

## The Mech 5711

### Chapter 5711 Stepping Into His Shoes

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Now that Alexa had become a Journeyman, her job and responsibilities needed to change.

She was not like all of the lead designers in the Design Department. She was his direct protege, and had demonstrated at least basic competence in living mech design.

While the sophistication of her products was not comparable to that of Ves, she could already serve as a substitute in cases where his intervention was normally required.

Once Alexa and Ves cleaned up the workshop and transferred the newly fabricated mechs to an available hangar bay, they settled down in a nearby office where they could discuss all of the changes.

Though a part of Alexa was still distracted by all of the new ideas and possibilities that became available to her, she was still attentive enough to discuss her altered place within the clan.

"In most large organizations, Journeymen are treated as more junior personnel who just happen to possess better future prospects." Ves began. "I think it is obvious to you that we do stuff differently. We don't have any Masters in our midst, and only a relatively short time has passed since I advanced to Senior. Journeymen are therefore the mainstays that do much of the work needed to progress the projects of our Design Department. Now that you have become one as well, it is time for you to step up and undertake more serious work."

"I understand, sir." Alexa nodded in a manner that made it clear that she did not intend to object to his arrangements. "I hope you can give me time to ease into my new rank and capabilities. I need to learn what I can do and adapt my mindset on mech design now that I have reached this level of dedication. It will take three or four months before I am ready to work full-time as a Journeyman."

"That is reasonable. I know what you are going through. I will give you all of the space you need to get a grip on your new strength. I am also aware that you also need to go on a pilgrimage to the regional headquarters of the Red Association in the Agamemnon Upper Zone. I'm not really sure what sort of secrets the mechers have decided to pass on to newly promoted Journeymen in this day and age, but they have probably prepared a different spiel than what I have heard."

Ves broke through in a different time. The mechers still tried to repress any knowledge of cultivation as much as possible and disguised everything through the lens of psionic power.

That approach had become redundant or even counter-productive in the Age of Dawn.

Everyone and their grandmother had already become aware of E energy, so a Journeyman making a pilgrimage to a major stronghold of the Red Association did not need to receive a lot of lessons anymore.

However, the mechers never abolished this obligation, which showed that they still expected mech designers to come and learn who was truly in charge of their profession.

The Terrans usually took a dim view of the domineering approach of the Association, but they had no choice but to play by the rules.

"What kind of responsibilities do you expect me to fulfill once I return?" Alexa asked.

Ves smiled back. "I have been thinking about your future for a while. I have tried my best not to bring this topic up to you because I did not want to add too much pressure onto your shoulders, but that is no longer a concern anymore. Once you have picked up your stride, I want you to receive additional lessons on the more advanced aspects of living mech design that I have yet to pass on to you. This includes the core principles of second generation, third generation and fourth generation living mechs."

His student looked shocked as she knew exactly what that meant. "That... that is everything that defines a living mech of your design! Anchoring design spirits to mech designs, establishing orders of life, opening up the possibility to acquire Ascension Runes... have I missed anything?"

"Yes. There is design spirit creation, living mech cultivation, Carmine mechs, battle networks and a bunch of other stuff that are not included in the package. I am not able to pass them on to you for various reasons, but I would be glad to teach you about everything else. You don't need to be as proficient in these aspects as myself, but I expect you to be able to reach a basic level of competency in designing fourth generation living mechs by the end of the year."

This was a big move. Ves was essentially willing to pass on most of his core trade secrets to his student.

It was an enormous gift to a Journeyman Mech Designer who was still relatively new to living mechs!

Although Alexa would undoubtedly get influenced by his direction, as a Journeyman she should be able to preserve her own design philosophy and cling onto her existing style and approach.

"I will try my best. Given that you are eager for me to learn how to design a fourth generation living mech, are you trying to train me as your substitute in living mech design?"

Ves nodded and smiled. "Yup. It has been a growing burden for me to make sure that the Design Department outputs a high quantity of living mech designs each year. It is impossible for me to reduce it as our clansmen and the market both hold high expectations for my works. Living mechs are both my brand and a part of my identity. It is unacceptable to deliver mechs that are not alive all of a sudden. This is where you come in. It would do me a lot of good if you can partially take over on my behalf."

His student understood his demand. "I cannot promise you that my living mechs will maintain the same style and possess the same level of strength as yours, but I will try my best to maintain consistency to avoid disappointing your customers."

Ves felt relieved to hear that. "Good. Redundancy and split responsibilities are essential to a growing mech operation. In the past, we used to rely on Sara Voiken to meet all of our defensive needs. It was only later that we hired the likes of Beatrice Hendrix and Viktor MacMillon. Their specialties may be different, but that does not matter as long as they can improve the defenses of our mechs. I want you to take on a similar position with regards to living mechs. Not only do I want you to relieve some of my current work burden, but I also expect you to supervise my other ongoing projects if I happen to go on a trip and fall out of contact for a while."

She knew what he was thinking about.

"You still wish to proceed and put your life on the line by participating in a possible future deep strike expedition? I do not think the mechers are eager to let you go forward."

"The mechers don't control my entire life. This is a matter of principle. My Journeyman days may be over, but that does not mean that I am no longer an explorer. I still need to live through different experiences in order to obtain the inspiration I need to produce new innovations. I'll sort this problem out with my minders. You just need to be prepared to step into my shoes during the times I become indisposed for whatever reason."

Alexa recognized that there were numerous problems with this plan.

"If I am expected to spend most of my time designing living mechs according to your style, I will not be able to allocate as much time on designing mechs that conform to my own vision."

"I know that this is not ideal, but the actual workload of turning a mech design alive is not that great so long as you do not invest too much time into the technical aspects. You will still have sufficient time for you to conduct your own research and lead your own design projects."

That placated Alexa for a bit. "I see. If that is the case, then I should be able to handle this responsibility. How much latitude will you give me to diverge from your design philosophy and add my own traits to your designs?"

"I don't want you to turn all of our existing mech lines into living legacy mechs." Ves responded in a firm tone. "They are still my products unless I say otherwise. Other than that, I will allow you to apply other, less drastic design solutions to them so long as their overall identities remain the same. I do not want my customers to obtain a completely different living mech after they have placed an order. Our brand must remain consistent."

"Understandable. This is your mech company, not mine."

"That leads me to your newly developed specialization." Ves continued. "The vision that you have shared with me makes it clear that your design philosophy is not conducive to designing products with mass market appeal. Unless you retool your approach, it is a given that your living legacy mechs will always remain a niche product. I cannot imagine that many people are willing to take your products seriously. They will think it is a giant joke to release mechs that can physically interface with each other in order to produce a miniature mech that is supposed to organically grow into a mature machine after a while. There are so many aspects about this that sound crazy that it is impossible for you to do well in the public arena."

Even Ves questioned whether Alexa had gone overboard, but the woman clearly saw little issue with her work.

"I have already taken this into consideration, sir. I proceeded with my plan because I am confident that there are still customers who appreciate the potential of my own brand of living mechs. I believe that over time, the disapproving majority will come to regret their ridicule. If they embraced living legacy mechs sooner, they would have been able to grow their own living mech dynasties by that time."

There was no guarantee that this would happen, but it did not hurt to dream about it. Alexa may have her life a lot more difficult for herself, but if she was able to fulfill all of her promises, then the power of her living legacy mechs could definitely exceed the more standard living mechs designed by Ves!

"It would help if I can begin to prove myself by designing mechs for the Larkinson Clan." Alexa said. "Do I have permission to design living legacy mechs for the Larkinson Army?"

"Granted. I won't convince any of the legion commanders to add your works to their mech roster. You will have to convince them of the merits of your specialty products by yourself. I think you are being too hasty, though."

"Oh? How so, sir?"

"The Larkinson Army is our main fighting force. It is risky for a fresh Journeyman like yourself to meet their intensive needs. It is better if you try to convince the various branches of the Larkinson Clan to adopt your machines instead. Their standards are lower and they are less critical about the quality of their mechs. They may also be led by more adventurous leaders who are more open-minded about all of the cumbersome requirements that they have to meet in order to make the most out of your products. I hope you don't attempt to push Project S2 on them though. Its performance is simply not up to par."

Alexa responded with a reassuring smile. "Project S2 was never meant for mass production. I will make sure to design living legacy mechs that best reflects the needs of the various mech units."

The Larkinson Clan as a whole was not ready to embrace this crazy living legacy mechs business. However, there were plenty of branches that might hold a different opinion towards Alexa's design philosophy.

They did not even have to replace all of their existing living mechs with the ones designed by the woman. Just a few living legacy mechs in a mech unit was already enough to make Alexa satisfied!

## Chapter 5712 A Small Celebration

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"Congratulations on your promotion, Alexa!"

The mech designers in Diandi Base decided to hold a party for Alexa's successful promotion.

Everyone was happy that Alexa managed to become a Journeyman Mech Designer. It certainly enthused the assistant mech designers and gave them hope that they would also break through one day.

The existing Journeymen all welcomed the arrival of a new colleague who could lighten their burdens and bring the Larkinson Clan's living mechs to the next level.

Alexa looked pleased and honored to receive the sincere well wishes of so many mech designers.

Although rivalries and conflicts could not be avoided in any group or organization, Ves and Gloriana had done their best to maintain a relatively harmonious atmosphere in their workplace.

They were all Larkinsons, so there were far more reasons for them to count on each other. The Golden Cat had done much to bring all of these people from different backgrounds together.

Alexa did not exhibit any of the more serious snobbish traits that made Terrans so notorious.

The other mech designers who all possessed second-class backgrounds did not begrudge Alexa for receiving so much attention and favor from the patriarch.

It was impossible to deny that she had become the favorite subordinate of Ves, but she had earned it due to her remarkable productivity, specialization and future potential.

As the crowd mingled in a festive hall, Alexa greeted and chatted with many mech designers as if she was friends with all of them. She also held Clixie in her arms and gently stroked the top of her head.

"Miaow~" The Rubarthan Sentinel Cat purred in satisfaction.

A young boy dressed up in a cute little suit walked up and stared at Alexa in wonder.

"You feel so much more like papa!"

"I do, Marvaine." The Journeyman responded as she smiled down at him. "Your father and I share a common research direction. We only differ in the details. Both of us can design living mechs, though I am still behind compared to him. If your senses are as good as I have heard, then you should probably regard me as a weaker version of him, am I correct?"

"Much weaker! It is still great. If you can do it, so can I! My science is always getting better. I'll become a Journeyman before you know it. Papa and mama will be so proud!"

"Miaow!"

"Hihihi." Alexa giggled as she continued to cradle Clixie. "You are so cute, Marvaine. As impressive as it is to make rapid progress, I advise you to take your time with your studies. I could have broken through years ago, but I waited until now because I wanted to be serious about designing the best living mechs. This is not the easiest field for a mech designer to get started with. It doesn't matter who your father is or what your companion spirit can do. What truly matters is your willingness to respect your craft and explore living mechs the way you want, instead of what your father wants. Do you understand?"

The little boy looked dazed. "Uh, I think so. I will definitely design my own living mechs once I grow up! I want to see whose mechs will be stronger."

