

The Mech Touch Chapter 19: Reborn

Ves revisited the C1A Nero. He was never proud of the mech, even if he learned a lot about the Caesar Augustus when working on it. The small solutions he implemented in the Nero only helped him fabricate a less horrible Caesar Augustus. In that regard, he succeeded modestly. When Ves checked his sales again, he saw that the Nero had already been sold once for a whole 60,000 credits.

"At least I don't have to worry about paying for the raw materials of my next model."

The Nero always felt like a half-finished job to Ves. Now that he came back with a lot of new ideas, he wanted to revisit its design and see whether he could transform it into a mech that enables pilots to reach the X-Factor.

Ves opened up the Mech Designer System and switched to the Designer page. The Designer stored all of his old designs, so he pulled up the Nero effortlessly.

When he modified the C1's design, he made changes based revolving around reducing its cost and increasing its efficiency. He treated the Caesar Augustus as a robot and rearranged its internals without any regards to its presumably non-existent feelings.

Ves wasn't sure working like that was the right approach. In his beliefs about the X-Factor, emotions played an important role. While he still wasn't certain how to engender these emotions in a giant machine, he had some guesses he could try.

First, he theorized a mech designer's emotions and intentions played an enabling role. In other words, his own feelings bled over into the design and fabrication of a new mech. The clues to this idea came from remembering the circumstances of designing the Seraphim.

Ice-cold designers who barely put any passion in their designs could never spark a semblance of life in these mechs. When Ves worked on the Phantasm, Nomad and Nero, he constantly tried to maximize his gains while minimizing his losses. Though he was upbeat, he didn't put in an excessive amount of passion in his work.

Despite being overburdened with toys, the Seraphim had been designed in a fit of passion. Ves vaguely remembered the emotions he experienced back then. He became elated at his first sale, and the completion of his second ever tutorial missions. He received a windfall of resources and also got drunk on purchasing a lot of virtual component licenses. With such an affected mind, he got straight to work at designing a colorful mech that embodied extreme joy and passion.

"These all happened to be the same emotions TheSeventhSnake felt when he performed at his best."

Ves formed a bold idea. The alignment of the emotions expressed by the designer, mech and pilot determined whether they could produce the X-Factor. Almost every speculation about the X-Factor Ves had read on the galactic net only focused on the mech and its pilot. It almost never included the designer. Even if they did, they focused on the designer's physical objectives, not his emotional demands.

How can a sword in the hands of a warrior shine bright when the blacksmith forged it casually?

There was no proof for Ves' assertion that the craftsman mattered. As far as humanity knew, emotions weren't bundles of energy that had a definable existence in the material universe. It certainly sounded highly unlikely that when Ves designed and fabricated the Seraphim, he somehow embedded it with some sort of voodoo mental energy.

No. Perhaps the mystery lay in purpose and intent. The strong emotions of the mech designer sharpened his intent. A mech designed to break through fortifications would not only possess the physical qualities that enabled it to perform such a task, it would also be built carrying the designer's intent to succeed. Paired with a pilot who carries the same wish, such a mech crystallized the intent of all three entities in a single machine.

In order to gift the new Nero with a purpose, Ves first had to look back on the intent of its base model.

"The Caesar Augustus is a product of a young, spoiled mech designer's desire to show off." Ves concluded as he recalled the debut of Jason Kozlowski. "At the time, it was built to be the best all-rounder currentgen mech."

Jason obviously hadn't been modest in his demands. However, he possessed one thing many other mech designers lacked. "He was incredibly passionate when he designed the Caesar Augustus."

The heir to National Aeromotives made a bet that he'd produce the design in a month. If Jason spent only one month to come up with a completely original design with so much pressure hanging over him, the emotions that he carried over in his creations would be immense.

"I've done a disservice to the Caesar Augustus." Ves realized as he recalled the times when he fabricated the virtual versions of the stock model and the Nero. Even though he crafted them in a simulation, the life-like circumstances meant that the frustrations and difficulties he felt must have bled over to his end products.

"I need to adjust my mood. Redesigning the new Nero without emulating Jason's passion will just deliver another half-assed result."

