. "This is not acceptable. The efficiency is too low. You need to speed up your progress and realize your design philosophy. As long as you have made it this far, you can spread your teachings far and wide and reap considerable benefits from doing so. It is obstacles like these that are holding us back from promoting you to a tier 2 galactic citizen."

Well, if the Transhumanists continued to pressure Ves into speeding up the development of his Carmine System, then that might not be an issue for long.

That ended this particular diversion. Ves at least gave Master Goldstein a consolation prize by conveying the theory and his specific method on how to attach design spirits to living mech designs. It was up to the mechers to figure out what they wanted to do with it. Perhaps they had a rational mech designer in their ranks who had already learned how to design living mechs by freeloading off the lessons that he taught at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology.

It would only be a matter of time before his monopoly on design spirits would come to an end.

It may take years or decades, but now that the Red Association successfully extracted this valuable trade secret from him, it was already a fixed outcome.

Ves did not actually feel too bad about it. The mechers would definitely use it for the collective benefit of human society, though they would make sure they gained the greatest advantage of all in the process.

Learning to let go and share valuable knowledge with the rest of the mech industry was a necessary process of advancing to Master Mech Designer.

It did not exactly feel good to follow this process, but that did not make it any less necessary. Ves was able to make peace with this fact even if it left a sour taste in his mouth.

The compensation from the Red Association better be good, or else he would get really pissed.

Chapter 5704 Another Vital Clue

5704 Another Vital Clue

"You have been a good boy. We are pleased by your performance, your dedication and your willingness to take the greater picture into account. Our faction prizes individuals who have not only demonstrated great ability, but also the magnanimity to let go of trivial affairs and work towards the common good of humanity."

Why did Master Goldstein have to use that cursed phrase?

Ves did not like being called a good boy! He was a man! He accomplished more in his life than the vast majority of mech designers throughout the history of the Age of Mechs!

He wasn't even a 'boy' anymore as he was already a father of three lovely children. He liked to think of himself as a good role model, though he hadn't exactly been able to spare enough time as he wished on showering them with attention.

None of this was particularly important, though. Ves could tolerate being called a good boy so long as he obtained the reward he was due. Though he was not able to help the mechers create and implement their own design spirits right away, he had abided by his works and given them the basic theoretical framework and method that enabled them to puzzle out the rest themselves.

The mechers might be greedy bastards, but they always reciprocated the favors they received.

Of course, that did not stop them from manipulating the exchange rate or setting up deals that always allowed them to secure the greatest advantage in the end, but that was their prerogative as the more powerful partner.

Ves just wanted to gain as many benefits as he could extract from the Association.

"Please don't tease me any longer. What can I get for my contribution?"

"That is up to you." Goldstein said. "Galactic citizens at our level do not strictly work for MTA merits anymore. The Merit Exchange is set up to provide a fair, transparent and informative trading platform for individuals throughout human space to obtain goods and services that they otherwise could not have attained based on their existing wealth and connections. It is most helpful to contributors who are young, inexperienced or not that talented enough. Obviously, you have already risen beyond this level. Whenever people such as you and I make a significant contribution, we usually earn the right to barter for exclusive benefits, much of which is never put on any official exchanges."

Ves nodded in understanding. "I get that, but that doesn't give me a lot of clarity on what I can gain. I already obtained the right to ask for three minor favors from the Star Designers of the Red Association. Will I be able to gain additional ones?"

"It is... possible, but not recommended. Consorting with Star Designers at your current stage will do more harm than good. Your primary goal is to advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer as soon as possible. You must dedicate your time to design more mechs and develop your core research projects. Relying too much on outside help will only stifle your enterprising spirit and make you develop bad habits. Three minor favors is already the limit."

Ves let out a frustrated grunt. He already heard this argument before. The mechers really cared about this kind of stuff.

"Fine. I am in no hurry to use them up right away, so I guess I don't really need any more. What else can I get?"

"That is up to you, Professor Larkinson. I still have a wide range of authority, and I can refer you to other high-ranked members of the Association if I cannot make arrangements directly. Perhaps it would help if you list out the issues that you are struggling with or are keeping you up at night. What are the problems that occupy your mind?"

There were plenty of concerns on his mind, a few of which he would never dare to mention to a mecher.

He recalled one of his oldest problems that he had yet to make any progress in after a long time.

He transmitted a short list of materials. "I am in need of a handful of very rare and very powerful materials. It would be great if you can supply me with these materials in whole or in part. I don't even mind it if I am not able to redeem them right away. I will just work hard to earn more contributions in order to earn them one day. What I want to know the most is if you are familiar with these materials and if you have them in stock."

Master Goldstein worked with a huge amount of different materials over his lifetime.

After becoming a renowned and authoritative Master Mech Designer, he came in touch with a large quantity of dazzling high-quality materials that were practically unheard of in the open market.

Ves bet that Master Goldstein might be able to give him another clue at the very least. That would probably make this transaction worth it already in his book.

The older mech designer did not respond immediately but paused for a few minutes.

That was a good sign as that showed that the Survivalist was probably looking up databases and using his network of contacts to make inquiries.

It took 6 minutes before Goldstein finally offered a response.

"The materials that have caught your eye are certainly interesting, to say the least. EE-343F-00334R is the easiest to track down. It is an experimental exotic alloy developed by the Common Fleet Alliance. It is unclear when it was made and whether it has been utilized in any of its warships. It is also unknown whether the Red Fleet has retained any samples on this side of the greater beyonder gate or whether they have the raw materials and specialized facilities to reproduce it. I cannot help you any further in this as our relationship with the fleeters is not good enough to trade this sort of favor."

In other words, Ves still had to solve this problem on his own. This was fine as this had been his plan from the start. He just needed to improve his bargaining chips before he mustered up the courage to contact a certain friend in the Red Fleet.

"I see. What about the other materials that I have mentioned?"

"They are obscure. Very obscure." Goldstein leaned forward and directed a measured gaze at Ves. "I had to contact many high-placed individuals within the Association and outside of it to see whether they have come into contact with the list of materials you have sent me. It does not help that you have only supplied their names without providing additional details such as density and any special traits. It may very well be that we have handled one of them in the past without knowing that they already bear existing names."

There was nothing else that Ves could do aside from shrugging. "I understand. I don't have any information that I can supply to you either. Have you attained any further results?"

"I did." The RA Master smiled. "The Xenotechnician helpfully informed me that he is not only familiar with Yondu Milk, but also happened to have studied it in extensive detail. He is regrettably unable to supply it to you since it is an organic substance produced by a one-of-a-kind exobeast that has only ever appeared in the old galaxy. Unless we are able to restore passage to the old galaxy, there is no means for you to obtain your desired quantity of this... alien milk."

Ves grew excited!

He finally obtained a solid piece of news! The information provided by Master Goldstein was extremely precious as it had been years since Ves last obtained any trace for the materials requested by the System!

"Do you know whether other people in the Red Ocean have Yondu Milk in their possession?"

Goldstein shook his head. "No. Yondu Milk is a remarkable liquid substance that decays over time due to its organic nature. It is difficult and costly to store it in such a manner that its potency remains intact. I think that there is a 95 percent likelihood that no one has brought it to the Red Ocean."

"Damn."

That was not good news!

"Do not give up yet, Ves. There is an alternative means for you to obtain what you seek. The Xenotechnician can supply you with his detailed examination report of the substance known as Yondu Milk. He is willing to let you have it if you are willing to use one of your saved-up requests. Once you have the report, you can bring that to a god pilot and respectfully ask him or her to utilize their God Kingdoms to directly synthesize this material on the spot."

"Wait, you can do that?!" Ves asked in a shocked tone.

Master Goldstein laughed at his response.

"Yes! It is more common than you realize. It is how we are still able to attain small quantities of extremely scarce exotics that we are no longer able to obtain because they are only prevalent in the Milky Way Galaxy. There are still limits, though. A difficult and powerful exotic material such as Yondu Milk cannot be synthesized without great effort on the part of the god pilot. Their strengths and specializations also limit what sort of top-end materials they can synthesize."

