

## THE MECH TOUCH

### Chapter 2: Mech Designer System

When Ves woke up, he brushed a hand over his brown hair and wondered why he ended up on the floor.

"It was.. the data chip!"

Ves tried to find the data chip that dropped him like a log. After a quick search, he only came across a fried piece of metals and other melted bits. The chip self-destructed after following its programming. He bewilderingly turned his gaze to his wrist communicator, which was still in pristine condition.

"That's strange. Anything that could have fried this chip should have melted my comm in the process. How could the chip have melted itself without transferring all that heat to my comm unit?"

Cautiously, Ves activated his comm, expecting it to malfunction. Instead, it turned online without a problem. After browsing the menu, he found that nothing changed except for the addition of one new program.

The Mech Designer System.

The name already sounded boastful. The act of designing mechs was an intricate discipline that required years of study in the fields of mechanics, physics, material science and more. Even after graduating from college, you merely got your foot through the door.

It took more than experience and brilliance for a mech designer to achieve true success. Just the thought of having a single app whip up a simple design in a matter of minutes rankled Ves. The mere thought of such a software devalued the five years he spent on becoming a mech designer.

Still... his father left him this 'System' for a reason. Ves had no idea where Ryncol got his hands on this mysterious app. Since he couldn't get anymore answers, Ves decided to run the app.

[Welcome to the Mech Designer System. Please design your new mech.]

The message ended there, leaving nothing for Ves to follow up. "That's it?"

[Deep scan complete. Registering new user Ves Larkinson. Welcome package granted.]

"Uh, you got anything more than that?"

[Please inspect your Status. To display this page, say Status.]

"Status."

[Status]

Name: Ves Larkinson

Profession: Novice Mech Designer

Specializations: None

Design Points: 0

Attributes

Strength: 0.6

Dexterity: 0.7

Endurance: 0.6

Intelligence: 1.2

Creativity: 0.3

Concentration: 0.9

Neural Aptitude: F

Skills

[Assembly]: Novice

[Business]: Apprentice

[Computer Science]: Incompetent

[Mathematics]: Incompetent

[Mechanics]: Apprentice

[Metallurgy]: Apprentice

[Physics]: Novice

Evaluation: Good-for-nothing loser.

"Hey, who are you calling a loser!?"

[User Ves Larkinson is a qualified loser for having spent half of your life wasting away your life. Your frequent diversions have left you ill-prepared for the future. Your inability to pay off your debt is a direct consequence of your ineptitude.]

Ves had to suppress the urge to raise his middle finger. Instead, he challenged this stupid System. "I admit, I used to be a stupid kid, but I cleaned up my act. I'm a mech designer now!"

[It is your lucky day! The Mech Designer System is the ultimate tool in this galaxy to design any machine that falls under the category of mechs. Any authorized user is allowed to use this System's many tools to design any mech imaginable with no conceivable limits.]

Who would believe such shameless boasting. "So can I just whip up something that weighs a thousand tons, runs at mach 50 and can even travel faster-than-light?" freewebnovel.com

[Certainly user, but you must design its components and integrate them into a viable design by yourself. If you then wish to fabricate the design using the System, then you will be required to exchange a corresponding energy value expressed in Design Points.]

It sounded ridiculous that a piece of software can just wish a mech into existence with energy alone. "How many Design Points does it take to fabricate a mech. How easy can I earn these points anyway?"

[An average mech requires 1,445,645,313 Design Points in order to be fabricated accurately. Calculating your current combination of attributes and skills. After estimating your capabilities, you are able to earn an average of 3.89 Design Points per day.]

Ves was literally speechless. The System disparaged him again in a roundabout way.

"You seem pretty useless. How am I suppose to get some use out of you if I can only earn about four DP a day?"

[...]

"Yeah, I thought so." Ves muttered quietly. His finger already hovered over his comm, ready to shut down this useless app.

[User, please do not exit the program yet. You have yet to explore the menu, nor have you opened up your welcome package.]

"Okay, so give me a menu then."

[Mech Designer System Menu]

Status

Designer

Missions

Skill Tree

Shop

Lottery

Inventory

"User, as a Novice Mech Designer, your privileges are limited. You currently do not have access to the Missions, Shop and Lottery menu."

Ves browsed the Designer option first. The System unfolded into a vast holographic design interface that seemed to be ripped off from a popular design suite that Ves had frequently used in his student days. The System's version came with a lot of additional features, though Ves wasn't in the mood to explore them right now.

The Skill Tree unfolded even more elaborately, taking up a panoramic view. The most fundamental skills sat at the top. It started with the most basic fields such as mechanics and mathematics. Beneath them nested an unfolding expanse of sub-skills that seemingly went on forever. He could upgrade skills as diverse as artistic judgment.