"I look forward to comparing my work with yours, but the comparison will not be fair at all. I am a full generation older than you. Do not be disappointed if your work cannot measure up to mine. Your father made fantastic progress ever since he first became a Journeyman. My growth will not be any slower by my estimation."

That did not deter the cute kid at all. Marvaine already saw Alexa as a rival to the position of being his father's best student, and he was determined to prove that he had learned the most in the future!

"By the way, what living mechs have you designed and built? I heard you made two machines."

"I did. Project S2 is the culmination of a years-long effort to encapsulate my ideas and principles in a mech that represents my vision. I actually produced two copies because I designed two variants. Just as humans can be divided into men and women, my mechs will also come in at least two genders."

"Ohhh..." Marvaine's eyes widened. "Can I see them?! What makes your living mechs special and different from the works of my father?"

"Ah, I cannot explain the full details of what makes them special, but I can tell you that my mechs can start their own families."

"What?! No way! How did you do it, Alexa?!"

"Miaow!"

Even Clixie was taken by surprise at this announcement!

"As I have just said, I cannot share the full details with you, but do not be surprised if my living mechs become fathers and mothers one day. By then, little children mechs will run around and play just like you and your sisters. Can you imagine the sight? It will be a fun sight!"

Marvaine stuck for a short time, but eventually Gloriana walked up and dragged her son away before she could convince Alexa to explain the process of interfacing between two living mechs.

A few minutes later, a group of dwarves walked up. They all dressed in their best formal clothing, but could not help but look out of place amidst the rest of the gathering.

Compared to all of the other Larkinsons, the Vulcanites lacked the clear and obvious connection to the Larkinson Network.

The fact that they were shorter and stockier than the tall folk around them did not help matters at all. It was rather impressive that the dwarves took no notice of the odd glances and held their heads up with pride and confidence.

The leading dwarf stopped and made a short bow. "On behalf of the Iron Emperor and the Eternal Vulcan Empire, we formally congratulate you on your successful advancement. Your success has lit a beacon in front of us, Lady Alexa. We too hope to be able to acquire the power to design our own living mechs one day."

Alexa was far too well-trained to mock or show any obvious sign of contempt towards the dwarves.

Though many Terrans would not think about making disparaging remarks about the descendants of a misguided genetic modification program gone wrong, Alexa knew how to be diplomatic.

"I am happy to receive your words Mr. Aaden. I understand the difficult journey that you and your fellow dwarven peers must complete. I am more than willing to set aside my time to pass on a part of my experiences to you. I can only point you in the right direction. If you truly want to design a living mech, then you must go beyond whatever teachings and advice you receive."

The dwarf who spoke with Alexa happened to be one of the descendants of the powerful Iron Emperor!

The sovereign of the only dwarven state in the new frontier had chosen to send one of his blood relatives to the New Constantinople System!

Despite the impeccable status of the dwarf known as Trent Aaden, his status was a bit murky in his home state.

The Eternal Vulcan Empire was a relatively new state and had many incomplete institutions. Princes did not exist as the Iron Emperor maintained such an iron grip on power that he was not even willing to let his 'offspring' shoulder a part of his burden!

His relationships with his children were not exemplary either. Though the Larkinsons were too far removed from the Eternal Vulcan Empire to know what was taking place over there, they heard stories how the Iron Emperor had sired a lot of test tube babies.

The legendary leader of the dwarves had only donated his DNA to a dwarven biotech institution.

This enabled the geneticists and other biotech experts to develop different designer babies based on the original donor.

Once the gene maps of many different designer babies came into existence, the scientists produced a lot of designer babies by placing their embryos into artificial wombs.

Suffice to say, a father who allowed a large batch of his genetic offspring to be born in artificial wombs was not the most affectionate to them. The children all grew up in what was known as the Vulcan Empire back then, and always had to pass difficult tests in order to do justice to their sire.

The sudden collapse of the original Vulcan Empire and the chaos that followed disrupted all of their lives, but it also granted amazing opportunities to all of the genetic descendants of the Iron Emperor.

Trent Aaden managed to get past those ordeals, increase his augmentations and successfully completed his studies so that he could become a first-class mech designer.

The dark-skinned dwarf with a short black beard smiled and took her words to heart. "We have been doing this every day since we arrived at this base. The access that your clan has granted to your living mech designs has been helpful to our own studies. We look forward to working under you when you embark on your own products. Perhaps the differences in the design philosophies of you and your mentor may teach us more about living mechs than any of us expected."

The two chatted a bit more before the dwarves thoughtfully moved aside. Alexa continued to stare at the dwarves, who all sought to become the next Journeyman who specialized in the same Class IX design philosophy.

Not even the 'son' of the Iron Emperor dared to make the assumption that he would succeed!

Might toil for 3 or 30 years and not make the crucial step that Alexa had successfully made.

This was why the elite dwarf had nothing but respect towards the deserving woman.

Ves eventually wandered over with Lucky following in his footsteps.

"Meow..." The dark-toned gem cat drew a lot of eyes away from the dwarves.

His new form with its archemetal characteristics and its much darker coloration made him look like an exotic artifact of a civilization that was much more advanced than anything else in this dwarf galaxy!

Many of the dwarves grew enthused at Lucky's arrival. The cat looked so much more advanced and sophisticated than any tech the Vulcanites had seen. This was despite the fact that they were elite first-raters who belonged to the uppermost class of the Eternal Vulcan Empire!

It was a pity that Lucky did not have a good impression of the dwarves. The cat arched his back in a vigilant manner and looked as if he was a few steps away from pouncing.

"Settle down, Lucky. We are among friends." Ves admonished his pet before he turned back to the dwarves. "Trent. I am glad you have decided to attend. Are you enjoying the party?"

"It is our pleasure to be here with your fellow Larkinsons." The leading dwarf responded. "We have only remained here as guests for a handful of months, but we are already impressed by how you Larkinsons treat each other. It is quite... different from what we experience back in our own state."

"Have you heard from the Iron Emperor as of late? Has he expressed any dissatisfaction in how we have chosen to handle your stay in our humble base?"

"The Iron Emperor has not made special remarks, which is a good development. He does not feel the need to track our daily progress too closely. He trusts us to learn your craft and he expects you to fulfill your obligations."

Ves moved closer and bent down to place his hand on Trent's thick shoulder. "I know. Once I have brought Alexa up to speed, I will not be the only mech designer that can teach you how to design living mechs. She can guide you almost as well as I, so you will not be lacking in instructors."

After chatting a bit more with Trent Aaden, he and his fellow dwarves all looked pleased as they became more assured in Ves' commitment to teach them his craft.

With a reward as big as a first-class fleet carrier at stake, there was no way that Ves dared to take it easy!

## Chapter 5713 Upcoming Events

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After the celebration party came to an end, everyone returned to work.

Though Alexa had become an extremely useful Journeyman Mech Designer, Ves could not activate her right away.

Not only did she have to go through a lot of tutoring sessions in order to serve as an adequate substitute for Ves, she also had to depart to the regional headquarters of the Red Association.

Fortunately, the trip should only take two weeks at most. She was able to secure passage on a fast superdrive-equipped courier vessel by asking nicely.

She may have renounced her ties to the Streon Ancient Clan, but that did not mean she became a nobody all of a sudden.

The fact that she had not only become the protege of the most successful mech designer of his fairly young generation, but also managed to inherit his design philosophy had already started to circulate among high society!

Not everyone paid attention to this news, but those that knew keenly understood the significance behind this incredibly impactful development.

"There are two of them now! If anything ever happens to Professor Larkinson, then his student will be able to carry on his torch. His successful product lines no longer suffer from having a single point of failure anymore. If the Devil Tongue has any sense, then he will make sure that his student is prepared to inherit his mantle."

"If the LMC has any publicly traded stock, then I am absolutely convinced that their value has risen by at least 20 percent from this news alone! Continuity has always been on the mind of every market analyst looking at this amazing mech company. For all of its successes, the Living Mech Corporation has always been regarded as a one-man show. Now that Professor Larkinson has finally



raised a successor with excellent qualifications, the long-term prospects of his mech company has improved by an enormous margin."

"It appears that human mechs as we know it will change forever. If he can pass on his design philosophy to a single student, then he can do so to another one. It is becoming increasingly obvious that living mechs are here to stay. Professor Larkinson does not have to realize his design philosophy to transform the entire mech industry."

"The Terrans are making too much progress! We need to do more to drag Professor Larkinson away from their clutches! What is the Impresario Prince doing? Why has he failed to persuade Professor Larkinson to visit the Rubarthan Pact? Doesn't he have a good relationship with the Destroyer of Worlds? Why haven't any of them sent any of their mech designers to study his craft?! The fact that this has not happened yet indicates that we have vastly underutilized our relationship with the famous mech designer! Even those filthy dwarves have managed to send a batch of their young talents to his design lab!"

As the ripple effects of Alexa's successful breakthrough continued to reverberate across important circles, Ves started to prepare for multiple important events that were scheduled to take place in the near future.

Ves and Gloriana sat on the couch while they watched a news broadcast from a mech-oriented news portal. As they watched yet another feature centered around the battles won with the help of the awesome firepower of the Ultimatum model, they held their sleeping daughters in their arms.

"Miaow~"

"Meow~"

Lucky and Clixie watched over the sleeping girls as they settled in the laps of their parents.

Ves looked down and felt as if he was holding one of the precious treasures of his life. Aurelia had grown a little taller, but he could still recall the times where she was just a little baby.

Gloriana meanwhile stroked Andraste's lovely red hair. The little girl had been bouncing around a lot earlier, but she looked so calm and peaceful now that she had chosen to take a nap.

"The living fey design contest that you started almost half a year ago is almost coming to an end." Gloriana softly said. "Where will the ceremony take place where the winners will be announced?"

"Keynar." Ves responded.

That name sounded familiar to his wife. "Keynar... I believe my ship stopped by this port system on the way to the Vulit Central Star Node and back to New Constantinople. It is situated much further away from the frontlines than Bortele and Davute."

"That is correct. Bortele may be an exciting destination, but I already visited it almost half a year ago. As for Davute, I never want to return to that stupid place again. My staff looked into many other possible star systems where we could invite the leading contenders and announce the winner of the contest, but we had to exclude star systems belonging to the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact right away. We chose Keynar because it has a very active mech sector and it is a place where I have never visited before. We can not only recruit a lot of talented second-class personnel over there, but we can also strengthen the presence of the local branch of the Larkinson Clan."

His wife did not care about that sort of stuff. "This will distract you from your design work. Are you not able to dispatch another mech designer instead?"

"No. It has to be me. I am the man responsible for designing the Fey Fianna. The least I can do is to meet with the earnest mech designers who have worked hard to supply my drone mech with creative new living fey models."

The LMC had made a commitment when it organized this contest, Ves had to see it through to the end. It would be an enormous disappointment for all of the contest participants if Ves just greeted them over the galactic net. That was a lazy solution that conveyed a clear lack of respect towards their efforts.

"What are the safety concerns?"

"Nothing will happen." Ves confidently said. "The mechers won't get fooled a second time. They have revised and upgraded their security protocols a long time ago. Besides, Keynar is not as haphazard or exposed to threats as Bortele. The former is a lot more stable and civilized than the latter due to how they developed. Keynar is virtually indistinguishable from a long-established trade hub situated in the old galaxy."