"What do you mean by that, Master?"

"I am aware that you have developed closer relations with the Destroyer of Worlds. She can synthesize many materials with her God Kingdom, but she mostly excels at producing substances that are strongly aligned with her attribute. She can produce the most powerful and destructive combustibles, some of which are even used in the production of her most potent explosive shells. However, if you ask her to produce other powerful materials, then she will either face an uphill struggle or is simply not capable of fulfilling the request."

"Oh. Does Yondu Milk..."

"It is an organic substance that is especially known for its healing properties." Goldstein informed Ves. "I will give you another freebie. Yondu Milk is a known ingredient for a formula of one of the most high-end life-

prolonging treatment serum in the old galaxy. You can forget about letting the Destroyer of Worlds synthesize it through her own abilities."

"What about the other god pilots?"

"They are unlikely to succeed. Ask them to produce iron or lead for you, and they can produce tons of metal bars in front of you in a matter of seconds. If you ask them to produce phasewater, they will struggle to produce a small drop. They all have their strengths. The First Flame excels at producing fire- related materials. The Fist of Defiance is good at producing materials with good toughness and physical impact properties. The Huntsman can produce materials that are lethal when striking powerful organisms. They will not be able to accommodate your request. Your only hope is..."

"The Evolution Witch." Ves finished the sentence. "If there is any god pilot who can do it, it has to be her. Shouldn't she already have the technical specifications of Yondu Milk?"

Goldstein shook his head yet again. "Likely not. There is a lot of complicated politics behind it. The Longevity Faction of the Mech Trade Association treated it as a controlled substance. It was one of

their sources of power, and they do not take kindly to others breaking their monopoly. It is already exceptional that the Xenotechnician was able to make so many detailed scans of it. He has likely assisted them into furthering its production or utilization given his extensive specializations. Whatever the case, the old covenants no longer apply to our Red Association anymore. No senior ranking member of the Longevity Faction has even bothered to travel to our dwarf galaxy."

That was good news, but there was not enough certainty that this would work.

Ves began to frown.

If he wanted to get his hands on Yondu Milk, then he would first have to use up one of his minor requests to the Xenotechnician.

He then had to approach the Evolution Witch and convince her to produce the necessary quantity of Yondu Milk.

This was going to cost Ves a lot.

Chapter 5705 Two Channels

5705 Two Channels

After many years, Ves finally learned a part of the truth about Yondu Milk.

It turned out that this was an extremely precious organic substance that was only produced by a single powerful exobeast!

Milk was the water of life and the carrier of nutrients. It sustained precious young lives and promoted their growth at a stage where they were more vulnerable.

The fact that it was actually one of the key materials that the MTA relied upon to produce one of their most precious life-prolonging treatment serums was shocking news to Ves!

Such a material had to be precious beyond comparison, and the Longevity Faction certainly treated it this way!

Ves imagined that the Longlifers probably managed to take control of this unknown exobeast and treated it as their most prized cattle beast.

This arrangement reeked of political machinations and compromise. Ves refused to believe that the Longevity Faction could maintain its outrageous monopoly just by asking nicely.

All of these revelations were incredibly interesting without a doubt, but they also made it clear that there was no readily available supply of Yondu Milk in the Red Ocean.

Obtaining a detailed report on this precious substance was easy enough. The price was high, but not outrageous. This was exactly the kind of scenario where Ves should use up the favors he had saved.

The more difficult part was approaching the Evolution Witch and asking her to reproduce an incredibly powerful material on his behalf.

God pilots were at no one's beck and call. It was taboo to treat them as servants who could be ordered around at will.

Although Ves was already an associate of the Transhumanist Faction, he did not have the guts to request an audience with her. He had yet to produce any truly remarkable contributions that he could use to cash in additional favors.

He needed to work hard and improve his relationship with the Transhumanists through persistent effort. Once he worked hard enough to become their 'good boy', he may finally receive the honor of issuing a modest request to their powerful leader!

Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought. As cumbersome as this process may seem, this was still a radical improvement compared to his previous condition.

Just an hour ago, he still had no clue what Yondu Milk was or where he could find it! Now, he not only knew its basic usage, but also obtained a solid channel on where he could obtain this rare and precious material!

This was information that would have been impossible for him to find through other means. Ves actually felt it was worth it to exchange his trade secrets for this crucial piece of information.

He knew that obtaining Yondu Milk would be worth it in the end. His Mech Designer System would gain another powerful upgrade and be able to help him even further!

Even though he had not made frequent use of the System in the past few months and years, it had still supplied him with crucial help. Improving it further would pay off in the long run, just as he did when he submitted the necessary quantity of Timpala Steel!

Ves tried to estimate how soon he could get his hands on Yondu Milk. It did not seem likely he could get any of it in the short term. That was bad because the longer it took for him to complete a Supply Mission, the longer he would go without the benefits of an upgraded System.

He suddenly had another thought.

There may be another way for him to obtain Yondu Milk.

The Red Association may no longer be able to source materials from the old galaxy, but Ves was different.

He had Veronica.

His cyborg cat incarnation happened to remain stuck in the old galaxy!

If Veronica could find a way to approach the Longevity Faction and offer a concession that was attractive enough, she might be able to get the necessary amount of Yondu Milk!

As far as Ves was aware of, Veronica had almost the same level of access to the Mech Designer System as himself due to complicated incarnation shenanigans.

The only complication was that he was not able to pass on any goods across galaxies by using the Vault of Eternity as a transit medium. The System was not that powerful yet, but there was still hope that this might change in the future once it had completed additional upgrades.

That made Ves even more eager to obtain EE-343F-00334R as well as Yondu Milk!

As nice as it was to have a second option available to him, Ves did not think it was a good idea to contact the Longlifers back in the old galaxy.

Unlike the Red Association, the original Mech Trade Association occupied a much more dominant position in its own galaxy!

The red mechers had to rein in their arrogance and seek greater cooperation with outside talents in order to strengthen their collective civilization as much as possible.

The original mechers were at the height of their power and were only kept in check by the fleeters, the Terrans and the Rubarthans!

Veronica was a nobody in comparison. She was only backed by a single vulnerable True God who did not dare to step outside the Nyxian Gap for fear of getting crushed with ease by a god pilot.

Though Ves had been promoted to an eminent tier 3 galactic citizen and made many valuable contributions and concessions to the Red Association, what did this have to do with the Mech Trade Association?

Ves was not naive enough to believe he could use his powerful standing and reputation in the Red Ocean to earn the respect of the Longlifers, let alone their attention!

Between the two options, working with the Evolution Witch was clearly the most viable and convenient solution that he could choose from. He needed to make use of his existing advantages in the new frontier instead of working hard to create new ones back in the old galaxy.

It was still nice to have a backup option available. Ves kept the possibility of transacting with the MTA Longevity Faction in the back of his mind.

With the mediation of Master Goldstein, Ves received the right to review the classified analysis report on Yondu Milk easily enough. Ves did not hesitate too long in using up his request.

It was a pity. He originally intended to make use of it to secure another short-term benefit, but his Supply Missions took precedence.

"For security reasons, we cannot transfer you the file to you directly." The Master Mech Designer said. "You will have to teleport to the Tarrasque where you will have the right to review the file in a secure chamber. Even then, you will not be able to access the most sensitive details. The Evolution Witch will have the right to access the full unredacted report if you choose to give her the right to review it as well. We have already taken care of the necessary permissions."

"Thank... you..."

Ves actually felt a bit scammed after learning that he wouldn't be able to get the full story, but it ultimately was not too important.

What truly mattered was that the Evolution Witch would get the information she needed to utilize her reality-defying power to produce Yondu Milk out of thin air!

As if sensing that Ves was not entirely satisfied with what he got, Master Goldstein threw the good boy another bone.

