

Chapter 52 (2,358 words)

"I told him to meet us here." Upgrade grumbled as she checked her tablet with frustrated finger swipes. "Since he wasn't in the lounge, my best guess is that he got cornered by some students." She looked up at Sal apologetically. "Stay here, and I'll go save him."

Sal just laughed as he watched her leave the second floor of their Headquarters. It was just him alone with the machines, and for the briefest moment, he actually felt at peace. Dealing with all of the lecturers and even Coach, it was draining... and he knew that there was so many tasks being added, no matter what he did. Sal was coming around to the idea of getting an assistant to help him with all of the tasks, but it felt ridiculous even thinking about it. Sure, he was a Guildmaster, but he was also a first year that was falling behind in modules. How was he going to fare when they got progressively more challenging in the next semester?

Rather than dwelling on it, Sal strode over to the massive screen that held many of the answers he was looking for. He had constructed a priority list through Prime after the events of the contract with Paradox. Rather than hiding from those responsibilities, he decided to take a look at the outstanding tasks.

Salvatore Argento: Priority List [Ranked by Legion System Impact]

- **Guild Administration:**
 - Grant Permissions for [Prime]
 - [Daedalus] Private Projects Found [13]
 - Replicate [All-Sight] [Suitability: Excellent]
 - [All-Sight] Progression Path [0.00% Complete]
 - Specialist Contracts Available:
 - [Anna Sakura] is eligible for [3] Named Assassination Contracts
 - [John O'Brien] is eligible for [17] VIP Escort Contracts
 - Apply for Guild Tier Increase [Tier 7: Guaranteed] [Tier 6: Probable]
 - Increases Headcount [Tier 7: 25] [Tier 6: 30] [Tier 5: 50]

Sal had apparently already completed many of the prompts, like getting new Guild members through Athena and fixing up weaves for Seth and O'Brien. Their advancement to Tier 6 hadn't been picked up by Prime, which told him that there were some administrative tasks that Jez had yet to complete.

It was nice to see confirmation that he was finally able to use All-Sight without the risk of going blind. Rather than just using trial and error, he decided that he'd ask his father for guidance on how to use it properly. He could have just followed the path that was created by the Legion System, and it would probably work out great... but Sal couldn't help but remember his father's expression when he had first shown his progress with the Silverson Arts. It was an adapted form, because his visor had made adjustments to the source material. All-Sight was his father's ability, and rather than learning a bastardised version or something that was tailored by research, he wanted to learn the original.

Glancing through the feed of information, Sal noted that the area for Specialist Contracts had changed. Rather than suggesting he apply for contracts, it was just stating that some were available. Was that a result of their strategic partnership with Paradox? If they were now trusted enough to dispatch people, then he wasn't going to say no. O'Brien and Sakura would likely be happy with the added opportunity.

Next was a new section dedicated to Guild Member advancements. Sal was a little curious to see what Prime thought his focus should be, and read through the listing... until he faltered at the first line. Barry's ability, which he had never actually learned the name of, was in full view. Facade? It strangely suited him, and would probably make a good Hero Alias.

- **Guild Member Advancement:**
 - **Barry Francis** [Class: Controller] [Ability: Facade] [Factor: 3] [Grade: 26]
 - Grant [Prime] Access to [Codename: Midas] for [Extreme Impact]
 - Grant [Prime] Access to [Codename: Endless] for [Extreme Impact]
 - Grant [Prime] Access to [Codename: Labyrinth] for [Significant Impact]
 - Grant [Prime] Access to [Codename: Commander] for [Moderate Impact]

Sal's joy at finding out Barry's ability ebbed away slowly as he continued reading through the advancement report. What were all those codename projects about? Was that what Prime was asking for permission to access? It would be just like Barry to make everything a secret project. That said, Sal couldn't help but be impressed with his progress. If the Codenames for Labyrinth and Commander were anything to go by, Prime didn't have a huge amount of input for those projects... which told Sal that they were either brilliant, or nonsensical. With Barry, Sal's suspicion was leaning towards the former of the two.

He paused for a few seconds, looking at the impact reports with a raised eyebrow. Prime knew the contents, but claimed that it wasn't able to access it. That was more than a little far-fetched, so Sal wondered if the logic-device was simply asking permission to play with the projects Barry was creating. It clearly didn't understand the concept of privacy, and Sal would need to change that.