"I see. Should I accompany you on this journey?"

"No. It is better if you do not. One of us needs to stay here and hold down the fort. Alexa can do this on my behalf once she has properly settled in as a Journeyman Mech Designer. She can even take over my teaching obligations at the Eden Institute of Business & Technology for a time. However, it is not necessary for you to accompany me, and you should also stay in order to keep our kids company."

Ves hugged Aurelia tighter in his arms. He did not like the fact that he would only be able to talk to his children by remote whenever he went on a business trip, but this was necessary in order to keep his mech company thriving.

"Will you return straight away once the contest has ended?" Gloriana asked.

"Not yet. I need to make a few other stops in order to take care of other matters. Do you remember the public inquiry that a coalition of 'concerned parties' has announced as of late?"

His wife immediately looked upset. "I do. The rise of third order living mechs among our customers has led to rising alarm among parties concerned with the growing influence of what appears to be mechs that have come under the control of AIs. Have you told them that your living mechs are not strictly AIs that have been the cause of many problems in the past?"

"I did, but not everyone understands or accepts the difference. To some people, the distinctions are meaningless because what really frightens them is the act of surrendering too much control over vital technology to intelligent entities that are not human in nature. The growing autonomy and ability to defy their human masters has caused my third order living mechs to violate a taboo. This is a fact that cannot be denied. If not for the fact that every mech pilot loves them and their obvious increase in effective performance, they probably would have generated a lot more controversy."

No one who actually relied upon third order living mechs objected to them in any way. The Red Association had also conspicuously issued numerous statements that essentially indicated that they investigated living mechs on a constant basis and saw no reason to take any disciplinary action.

Yet that did not stop a growing gathering of political adversaries and business rivals from joining forces in order to place more restrictions on the proliferation of living mechs.

If Ves did not handle this so-called public inquiry in a deft manner, then his products would become a lot harder to sell going forward!

"It is unlikely that my opponents will be able to prohibit the use of living mechs outright, but that is not the only way they can hinder my work. The greatest danger is that my opposition successfully whips up such a frenzy against living mechs that many more potential customers will develop paranoia against my living mechs. You should understand as well as I do that a lot of people have grown up with constant warnings about the dangers and perils of relying on AIs. This is a powerful bias that I need to defeat once and for all if I want to make the public embrace my products. Third order living mechs will only continue to emerge at a growing rate. Before you know it, millions of mechs that can think, talk and even act on their own accord. Once the scale has reached this level, the public will truly become alarmed unless we nip this problem in the bud."

Ves had unleashed a monster on red humanity. Now he needed to account for his actions. He had made the deliberate choice to give the public access to third order living mechs on a large scale with the belief that they would benefit human civilization.

However, every radical innovation inevitably provoked a backlash, especially one that clearly broke several of the unspoken rules of human society.

There was no way that Ves could get away with supplying so many powerful 'AIs' without getting confronted sooner or later.

Since that was the case, Ves might as well act boldly so that he could defend his actions without feeling guilty.

It was all about projecting confidence and certainty. The more he sounded evasive about this subject, the more people would begin to doubt the reliability of his work.

"What else do you have on your agenda?"

"I think you will like what you will hear next, honey. After a lot of thinking, I decided to accept your proposal. I am prepared to auction 25 percent of the outstanding shares of the LMC that are currently in my possession."

"What? You have already made a decision?!"

Gloriana grew so excited that she had to put a lot of effort into suppressing her excitement for fear of waking up her napping children.

Ves smiled and nodded back. "I agree with you that there is not much benefit to hoarding so many shares. Our clan may be growing quickly, but we are still deficient in too many areas for me to feel secure about our short and medium-term prospects. I am really tired about the fact that we have to rely so much on external partners to acquire our own first-class starships. It is high time we took matters in our own hands and acquired our own fully functional first-class shipyard. This is the only way I think we can secure such a strategically valuable asset."

"I... I am so pleased! You have made the right choice! This will definitely make our clan more secure in the following years!"

## Chapter 5714 Esteban Leeds

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With three major appointments in his schedule, Ves became busier than ever.

He was not able to devote as much time to overcome the many design challenges of the Dark Zephyr Mark III Project, but it was not as if Gloriana noticed the difference.

Ves still felt bad about slowing down his other projects such as the much-anticipated upgrade of the Valkyrie Redeemer line. He was so enthused about all of the possibilities and features that he intended to introduce to this popular Hexer mech that he wanted to delight its fans as quickly as possible. Postponing its anticipated release by a few weeks would be a letdown to many people.

The price of delaying the release of the next iteration of the Valkyrie Redeemer was not that bit, though.

Botching the public inquiry on the safety of living mechs was much more catastrophic for his future prospects!

Ves also wanted to make sure he was abundantly prepared to auction out a significant chunk of his mech company. If he did not do a good job of making his case before a gathering of wealthy and powerful groups, he could miss out on trillions of MTA credits worth of value!

Since the public inquiry and the bidding of the shares had to take place in a secure and highly developed first-class planet located in a fairly neutral region, Ves had the bright idea of handling both of them on a single planet.

It just so happened that the organizers of the public inquiry wanted to interrogate Ves in a public forum in the Ector System.

The first-class port system was situated in the center of the Zelmar Upper Zone and had risen up to become a prominent shipbuilding center in the entire region.

It was situated close enough to the front for lots of salvaged alien materials to be shipped back from the frontlines without excessive delays. It was also located far away enough from the border regions to remain safe from alien incursions.

The alien raiding fleets occasionally chose to bypass a lot of targets in order to launch a surprise attack on a human-occupied star system that was still full of riches, but that became a lot more difficult the further they traveled behind enemy lines.

Besides, the Ector System was anything but lightly defended. As a strategically important first-class shipbuilding nexus, it hosted a truly formidable amount of defenses.

In short, the Ector System not only met his security needs, but also allowed him to tour the highly sophisticated shipyards that he might be able to take into his possession in exchange for a portion of his valuable shares.

The process of auctioning those shares needed to be impeccable and beyond any fault. The elite representatives of large first-class powers were accustomed to enjoying the highest level of service. If the Larkinsons made a faux-pas or stumbled in the organization of this immensely important event, then that would most definitely depress the enthusiasm for placing a higher bid!

"We cannot organize one ourselves." An assistant concluded after he had led an investigation into the viability of organizing a high-end auction. "We do not have the personnel, experience, clout, expertise and connections to guarantee a perfect experience for the attendees. It is better to contract this event to a trusted third party. The most professional option is to allow an existing auction house to allow its VIP guests to bid on your shares. A first-

class port system as large and wealthy as Ector is most definitely host to many exclusive auctions."

Ves definitely saw the wisdom in this approach. He always wanted to attend one of these mysterious grand auctions that he only recently became qualified to attend. The first dividend payments from Isthmus Manufacturing was also about to come in, and even if he had to pay back the large debt accrued by his wife, the income was still generous.

The Ultimatums produced by Isthmus had sold for such great quantities that demand still continued to grow with each passing month!

The exceptionally high product margin of the Ultimatum line made it so that the company was raking in profit.

Although the price levels of Isthmus Manufacturing's first-class products were much greater in absolute terms, their sales volumes did not come close to that of a mainstream second-class mech model.

The initial popularity of the Ultimatum was already impressive enough, but what truly caused the first-class mech manufacturer to value this celebrated product line was that it had all the signs of becoming an enduring seller. It was difficult to imagine that any competing mech model could dethrone this unique heavy artillery mech anytime soon.

In any case, the money earned by Isthmus from selling a sizable range of first-class and second-class mechs made it so that Ves was not lacking in financial strength at this time.

If Ves ever encountered an offering during the grand auction that was way beyond his means to pay in cash, he could always borrow a page from Gloriana's book and go heavily into debt to secure a juicy prize.

"Please look into this option. Find a reliable partner that we can work with on this matter. It would be best if the auction takes place not too long after the public inquiry in Ector."

"That is a risky decision, sir. If you decide to hold the auction a short time after your public interrogation, then the enthusiasm for shares that you are willing to make available will heavily depend on your performance. The value of the LMC is highly dependent on the quality of its products and the strength of your works. If there is a growing demand to limit the growth of your living mechs, then that will be detrimental to obtaining a high price for your shares."

Ves shrugged at that. "I will just have to make sure that I won't fail then. Don't worry. Even if I don't do as well as I hoped, it is unlikely that living mechs will be prohibited outright. At most, I will have to limit the emergence of third order living mechs to the public."

After Ves had made his decision on how he preferred to auction his shares in the LMC, his staff quickly went to work and explored their various options.

A few days later, the Larkinson Clan signed a quick deal with a prestigious auction house that operated in the Ector System.

Ves shook hands with one of the managers working for Esteban Leeds.

"It is an honor to serve your needs in our upcoming grand auction. Please be assured that we shall handle everything related to the handling of the stock that you have made available. The nature of this prize makes it unsuitable for us to include it in the main auction. There are too many individuals who have no chance of placing a competitive bid and will only impede the more serious bidders. We recommend a private auction that takes place in an adjacent auction hall that is only accessible to VIP guests that we have especially invited to take part. We have an excellent understanding of the interest and payment abilities of all of our major clients. We can also leverage our extensive network to persuade other interested groups to dispatch their representatives so that they can take part in the bidding as well."

"Online bidding is not allowed?" Ves questioned.

"That is the prevailing standard in such occasions, Professor Larkinson. Attending in person is a sign of respect as well as commitment. Remote communications are also too flawed and imperfect. They can be blocked, intercepted or even altered by nefarious parties. Attending in person brings its own share of problems, but it has worked well for humanity for many years."

The demand to attend the private auction in person would hinder a lot of wealthy groups from taking part. They were either situated far away and did not have a trusted representative close enough to arrive in time.

Regardless, Ves did not want to delay this matter too much. He wanted to obtain a first-class shipyard sooner rather than later and this was the best opportunity for him to secure one. Taking over one of the shipyards in the Ector System would be perfect as he would be able to inspect his new asset straightaway.

"Do you wish to impose any limitations on the eligible individuals or groups that can attend this private auction, or are you willing to allow any upstanding member of red humanity to place a winning bid on your shares?"

That was an important question.

"I have no restrictions per se, but I do not want my shares to fall into the hands of any enemies. I will transmit a more detailed list of criteria later, but aside from certain enemies, I don't care too much about the rest. You can let the Terrans and the Rubarthans participate in the auction. I have no objections to them, so long as they don't obtain the full 25 percent of outstanding shares that I am willing to exchange."

"Understood. We shall make certain to invite the representatives of Terran Ancient Clans and Rubarthan Principalities. We have ample experience in hosting them both without causing them to come into frequent direct contact with each other. What is pleasant about working with them is that they are so driven to compete against each other that we can exploit their brinkmanship to stimulate more bidding. You can expect to exchange your shares for a higher price, although much of it may end up in the hands of Terrans and Rubarthans in the end."

"I don't believe the mechers will let that happen." Ves openly speculated. "They may secretly back a handful of neutral participants from the Red Ocean Union just to stymie the efforts of the first-rate colonial superstates."

Both of them smiled. The greater the competition, the higher the bids.