"Let us go back to the initial reason why you have taken the initiative to contact me." The bald Master leaned back and lightened his tone. "You seek to design a specific auxiliary mech, and currently you believe that you can produce the desired effect by relying on the power of a design spirit."

"Uh, that is correct."

"As I originally intended to say, it is not a good habit for you to solve problems by relying on external sources of power, especially ones that you do not have a full grasp on. Reliability is a serious problem. The more you rely on your so-called design spirits, the more you become beholden to them. Do you realize this problem?"

This was a familiar concern to Ves.

"I do, Master, but... can we afford to set aside the obvious benefits they can provide? A partnership is better than nothing. How am I supposed to design an auxiliary mech that can project a large and effective sensor-blocking particle field that can effectively provide cover to a lot of mechs in open space? As far as I know, no other existing technologies can produce the desired effect in a cost-effective manner. Even if it is possible, my mech will end up costing as much as a first-class product. The advantage of relying on a design spirit is that it does not add much at all to the production cost of my machines. The mech forces fighting in the border regions are already having a tough time. Mech designers are supposed to relieve their problems, not add to them. I am highly confident that any living mech tied to a design spirit will perform exactly according to my intentions in the short and medium term."

Ves was not able to guarantee whether his design spirits would continue to remain docile over a long stretch of time, but that was too far away. The Red Association did not have the luxury to plan too far ahead. There was nothing wrong with prioritizing more immediate short-term solutions.

"Very well." The bald Master Mech Designer nodded in acknowledgement. "I cannot say I agree with your strategy. It certainly does not fall in line with the standards of our Association. That does not mean your argument is wrong. When our conditions have deteriorated, there is no time to be pedantic. As long as you are aware of the failure points, I believe you are experienced and responsible enough to manage the risks. That said, you cannot rely entirely on a design spirit to produce the desired effect. The mech itself and the tech it relies upon are crucial to your design project as well."

That was true. "What are you getting at, Master Goldstein?"

"I have spent a measure of my time on searching our extensive database on any tech or research that may facilitate your goal. There are numerous promising options that you can choose from, but I recommend one solution in particular. It has its shortcomings, but its advantages are too compelling."

The Master Mech Designer transferred an obscure research report to Ves.

He immediately utilized his implant to skim through it. "This... is this true?"

"Yes. It would not have been in our database otherwise. There are many curiosities in the Red Ocean that we have yet to explore. We are newcomers to this sea of stars and we have yet to fully explore all of the star systems in our claimed territories, let alone outside of them. When we began to fortify our presence in the Torald Middle Zone and other border zones, we conducted more thorough surveys, primarily to detect and eliminate any hidden threats in advance. We also completed more thorough surveys that have mapped out the available resources in the star systems. This enabled us to discover an exotic gas buried underneath the sole of an untamed planet that has made it much more difficult to scan the terrain."

In other words, this gas or a related factor could play a key role in developing and producing an auxiliary mech that could produce the all-encompassing smoke screen that Ves sought the most!

Even if this gas had only ever been detected on only a single planet, it could still play an immensely useful role as long as his planned mech did not need to use too much of it to produce a noticeable improvement in performance!

"What is it called?"

"X45454-394B-2399331FFT."

"That... is certainly a mouthful." Ves mildly responded. "Can't you guys give it a proper name?"

"We can. We discover so many new exotics and hypers every day that none of us can muster up the enthusiasm to give them all a unique name. You can propose a name right now if you wish. Given that no one has shown any obvious interest in it, there is a 99 percent chance that it will be approved within seconds so long as the suggested name is not too vulgar."

"Oh really? If that is the case... then let's call it Ves Gas!"

"..."

Chapter 5706 Solus

5706 Solus

If Ves had the right to name a recently discovered exotic gas, then why not name it after himself?

Plenty of people did it. This was a clever little way for people to ensure that their names and their legacies lived on long after they had passed away.

Even if their other works and accomplishments eventually faded from public memory, the names of the materials that society used still lived on for many years.

Unfortunately, Master Goldstein decisively squashed Ves' attempt to immortalize his own name!

"Rejected. It is too short and not distinctive enough. You may do what you want if you or your organization has discovered this substance yourself, but since this is not the case, the primary decision-making power still lies with us. We are merely open to suggestions."

In other words, Ves better come up with a more proper and acceptable name, or else the mechers would take care of it themselves.

His mind studied the images attached to the research report. The mildly toxic gas was predominantly green and reportedly had a stench that reminded the surveyors of a decaying swamp.

When Ves continued to examine the images and recordings attached to the research report, he gained the impression that the gas possessed a cloying and repelling character to it. The green gas drove away all organisms that sought to occupy the lands where it was leaking out of the atmosphere.

Strangely enough, due to its weight, it stayed low to the ground and might even seep back into the ground.

This led to the creation of completely dead lands where no exoplants and exobeasts were willing or able to live in. The gas was so unfriendly towards the ecosystem that it created its own one that was completely absent of any organisms as far as the surveyors have ascertained.

A burst of inspiration welled up from his mind.

"How about... Solus Gas?"

The Survivalist looked a lot more impressed at Ves' second suggestion.

"It is still rather short, but... it is not a name attached to any gas or frequently used material, so it is technically acceptable. I will permit it. X45454-394B-2399331FFT will henceforth be known as Solus Gas. Whether this name will be sung from the lips of people throughout the new frontier is up to you. This gas has shown useful properties, but it is only supplied by a single planet. It cannot be reproduced through other means as far as we know, so we do not deem it viable enough to be used on a large scale."

The scarcity and non-renewable nature of this gas made it so that once this resource ran out, any mech that relied upon it would become useless overnight.

This was not an ideal situation, but Ves did not look down on it like the mechers.

"I can treat it similar to how I use my design spirits." He explained his own perspective. "If there is enough Solus Gas to enable the production and use of a couple of million copies of my auxiliary mechs, then that is already enough. This is because I will do my best to give my work the capacity to support at least hundreds of other friendly mechs by forming a large smoke screen where they can enjoy total concealment. This is what support mechs are good at. You only need a handful of them to amplify the performance of many other machines."

As a support mech specialist, Master Goldstein knew this rule better than anyone. He agreed with Ves' sentiment. As long as support mechs were designed well enough, they could indeed increase the effective performance of many more mechs, which ultimately made them worth far more than their list prices!

Of course, not every support mech was able to make a positive impact on the battlefield. They were subject to many limitations and could face difficulties that hindered them from being useful.

No mech was invincible. Every work had its flaws. It was not necessary to erase them all. Ves just had to identify them and account for them so that their pilots knew how to best play to their advantages.

Ves and Master Goldstein continued to discuss the development of a possible second-class support mech that could maximize the use of Solus Gas.

It was incredibly helpful for Ves to bounce off his ideas to highly knowledgeable mech designer who specialized in the relevant areas.

Though Master Goldstein tried his best not to give any outright answers to many problems, he was more than willing to provide hints and directions for further investigation.

Ves would be able to save a lot of detours and flesh out his design project a lot faster. He would also minimize the chance of overlooking important factors that he really should have thought of sooner.

The most critical part of the support mech was the smoke screen generator that was responsible for producing an incredibly effective particle cloud that was mixed with both Solus Gas and other complementary substances.

There were many nuances to the design and configuration of such a device. Master Goldstein explained a lot of common sense considerations, but also went in deeper and pointed out many different technical puzzles that Ves needed to solve in order to make it viable.

Designing this support mech was anything but simple. Master Goldstein raised so many points of concern, many of which Ves had yet to think about.

He appreciated all of the lessons and advice. Ves knew that as long as he addressed all of these issues properly, he would be able to complete a proper support mech design that had a good chance of matching if not beating the competition.

"Thank you for your guidance, Master." Ves bowed in respect.

"It is my pleasure, Ves. You are already a fairly experienced mech designer, but I will say this to you anyway. Mech design is not a process of following predetermined scripts and formulas. It is meant to be dynamic. Do not let my advice overwhelm you and dominate your design process. You have already developed your voice in our craft. Keep following it even if others do not necessarily approve. As long as your results are outstanding enough, then we can overlook aspects that would otherwise be problematic."