Blathnaid was next on the list, with her main bottleneck coming from the Research required for the Harvesting Station. Rather than stalling on it, Sal gave Prime the green light to proceed with the research. Prime also wanted access to the Mythic Guild Uniforms, all of the versions, but Sal wasn't going to let it play with them. If Blathnaid, Jack or Anthony wanted the super computer looking at their project, they wouldn't have set it to private in the first place.

- **Blathnaid Clean** [Class: Support] [Ability: Construct] [Factor: 2] [Grade: 17]
 - Complete Harvesting Station Research [Available]
 - [Unlocks Path: Demon Butcher] [Suitability: Excellent]
 - [Unlocks Path: Demon Harvester] [Suitability: Excellent]
 - [Unlocks Path: Demon Researcher] [Suitability: Excellent]
 - Grant [Prime] Access to [Codename: MGU-V5] for [Significant Impact]
 - Grant [Prime] Access to [Codename: MGU-V4] for [Significant Impact]

It was no surprise to see Michaela's feed come up next, and the only real updates were the additional cores from the Elite Switcher and Elite Scuttler variants they fought in the Dungeon. Both would give her a significant uptick in capability through her Predator Ability, but the Void Seeker was still in the lead. They'd need to kill so many damn Voiders to get enough cores to synthesise one, though. Sal would need to check how many were pilfered from the Tartarus Vault and the various Arsenals by the Creation Engine or the Drones.

- **Michaela Egan** [Class: Offence] [Ability: Predator] [Factor: 3] [Grade: 19]
 - Grant [Void Seeker] to [Predator] for [Extreme Impact]
 - Grant [Elite Echo Switcher Core] to [Predator] for [Significant Impact]
 - Grant [Elite Abyssal Titan Scuttler Core] to [Predator] for [Significant Impact]

There were so many updates with single line entries, usually saying that a team member needed additional gear to increase their combat potential. Those were solved by having Daedalus make something for them. Other entries asked for research permissions to create better Progression Paths. Sal went through all of them, looking to see if anything stood out, but they were mostly the same. Well, until he got to the last entry on the list.

- **Rochelle DeVerdon** [Class: Healer] [Ability: Transference] [Factor: 2] [Grade: 12]
 - Source [Lord Core] for [Athena] to Grant one of the following:
 - Grant [Skill Implant] of [Ability: Assimilate] [Factor: 3] [Grade: 24]
 - Grant [Skill Implant] of [Ability: Crystallise] [Factor: 2] [Grade: 14]
 - Grant [Skill Implant] of [Ability: Solidify] [Factor: 3] [Grade: 18]
 - Grant [Skill Implant] of [Ability: Imbue] [Factor: 3] [Grade: 20]
 - Utilise [Daedalus] [Skill-Paragon] [Creation Engine] to create equipment with:
 - [Assimilate] [Crystallise] [Solidify] [Imbue] for [Extraordinary Impact]

Whatever research Rochelle was doing with Grant, had certainly piqued Prime's interest. There were over thirty research proposals that were on standby with Prime, waiting for his consent to process them. Sal allowed it, and was inundated with all sorts of mathematical equations that trivialised his progress in EssPro. Essence Calibration, Absorption and Assimilation research was folding in on itself, with each new discovery informing and correcting the previous papers.

Sal stood there for a few minutes, watching as more than a hundred research nodes were completed. Prime's processing speed was ridiculous, but the sheer volume of data was beyond Sal's comprehension. For every solution offered by Rochelle and Grant's research, it created five more questions that needed to be answered. A small part of him wondered if he had potentially asked Prime to calculate something impossible, and wondered if it would result in a never-ending logic loop until it bricked itself.

He wasn't proud of how quickly he navigated back to his list, hoping that his anxiety would melt away if he didn't look at the problem. Out of sight, out of mind. That's what Sal told himself as he focused back on the priority report.

- **Guild Manufacturing:**

- [Critical] [Bumble] Interior Design Research [Available]
- [Critical] [Bumble] Workflow Optimisation Research [Available]
- ~~[Important] [Administrator] Harvesting Station Research [Completed]~~
- [Important] [Realm Matriarch] Dungeon Restoration Research [Available]
- [Important] [Realm Matriarch] Dungeon Production Facility Research [Available]
- [Important] [Realm Matriarch] Dungeon Defensive Network Research [Available]

Of course it was more research requests. Sal approved all of them, hoping that the distraction would pull Prime's attention away from Rochelle's clusterfuck of data. Bumble wanted to be an Interior Designer, apparently. That was enough to earn a chuckle as Sal glanced through the other entries. Workflow optimisation made a lot of sense, and he wondered what the resulting efficiency would look like. It being labelled as critical was a chilling thought, though. If recreating buildings from scratch in a few days was deemed inefficient, Sal wasn't sure what Bumble would qualify as efficient.