"Auctioning out highly desirable shares is usually an event that is announced a year in advance. This is not possible due to demanding that your shares can be fought over on a relatively short notice, but the urgency of the moment may spur participants to bid higher. We shall see what we can do, but again, it is our honor to accept your entrustment."

The manager from Esteban Leeds made all of the right sounds. Ves had little concerns about the follow up actions of the highly regarded auction house.

Of course, Ves was not completely stupid. Once the call came to an end, he made sure to send a couple of his first-class staffers to the Ector System in advance in order to keep an eye on the proceedings.

When Gloriana heard what he was up to, she immediately grew red with desire.

"You actually managed to secure an agreement with Esteban Leeds? You also intend to participate in the grand auction as a bidder? Change of plans! Bring me with you! How can you possibly attend such an elite auction that is able to attract the leaders and representatives of the great powers of red humanity without letting me participate?"

Ves could already imagine all of the money pouring out of his bank accounts.

"No. We already talked about this. You are staying here. The Design Department needs a leader in charge, and you are the only one that qualifies. Our children will also need their mother even more now that their father is going on a business trip."

"Then we will just take our children with us! We can request an early vacation for them so that they can travel with us to a busy first-class port system and expand their horizons!"

"This is not the time! You are staying put and that is it. Don't argue with me any further."

Ves did not want to bring along his wife and children for several reasons. His greatest concern was safety. Each time he traveled, he put himself at greater risk of interception by greedy opportunists who sought to claim the juicy bounty on his head.

While he trusted the mechers to do their jobs, it was best to be safe rather than sorry.

## Chapter 5715 Planned Collaborations

### 5715 Planned Collaborations

On the day of his departure, Ves kissed his children on the head one last time before saying goodbye to them for a time.

"Do you have to go yet again?"

"Why can't we come with you, papa?"

Ves chuckled as he rubbed Andraste's hair. "I am not going on a vacation this time. This is purely a business trip. The stuff I am scheduled to take part in are not particularly fun for you. It is better if you stay home and attend your school as usual. I don't want you to slip in your grades. It is really hard to catch up to your peers after you have fallen behind."

His wife snorted when he said that there would be no fun. She clearly held a different opinion on this matter.

"Do not take long." She instructed Ves. "You must return right away once you are done. Also, make sure you attend our remote design sessions whenever possible. Just because you are not able to be physically present in our design lab does not mean you are exempt from work. You should at least keep up with your own studies. The archetech version of the Dark Zephyr is cumbersome to design. I could truly use a qualified helper that can assist me in exploring the right solutions to the astronomical amount of problems that I have to solve."

After exchanging a few words, Ves made a signal so that the Tarrasque would teleport him up to the heavy cruiser that was hovering in high orbit.

A squad of bots automatically brought his luggage away while Ves moved to the closest lounge in order to meet the resident mech designers on the ship.

"Hello again, Jovy. Hello to you as well, Professor Loban."

"Please call me Vector." The Transhumanist responded as he and Jovy stood up from their seats. "Since you are on a first-name basis with my Survivalist friend here, you should be more familiar with me as well."

They all sat down and ordered refreshments that quickly materialized on a nearby table.

"So I guess I will be staying on this ship for a while." Ves said as he took a sip of his tea. "How have the two of you been getting along?"

Jovy and Vector looked at each other.

"We have become more acquainted with each other. We frequently work together whenever we test the Carmine mechs."

The two mechers did not appear so different from each other. They were both Senior Mech Designers from the Red Association.

Vector Loban was a bit older, but he could still be counted among their generation. He certainly proved his competence by advancing to the rank of Senior before his 50's.

Between the two of them, Ves still preferred Jovy's company. This was not just because the man had proven his trustworthiness several times over the years.

Ves had gotten a decent glimpse at the personalities and the motivations of the two RA Senior Mech Designers.

From his brief contact with Vector, the Transhumanist had proven to be dedicated to his cause.

He was just as crazy as the other Transhumanists when it came to seeking a way to transcend his mortal limitations!

Jovy on the other hand came across as a typical Survivalist. Though Ves understood that the Survivalists could be even more crazy at times, they were usually calm, rational and most importantly predictable.

The problem was that Ves did not have a choice on which mecher he could interact with. Ever since the Transhumanist Faction sent Professor Vector Loban to the Bluejay Fleet, he had made it clear that he was here to stay for the time being.

"So what do you think of the Carmine mechs being tested aboard this ship?" Ves asked.



"They are fascinating. You have clearly made an effort to integrate biology more extensively with a handful of your experimental mechs. I have learned many clues on how a Carmine System interacts with other biological systems. The only disappointment is that none of your experimental works are first-

class mechs. There are many differences between a first-class and second-class mech."

"I know. I am still studying. I think I have already acquired the necessary knowledge to design a very simple first-class mech, but that is not my goal."

"Both of us are waiting for you." Jovy said. "Vector wants to collaborate with you to design a first-class Biocarmine mech, but I would also like your cooperation to design a special mech that can play a significant role in the future."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "Oh? You mentioned this desire before, but you never really shared any solid details on your proposal. What sort of first-class mech do you want to design that necessitates my involvement?"

The Survivalist smiled and waved his hand. "We can leave this discussion for later when we are ready to work on it in earnest. For now, I can tell you that I think it is possible for us to design a highly experimental mech that may have the power to attack one of the links in the chain that makes hyper technology effective. The aliens may not show it at the moment, but we have gathered enough intelligence to know that our adversaries are working hard to incorporate hyper technology in their warships. Once they become available in larger numbers, we expect the Red Cabal to launch a major offensive. I think we must be ready to blunt their assaults and deprive them of their latest advantages."

The idea certainly sounded interesting to Ves!

He had never heard of a mech that directly targeted the effects of hyper technology. Such a product would certainly become more useful once the aliens adapted to hyper technology with the help of the cosmopolitans.

"I would be glad to cooperate with you on such a project, but you need to give me at least a year before I am ready to tackle such a project." Ves responded. "In the meantime, I can mull over the idea and look into numerous possible design solutions that can give real teeth to this mech. I already have a couple of ideas in mind, one of which is based on one of my older works."

They continued to chat a bit about this proposal, but not too much as it was still too soon to get serious about this first-class design project.

Technology was still advancing at a fairly rapid rate. New discoveries and innovations related to hyper technology came out every day, and E-

technology was picking up its stride as well. Perhaps a fancy new tech might come out in the following months that would have major implications for their upcoming design project.

Ves eventually turned to Vector. "By the way, I haven't remained up to date on the state of the Yuri Machine. How is it... he... doing?"

It was not clear whether Jovy was authorized to know about the Yuri Machine, but Ves did not care.

Fortunately, Jovy had been appraised of its existence due to his involvement in the study of Carmine mechs, so Ves did not break any rules.

"The Yuri Machine is just beginning to settle into its new accommodation." Professor Vector Loban responded. "I am no longer in charge of it, so I do not have a complete understanding of its condition. From what I have been told, long-term exposure to the glows of your Pacifiers has done wonders for the mental health of its captive mech pilot. Yuri Enfame still misses his human body, but he is at least able to find fulfillment by browsing the galactic net and watching all sorts of interesting drama broadcasts."

That sounded encouraging to Ves, but it was far from enough to reverse the travesty of what had happened.

"Consuming entertainment alone does not constitute a fulfilling human life." Ves argued. "Yuri will only be able to enrich himself for so long. He needs to regain a real semblance of life in order to restore his mental health."

"We are working on it, Ves. Our interest in restoring Yuri is greater than you know. We hope that he will eventually be able to take control over the enormous physical machine that he has become attached to. To that end, we are considering whether we should bring the Yuri Machine to a special individual in order to properly diagnose its problems and investigate whether it is possible to solve them by relying on brute force. The greatest issue with resorting to this measure is that there is a long waiting list. Do not expect us to make quick progress."

"What Vector is saying is that if the Transhumanists cannot improve Yuri Enfame's themselves, they will try and ask the Evolution Witch to handle this case in person."

That certainly attracted Ves' attention!

"Is the Evolution Witch free enough to examine a single anomaly like this? I would have thought she is busy with far greater concerns."

"You are not incorrect about Her Divinity, but the Yuri Machine is absolutely worth her attention. We are merely trying to see whether we can resolve its many problems without making use of our last resort right away. The Evolution Witch's time is precious beyond comparison and should not be squandered."

That stopped Ves from raising his request to schedule a meeting with her. He clearly needed to bide his time and prepare a large enough concession to convince the god pilot to leverage her powerful God Kingdom to reproduce a sample of Yondu Milk.

Ves had not forgotten about this goal, but he figured it may be best to wait until he and Vector have completed their first collaborative work before trying to solicit the Evolution Witch's help.

She was not a god pilot to be taken lightly.

Unlike the Destroyer of Worlds whose intimidating relationship was interspersed with stories that emphasized her kindness and her empathy towards the bottom half of human society, the Evolution Witch had always been described as a radical visionary.

She had inherited many of the bad traits of biotech researchers such as an extreme interest in conducting dangerous experiments and constantly pushing the limits of what was possible with biology.

If not for the fact that her cause did not completely fall out of line with the interests of the mechers and the fleeters, it was easy to imagine that the Evolution Witch would become just as much of a pariah as the hated cosmopolitans!

When coming into contact with a powerful figure that had shown little restraint throughout her career, it was best to keep everything strictly business.

Ves turned his attention back to the anomalous machine that still remained a cause for concern.

"I don't know what you Transhumanists are capable of, but... I think the Yuri Machine is beyond your capacity to solve. It has become an incredibly tangled and contaminated living mech. It has grown stronger, but also lost almost all semblance of control. That is not a condition that you can simply undo by untangling all of the messy threads. I speculate that the only way to truly restore Yuri Enfame is to go forward and keep pursuing further changes. Just like how the Evolution Witch managed to solve her congenital defects through continuous evolution, I think that the Yuri Machine can achieve similar results by following a similar trajectory."

Both Jovy and Vector look thoughtful at this suggestion.

"This does not sound like a reliable solution." Jovy remarked.

"It can work." Vector thought. "Undoing evolution cannot be done. Evolution is a journey that can only traversed in one direction. The Evolution Witch is an expert in this manner. She will be able to guide the Yuri Machine like no other god pilot."

"Please keep me informed if the Evolution Witch actually does anything to the Yuri Machine."

"I will keep your request in mind, but I cannot make any promises." Vector said with an apologetic expression.

"Just do the best you can. I at least want to know if the Evolution Witch has found out the true cause of the Ultimatum's sudden transformation."

#### Chapter 5716 Keynar VIII-C

The Selan Middle Zone was located much closer to the starting point of humanity's invasion of the Red Ocean. It had been settled a lot sooner than many of the other middle zones that Ves frequented.

The overall air and atmosphere of the colony settlements in this region of space was different. An important port system such as Keynar was largely dominated by the successors and off-shoots of many different old powers that used to have deep roots in the Milky Way.

Despite the catastrophic consequences of the Great Severing, many of the branches and subsidiaries that had set up shop in the Selan Middle Zone managed to survive the ensuing financial crisis with only a modest degree of bankruptcies and consolidation.

This was because the branches that had lost their access to practically unlimited funds from the old galaxy had already reached an advanced stage of their development.

Their factories were already up and running. Their research institutions were making all kinds of valuable discoveries. Their sales channels had already become thoroughly embedded into the bustling frontier economy.