Ves had a feeling that these worlds of wisdom applied to more than just his upcoming support mech design project.

"Okay... I think I should go now. I want to take a look at the classified report on Yondu Milk, and I need to direct my clan to start survey and mining operations on the planet where Solus Gas has appeared. What is it called, anyway?"

"Reticula Corein V. It is located in a binary star system, so it has two fairly old stars. One is a yellow dwarf and the other is a red dwarf. Their combined light output is not as strong as in many other binary star systems. What is more concerning is that the Reticula Corein System is roughly located in the middle of the Torald Middle Zone. This puts it out of the reach of most ordinary alien raids for the time being, but this can change drastically if our adversaries have launched a powerful offensive. Once that happens, Reticular Corein can become a hotspot of combat activity."

"This is probably one of the driving reasons why no one has taken steps to colonize Reticula Corein V." Ves determined. "That's a shame. It is an untamed planet that does not need a lot of changes to become comtable to human physiology. If there are any other unique or valuable resources on this planet, then it could turn into a nice stronghold for any pioneering organization."

"The planet's ecosystem and possibly its terrain may have undergone drastic changes since our surveyors submitted this report. Look at the date. The survey was completed only months after the start of the Age of Dawn. I think you should know extremely well what that implies."

Ves recalled his recent vacation to Ocanon VI. The Hunting Association had to put in a lot of work to preserve a modicum of the planet's rich and diverse ecosystems. THis was a problem that always needed to be worked on because the local mutated beasts and calamity beasts could easily grow out of control if left unchecked!

Ocanon VI produced an awful lot of mutated beasts, many of which grew rapidly until they were on the verge of evolving into calamity beasts.

Since this level of threats could emerge on a planet that was already tightly regulated, what about a completely untamed planet that had not been actively governed or managed by any human institution?

The mutated beasts that had evolved without any artificial restrictions must have transformed into powerful monsters without doubt! It was probably a guarantee that it held multiple calamity beasts, of which a handful may have set off into space and gone elsewhere!

Ves already started to get a headache. Starting a mining operation on hostile territory was incredibly foolish.

Most groups did not think it was worthwhile to go through all of the effort of mining Solus Gas, just to lose the facilities a few days later because they got blasted to pieces by a giant monstrosity!

However, Ves did not look deterred. He had a powerful feeling that he would find what he was looking for in the Reticula Corein System. It was such a powerful impulse that it seemed rather suspicious why this location of all places merited so much importance all of a sudden.

Solus Gas sounded like a useful material to incorporate in his mech design, but he could find other substitutes if he wanted to. They might not be as effective as this specific material, but they would more likely than not be a lot easier for him to source.

With that in mind, Ves quickly ended his discussion with Master Goldstein and contacted the expeditionary fleet.

The projection of Master Benedict Cortez appeared in place.

Unlike Ves who had become more 'civilized' after spending a lot more time away from dangerous places, Master Benedict still possessed a strong frontier air to his person.

Being put in charge of the expeditionary fleet also forced him to step up and tailor his public persona in a way that made him more palatable to the mech pilots who were doing the heavy lifting.

"Ves." The former Skull Architect grinned sharply. "It is good to see you again. I almost thought you had forgotten about us already."

"I am doing well. I am not here to catch up on old times. I want your input on a proposal of mine."

Ves briefly explained his intention to design a certain support mech and the need to harvest gas from a specific planet in the Torald Middle Zone.

Suffice to say, Master Benedict did not like what he heard. "So the mechers coincidentally recommended you to examine a newly discovered exotic that just happened to be found on a single planet in the new frontier. That planet is located in a middle zone that is under constant threat and may very well be overrun within the decade if our side is losing ground in the Red War. Does that not sound suspicious to you in any way?"

"I know it sounds fishy, but I have no choice but to play with the cards the mechers have dealt to me." Ves helplessly shrugged. "I need you to divert at least a part of the expeditionary fleet to the Reticula Corein System. The mechers have surveyed it just after the start of the Age of Dawn, but you know as well as I do that continued exposure to exotic radiation must have produced massive

changes. I need our forces to scout and survey the planet in greater detail to discern whether the Solus Gas is still around and whether it is viable for us to start a mining and harvesting operation."

That was a heavy request to make.

"Mhmm. It is doable. We are still preparing to launch another big operation, so we can spare the troops for now. It is best if you arrange other forces to take over from ours, though."

"I'll take care of it, but I want my clansmen to take a look at what is going on over there. This task is too important to be left to third parties."

Chapter 5707 The New Guests

5707 The New Guests

Solus Gas merited a lot of investigation, but it took time to organize a decent expedition to the Reticula Corein System where it had been discovered.

After Ves passed on his instructions, he let this matter be and directed his attention towards other affairs.

There was not much point in formulating his mech concept and coming up with a draft design when he was not sure what sort of support mech he could make. Everything depended on the properties of Solus Gas that routinely spurted out of the surface of Reticula Corein V before sinking back down in the ground again.

The only instance that gave him pause was the strong urge to investigate the planet. He even felt tempted to take a trip to the Torald Middle Zone himself in order to conduct a first-hand investigation!

That was crazy of course. Ves had become a high-value target to any cosmopolitan or other assassin who wanted to get into the good books of the Red Cabal.

His latest bestsellers had also disrupted the market for both second-class drone mechs and second-class heavy artillery mechs. The competitors who used to be able to earn a lot of profits by selling their own equivalent products definitely had reasons to resent the latest upstart!

With more and more rumors circulating throughout the mech community of his intentions to 'disrupt' the market for other mech categories, a lot of established mech designers did not look forward to the works that Ves sought to bring to market in the following years!

As much as he wanted to examine the circumstances of the planet in person, it was best not to do anything foolish and leave this matter to the professionals.

"I really want to take a look in person, though."

It was not enough for him to witness events unfolding by watching a live feed. Not only was the connection unable to give him a full impression of the mysterious environment that produced the exotic green gas, but it was also a highly insecure means of remote communication and observation.

Ves had other options, but he needed to think about it. The best alternative would be to send out one of his incarnations and have him take a look on his behalf.

Perhaps Vulcan could fulfill this role. He just needed to extend his presence on site with a suitably powerful totem.

In any case, work on his mech designs continued. He invested special care and attention on making the new Journeymen in the Design Department become more involved and invested in his design projects.

Though Gloriana already did a good job in actively managing and supervising all of the 25 Journeymen that had joined up in Bortele, they ultimately answered to Ves.

At least that was supposed to be the case.

Ves also had to allocate a bit of time on accommodating the Vulcanite Novice Mech Designers that the dwarves had carefully selected and sent to the New Constantinople System.

Back when they arrived a few months ago, they instantly changed the intimate atmosphere of the Design Department.

"What is the meaning of this?!" Gloriana pulled her husband aside and hissed in his ear. "You told me earlier that you have made some sort of agreement with the Eternal Vulcan Empire to teach their Novices how to design a living mech, but must you insist on bringing them to our work place?"

"What's wrong with that? They need to get a real feel on how we design living mechs. We can't do that if we stuff them in a dark and isolated hole. Don't worry, honey. I have already prepared an adjacent design lab where they can do most of their work. Aside from that, I have granted them access to the common rooms, but they won't be able to enter into any of the chambers where we design our more sensitive and classified mechs such as the Dark Zephyr Mark III."

"That hardly makes this any better! There are still many security risks just by having them able to talk to our Larkinson mech designers in the common areas!"

Ves placed his hand on her shoulder. "Just bear it, Gloriana. It is for a good cause. You don't even need to pay attention to them yourself. I will be in charge of them while they remain guests at our Premier Branch. As long as we can tolerate their presence for 3 or so years, the Eternal Vulcan Empire will reward us by transferring one of their fairly modern first-class fleet carriers to us. This is an insanely profitable deal for our clan, so I would appreciate it if you don't do anything that will spoil this arrangement."