This Skill Tree alone appeared way too fantastical and unreal. How could anyone improve themselves with the press of a button? All it took to upgrade his skills was to spend a couple of so-called Design Points.

It was fairly uncanny that the system managed to map his current skills pretty accurately. Ves reserved his judgment for the moment. His father had to have a compelling reason to pass on this absurd piece of software to him. Ves refused to consider the System to be a work of fantasy.

He opened the inventory last. It appeared to be a typical, game-like interface except he couldn't store or take out real-universe items. The inventory mainly dealt with storing designs and other virtual content, though it offered the option of storing real items later on.

Naturally, his inventory contained no designs, but he found the vaunted welcome package in the miscellaneous tab. He curiously tapped it with his finger.

The holographic box cheerfully opened up accompanied by the faux-celebratory fanfare prevalent in cheap online games. Three silhouettes floated in front of him, tempting his anticipation a tiny bit even as he remained skeptical of this System.

[Congratulations, you have received 10 Design Points. Please spend them well.]

"Just ten measly Design Points?" Ves exasperatingly questioned.

From browsing the previous menus, he learned that 10 Design Points was only worth peanuts to the System. With this amount, he could neither afford to increase his attributes or upgrade any skills. The paltry amount only afforded him enough to purchase a soda.

He then clicked the next silhouette which revealed three copper lottery tickets. It allowed him to draw three prizes from the system's lowest-ranked lottery draw.

When Ves activated a ticket, the Lottery page projected a prize wheel. After staring at the wheel in doubt, he spun the large object by heaving a lever with his arm.

[You have failed to draw a prize from your copper lottery ticket. Please draw again.]

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"Really, even the lottery tickets from the convenience store aren't so stingy."

After using up the lottery tickets, The System's final present unfolded. The silhouette faded away, revealing a small mechanical cat.

The pet displayed on the hologram seemed no different from any of the other artificial intelligences available on the galactic net. Popular with little girls around the galaxy, these virtual pets offered companionship and distraction without the hassle of taking care of a real animal.

"So you got me a virtual cat. Whoop-die-doo."

[You are mistaken user. This gold-ranked auxiliary companion is an extremely rare random draw from the welcome package. Congratulations on acquiring your new gem cat.]

The creature in front of Ves shifted. The holographic interface dimmed as the projection of the mechanical cat brightened.

The cat thudded on the floor with an audible thump. Just as Ves thought the System was tricking him, the cat meowed and physically brushed his leg with its very real body.

"What?"

This couldn't be happening. The cat felt real. Ves bent down and put his hands around the light metallic shell of the cat and lifted it in front of his face. The cat questioningly purred as it beheld its new owner while Ves processed its appearance.

His communicator was just a basic model. It didn't possess the fancy micro fabrication options that came with premium models.

Even if his comm turned into premium model overnight, it was impossible to fabricate a mechanical animal larger than a mosquito. His comm simply couldn't store the required materials. Who knew how the cat came into existence. The System's workings already broke the bounds of reality.

[Do not be surprised user. As the ultimate design tool for mechs, the Mech Designer System is able to utilize [REDACTED] to instantly fabricate any design or item you have exchanged at the shop at the cost of Design Points.]

Only until now did it sink in that Ves' father had left him an impossibly amazing software. Though he understood very little so far, he was fairly certain that whoever created this System was light-years ahead of even the most advanced human scientists. He guessed that the System might be hiding some massive secrets, some of which may even involve alien technologies.

These questions were so far above Ves' tiny head that he simply set them aside for the moment. He had more immediate concerns.

"This cat is kind of cute." Ves remarked as he scratched the mechanical creature's head. "Is it supposed to do something more than beg for scratches and hugs?"

[Concentrate on the gem cat in order to call up its Status.]

[Pet Status]

Name: None

Owner: Ves Larkinson

Rank: Gold [Exclusive]

Level: 1

Skills

[Gem Excretion I]

"What kind of a skill is Gem Excretion?"

"Concentrate on the skill to see further details."

[Gem Excretion]

The ability to convert low value materials into rare gemstones of a higher value through manual absorption, digestion and excretion. These gemstones provide random benefits helpful to any mech that incorporates them into their design. Certain raw materials have a higher emphasis on the benefits that the resulting gemstones can express.

It took half a minute for the description to sink in with Ves. From what he could understand, this cat ate minerals digested it into gems. These gems ought to be quite valuable depending on their effects. He might be able to earn some quick cash if he sold these shiny gems.

[Do not overestimate the gem cat. At level 1, the pet can only excrete one gem per week.]

Ves sighed in disappointment. The cat booped his nose with its soft paw.

"Well I'm better off now than before, so I've got no grounds to complain. As for you, let me call you Lucky, since I'm counting on you to be my lucky charm."

The mech cat adorably meowed in response, indicating that its artificial intelligence possessed at least some form of low sentience.