The branch organizations had already overcome the cumbersome investment stage and had reached maturity to such an extent that they could already stand on their own merits!

With brighter, younger and more ambitious leaders in charge of these newly independent conglomerates and family organizations, they pivoted quickly and made sure to cement their dominance over the regional economy and politics of the Selan Middle Zone.

This created a commercial atmosphere that was welcoming to visiting customers but quite resistant towards the arrival of additional competitors.

The regional markets here might be less dynamic as a consequence, but they were also stable and less susceptible to external shocks.

Not even the LMC managed to gain as much ground in the Selan Middle Zone. Only when the insane demand for the Fey Fianna and the Ultimatum models became too great to bear did the regional players relent and allow the Larkinsons to expand their branch in the Keynar System.

When the Bluejay Fleet arrived in orbit of Keynar VIII-C while attracting a 12:04

great amount of attention, Ves said goodbye to Jovy and Vector before getting When the Bluejay Fleet arrived in orbit of Keynar VIII-C while attracting a great amount of attention, Ves said goodbye to Jovy and Vector before getting teleported down to the surface of the terraformed moon.

His entourage which consisted of a number of his staffers, bodyguards along with a certain cat arrived in the middle of the landing zone of the branch headquarters of the Larkinson Clan as well.

"Meow."

Lucky experimentally jumped in the air a few times.

"The local gravity here is only 0.81 g." Ves mentioned as he experienced the reduced pressure on his compressed body as well. "It takes a bit of time to get used to. Baseline humans who lack gravity adjustment capabilities occasionally have to swallow pills in order to keep their bones strong."

Everyone had to adjust their gait a bit in order to maintain stable motion. As Ves and Lucky took in the local environment, the branch director soon arrived and led the patriarch to his office in order to discuss the itinerary for the next few days.

"You have arrived just in time." The older Larkinson man spoke to Ves as both of them sat down.

"We have already organized the wrap-up of the contest at one of the largest exhibition halls in this colony settlement. We have worked together with both the Red Association and the local authorities to strengthen the security arrangements and thoroughly inspect every guest before they can proceed inside."

A projection of the venue appeared along with a detailed diagram of all of the security arrangements. Ves took a brief look and became satisfied with what he saw. The mechers and everyone else had taken the near-catastrophe that took place on Bortele III to heart and added a lot more redundancies to prevent a repeat incident.

"It's regrettable that I won't be able to come close to any of the guests or contest participants." Ves said. "I suppose it is for the best. There is no real need for me to interact with all of those people in person."

The branch director smiled in relief. "I am glad that you are making our lives easier. Moving on, this event is not just about announcing the winners of the Fey Shaper Contest, but also marketing the variety of functional fey that have become available in the past half year. To that end, we have made sure to acquire copies of the top 50 fey models and put them on display so that they can impress our audience. There are at least a dozen of them that have attracted the interests of many Larkinsons."

That was one of the reasons why he wanted to preside over this event in person. The Fey Fianna was one of his more recent cash cows. The development of lots of new and different fey directly enhanced the value and the longevity of his new drone mech platform.

"What about the top 10?"

"We have invited the lead designers of the top 50 fey models to attend the ceremony in person. Most have already arrived, though a few could not make it unfortunately. The ones that are currently on Keynar VIII-C ready to present their works and receive their prizes. The prizes they are entitled to receive has yet to be determined."

"That's my job." Ves spoke. "I deliberately did not spend much time on studying the fantastic new fey models that these inventive designers have released over the months. I have a general overview of what has come out, but I am not familiar with their specs or finer details as I want to preserve the element of surprise. I think there will be plenty of times where I will be pleasantly delighted with what I have come across."

"We think so as well." The branch director confidently smiled. "Our branch along with many other branches I am familiar with has already adopted a number of them. Pairing them up with our existing Fey Fiannas has significantly increased the utility and versatility of our powerful drone mechs."

Minutes passed by while they talked a bit more about other topics. Ves asked a few questions relating to the local economy and business atmosphere. Nothing he heard surprised him particularly much.

Keynar was a bit of a boring place. It benefited from its relative proximity from the much more bustling Vulit Central Star Node, but also suffered from the downsides of being so close to a top trading hub.

Nonetheless, it had become more popular as the Red War continued to drag on. Its safe and relatively rear position made it an attractive refuge for groups that were looking to shift their operations away from the frontlines.

Perhaps the Larkinson Clan might need to do so as well if locations such as Davute became a lot more exposed to the encroaching alien offensives.

"It is difficult for us to expand our operations in this port system, patriarch. This is not a question about money or influence. The fact of the matter is that the early movers have already occupied all available lands and built their own houses, offices and factories on top of them already. This is a fairly small moon, so it did not take too much time and resources for the wealthy old powers to construct a thriving globe. The only way for latecomers to put down their roots on Keynar VIII-C is to purchase existing property at vastly inflated prices. This is one of the means in which the local powers are able to maintain a positive cash flow despite their enormous investment into their

defenses. Their efforts to make this port system safer is driving up the price of land and property even further. You do not want to know how much it costs to purchase a single square meter in this settlement."

This spoke of a larger trend in which the existing players who had put down their roots in the hinterland of human space rejected the flood of newcomers who chose to abandon their risky investments that had come under greater threat.

It was a rather sad state of affairs because it showed that much of the public lacked confidence in red humanity's ability to keep the aliens at bay.

The leaders of all of these relocating organizations were not stupid. They were able to analyze their situations in a rational manner. They had evidently come to the conclusion that the war would only grow worse.

The branch director shared an interesting rumor related to these movements.

"Word has gotten around that the Red Cabal is planning to launch a big offensive in the near future." The older man almost whispered. "Talk of that has spurred on many doubters to make the hard choice to abandon their old foundation and move to the rear. The possibility of a coordinated invasion that is substantial enough to break through at least a couple of our defensive lines has spooked many people. Those with a lower risk appetite are feeling more scared than ever."

Ves narrowed his eyes in suspicion. "From the way you are saying that, you think there is something fishy behind these movements."

"I cannot say whether the upcoming offensive is a legitimate concern or not. I cannot help but think that the cosmopolitans have deliberately sparked all of this upheaval in order to divide red humanity even further. The more people are being forced to share a dwindling amount of available space, the more conflicts will arise among them. This falls in line with the goals of our enemies."

"Hmm." Ves rubbed his hairless chin in thought. "I am not sure whether that is actually the case, though I can definitely imagine the cosmopolitans pulling off this kind of scheme. The offensive doesn't even have to be real to produce the desired effect."

"Keynar will only grow more popular and desirable in the future. It will probably grow less stable as well as a consequence."

None of that mattered too much to the Larkinson Clan. The local branch was not that big and mostly dealt with ordinary commercial matters.

Even if Ves wanted to expand his clan's foothold on the planet, he couldn't, as there was simply too little development space to accommodate so many more clansmen.

Ves continued to talk to the branch director for twenty more minutes before he became satisfied with what he learned.

Once he retired to a suite that had been especially prepared for him, he finally enjoyed a moment of relative privacy.

While he was in the process of preparing for the big event that was scheduled to begin in a few days, he motioned for Lucky to come over.

"Meow?"

"You know what to do." Ves said. "You have free reign as long as you can remain discreet and undetected. Take a peek at the locations that I have pointed out and record anything that looks suspicious to you. I do not believe that a place like this is devoid from cosmopolitan influence. Master Xieliq Quan originally came from the Selan Middle Zone. I bet that other hidden traitors may be lurking in this neighborhood."

"Meow meow."

"No, I haven't cleared your mission with the mechers, but I believe they won't care even if they know. At most, they don't want to claim any responsibility if you happen to get caught. Don't let that happen."

"Meow!"

"Haha, it is good that you feel confident. Just remember that you shouldn't get too distracted by irrelevant stuff that you have managed to find. Your main goal is to root out the cosmopolitans or at least find clues that hint at their identities."

"Meow meow meow."

"I know the mechers have interrogated Master Quan and are in the process of conducting their own operations, but so what? These cosmopolitans have made the wrong decision by messing with me. Do they really think that I will let them take aim at my head without consequence? Hah! The mechers may be great at monitoring, but the cosmopolitans know them far too well to expose themselves so easily. If we want to catch more of them, it is best to employ less conventional measures."

## Chapter 5717 Useful Fey

### 5717 Useful Fey

While Lucky initiated his secret jaunt, Ves stayed put and quietly fulfilled his various responsibilities for the following days.

Nothing special happened during this interval. Lucky hadn't gotten caught while he secretly intruded into many different locations and searched for any evidence of suspicious activity.

Although it was a certainty that Lucky would encounter questionable situations, they did not matter so long as they were not related to the cosmopolitans or anything else that threatened the current order.

Given how absurdly effective the cosmopolitans were at circumventing the expansive monitoring and spying efforts of the mechers, Ves had developed certain suspicions about the human traitors.

He did not dare to voice these suspicions to anyone. He lacked proof as well as a strong base of support that could support his claims. He did not dare to expect too much from Lucky's fact-finding mission. It would already be worthwhile to obtain a few clues about the identities of a few more hidden cosmopolitans.

Finding them was the most difficult step. As long as the cosmopolitans had lost their disguises, they became a lot easier to deal with! Each of them were parasites who could only exist so long as they attached themselves to more powerful parties.

In any case, Ves was not able to act without more information, and that would only happen if Lucky returned with useful findings.

For now, the upcoming contest took up most of his attention. The Fey Fianna along with the Ultimatum had become the two bestselling mech lines in the past few months.

Their existence and proliferation changed the mech community and forced many people to adapt to the new machines.

The Ultimatum sold extremely well despite its inflated price and its cumbersome requirements, but the Fey Fianna continued to sell the most units on a monthly basis.

At the start of the Fey Fianna's release, many customers had become attracted by the drone mech's strength and versatility. Its value proposition was already higher than any other second-class mech released at that time.

The emergence of newer and more varied fey models complimented the Fey Fianna's strengths and plugged a lot of gaps in its capabilities. There were lots of mech outfits that developed their own unique approaches to combat that could sorely use these helpful fey.

In any case, now that the day of the closing event had finally arrived, Ves finally received an opportunity to explore the top 50 fey models in person!

He looked forward to seeing what the contest participants had come up with. The creativity of the masses always surpassed that of any single individual. Ves expected for at least some of the newly developed fey to surprise him and exceed his expectations.

As Ves got ready to depart for the large exhibition hall where the closing event was being held, he dressed himself in one of his best first-class outfits that his wife had bought for him during her trip to Vulit.

He decided to change up his style a bit and opted to wear a predominantly black suit that was integrated with reflective and slightly luminescent patterns that looked like cats streaking across the surface.

Ves liked the programmed fit and the refinement of the smart clothing. It also helped that it was able to part instantly and remain intact and out of the way if Ves ever wanted to unfold his true body. It could even grab his toolbelt and anything he carried to a safe location without needing to be ordered.

"I look good." He smiled as he examined the mirror projection of himself.

He had a feeling he would look even better if he grew a beard, but that was a taboo that he did not intend to violate.

"I'm ready."

Ves entered his shuttle and departed for his destination under heavy escort.