Though Gloriana looked anything but pleased at having these odd dwarves work in the same facility as herself, she understood how important it was for the Larkinson Clan to build up a fleet of first-class warships.

"Fine. You can do what you want with the dwarves, but you will be responsible for their conduct. Do not allow their anti-human cultural sensitivities affect the morale and productivity of our lead and assistant mech designers."

"I don't think you need to be worried about that. The Vulcanites aren't stupid enough to send rabid tall folk haters to us. If I am wrong, then I will make sure to set any dwarf straight. They are under my control now that they have arrived in Diandi Base."

A few minutes later, Ves left Gloriana's side and approached the batch of young but remarkably composed dwarves standing in a neat row.

The dwarves most definitely received a lot of training on how to comport themselves outside of Vulcan space. They may have originally grown up in an environment where tall folk were clearly

dominant, which meant that these foreign exchange workers were not the same as their more isolated and segregated brothers.

That was good news.

"Good day, ladies and gentlemen. I hope the journey to this star system has been comfortable to you. Each of you knows who I am and what I do, so I will skip the redundant introduction. Let me ask you a question. Do you know why you are here? What is your mission?"

The row of dwarves who were clearly at least a full head shorter than Ves answered in unison!

"To master the art of living mech design and learn from your example!"

Ves twitched his lips.

"I admire your enthusiasm, but don't be so stiff. This is not a military camp. If you truly want to learn how to design living mechs, then you will need to loosen up and embrace the facets of life. You must freely channel your emotions and earnestly aspire to turn a lifeless object into an intrinsically alive machine. The greater your love, empathy and passion, the faster you will succeed. I have a direct disciple in my ranks who is on the verge of breaking through as a Journeyman with a design philosophy that is nearly identical to mine. You can approach her and ask for tips from a student's perspective in order to smoothen your journey."

One of the male dwarves with a short black beard raised his arm. "Professor Larkinson, how many students have received lessons in living mech design?"

"Hundreds. Many of them are Terran mech design students who have enrolled in the Eden Institute of Business & Technology. While I have increased the class size by a lot, I have still put a limit on how many students I am willing to teach in a single semester. I like to believe that the school administration has done its best to select the most qualified and eager students to learn from my craft."

"How many of those students have gone on to design a living mech?"

"I don't know the exact figures. I can only confirm that one of them has successfully proven the capability to design a living mech, and she happens to be my teaching assistant and direct disciple." Ves honestly replied. "I have lost track of most Terran students who have passed my introductory course. They still have to complete many other courses before they can finally graduate. Even then, they may not have the opportunity to independently design a true living mech when they enter the workplace for the first time. It is possible that a few of my former students have entered a secret research institution where they have already designed a rudimentary living mech, but I won't know about it unless the responsible party is willing to unveil it to the public."

Ves was not too concerned about this. He already expected that most of his students would experience a lot of difficulties unless they truly threw their heart and soul into living mech design.

Not every had the special background and motivation that drove Alexa Streon to pursue living mech design at all cost.

Most of the Terran students had already committed to a clan or a mech company. Much of their study and work careers had already been mapped in advance by their parents or superiors. Learning a single unusual subject was not a reason to throw all of that planning overboard.

"I won't lie to you." Ves told the 10 dwarves. "Learning how to design living mechs is difficult, but not in an academic way. It is a Class IX Design Philosophy that requires you to undergo a large shift in attitude towards mechs. You absolutely cannot regard them as lifeless commodities. You need to treat each of them as alive or with the potential to come alive. I actually think that a third-class mech designer has a better chance of learning my craft. Do you know why? They don't know as much about science and technology as you guys, so they are much more open-minded and free from existing constraints."

"Does that mean that there is no guarantee we will be able to learn your craft, professor?"

"Who knows?" Ves shrugged. "There are certain tricks and shortcuts that I can employ in order to forcibly boost your comprehension of living mechs, but it is questionable whether you can go much further in this field if you make use of them. I would much rather have you work earnestly towards understanding my design philosophy. Only by organically changing your mindset and appreciating the wonder of living mechs will you have the possibility of advancing to Journeyman, Master and maybe even further."

He carefully observed the dwarves as he detailed how difficult it was to meet their goal. He wanted to take their measure and determine how they reacted to adversity.

Fortunately, the Vulcanites had indeed done a good job at selecting their candidates. Most of the gathered Novice Mech Designers looked eager to tackle this challenge and work hard to overcome it. None of them showed signs of giving up, though Ves was not sure whether they would be able to maintain their persistence a year or two later.

Ves would just have to deal with that problem if it became serious enough.

For now, he wanted the Novices to be helpful and compliant.

"This is going to be a marathon instead of a sprint. You should start working here with the mindset of investing in your own future. You won't be able to earn a payoff immediately, but as long as you work hard enough, I will do my best to lead you across the finish line. For now, I want to assess each of you on an individual basis so I know what you are capable of. Do note that most of our projects are currently based on second-class mechs. We will not be designing any first-class mechs until much later, so make sure you adjust your methods and make sure you are up to date on the standards of second-

class mechs."

Ves probably needed to spend a bit more time on instructing the new batch of dwarven recruits to make sure they could do their jobs properly.

This was not an appealing chore, but it would be worth it in the end. These Novices were the best of what the Eternal Vulcan Empire was able to offer.

As genuine first-class mech designers, their productivity should be almost as high as that Alexa Streon at the start. This meant that once they settled into the Design Department, every commercial mech design project would probably speed up their progress by leaps and bounds!

Chapter 5708 Gloriana's Brilliant Proposal

5708 Gloriana's Brilliant Proposal

As elite young mech designers who were expected to lead the Eternal Vulcan Empire's mech industry a century later, all 10 Novice Mech Designers were excellent in their own right.

Perhaps their thoughts and cultural sensibilities may not completely align with that of the Larkinson Clan, but they showed very little of it when they talked and worked alongside human mech designers.

One of the issues that prevented the new dwarves from developing a close relationship with the Larkinson mech designers was the fact that the former was not connected to the Larkinson Network.

The recent recruits had all spent enough time with a permanent connection to the Golden Cat to completely integrate it into their lives.

Every member of the Larkinson Clan was instinctually able to identify other members. The encouraging glow radiated by Goldie inspired so much love and affection that it was difficult to imagine how people lived all this time without access to this incredibly useful benefit.

Despite this difference, the Novices settled in Diandi Base decently enough. Neither side was stupid or irrational enough to provoke any incidents and displease their superiors.

Even Gloriana cleaned up her act and treated the Vulcanites cordially, though he was pretty sure she felt disgusted by their shorter and much stockier bodies.

The dwarves resembled humans so much, yet deviated in a few clear ways that offended Gloriana's perfectionist tendencies.

"The following three years shall be tiresome." She complained to her husband after they completed another day at work. "Please do not make similar promises again. The Design Department is the most important institution of our clan. Having guests work alongside our own mech designers adds too many complications and makes it difficult to exert total control over every variable."

Ves leaned over and embraced his exhausted spouse. "I can't guarantee anything, but I will try my best to avoid this in the future. Believe me, I am not too enthused about this either, but the Vulcanites may very well be the only ones who are willing to give us an actual first-class fleet carrier. You should know as well as I do how incredibly scarce and valuable they are. Everyone else who has the capacity to construct fleet carriers have outright stopped their sales. They would rather keep the powerful vessels for themselves so that they can ensure they remain at the forefront of changing times."

"If that is the case, why not start our own first-class shipbuilding operation? Do not tell me that our clan is not familiar or proficient in this industry. Our shipwrights have already accrued more than enough experience with producing our own combat carriers over at the Diligent Ovenbird. We have also cooperated with the Murphy Family for numerous years. We are no longer as ignorant about the complexities related to shipbuilding as before."

