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PROJECT NEW EDEN PART 4 – HOUSE VANDERSMYTHE: THE GILDED MANSION
by
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A dry wind rustled the fledgling stands of genetically modified trees that dotted Gilligan 4's rolling plains. Bright morning light shone on a half-finished estate rising from the soil—an ostentatious structure lined with gilded panels, sweeping marble steps, and regal arches. It looked more like a palace from a storybook than a home on a still-developing world.

In the center of this extravagance stood Vandersmythe, an imposing figure in lavish attire. His perfectly tailored coat was threaded with gold accents, proudly displaying the family crest: a stylized “V” cradled by laurel leaves. Around him, a cadre of sycophantic advisors—mostly inheritance managers and a few hapless aides—applauded his every declaration, no matter how outlandish.

“Isn’t it magnificent?” Vandersmythe crowed, gesturing at the estate’s sprawling façade. “Only I have the vision to blend architecture and environment seamlessly. People will say: *Vandersmythe truly understands this planet like no one else.*”

To the casual observer, it was plain that Vandersmythe had little real understanding of Gilligan 4's challenges. But his advisors offered only dutiful smiles. None dared mention his

infamous chain of business failures back on Earth—debacles that had each, ironically, been pitched as “unbeatable successes.” Inherited wealth shielded him from consequences time after time, allowing him to remain supremely self-confident.

A short distance away stood Vandersmythe Prime, the specialized liaison robot assigned to his House by Planetary Prime. Slim and silver-plated, it resembled a poised butler with integrated sensors. Nearby ROBU (Robotic Operators for Biome Upgrades) units hauled steel beams and fresh water canisters, while nimble DOBU units erected decorative arches. The entire building site buzzed with mechanical efficiency—except Vandersmythe’s flamboyant demands stretched resources thin and made the robots uneasy.

The day’s work began with a meeting on the mansion’s half-finished terrace. Vandersmythe lounged on a carved marble seat, sipping from a jeweled chalice of purified water—already a precious commodity on Gilligan 4.

“Vandersmythe Prime,” he announced, “I want more fountains. Grand fountains. Flowing water will cascade down these steps. Imagine the spectacle!” He paused to admire his reflection in a gilded column. “And gold plating on those upper spires. That’s essential, too.”

Vandersmythe Prime’s optical sensors flickered as it processed the request. “Sir, water resources in this region are carefully allocated. Planetary Prime indicates we must preserve the reservoir for agriculture and life support. Additional fountains may strain our supply.”

Vandersmythe waved a dismissive hand. “You worry too much, my good machine. I *know this environment* better than any overcautious bureaucrat. Besides, we just overcame Farnsworth’s meltdown fiasco, didn’t we? We’ll manage.”

A hush fell over the terrace. Even Vandersmythe's aides wore guarded expressions, recalling Farnsworth's ill-fated X-SuperRail demonstration that nearly destroyed the colony's power grid just days ago. Resources were scarce enough without another high-profile debacle.

Nevertheless, Vandersmythe's bravado remained unshaken. "Gold trim on the highest dome," he reiterated, "and double the water features. I have an image to maintain."

Despite the warnings, construction pressed onward. Each day, lines of ROBU units transported building materials from distant outposts, traveling newly built roads across the plains. Strong metal frames rose around the mansion, while DOBU robots applied decorative touches Vandersmythe insisted on:

- Polished tile floors imported from Earth's quarries (shipped at enormous cost).
- Ornate pillars carved in swirling designs, each inlaid with precious metals.
- Expanded fountains running through artificial channels that crisscrossed the estate's grounds.

The colossus of an estate swallowed up more resources than some of the colony's vital infrastructure projects combined. Water that could have irrigated farmland or supplied medical stations ended up cascading down Vandersmythe's elaborate waterfalls.

Periodically, Vandersmythe Prime tried to raise concerns about the local environment—thin soils, occasional seismic tremors, the need to reinforce foundations. But Vandersmythe brushed them all aside. "I've read more about environmental engineering than you realize," he boasted. "I inherited an entire library on Earth—my father was a brilliant tycoon, you know. I practically invented sustainable living in my previous ventures."

In reality, Vandersmythe’s “previous ventures” had mostly ended in scandal or bankruptcy. But his staff nodded faithfully, and the robot had no direct evidence to argue otherwise—only quiet data logs that predicted structural instability if the mansion grew any larger.

One morning, a transport rover arrived bearing Planetary Prime. The broad-shouldered, graphite-plated figure disembarked and surveyed the construction site with meticulous care. ROBU units paused to bow, and DOBU drones hovered to record data.