Ves felt as if he was forced to go up to a stage and begin acting while he had zero experience. The only thing he could do is recall the times when he was still young and bright, before his moody teenage years set in. He used to dream of following in his father's footsteps and become a mech pilot.

"I was naive back then. Naive but happy." Much like how Jason felt thirty years ago when he just graduated from Estelon.

While he didn't succeed in summoning up a youthful and arrogant mood, Ves somewhat managed to instill confidence in himself. "I don't have anything great to draw upon in my past, but with the help of the System I can still dream of the wonders I'll experience in the future."

The Caesar Augustus' main attribute was exuding absolute confidence. Jason believed the mech he designed was the best of the current generation. It surpassed any frontline or elite mech within the same technological boundary.

Only the most advanced nextgen models carefully developed and kept hidden by the first-tier states could beat it in a fair fight, and those mechs were usually kept hidden from the public, employed only in the most frigid battles by the geniuses of the largest empires.

In other words, the Caesar Augustus had reason to be arrogant.

After matching his confident mood with the arrogant and narcissistic mindset behind the Caesar Augustus, Ves went to work making adjustments to the Nero. Naturally, in the perspective of improving the Nero's physical capabilities, he only had limited options. He hadn't learn any new sub-skills since the time he designed the Nero, after all. He also couldn't undo all of his work in the misguided intention to emulate Jason.

Instead, he sought to bring back the charm of the base model. Ves had originally smoothed out the minute incongruities Jason incorporated in C1's armor. He used to regard them as sloppy flourishes that added nothing of value. Now he noted the seemingly useless contours enhanced its domineering image.

Next, he paid attention to its internals. The changes he made to produce the original Nero were minor optimizations. They reduced the risk of catastrophic faults and made the mech easier to maintain, but the underlying idea behind the changes was that he made the mech more timid.

Jason designed the C1 to be a showstopping elite, focusing purely on its martial prowess and not nearly enough attention to its practicality. Ves somehow had to reconcile two opposite intents. One was the need to make the Nero more practical to maintain and repair. The other was to retain the Caesar Augustus' aggressive edge.

The way Ves decided to go about it was to revert a couple of changes and implement a couple of new ones. The Caesar Augustus emphasized confidence to the point of recklessness. The Nero emphasized self-preservation to the point of timidity. Therefore, the Nero Redivivus should be focused on competence that its systems could take a better beating. Essentially, Ves left out much of the arrogance embedded in the base model.

Since he hadn't made any major changes, Ves finished updating his Nero after only half a day. After Ves added in the finishing touches, he let the System evaluate his redesigned variant. He aptly named it the Nero Redivivus, after a somewhat dubious legends that the Ancient Roman emperor rose from the dead. Ves imagined he succeeded in bringing his older work back to life.

[Design Evaluation: C1B Nero Redivivus.]

Variant name: C1B Nero Redivivus

Base model: Caesar Augustus C1

Original Manufacturer: National Aeromotives

Weight Classification: Medium-Heavy

Recommended Role: Elite Vanguard

Armor: A

Carrying Capacity: C-

Aesthetics: B

Endurance: D

Energy Efficiency: D+

Flexibility: E

Firepower: B+

Integrity: E

Mobility: D+

Spotting: C-

X-Factor: E-

Deviance: 4%

Performance improvement: 3%

Overall evaluation: A customized design that barely improves on the original. While it is slightly easier to fabricate and repair, this variant offers barely any benefits. Rare among other variants, this design has not butchered the base model's X-Factor. Instead, it has retained a shadow of its presence.

[You have received 50 Design Points completing an original design of a last generation mech.]

[You have received 100 Design Points for designing a mech with a trace of X-Factor.]

"Yes! I did just enough to get it to work." Ves rejoiced, happy for reaching the finish line just as he put in so much work. The windfall of DP he received also helped. At least Ves received some indication from the System that his attempts to recreate the vaunted X-Factor succeeded. "I haven't wasted all of my time."

Ves waited for a moment, but nothing else had happened. "Uh, System. I've completed the mission. Won't you give me the rewards?"

[Please continue fabricating your design in order to complete the mission.]