Dungeon Restoration and Defensive Networks sounded great in theory, but Sal wasn't exactly sure what they meant. Rather than leaving it to chance and getting surprised or annoyed by the outcome, Sal tapped into it to get a better understanding. What he found was a trove of proposed improvements to the layout of the Dungeon Interior, including walkways, barrier-style partitions to funnel the Demons into kill-zones... and designating spaces for the Guild to recuperate safely. It was essentially a method to create Safe-Zones for combatants on each floor.

As for the proposed production facility? It was something similar to his own plans for the Death Net, where they could process the gathered raw materials within a protected space. Refineries sounded a lot more advanced than his original plans, and he couldn't for the life of him remember if he had seen any sorts of ores within the Dungeon. Was it just going to churn out essence-infused stone? The Scuttler Chitin bricks were likely on the menu, but Sal didn't want to think about those costs. Would it incorporate the Harvesting Stations to create some nightmarish demon chop-shop?

Sal had to do a double-take as he read the entry again, just to be sure that he was reading it correctly. It was such a ridiculous concept, and likely far more expensive than it had any right to be. If they were only using the materials from within the Dungeon to create it, then it wouldn't bother him as much. Safe Zones were the key thing to focus on, for both his guild and the drones. Giving the Realm Matriarch time to recuperate and build new offspring was also ideal.

- **Guild Recruitment:**

- [Staff: Healer Advisor] for [Rochelle DeVerdon] [Elina Lux]
- [Staff: Defence Advisor] for [Hannah Unruh] [Yasmin Darya]
- [Staff: Refiner] [2] for [Panacea's Crucible] [Rotation: Refiner 1]
- [Staff: Botanist] for [Panacea's Crucible] [Rotation: Anderson Royce]
- [Staff: Alchemist] for [Panacea's Crucible] [Rotation: Alexander Farrell]
- [Staff: Administrator] for [Legion System] [Paths] [Profiles] [Rewards]
- [Staff: Administrator] for [Dungeon Management] [Bounties] [Specialist Contracts]
- [Staff: Administrator] for [Commissions] [Contracts] [Team Management]
- [Member: Darren Lenihan] [Ability: Configure] [Protege for Vanessa Blake]

- [Member: Lucia Hernandez] [Ability: Configure] [Protege for Vanessa Blake]
- [Member: Derek Norman] [Ability: Reinforce] [New Team]
- [Member: Thorsten Valve] [Ability: Salvation] [New Team]

When Sal got to the end of the list, he was a little surprised to see that Prime was critical of the Elixir Machine's output. It was suggesting that they get another team dedicated to production to increase efficiency. Sal couldn't imagine that Alex would take that news well, and he had no real intention of having the machine operating overnight every night. Again, rather than assuming the worst, Sal tapped into the option to see the logic behind it, and was pleasantly surprised.

Those whispering flowers that Anderson created, were a ridiculously good fuel source for the Elixir Machine, since they actually generated more essence than they consumed. Apparently, if they kept those flowers on a rotation, they'd be able to operate the Elixir Machine around the clock. It was nice to know that Prime wasn't simply calling his team inefficient. Rather, his team had created a fuel source that improved the entire operation.

There were a few more surprises, like Darren being suggested along with Thorsten and Derek. Did Prime think that Lucia would decline an invitation, or was it saying they should try to take in both? A chuckle escaped him when he saw that Prime agreed with him getting some Administrators into the Guild to handle a lot of the busywork. Most of it was being juggled by his father, Upgrade and Vanessa... but having a dedicated unit for those roles wouldn't be the worst.

If Coach proved to be a good Scout, then maybe they'd be able to start picking up a few good people. Prime seemingly didn't know about Villa's transfer to the Guild, so he'd likely have to manually input that one. Maybe one of her team would be a good Defence Advisor?

"I found him!" Upgrade announced as she entered the Pantheon with Forge a step behind her. Judging from his expression, it was his first time in the space.

"Want to take a look around?" Sal asked him with a warm smile, gesturing to the Creation Engine first.

Forge nodded slowly, a rogue smile tugging at his lips. "Only if it's a guided tour."