It did not take long before the strong procession arrived in an underground hangar that was built to receive important visitors of the exhibition hall.

He talked to a few personnel and learned that almost everything was proceeding according to plan at this time.



"Since that is the case, there should be nothing preventing me from examining the contest submissions, right?"

"Correct. You may proceed whenever you wish. We have reserved the upper floor for you so that you can inspect the fey without attracting the attention of our guests. There is one complication, however..."

"What is the matter?"

"One of your mecher friends has decided to stop by and accompany you while you perform your evaluation. He is waiting on the same floor."

It turned out that Jovy decided to descend from the Tarrasque and keep Ves company for a while.

"Hello again, Ves. I have developed a curiosity towards these living fey. I hope you can tolerate my presence."

"Ah, it's no problem at all. You are welcome to join me as we examine the various works. I could use a second opinion."

When Ves entered the upper floor, he looked down and saw that it was completely transparent. The main floor down below was where all of the contest submissions had been put on display.

Thousands of visitors curiously approached these displays and admired the diverse possibilities of the third party products. Many of the people who attended this event either piloted the Fey Fianna or was part of an organization that relied upon them to varying degrees.

There was no doubt that these folk were purposely on the lookout for fantastic new fey models that could enrich their own mech forces.

Given the positive reactions that they frequently produced, it appeared that there were enough gems among the contest submissions that they were bound to fulfill their goals today.

Jovy noticed as well. "Interesting, is it not? A mech design published half a year ago can single-handedly stimulate the entrepreneurial desires of thousands of designers and encourage them to expand upon your drone mech platform. Many other drone mech lines such as the famous Sparrow Storm have managed to build a thriving market of spur models, but it has taken many years and multiple version updates to reach this state. You have managed to do this while the Fey Fianna model is still fresh and new."

"This shows that the mech market and the mech industry have a lot of sense." Ves smoothly replied as he moved to a location that was positioned directly above the nearest living fey that was hovering above the main floor. "As long as the product is good enough, there will be a lot of demand for customization and expansion. It has happened to any mech model that sells for over a million copies on a monthly basis. The default configurations cannot fully satisfy every customer. I am glad to be honest. These third-party developers are doing my products a lot of good by extending their usability."

"I suppose the fey model down below is a good example of what you have described."

Both Ves and Jovy looked down at a fey that possessed a different design than the starting models associated with the Fey Fianna system.

A projected information panel offered a basic description of this product.

## [Heat Disperser Fey]

Developer: Ray Tauron, Apprentice Mech Designer

Category: Utility

E Energy Attributes: Heat

Summary: The heat disperser fey is a hyper product that is designed to attach to any mech or large object and absorb heat before actively dispersing it into the environment.]

"This is a simple product, but that does not mean it is less valuable." Ves remarked as he took a good look at the predominantly black fey. "The rapid buildup of heat is a growing problem for many spaceborn mechs. They are expected to perform at their peak and remain as productive as possible on the battlefield for at least half an hour or longer. That is practically impossible for most mechs as their energy reserves and heat management systems cannot sustain a high level of intensity for long."

Jovy gestured at the simple fey down below. "Which is where this heat disperser fey comes in. The way they are designed makes it clear that they are solely meant to absorb lots of excess heat and disperse it in the form of radiation as much as possible. Their large surface area and considerable mass makes them far more effective for this purpose than other types of fey. They might not be able to disperse their heat fast enough, but they can absorb enough of it to relieve the immediate problems of overheating mechs. The best aspect of this heat disperser fey is that they do not strictly have to be alive. They also are not that complicated to control. This means that a typical Fey Fianna can enter the battlefield with 8 or maybe 12 heat disperser fey in tow. Together, they can effectively support an entire squad of rifleman mechs."

Not every mech force required a Fey Fianna mech that was configured to support other mech units by helping them vent their heat.

Those that did would find such a mech incredibly useful, though!

There were mech forces that relied on a lot of energy weapons to bombard enemies at range.

The mechs they employed for this purpose were already designed with lots of energy cells and heat sinks in their configurations, but it was never enough.

If a handful of Fey Fianna could effectively extend the maximum output phase of entire squads of rifleman mechs by 20 or 30 percent, then the drone mechs effectively contributed more to the battle in a support role than if they resorted to offensive fey instead!

Of course, the heat disperser fey did not add much value to mech forces that adopted a more balanced approach to battle.

"The applicability of this heat disperser is still limited to an extent." Ves evaluated. "Its utility is situational. I can still come up with many scenarios where it is more preferable to employ other fey models. Its design is also rather simplistic. The selection of materials is rather elementary and the way the developer combined it all together shows a clear lack of understanding of more advanced technological applications. Even so, its simplicity makes it cheap to produce, and their relative ease of control means that even beginners to drone mechs can control them with only modest practice required. This is a creative and qualified submission from an Apprentice. Mr. Tauron should feel proud for contributing a useful product."

"The heat disperser fey has clearly earned a place in the top 50, but how high do you want to rank it, Ves?"

"Not high." Ves said. "The fact that I can easily think of a million different ways to improve and optimize the heat disperser fey means that there is a lot of potential left untapped. It is a useful product, but not a competitive one. I'll probably rank it close to the bottom once I have evaluated the other fey models."

"Well, at least Mr. Tauron can expect to depart from this venue with 100 MTA credits in his pocket."

This was the prize awarded to contest participants who fell outside of the top 10. This was a great sum to some mech designers, particularly the younger ones who were still trying to build up their foundation in the mech industry.

The two mech designers moved on to examine the next contest submissions.

Most of them were not that complicated, but they did not have to be. Anything that was useful enough had a chance to enter the top 50. Their functions ranged from strengthening communication signals to producing a large and relatively convincing decoy of a small starship!

Ves had no qualms about appreciating them as long as they scored well enough in other criteria such as affordability and user-friendliness. He even planned to encourage his Larkinsons to adopt a handful of these useful products.

It still took a bit of time before Ves encountered a submission that truly impressed him for the first time since he started this tour.

"Whoever designed this fey is a lot more competent than the other ones."

## Chapter 5718 Expanded Functions

### 5718 Expanded Functions

One of the key characteristics that differentiated more skilled mech designers from their less proficient counterparts was their mastery of hyper technology.

Although hyper technology was not as difficult to learn as phasewater technology and other alien-derived technologies, it still took a lot of effort to learn or figure out the more advanced applications of hyper materials.

The previous fey models that Ves examined such as the heat disperser fey only made shallow use of hyper materials.

On the one hand, that was an advantage as the fey models were cheaper and easier to build.

On the other hand, the basic implementation of hyper materials heavily limited their potential and constrained their options.

"The best way to distinguish a good mech designer from a bad one in this day and age is to look at how proficient they are at using hyper technology." Ves remarked as he keenly studied the first fey model that truly managed to impress him. "The differences between a good and bad mech designer will only grow more pronounced in the future."

"To be fair, Ves, that has always been the case before the Age of Mechs has begun. Back when mechs were still fairly new, the mech design was not even close to reaching the complexity and

depth of technological solutions that we have access to in the present day. What amounts to a Senior Mech Designer back then possesses enough knowledge as an experienced Apprentice Mech Designer from our current time. With every passing mech generation, the gap between the upper and lower echelon of mech designers has continued to widen. Why do you think that every first-class mech designer needs powerful first-class augmentations in order to complete all of their studies? It is impossible for a baseline human to learn all of the subjects that have been added to the evolving body of mech design!"

The Survivalist had made a powerful point. Mech design was constantly progressing forward, and that brought its fair share of difficulties. The profession became increasingly more complicated and less accessible to humans.

The problem was not that bad in the third-class mech industry because the market environment was too poor to afford any sophisticated solutions. The people over there were spared from much of this misery, but that also meant that they missed out on a lot of exciting developments.

In any case, Ves took a look at the information panel for the fey that earned his appreciation.

[Anti-Shield Pulse Fey

Developer: Sarah Koyama, Senior Developer

Category: Offensive, Utility

E Energy Attributes: Electric, Space

Summary: The anti-shield pulse fey is a specialized solution that is designed to effectively destroy (transphasic) energy shields by heavily altering the operation mode of a space suppressor. By concentrating the space suppression field and combining it with an active EMP effect can produce a highly effective shield-breaking fey. The product can overcome transphasic energy shields more effectively at the expense of greater power consumption and near-total immobility.]

Space suppressors were already fairly complicated hyper products. Sarah Koyama did not let that hold her back and iterated on this tech. She successfully developed a more focused variation that could destroy transphasic energy shields more effectively.

The anti-shield pulse fey needed to press right against the surface of a transphasic energy shield. This not only minimized the weakening effect of the inverse-square law, but also maximized the impact of the EMP effect.

Although the space suppressor and the EMP component sounded like two separate and unrelated products, Sarah Koyama actually managed to employ inventive means to find enough synergy between the two! This was a remarkably creative implementation and elevated the worth of her anti-

shield pulse fey.

"Sarah Koyama may not be a mech designer, but that doesn't stop her from developing mech systems on her own initiative. This anti-shield pulse fey is brilliant!" Ves spoke in a tone that made it clear that he saw promise in this tech.

Ves glanced at another projection that displayed a field test of this strange fey.

It depicted an active Fey Fianna that sent forth four identical anti-shield pulse fey before they attached themselves onto the active surface of an energy shield.

They then proceeded to generate synchronized pulses that rapidly destabilized the active energy shield to the point where it scrambled a lot sooner than normal!

"Interesting." Jovy said as he too recognized the strengths of this specialized fey. "Normal space suppressor can only weaken transphasic energy shields. They are not inherently weapons, so a mech unit must rely on massed attacks to fully destroy an energy shield that has been affected by a space suppression field. The anti-shield pulse fey drops this requirement and can effectively launch effective damage by itself."

"That is not what makes this fey so damn good." Ves said. "It combines hyper technology and other technological principles to make it so that its EMP effect can actually take effect over multiple dimensions. It exploits the effect of phasewater technology and negates it by disrupting the transphasic foundation of a typical alien energy shield!"

The exact theory and mechanics behind this implementation was a lot more complicated, but Ves understood enough phasewater technology to understand how difficult it was to design the set of solutions that made this living fey model possible.

"If not for the fact that the anti-shield pulse fey can easily be shot down once they are being used, they may be a contender for the top rank."

Ves nodded in agreement. "Sarah Koyama's entry most definitely earned a place in the top 10, but not necessarily in the top 3. I can still see a lot of people making use of her anti-shield pulse fey as an effective sieging tool. They are certainly not cheap, but they are considerably more cost-effective compared to other shield-breaking tools."

Did they replace space suppressor fey? No. definitely not. Anti-shield pulse fey were more effective in their specific job, but were fairly useless outside of overcoming transphasic defenses.

Still, this was what most people used space suppressors for. Ves could easily foresee that the anti-shield pulse fey might become a popular alternative product for mech forces expected to fight against plenty of hardy alien warships.

"It will be more expensive to employ these anti-shield fey because their likelihood of getting destroyed is greater." Jovy Armalon concluded. "However, as long as they break down transphasic energy shields more effectively, a mech force should be more than willing to cope with the additional burdens and requirements. The lives and assets saved from destroying an alien fleet sooner is far greater than the increased expense of replacing broken and missing anti-shield pulse fey."