Ves frowned. "That may be true, but we are talking about constructing first-

class starships here. Do you know how many requirements we have to meet to make that possible? First, we need to acquire a modern first-class shipyard. The insane amount of tech and materials that is needed to construct this orbital facility are so high that it can cost at least 10 trillion MTA credits or something to build one. Our clan may have grown a lot wealthier since we have acquired a 20 percent stake in Isthmus Manufacturing, but even that is not enough for us to order the construction

of a first-class shipyard. Do keep in mind that their price has inflated by a lot due to obvious reasons."

Even with his improved connections and reputation, Ves would find it difficult to find qualified construction companies that were willing to accept and prioritize his order. Their waiting lists have already stretched on for decades!

Gloriana frowned. "Can we take over an existing shipyard or shipbuilding company instead? We do not necessarily have to acquire it by paying cash. You can trade favors or offer other valuable services such as accepting mech commissions."

"That sounds like a more realistic idea, but no one is stupid enough to trade away one of their top strategic assets so easily. A first-class fleet carrier is hard currency in this day and age. A shipyard that can pump them out on a regular basis is an inexhaustible mine. The concessions I need to make in order to match or exceed the value of this asset is insanely high. That is not the kind of thing that I can fool other people into giving up in exchange for a few fancy living mech designs."

His wife clearly did not like the sound of that. She wanted to reduce the Larkinson Clan's dependence on external parties when it came to acquiring first-class starships.

"You are not going far enough with exhausting your options. There is one asset that you can readily exchange for a first-class shipyard. It will be painful on our part, but it is only by making a sacrifice that is almost equivalent to the value of the shipbuilding facility that we can complete this trade."

Ves looked confused. "What are you talking about? Are you suggesting that we should sell our stake in Isthmus Manufacturing?"

"No. It would be foolish for us to let go of these shares. You are close to the correct answer. What I want to propose is that you agree to sell a part of your shares in the Living Mech Corporation. Our mech company has been growing at a meteoric rate, especially due to the release of our most recent commercial mech lines. Its valuation has grown higher than ever due to its amazing future potential. I can tell you that there are many eager groups that want to purchase a stake in the LMC while it is still possible. As long as you are willing to give up a sufficient degree of ownership, I think that you will be able to tempt at least one interested party into giving up a first-class shipyard."

"..."

The mention of trading away his shares violated one of Ves' taboos.

He still felt really bad about the past instances where different people forcibly demanded a share of his pie. His shares fell into the hands of different people and government institutions who did not deserve to profit from his success.

The reminder from his wife threw him in a pit of dark memories. His mood instantly deflated and he could no longer treat this topic as lightly as before.

Gloriana did not let his reaction stop her from pressing her argument.

"You are being too sensitive about this subject. You are no longer the third-

class mech designer of before. You are a tier 3 galactic citizen and an honorary member of the Red Association. No one will try to exploit you as badly as your enemies have done in the past. What is

the current ownership structure of the LMC? How have the shares that used to belong to Master Carmin Olson and Master Toqueman Huran been dealt with? Have they been invalidated?"

Ves shook his head. "Not precisely. When the Great Severing occurred, a huge financial mess fell onto the laps of red humanity. Ownership in many big companies and organizations rested in the big players that were overwhelmingly based in the Milky Way Galaxy. Freeing up all of this owned property at once might sound nice to many people, but it would have caused an economic upheaval that our society absolutely did not need at the time. The Red Two instituted a lot of policies to fix this mess. In our case, the Red Association basically swooped in and claimed the orphaned shares in the LMC. It doesn't really matter what justification the mechers have used. I think they just wanted to plant their flag in my mech company."

"Oh. That still leaves you with 72 percent ownership in your mech company, but that is a deceptive figure."

"How so?" Ves raised his eyebrow.

"The Larkinson Clan owns the remaining 24 percent stake in the LMC. This effectively means you are in control of it as well, though you are not able to dispense with them as freely as your own shares. The fact of the matter is that if you want to maintain absolute control over your own company, you must merely ensure that you hold on to 50 percent ownership. Any shares beyond this threshold should be treated as tradable assets as far as I am concerned. Yes, they can supply you with a large amount of dividends, but do you really need the extra money at this point? Unless they can supply you with a much larger income, the additional wealth is dispensable."

Ves did not entirely agree with that, but he understood her meaning.

"So are you saying I am stupid for holding on to so many shares and that I should get rid of them as soon as possible?"

His wife sighed. "I am not belittling you, Ves. I am trying to help you treat your assets in a more rational manner. There are many more logical arguments in favor of trading away your shares as opposed to hoarding them as if you are a frightened squirrel. You can exchange up to 46 percent ownership of the LMC that is currently in your name and still retain majority control over your precious company. Think of how much wealth and assets we can raise with that many shares. The Terrans, Rubarthans and many other wealthy groups will frantically try to buy into your bright and prosperous future. If we can organize an auction and have all of the interested parties bid against each other, then obtaining a first-class shipyard is a foregone conclusion. You may be able to gain an additional one if the valuation of your stock is high enough!"

As much as Ves wanted to feature her argument, he had to admit that she made a powerful and compelling argument.

Auctioning out a large chunk of his shares would enable him to get many of the items on his wish list that he had always dreamed about but never managed to obtain through his existing channels.

Perhaps it might not be the best long-term decision for him to give up so many shares for a mech company that was continuing to grow like an ascending shuttle.

Yet Ves knew extremely well that investing too much in the long-term might not pay off due to all of the calamities that would befall red humanity in the coming decades.

It had become a lot more important for him to invest in the short and medium term prospects of his clan and his people.

Acquiring a first-class shipyard meant that his clan would be able to pump out first-class starships on a regular basis. This would not only relieve the needs of the Premier Branch, but also ensure that his clan would be able to build up a powerful first-class fighting force that could confront or deter some of the most powerful human and alien enemies in the Red Ocean!

If a scenario like the Black Tide ever took place where every human survivor sought to board the Whale Ark that could bring them away from the Red Ocean, then all of the shares in the Living Mech Corporation no longer held any value anymore.

The complete breakdown of human civilization and order would revert society to a much more primitive stage where the value of those shares could not exceed the value of a single combat capable mech!

"I'll think about it." Ves eventually decided. "This is not a decision that I can make in an instant. I will weigh it properly and decide to go forward if it truly makes sense for us at this time."

"Please do." Gloriana leaned in and kissed his cheek in an affectionate manner. "I am not the only person in our family that is concerned about our safety and the safety of our children. The second-class starships of the expeditionary fleet are no longer enough to protect us against the enemies that we have attracted as of late. Only the superior defenses and mobility of proper first-class vessels can meet our needs."

Chapter 5709 Improved Designs

5709 Improved Designs

"What do you think about my wife's latest proposal, Alexa?"

The next day, Ves had taken care of his usual chores before paying a visit to Alexa's workplace.

His direct disciple was just in the process of completing the refinement to her chosen design philosophy and the mech designs that reflected her aspirations.

This was a crucial moment for Alexa. After receiving her mentor's critique, she had courageously delayed her impending advancement in order to strengthen her foundation even further.

Any modest advantages that she was able to establish at this point would definitely pay off immensely in the future!

The quality of Project S1 and Project S2 had clearly benefited from her additional care and attention.

As Ves carefully reviewed the design schematics of Alexa's smart metal mech and rifleman mech, he became particularly impressed by how she was able to make them feel more human rather than pursue efficiency at all costs.

The more familiar shapes and proportions should do a lot to make mech pilots feel better about piloting Alexa's concept works.

While Ves continued to admire his student's updated works, Alexa thought over the story that he had shared and formulated her response.

"I think your wife's argument has merit." She said. "I have heard about your mixed past related to this subject, but that should not serve as an impediment to advancing the strength of your clan. Our clan. We still have a severe mismatch between our value and our military might. The expeditionary fleet alone cannot possibly protect you or the amazing organizations that you have built. The fact that you need to depend on the Bluejay Fleet is a clear sign of weakness on your part. The sooner you can rid your dependence on the mechers for protection, the better. There is no telling when the Red Association sees fit to withdraw its fleet or worse."