Ves searched the cabinets of his workshop and scrounged up a pile of loose ore. The random materials were likely left by the previous owner that his father didn't bother to tidy up when he bought them second-hand.

Ves took a head-sized chunk and the small cat somehow managed to gobble up the entire thing in a clear violation of the laws of physics. There was no way a normal mechanical cat could fit so much material in its cat-sized belly.

"Okay, this is clearly another freaky thing in a long list of impossibilities. No use cracking my head over these miracles. I've to take care of my money problem first."

Ves dropped the cat and left it to explore the workshop alone. he approached his desk and turned on the computer terminal in order to do some research.



He briefly went over the manuals of the machines in his workshop. He found that they were basic but reliable models, and didn't differ much from what he used during his studies.

He then checked the prices of mechs, parts and raw materials at the public markets. Cloudy Curtain was just a regular boring residential planet, famed for its colorful clouds rather than any industry, so its mech market was anemic.

If Ves wanted to sell his products to a viable market, then he needed access to the bigger trading nodes nestled in the heart of the Bright Republic. Not anyone qualified to do so. Ves lacked both reputation and a track record. Even if he did gain access, he lacked the capital to acquire the raw resources needed to fabricate a mech.

"It takes money to to make money."

That was one of the most important lesson he learned in college. Surprisingly, he did quite well in his business classes. Ves owed this achievement due to his aspirations. It also helped that the classes only involved simple math.

After half a day of research, Ves gained a clearer idea on the viability of his new enterprise.

He gave up on producing a physical product. The areas of mech design, mech customization or mech fabrication all required substantial capital in order to step foot in them. He needed at least several million credits upfront.

The only economically viable market where he could realistically offer his services was in the field of mech repair and maintenance. However, his workshop was limited by its scale, and without a reputation he doubted he could attract any customers.

He needed to make a start in a market with a low barrier of entry, one that didn't demand any prior investment. Ves made a resigned look at the section of games on his terminal.

**IRON SPIRIT - The most exclusive galactic mech simulator in the galaxy!**

Iron Spirit was not the most played online game on the market. However, its esports broadcasts attracted a very wide audience, allowing the game to foster a large and diverse creator's market.

The reason for the game's success could be attributed to its adherence to reality. Iron Spirit emulated reality so well that players had to buy or rent expensive simulation pods to pilot a mech. It turned the player base into an elitist club that served as a decent simulation to actual mech combat.

The BSBH Corporation stuck to the creed of realism so much that its virtual mechs had to be fabricated within its simulated ecosystem in a realistic manner. Only the mainstream mech models could be bought off-the-shelf.

The true high performing mechs in the game were all customized or original designs that could be sold for either gold, the virtual currency, or with real credits. Unlike piloting a virtual mech, Iron Spirit didn't demand its designers to be a potentate, so even an average norm like Ves could engage in its virtual market.

As Ves registered a mech designer's account in the game, he came across a few snags. He had to pony up a registration fee of 800 bright credits. This wiped out more than half of his remaining savings.

When the game approved his account, he encountered another barrier. Customizing any existing design required the purchase of a so-called virtual license. The licenses for the cheapest parts started at around 10,000 credits, while the licenses for the most outdated 1-star mechs were valued at 100,000 credits.

"I'm such an idiot for forgetting the licensing fees."

BSBH apparently didn't want its virtual mech market to be flooded by a tsunami of awful designs.

With no other way out, Ves turned on his wrist communicator and started up the Mech Designer System. "Hey System, I don't have the money to afford a virtual license. Can you lend me a hand?"

The System accessed his terminal through a wireless connection. It took only a dozen seconds to scan the entire game and absorb additional information from the galactic net.

[Tutorial mission received. Please enter the Missions page to browse the details.]

Ves obediently turned to the Missions page of the System.

[Mission]

Mission: Tutorial Part 1 - Your First Design

Difficulty: F-Rank

Prerequisites: Be an idiot who can't solve his own problems

Description

As a mech designer, it is shameful that you have not completed a single design that is ready for sale. Use the Mech Designer System and the provided mech model to design a customized mech that has a minimum deviance of 10% and a performance improvement of 2% of its base model.

Reward: A random 1-star virtual mech license. A random 1-star virtual component license.

"This sounds doable. Can I ask how you're able to reward me with those virtual licenses?"

[Nothing is impossible to the Mech Designer System. With enough Design Points, the user may even be able to achieve immortality. Please increase your mech designer rank for a more detailed answer.]

Yeah right. Ves guessed the System had some way of hacking into Iron Spirit's servers. In order to preserve his sanity, Ves stopped his inquiry and instead turned his attention to the Designer mode.

It wasn't until Ves saw what kind of licenses he had to work with that he practically spat out blood.

"This is impossible!"