Anyone who resorted to this solution should stock up on a lot of spare anti-shield pulse fey. This was also what hindered Ves from raising his evaluation of this living fey higher.

"I will decide upon the final ranking of this product later, but if there are not many surprises, then it should easily earn a place in the top 10." Ves declared before moving on to examine another living fey model.

[Trixie DARTER]

Developer: Esbeth Sandhurst, Journeyman Mech Designer

Category: Utility

E Energy Attributes: None

Summary:

The Trixie DARTER (Downed Airmen Recovery, Transport, and Emergency Reconnaissance) is an adaptation of an early beast mech with the shape of a dragonfly that is dedicated to battlefield rescue. The original beast mech which this living fey is based upon is very light and small, which limits its operational time but makes it impressively fast at retrieving ejected cockpits or drilling mech pilots out of deformed wrecks. By reducing this mech concept into a fairly large living fey, the Trixie DARTER has become a more compact and much more automated product that can be employed in significantly greater numbers than before.]

"Yet another utility fey." Jovy remarked.

Ves sounded more appreciative of this product. "This is really useful, though. The Trixie DARTER or whatever it is called can save real lives on a chaotic battlefield. The original product that it is based upon is most definitely more effective, but the fact that it is a piloted craft heavily limits its practicality. By applying this mech concept to a living fey, Miss Sandhurst has provided a mech force with a more convenient and economical way to perform search and rescue operations, especially while a battle is still ongoing. The risk to the lives of mech pilots is really high the longer they are drifting defenselessly through space."

Not every mech force would choose to devote their Fey Fiannas to this purpose. By making them responsible for search and rescue, the drone mechs were unable to make more direct contributions that could tip the battle in their favor.

However, as long as the mech force was in a superior position, the greater priority was to minimize its losses. Fighting against any alien fleet was a dangerous prospect. Casualties were unavoidable, but timely search and rescue could cut the loss of mech pilots in half or more.

"How high are you willing to rank the Trixie DARTER?" Jovy asked.

"I am not sure to be honest. It is undeniably effective and useful. It is fairly well-designed as it is adapted from a proper mech design. Miss Sandhurst clearly knows her craft well enough. The biggest shortcoming is the lack of hyper materials. There is nothing that is increasing its speed, its detection ability, its defenses or anything. It is like it is a product out of the Phasewater Generation."

"That may be the case, but this is not necessarily detrimental to its purpose, Ves. Hyper technology has granted our products greater power, but it has also introduced a new source of instability. When the Trixie DARTER approaches a disabled mech, it will not generate any conflicts due to clashing E energy attributes because it does not contain any hyper materials. I believe this may be a deliberate design choice as opposed to a consequence of a lazy adaptation of an older mech design."

He made a good point. Ves had become so enamored with hyper technology that he automatically considered products that lacked it to be inferior.

That was not a fair evaluation.

"I can think of several ways to improve it so that it can do an even better job." Ves said. "I can attach Ylvaine to it so that it can move to rescue mech pilots with as little delay as possible. I can attach Gaia or the Superior Mother to it so that it can detect lives buried within a lot of wreckage a lot more effectively than relying on conventional scanners. I can attach a modest amount of hyper materials that can lightly increase its acceleration without producing too much instability when approaching hyper mechs."

"That may be true, but you cannot deny that the current product already possesses a good base."

"Hm. You're right, Jovy. I will include it in my provisional top 10 list. It may have a shot of ranking higher, but it will be difficult for a utility fey model to overcome more powerful fey that relies on more direct features."

"I believe that search and rescue products such as the Trixie DARTER will only become more valuable going forward." Jovy speculated. "As the Red War drags on, mech pilots will only suffer more casualties. The attrition rate will become so high that our mech academies cannot produce graduates fast enough to make up for the shortfall in experienced mech pilots. More emphasis will be placed on preserving the existing stock of mech pilots. Devoting valuable hangar and storage space to solutions devoted to rescuing soldiers from the battlefield will become especially valuable at that time."

Ejected cockpits and escape pods were always vulnerable on the battlefield.

It only took a single gun battery from a single alien warship to target them and blast them to pieces without missing due to the limited evasion characteristics of these escape devices.

Solutions such as the Trixie DARTER could not prevent every loss from occurring, but it could minimize the exposure time and eventually preserve the lives of hundreds if not thousands of mech pilots for a typical mech force!

## Chapter 5719 The Significance of Lesser Mechs

### 5719 The Significance of Lesser Mechs

Ves and Jovy continued to walk across the empty upper floor while gazing at the display models down below.

The crowd examining the third-party fey models submitted to the contest had no idea that a tier 3 galactic citizen was walking above their heads. They continued to admire the more interesting fey products and even started to inquire about where they could place orders.

The Fey Fianna had become such a phenomenon in the second-class mech community that they started to show up everywhere.

Although not every mech outfit was able to purchase the amazing drone mech due to financial, contractual or doctrinal reasons, those that had benefited from its use often went on to order a second or third batch of Fey Fiannas.

The popularity and the appreciation earned by the Fey Fianna gratified Ves a lot. To think he originally intended to design it as a Larkinson-exclusive mech. That would have been an enormous waste of potential, especially since the timing of its public release was exactly right.

The Fey Fianna was shaping up to become one of the products that defined the Hyper Generation!

The drone mech wouldn't have become nearly as great if not for the variables that defined the Age of Dawn.

As Ves continued to examine one living fey model after another, he sighed several times as the contest submissions provoked a lot of thoughts in his mind.

Jovy clearly noticed his distraction.

"What are you wondering about, Ves?"

"From what I have heard, tens of thousands of mech designers and developers have submitted an entry in the Fey Shaper Contest. Only 50 of the ones deemed more superior than others eventually made it to this stage. Just 10 of them will receive a personal highlight from me in the end. That is a lot of work and effort put into the development of fey that may or may not catch on in the market. Ultimately, many people who have worked hard to attain success in this sphere will ultimately have to return empty-handed."

"Oh, come now. The mech industry has always been highly competitive. Only the best of the best are able to rise above the rest and thrive from their success. The moment we start to subsidize and reward failures is the moment our mech industry begins to decline. As much as we would like to reward every earnest mech designer for making a contribution, we simply cannot because the health of mechs as a whole is ultimately more important than the wellbeing of incompetent mech designers."

Ves' expression remained grim as he stared at the different fey on display and imagined how they would get used in combat.

"Is all of this useful?"

"Of course it is. I can easily select half a dozen fey that can produce such a great impact on the battlefield that they are bound to sell well after they become known to the wider market."

"I don't mean in this way," Ves said. "What I meant to say is whether there is any point in investing so much attention and resources into developing strong second-class mechs. I mean, even if I design fantastic machines like the Fey Fianna and the Ultimatum, what difference does it make in the Red Ocean? At most, it will allow our second-class forces to defeat more alien cannon fodder. I do not see how my effort can significantly turn the tide and put red humanity in a winning posture. Everyone knows that the Red War will ultimately be decided by the struggle between first-class human forces and the major alien races who enjoy the best tech and resources. Everything else is a sideshow in comparison."

Jovy grew concerned. This was not a healthy train of thought. A lot of second-class and third-class mech designers eventually grappled with this existential problem. Perhaps Ves had entertained these notions once before, but managed to get past them. It was not unusual for mech designers to suffer a relapse, though.

"Second-class and third-class mechs are not useless, Ves." The Survivalist explained in a gentle tone. "If you look at their impact from a strategic planning perspective, they may not be able to single-handedly beat back the aliens, but they are consuming the enemy's resources as much as the aliens are trying to do the same to us. Not every adversary in the Red Ocean is as strong as the major alien races. The minor alien races may be weaker, but they still take great effort to defeat due



to their vastly superior numbers. More powerful second-class and third-class mechs can effectively stop these enemies from becoming a threat great enough to merit the intervention of our Association. That will allow us to concentrate our own forces to combat the real threat to our civilization."

Ves slowly nodded. "I understand this dynamic, but I still cannot help that we would all be better off if we just station first-class mechs across our entire border."

"We don't have the numbers for that, Ves. First-class multipurpose mechs are as powerful as second-class ace mechs in some cases, but what is not as obvious is that the resources needed to field the former is astronomically greater. The scant availability of first-class exotics and their exorbitant cost is the main reason why first-class powers have leaned so heavily on emphasizing quality over quantity. That is not the only cumbersome requirement that limits the number of first-class mechs. It takes a huge amount of investment in expensive augmentations and intensive education programs to raise highly qualified mech pilots and mech designers. If you add all of these costs together, you will come to realize that it is simply not feasible to increase the amount of active first-class mechs."

"It doesn't help that many first-class mech academies only take mech pilots with A and B-grade genetic aptitudes seriously." Ves said in a slightly accusing tone.

"You have studied first-class multipurpose mechs long enough to know that we are not being elitist about that. We have no choice. The complexity of a first-class mech that has integrated at least a dozen major modules is beyond the ability for baseline humans to control. Why do you think we are placing so much attention on the development of your Carmine System?"

"Aren't you guys interested in turning ordinary people into mech pilots?"

"We are, Ves. We are especially keen on having this option available to us when the readily available pool for mech pilots begins to dwindle due to continuous attrition. Look, the Transhumanists may value the promise that your Carmine System can turn their bodies into powerful mechs, but we are mainly invested in how your invention will be able to augment humanity's collective fighting power. Not only will mech pilots with A and B-grade genetic aptitude be able to fight as if they are at least a partial grade stronger, but your work can even allow previously undervalued C-grade mech pilots to control first-class multipurpose mechs without suffering any handicap. That will make it significantly easier for us to field more powerful mechs in the toughest battlefields of the Red War."

Ves widened his eyes. He always knew that the mechers had big plans for the Carmine System, but this was the first time he heard such an explicit benefit that was sure to have a significant impact on the outcome of battles at the highest levels.

"How soon do you want to roll out first-class Carmine mechs?"

"Ideally, we would like to wait and test your Carmine System further, but we are in agreement with the Transhumanists that we cannot take our time anymore. Let alone a decade, we may be forced to take more drastic measures within 5 years in order to keep our survival prospects alive. When you have formally gained the qualifications of a first-class mech designer, you should work on gaining more experience in designing mechs of this caliber. Once you have a number of true first-class mech designs under your belt, we may ask you to collaborate with me or one of our other members to design a first-class Carmine mech, perhaps one that is specifically designed to give C-grade pilots

the power of a B-grade pilot. This is the most direct way I can think of that can make an immediate impact on the war."

These were big plans. Ves was not sure whether he or his Carmine System would be ready for this in a few years. It was all happening so fast.

"I will try my best to improve and get ready for this task." Ves promised to his friend. "Designing first-class mechs has always been one of my greatest dreams. I would be happy to design a first-class Carmine mech that can help first-class mech pilots unlock their greater potential in a way that other mechs simply cannot do. However, you need to make sure that these pilots understand the consequences of forming a Blood Pact with a living machine."

"We have not forgotten. We have devised a few potential solutions to mitigate this restriction. Did you not come with a possible idea to preserve the pilot's ability to continue to fight with mechs?"

Ves suddenly froze as he made a number of unusual but incredibly promising associations!

Jovy looked concerned as his friend became distracted a second time.