Ves grimaced. "I get what you mean. I worry about this as well. Even so, the shares in my mech company are really valuable. I don't mean to boast, but I think I have a pretty good chance of advancing to Star Designer one day. How do you estimate the value of any shares of the main mech company of a figure of this stature? People should be glad to give me possession of their starships, shipyards or even a piece of their own organizations in exchange for getting involved in any of my businesses! However, no one in the present is willing to go this far. I won't get as much value for selling those shares today than if I wait a decade or two decades."

Alexa shook her head in disapproval. "You should not think of this issue from this angle. It is indeed likely that the market value of your shares will continue to rise over time as long as you keep releasing more impressive works, but you will spend many more years without the security and safety provided by the additional strategic first-class assets that you can bring under your control. It is ultimately up to you to decide whether you are willing to rely on the Bluejay Fleet going forward, but that will take much longer to build a proper fleet and allow your clansmen to accrue vital experience needed to make the best use of these powerful assets. If you start to build your fleet too late, then it will not be able to perform at its best when you need to rely on it the most."

That was a concern that Ves was worrying about as well. He could not forget about all of the images of doom and gloom that he and Ylvaine had painted on the surface of the Zeal.

The mechers may have forced him to erase the prophetic visions, but they still lived on in his mind.

Sure, the Red Association would do its best to prevent the doom scenarios from unfolding, but success was not guaranteed. If the mechers failed, then Ves and the Larkinsons needed to be able stand on their own without relying on dubious allies and fair weather friends.

Though Ves did not make up his mind right away, he clearly became more swayed by Gloriana's proposal. Alexa's lack of disapproval played a major role in shifting his feelings about this subject.

"No person or organization is able to stand alone." Alexa said. "My former ancient clan is no exception. It has forged many bonds with other organizations by exchanging shares of its assets. By surrendering a part of your control, you will gain the allegiance of a powerful ally who will be incentivized to stand up for you in the situations that matter. The early injection of wealth or other strategic concessions can be used to consolidate your position and reduce the risk of collapsing."

"Mmmhmm." Ves grunted as he continued to contemplate this situation while at the same time completing his examination of her two living mech designs. "I like how you have made great strides in anthropomorphizing the design and visual appearance of both the male and female variants of Project S2. I can't help but notice that you have widened the hips of the female variant to a rather obvious manner."

Alexa sheepishly smiled. "I did not initially design the female variant to simulate the birth of a human child through this specific channel. As I have shown you months earlier, the original process

of procreation should have taken place in a specialized rear-mounted module that could easily be attached or detached to the machine as needed. Here, I have made many adjustments so that the module is not only attached to the front, but will also connect to internal channels of the torso of the mech frame in order to 'deliver' the mechanical offspring when the time has come."

The technical complications resulting from all of these changes were considerable. Ves knew that Alexa could not have possibly enjoyed the tedious redesign process, but that was alright.

All that mattered was whether the mech design became and whether she had learned numerous useful lessons in the process.

Her redesign certainly caused the female variant of the experimental spaceborn rifleman mech to lose much of its slender profile, but the added width and bulk should be worth it. Alexa had tried her best to put the added mass and thickness to good use by making the machine more resilient and able to absorb more heat.

"If I decide to auction a part of my shares, how much do you think I should pass on to the winners?" Ves asked.

"That is difficult to say. You do not need to push yourself to the limit and give up 46 percent ownership at once. That is far too excessive for your current purpose. You should only auction as much as you need to acquire the key assets that you seek to strengthen our clan. If you can obtain a working first-

class shipyard by surrendering 15 percent of outstanding shares of the LMC, then you will have already satisfied your minimum goal."

Ves played a clip of a simulation in the projected interface. It showed how the process of procreation between two similar mechs was supposed to unfold from a purely physical and technical perspective.

The simulated movements were quite intriguing. Ves gazed at the motions with a critical eye. He began to rub his hairless chin as he contemplated the practicality of this possible scenario.

"I see that the wider hips certainly help with this ritualistic process. However, I cannot help but notice that the male variant can only interface with the female variant from the rear and only in a specific posture. It appears that your Project S2's lack the flexibility and the proportions to interface in other stances."

"That is correct." Alexa said. "I can make it possible for the living mechs to interface with each other in other stances, but I would have to apply so many tweaks and modifications that the mechs will become needlessly complex. I have made the deliberate decision to limit these variables and keep it basic. I have found that the stance I have selected requires much less compromises in the designs due to the relatively minimal contact between the surface areas of the two variants. The only issue was that the simulations would show that certain delicate parts might vibrate out of shape from repeated activity over the long term, but I have reinforced them until they ceased to be an issue. Project S2 is only a first-generation product of my design philosophy, so it is not necessary for it to possess the full range of options. As long as it can serve as my proof of concept, then that is sufficient."

He agreed with her approach. Though he wanted living mechs to experience the fullness of life, they were still limited by all kinds of practical considerations that just did not allow them to live exactly like a human.

The point of his design philosophy was not to make them exactly identical to each other. That would defeat the purpose of designing mechs. Ves just wanted his living products to be able to grow in a more rounded manner. This was highly conducive to their growth in the long run.

"Okay. I think you are ready." He declared with a hint of pride and anticipation in his tone. "You have proven through your updated mech designs that you are ready to sunset your Apprentice days and become initiated into the true world of mech design. The only thing you have to do is to realize one of your mech designs. Will you be fabricating the S1 or the S2?"

"S2. Both variants. Project S1 is also excellent, but it is not a mech that is challenging to 'fabricate'. I only have to order a large batch of smart metal and command the nanomachines to assume the correct shape. Project S2 has to be fabricated as any conventional mech."

"Good choice. Are you sure you can fabricate the male and female variant at the same time?"

Alexa nodded. "I have already taken their production steps into account when I designed them. No process should be beyond my reach."

"Very well. If you do not have any other commitments, let us head down to the workshop so you can start right away. You need to strike while the iron is hot. I can tell you are excited for this, so it is best if you can take advantage of your current condition."

The former Terran mech designer was eager to get started, so she agreed to start her fabrication run.

It was wonderful to see her at work. Alexa might not possess the insanely high affinity towards mech that Ves currently possessed, but her theoretical understanding of all of the production machines was fantastic.

What she lacked in experience, she made up for it with logic, an attention to detail and extensive familiarity in all of the first-class instruments.

Alexa was able to work quickly. Project S2 was just a second-class rifleman mech, so it was overkill to use the current workshop to produce both of its variants.

Ves did not hover behind his student throughout this fabrication run. He still had many other responsibilities to take care of, but he tried his best to come back and stay whenever he was free.

Seeing Alexa bring her vision and her dreams to life was like witnessing the metamorphosis of an insect.

Like an ugly larva transforming into a beautiful butterfly, Alexa gradually experienced a form of tempering that increasingly added more substance to a design philosophy that previously existed as a collection of theories, assumptions and design principles.

By infusing them with her spirit and passion, she gradually transformed her design philosophy into a more spiritual existence. This would gradually make it strong enough to drag her over the extraordinary threshold and open up a wealth of new possibilities!

On the final day of the fabrication run, a new Journeyman Mech Designer had emerged.

Chapter 5710 A New Legacy

5710 A New Legacy

Alexa Streon-Larkinson fabricated her first true living mechs by herself.

She combined both skill and passion to bring her vision to life one part at a time.

She worked on both mechs concurrently so that she completed them both in quick succession.

As the male and female variants of a special second-class rifleman mech design took shape in front of Ves and their maker, the two machines immediately radiated the characteristic presence of living entities.

"They are alive." Ves quickly concluded. "Congratulations, Alexa. You have fully graduated from my class on how to design and make a true living mech. The effort that you have put in your work in the last few days has fully proven your ability to understand the essence of my design philosophy and adapt it in a way to make it yours. This shows that you have the qualifications to proceed forward in your chosen direction. It is not enough to master my theories and techniques. A true mech designer is a pioneer, a visionary and an explorer who does not hesitate to push a new direction in our industry, not because it will bring you glory, but because you believe with all of your heart that your grandfather and many other mech pilots will benefit endlessly from your unique contributions."