Regardless of the Nero Redivivus' inadequacies, it offered the possibility to unleash the X-Factor, but evidently the possibility wasn't

enough. He had to prove its existence by making the design come to life.

"I'm pretty sure the mission stated that designing a mech should be enough. Do you just want me to finish what I started?"

It didn't hurt to practice. "I might as well do it. But first, let's spend my DP."

Enough time had passed for his Fantasia variants to sell several hundred times, though their sales trend started to decline. And while Ves only managed to sell the Caesar Augustus and the Nero once, their higher tiers resulted in more DP when they were sold. Together with the DP he received as a reward for designing the Nero Redividus, Ves saved enough points to purchase the Mediumweight Armor Optimization I sub-skill in the Skill Tree.

"I'd rather purchase the 3D Printer Proficiency II upgrade since I still have trouble reproducing the Caesar Augustus' parts, but I really need to learn how to work with armor once I receive the new licence."

It was a matter of priorities. Without becoming more proficient in modifying armor, he might fail in adapting the new armor to the Caesar Augustus. He'd be wasting the valuable license if he botched the design.

He checked his Status again to see if anything else had changed.

[Status]

Name: Ves Larkinson

Profession: Novice Mech Designer

Specializations: None

Design Points: 74

Attributes

Strength: 0.7

Dexterity: 0.7

Endurance: 0.6

Intelligence: 1.2

Creativity: 1

Concentration: 1.1

Neural Aptitude: F

Skills

[Assembly]: Novice - [3D Printer Proficiency I] [Assembler Proficiency I]

[Business]: Apprentice

[Computer Science]: Incompetent

[Electrical Engineering]: Novice

[Mathematics]: Incompetent

[Mechanics]: Apprentice - [Jury Rigging I] [Speed Tuning I]

[Metallurgy]: Apprentice

[Metaphysics]: Incompetent

[Physics]: Novice - [Lightweight Armor Optimization I]

[Mediumweight Armor Optimization I]

Evaluation: Achieved a step into novice territory.

Surprisingly, he gained some benefits from his focused research. The long hours he spent reading and watching interviews rose his Concentration by 0.1 points. The scattered but varied theories he learned and formulated by himself also gained acknowledgement by the System, resulting in a new sub-skill called Metaphysics.

"Seems like you acknowledge that metaphysics has merit." Ves remarked coyly at the System. It didn't deign to reply.

Shrugging, Ves switched back to his Skill Tree and saw that the Metaphysics sub-trees were under a special condition. He spotted plenty of icons, but fog shrouded their names and descriptions. He also couldn't spend his DP to unlock them. He wasn't allowed to cheat his way into mastering the X-Factor.

This only underscored its value.

Well, he could figure it out later. First he had to fabricate the Nero Redivodus in order to prove his assumptions and complete the mission.

"First, I need to get in the right mindset again. I can't treat the fabrication process as a chore."

He began work on fabricating the new Nero whilst keeping a confident, trusting attitude. This wasn't always easy to keep up for hours. Ves frequently took breaks in order to keep his mood fresh. This caused him to take twice as long to finish the Nero Redivodus, but when he finally read through the testing and diagnostics of the completed model, he gained a pleasant surprise.

Despite his fumbling, the Nero Redivodus had actually improved. Its construction went a little smoother, causing less sub-standard parts to pop up. This improvement helped along the assembly process, where Ves spent much less time wrangling ill-fitting parts into a whole.

"I'm finally done with this." Ves sighed. He visited his store page, removed the first Nero from his catalog, and added in the Nero Redivodus to take its place.

The System finally gave Ves what he deserved.

[Congratulations for completing the mission. The road to understanding the X-Factor is long and bumpy. There are many destinations at the end of the road. Believe in yourself and advance towards the end point unique to you.]

[You have received a 10-year random medium armor production license lottery ticket. Please visit the Lottery page to redeem your ticket.]

[You have received a 200 ton medium armor raw materials package. Please visit your Inventory to open the package.]

Ves was already filled with glee. "My luck's been bad lately. The heavens must surely compensate me this time. Hopefully I won't encounter another pagoda."

Chapter end