"What is the matter, Ves?"

"Oh. It's nothing. I just came up with a really good idea that has the potential to massively increase the practicality of my Carmine System! It is still a speculative idea. I will need to conduct a lot more research and investigations in order to determine whether it is viable."

"Are you willing to share your latest theory or is it too rudimentary or controversial for you to explain your thoughts?"

"It's okay. I don't mind it if I explain my new layout to you. Perhaps you can give me useful feedback. It all starts with my latest protege. You know that Alexa Streon recently broke through with a design philosophy that is highly related to mine, right?"

Jovy nodded. "It was impossible for me to miss this occasion. Congratulations on raising a potential heir and successor of your design philosophy."

"Thank you. What I am getting at is her design philosophy is based on living mechs with a focus on procreation and building up a legacy over multiple generations. One of her explicit goals is to create a lineage of living mechs that all share a common root. By continuously producing a chain of offspring, the later generations of living mechs not only benefit from having access to a lot of inheritances that are unique to their lineages, but also have the opportunity to inherit the strengths of the strongest and most successful living machines of their mech dynasties!"

The Survivalist was not stupid. He managed to advance to the rank of Senior sooner than Ves, after all. His eyes widened in realization as he made the crucial connection in his mind!

"Are you suggesting that your Carmine System, or rather the Blood Pact, can be combined with the living legacy mechs of your student? If that is so, then... the synergies between the two would lead to an enormous increase in value between both mech systems!"

Neither Ves nor Jovy were certain whether it was even possible to combine these two radically different design applications together, but if it was possible, then the implications were massive!

Perhaps Ves could work together with Alexa to retool the Blood Pact so that it became a lot less restrictive than before!

Instead of letting a single human individual form an unbreakable bond with a single living mech, Ves and Alexa might be able to allow a human to form a Blood Pact with an entire dynasty of living mechs!

The greatest downside of the Carmine System would be wiped away if that happened!

The larger the mech dynasty, the more alternatives a Carmine mech pilot could choose from. No longer would he be bound to a single Carmine mech for the rest of his life!

Ves suddenly had a powerful hunch that if he followed through with this collaborative research direction, he may be able to make Carmine mechs practical enough to realize his design philosophy shortly afterwards!

## Chapter 5720 Promising Breakthrough Direction

### 5720 Promising Breakthrough Direction

From the moment Ves got struck by inspiration, it was as if a veil parted before him. The Carmine System that he had initially developed a while ago was already capable of producing widespread changes that could transform the lives of a lot of people regardless of their genetic aptitudes.

Yet for all of the wonder it evoked, Ves was more aware than anyone else of its flaws. Aside from the fact that a mech had to be integrated with an abnormal biological construct, it also locked the mech pilot to a single machine for the rest of his career.

This was a major shortcoming that massively dampened his target audience's enthusiasm for Carmine mechs.

Even the Red Association which saw plenty of utility in his signature invention did not fully buy into his Carmine mechs either. The mechers were highly conscious of the fact that if the Carmine mech ever got blown to pieces, it would be useless of the ejected mech pilot managed to save his life.

That was because the commitment he had made prevented him from piloting any other mech, no matter it was through a Blood Pact or with the use of a traditional neural interface!

This was not a theoretical prediction. The mechers had already tested this assumption in real tests where they deliberately destroyed the Carmine mechs bonded with different test subjects.

No matter whether the Blood Pact was only a few hours or a few months old, the consequences of destroying the bonded Carmine mechs remained the same.

A Carmine mech pilot needed to abide by the terms of their Blood Pact without exception. This rule was as fixed and unchangeable as the oath that his grandfather Benjamin made when he was still a high-flying mech pilot.

The rules were harsh and unforgiving, but that was what made the Blood Pact so strong. Ves had invested a lot of hours into trying to explore alternate versions that would not impose such harsh demands, but he never produced any acceptable results.

It was because of all of the prior work he put into testing the limits of the Blood Pact that he knew that his latest inspired idea had a real chance of success!

Even Jovy understood the enormous significance of this potential technological breakthrough. The mecher completely disregarded the Fey models below his feet and faced Ves head-on. HIs

expression grew extremely serious as a lot of people invested in the Carmine System would definitely want to know if its inventor was being serious at this time!

"How viable is this idea of yours? How certain are you in turning it into a practical improvement to your existing Carmine System?"

"How can I know?" Ves replied in a bewildered tone. "I just came up with this. I need to account for so many variables that I really can't give you an accurate estimate. Still, if you are okay with receiving a less substantiated answer, then I can tell you that my gut feeling is cautiously optimistic about my ability to realize this idea. My gut feeling tells me I have a 60 percent chance of success."

"60 percent. That is rather high for a breakthrough of this magnitude. What are the major challenges?"

"There are many. First, in order to make this possible, I need to flesh out the foundational structure of the Blood Pact. Even though I have conducted a lot of research in it, I still do not entirely understand all of its mechanisms. My prevailing theory is that I accidentally rediscovered and repurposed an ancient and forgotten ceremonial ritual for present day use. The building blocks were already there. I just randomly mashed them together to produce a working spiritual construct. I have little understanding of the actual building blocks themselves and how I can rearrange them to create a more complex spiritual construct. The only way I can make that happen is to conduct old-fashioned research in this subject."

"That long?"

"Yes, Jovy. Ever since I developed the second generation Carmine System, I have reached the limit of what I can rapidly improve with my current level of understanding of the relevant variables. My inadequate theoretical framework is holding me back from developing more refined applications. I need to complete the development of the third generation Carmine System first where I incorporate improvements that are reminiscent of what I have observed from the Yuri Machine."

"I see. Only then can you work on binding the mech pilot to multiple Carmine mechs as opposed to a single machine?"

Ves nodded. "That will probably be the goal for my hypothetical fourth generation Carmine System. The difficult part about this is that I cannot do it alone. Deepening my understanding of the building blocks of the Blood Pact is only the starting point. I will need to work together with Alexa Streon to see whether I can expand the definition of the Blood Pact so that it binds the mech pilot with an ever-changing dynasty of living mechs. This is a huge difference you know. The original Blood Pact is supposed to be an intimate oathbound connection between two real living entities. They may be different from each other, but they are still individuals. Trying to change one side of this relationship from an individual to an entire institution of related entities is a huge expansion."

"Will altering the definition of the Blood Pact cause its effect to weaken?" Jovy asked with concern.

"I really don't know the answer to that question. My preliminary guess is that there will certainly be consequences to doing so. I think that the original Blood Pact will still provide the greatest benefit to the mech pilot. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the rewards. Changing the ritualistic contract so that the mech pilots form a permanent bond with a larger institution is less costly but also less personal. The sense of ritual is weaker, and before you ask, that is really important. Don't ask me

why I know this. All I can say is that I believe that forming Blood Pact with mech dynasties will likely shape up to become a more expedient but less rewarding option."

Both Ves and Jovy fell silent for a minute as they went over the implications of these words.

The biggest problem was that Ves had no solid proof to back up his speculations. He was basically using his inadequate understanding and his intuition to form a lot of spurious guesses. Without enough proof, there was no way to know for sure whether Ves was talking truth or nonsense.

"We need more data." Jovy stated. "As promising as this possible breakthrough may be, we have no indication whether it is viable. Even if you have made it work, the tradeoffs you have mentioned may lead to an outcome where the altered Blood Pact is only 10 or 20 percent as effective as the base version. That is far too great of a reduction to make this invention worthwhile."

Ves shrugged. "I will work on it, but do not expect to obtain any quick results. As I have mentioned before, I first need to complete the development of the third generation Carmine System. As for the fourth generation that comes after that, a lot of progress will depend on Alexa's efforts. I can only complete this breakthrough if Alexa has made significant progress in her own design philosophy. What is most important is that in order to test our work, we will have to experiment with an existing living mech dynasty. No such thing exists at this moment as Alexa has only just broken through the rank of Journeyman."

An existing living mech dynasty was extremely important for Ves' purposes. He was unable to make one himself. Only Alexa possessed the capability to do so at this time.

What this meant was that Alexa's cooperation was indispensable for Ves to attain his desired result.

If anything happened to Alexa that caused her to die, fall out with Ves or otherwise become indisposed, then Ves could forget about making any further progress in this specific research direction!

He would have to pursue a completely different line of research that might hopefully make the Carmine System practical enough to allow Ves to realize his design philosophy.

"You are both lucky and unlucky, Ves." Jovy said as he considered the same variables. "The main reason why older mech designers are so keen on raising disciples is because the students can pursue alternative possibilities that can help their teachers find new breakthrough opportunities. It is usually Master Mech Designers who do so, but it is not unheard of for Seniors to benefit from this as well. The fact that you can already deduce a promising breakthrough opportunity only a short time after Miss Streon locked in her design philosophy is nothing less than amazing."

"That should be the part why you think I am lucky. What about the other side of the coin?"

"Your explanation makes it clear that when you reach this stage in your journey as a Senior Mech Designer, you can no longer rely on your hard work to advance further." Jovy grimaced. "You will become shackled to Alexa Streon's speed of progression. If her design philosophy doesn't progress fast enough and if her work on combining her own innovations with your Carmine mechs continually counters setbacks, then you will effectively be at her mercy."

Ves did not like it either, but thinking about how well Alexa performed so far gave him a shot of confidence.

"No mech designer truly stands alone." He spoke with conviction. "Larkinsons should be able to count on each other without harboring any doubts. I trust Alexa. Ever since she came under my wing, she has performed nothing less than exemplary. There are very few reasons for her to fall off at this point. She has only just begun her meteoric rise as a mech designer. I have full confidence in her ability to make quick progress and flesh out her living legacy mechs to the point where her signature works can successfully be combined with an altered version of my Blood Pact."

He built up a solid development roadmap in his mind. He knew what he needed to work on in order to satisfy the requirements on his end.

The biggest complication was Alexa's side of the equation. Ves did not possess a thorough understanding of all of her work, so it was mainly up to her to improve her signature design application to the point where a living mech dynasty gained enough definition to function as a whole institution in spiritual terms.

Of course, neither Ves nor Alexa had to work in isolation to make progress in their respective design philosophies.

The advantage of working in the same field was that they could easily pitch in and assist the other in related research!

Two minds working together was better than a single mind working in isolation. The ability to bounce ideas, solicit feedback and having a second opinion on hand could potentially shave years if not decades worth of research in the right situations!

"If everything goes right for you, how soon do you expect to be able to complete the development of your fourth generation Carmine System?" Jovy questioned.

"A decade. It shouldn't take too long. However, the most important requirement is that there is at least one living mech dynasty at my disposal. It takes time to build one. It is not enough for a pair of living mechs to produce one generation of offspring. Those children will need to mature and produce grandchildren in order to form the semblance of a healthy and continually expanding mech dynasty."

"I see. If Alexa is able to satisfy this important condition, will your resulting research results be sufficient for you to realize your design philosophy?"

Half a minute went by as Ves mulled over this question.

"I cannot say for sure, but my gut feeling says yes. If mech dynasties can serve as legitimate targets for the Blood Pact, then I am very confident that my Carmine System will truly have the capital to become a widely used system that can allow many people to pilot mechs they are otherwise qualified to handle. They can gain all of this benefit without making an excessive sacrifice."