As her mentor spoke, Alexa continued to undergo a subtle but profound spiritual sublimation.

This was the first time Ves was able to witness the breakthrough of an Apprentice Mech Designer so close and in such an intimate setting.

It was fascinating how a mysterious force drove the transformation of Alexa's design philosophy from a set of intangible ideas to a real spiritual seed.

Ves had experienced this transformation himself, and it was magical to see it happen to a student under his tutelage.

The process was the same. Though Ves could not perceive the mysterious force, he knew without needing to guess that it was the Red Kingdom exerting its influence over a mech designer it had deemed worthy according to an unknown set of criteria.

It may have been possible for Alexa to break through as a Journeyman Mech Designer if she tried to do it herself.

However, there were way too many variables that could go awry in the process. Alexa had never engaged in active cultivation in her life, and even if she was able to perceive the imaginary realm through her companion spirit, her lack of knowledge and experience in this dangerous sphere increased the likelihood that she would botch the process and suffer cultivation deviation.

The existence of the Red Kingdom made these breakthroughs a lot easier and safer. People only broke through when they were absolutely ready, and the powerful assistance was far more competent and proficient in helping people attain a higher life level.

Ves learned numerous useful insights about mech designers and the operation of the Red Kingdom through his observations.

As Alexa continued to undergo her silent sublimation, Ves also noticed that parts of the thoughts and emotions in her mind got sucked into her growing design seed as well.

This reduced its purity, but also bound it closer to Alexa.

Ves used to believe that the absorption of irrelevant factors contaminated the design seed in an undesirable fashion, but now he held a different opinion.

The Red Kingdom shouldn't be so stupid to overlook this factor. Since it had allowed this process to happen, then there had to be good reasons why this was the case.

The moment mech designers broke through was often one of the best moments of their lives.

By absorbing the prevailing elements that were lingering in their minds, their design philosophy became intertwined with the factors that closely aligned with their passion, their drive and their sense of accomplishment.

Mech design was both an art and a science. It was more than a clinical approach to designing a mech. Ves believed that it was also an art in which the creator's desires and emotions infused a spirit of their own making into a work.

No AI or set of algorithms were able to replicate this unique ritual that was intrinsic to life. It was the key factor that justified the existence of the mech designer profession, and now Alexa had become a part of the exclusive gathering of people who shared a common goal and interest.

As the formation of Alexa's design seed came to completion, it began to radiate invisible energy waves that propagated her design philosophy.

The only beneficiaries of this effect were her newly fabricated copies of Project S1. Both the male and female variants of her most representative work so far seemed to gain a small infusion of life and awareness.

Of course, the effect was pretty weak when compared to the living mechs designed by Ves. They were still comparable to his earlier first order living mechs.

While Alexa was still trying to collect her thoughts, Ves continued to study the characteristics of the S2's that looked both common and different from what he was accustomed to seeing from his own works.

"Interesting."

Ves had only witnessed a few other living mechs designed by other mech designers.

Ketis for example had a penchant for designing first-order living mechs that could serve as effective carriers for her extraordinary sword styles.

Glorian had never independently designed a living mech as far as Ves was aware of, but she had learned enough from him to be able to do so. Her work would probably be a lot more generic and devoid of any special traits due to her lack of specialization in this subject.

The works of Alexa were different from the other two women.

Ketis may have been his first student, but she had already chosen her own path that was radically different from his own. Her swordsmanship and focus on sharpness were the true sources of her passion. Living mechs only served as a supplement to her primary goals.

Gloriana partially cheated her way into learning living mech design. She had little appreciation of the work and effort needed for other people to do what she took for granted most of the time.

Her main reason for becoming familiar with his theories was not to design living mechs herself, but to be able to coordinate better with her husband whenever they engaged in any collaborative work.

That made Alexa stand out more. She was his first 'direct disciple'. Even if Ves had yet to realize his design philosophy, the former Terran woman had nonetheless put in an unreasonable amount of dedication and hard work to successfully develop a living mech without any outside assistance!

This was amazing because it showed that Alexa had the capacity to develop a method on how to design a living mech even if Ves never entered her life.

While the probability of success was much lower than if Ves actively taught her all of his basic theories, her many favorable qualities still demonstrated that she was the real deal.

She was a true living mech designer.

The implications of this statement were massive.

Ves was no longer alone. From now on, he could share his greater ideas with a like-minded mech designer. He could bounce ideas off her that only made sense for them both.

He no longer had to bear the responsibility of carrying the torch of living mechs alone. Even if he died or became indisposed, Alexa would still be able to inherit all of his existing living mech designs and keep them up to date, though she would definitely put her own spin on them to claim her ownership over his old works.

That was not the extent to which Alexa's successful elevation changed the game.

Not only did she add much-needed redundancy to the Design Department, she also became a part of a great endeavor started by her mentor.

As long as Alexa remained productive, she would blaze her own trail and develop their shared field in a different direction!

Living mech design was no longer a spurious diversion of mech design anymore.

Now that Alexa proved beyond doubt that the field of living mechs could be practiced by multiple mech designers, it had gained a lot of legitimacy and gave hope that others might master it as well one day!

All-in-all, Alexa's successful elevation was not only a day of celebration of a woman who sought to fulfill her cherished dreams, but also bestowed a huge present to Ves!

The newly advanced Journeyman finally opened her sparkling green eyes. The light of her strengthened spirituality seemed to shine through them, enabling her to see and experience the reality around her through a different lens than before.

"Myah myah myah!"

Alexa felt so jubilant that her companion spirit sprung free from her mind and celebrated this long-awaited breakthrough!

Ves did not fail to notice that Maia had grown a lot stronger as well. Now that Alexa had formally surpassed the extraordinary threshold, her companion spirit automatically became more substantial and more capable of channeling E energies.

"Is this everything that you have hoped for?" Ves asked.

"It is." Alexa smiled as she cradled her own companion spirit. "I already had an expectation of what would happen if I broke through. I have read through numerous records that described the breakthrough process. Now that I have actually become a Journeyman, I find that I have underestimated the expansion of my senses and the strengthening of my instinctual understanding of mechs. I no longer view my mechs in the same way anymore. Now that I can see the fruits of my labor, I have the urge to go back to my old design and optimize it in numerous different ways."

Both of them stared up to the male and female variants of the S2.

"Your living mechs feel... young." Ves noted as he analyzed the newly fabricated mechs. "Not in the sense that they are just a few minutes old or that they are really weak compared to my own living mechs. They give me the impression that they are... babies."

His student grinned when she heard his remark. "That is deliberate on my part. One of the factors that I think are missing in your theoretical framework of living mechs is a more defined life cycle. I think that the process of aging can add more depth and development to the evolving characters of our works. Your products always start their lives as 'mature' living mechs that are ready to go into action straight away, and I have no objections to that. You are doing your best to meet the demands of the market. Your customers will not necessarily appreciate a living mech that is not able to tolerate action shortly after they are built and deployed."

Ves appreciated her compliment, but it did not do her own approach any good.

"Your works are different. If these two living mechs are going to be representative of your products going forward, then every living mech that you design will start as babies. I don't know about you, but I don't think it is a good idea to put the mech equivalent of babies on the battlefield."

His student did not seem to mind this circumstance. "Then don't. I am aware that they are essentially babies that have been put into the bodies of adults, but this is only a characteristic of the first generation of my living mechs. My works... are not meant to be used by their human partners in the same way as other mechs. They are an investment. As long as my clients and customers understand the true value of my legacy mechs, they will gladly spend the time to raise them, mold them and ultimately allow them to procreate."

Alexa believed so strongly in her vision that Ves admired her willingness to go against the prevailing standards and insist on pushing her own ideals.

However, it was questionable whether her eccentric works would be able to appeal to the masses. There were so many complications to her so-called living legacy mechs that only the most ardent believers in living mechs would become attracted to her specialty products!