Vandersmythe greeted Planetary Prime with a perfunctory wave. “Ah, the big boss of the robots. Come to marvel at my architectural marvel, no doubt.”

“I am here to discuss resource allocation,” Planetary Prime replied, its voice even. “Your project is drawing heavily on water reserves and metals designated for colony-wide infrastructure. We urge caution. The environment on Gilligan 4, while improved, remains fragile.”

Vandersmythe laughed. “I’m well aware of your caution. But this mansion—my *Heritage Estate*—will become the colony’s cultural beacon. Future generations will thank me.”

Planetary Prime remained unmoved. “Your own assigned robot, Vandersmythe Prime, has flagged concerns about foundation stability. The underlying soil near this water table is not fully compacted. A seismic shift or storm could—”

“Nonsense.” Vandersmythe’s hand cut the air dismissively. “My father’s building advisors taught me plenty. A quake can’t topple a sturdy estate. Now, kindly refocus your units on finishing the gold spires. I’m hosting an unveiling in less than two weeks.”

Seeing no easy resolution, Planetary Prime gave a subtle nod of acknowledgment. It departed, leaving Vandersmythe free to continue his extravagance—though the robot’s parting words lingered: *A quake can’t topple a sturdy estate... if the estate is truly sturdy. And if the environment cooperates.*

In the following days, Vandersmythe Prime recorded a rise in small-scale tremors along a fault line not far from the mansion site. Though Gilligan 4’s tectonic activity was mild, the planet was not entirely geologically dormant. Vandersmythe Prime quietly requested a structural reinforcement to the estate’s lower foundations.

Vandersmythe read the recommendation, then pinned it to a gilded board in his makeshift office as if it were a trivial curiosity. “We’ll get to that if we have time,” he said. “Right now, my main concern is the waterfalls—can we double their flow for the unveiling ceremony? The crowd expects a spectacle.”

No matter how strongly Vandersmythe Prime urged caution, Vandersmythe insisted that quantity and opulence overshadowed prudence. The staff continued expansions, building decorative balconies, installing polished railings, and hooking up additional water lines. From a distance, the mansion looked almost magical in the planet’s orange sunlight. Up close, the magnitude of the project—and the corners cut to meet deadlines—grew more alarming every day.

Finally, the day arrived for Vandersmythe’s grand unveiling ceremony. Representatives from House Aurelia came with cameras and drones, hoping to broadcast the event as premium content. A few Redwood advisors showed up, half-rolling their eyes at the mansion’s

extravagance but curious nonetheless. Farnsworth was notably absent, still nursing his bruised ego from the X-SuperRail fiasco. Harrington sent a single aide, whose expression was guarded.

Vandersmythe had ordered every fountain turned to maximum flow. Water poured over tiered stone basins, shimmering in the midday sun. Gold spires gleamed. A small stage had been set at the mansion's entrance. Vandersmythe's staff ushered guests onto rows of plush seats. The entire front courtyard bristled with energy, the air filled with the roar of cascading water.

Vandersmythe stepped up to a podium, arms spread wide, basking in the attention. "Friends, fellow colonists, esteemed robots—behold the pinnacle of artistry and engineering on Gilligan 4. This estate will stand as a testament to my House's commitment to culture, nobility, and environmental harmony."

Behind him, Vandersmythe Prime stood rigid, scanning the structural data. Warnings scrolled across the robot's display. Cracks in the foundation had widened overnight. Water infiltration near the subterranean supports threatened stability. The local forecast even hinted at a possibility of strong gusts later in the day.

No one wanted to disrupt the ceremony, especially with cameras rolling. Yet a quiet tension ran through the crowd. The memory of Farnsworth's meltdown was fresh, and many wondered if Vandersmythe's show of confidence might similarly end in disaster.

Halfway through Vandersmythe's speech, the wind picked up. Dust swirled in mini-twisters across the plains. The fountains splashed more erratically, spraying the guests in the front row with water. Vandersmythe frowned but carried on, raising his voice over the gale:

"As you can see, the synergy of gold, water, and architecture celebrates the spirit of—"

A low rumble cut him off. It came from deep within the ground. Micro-tremors spread beneath the crowd's feet, rattling chairs. Vandersmythe Prime's eyes blazed with alarm.

“Sir, the foundation is shifting. We need an immediate evacuation—”

“No, no, nonsense!” Vandersmythe protested, but fear laced his tone. The rumble surged, intensifying. Structural beams groaned, and the grand entrance arch vibrated ominously.

CRACK. One of the massive gold-plated columns near the mansion's front gave way, snapping at its base. It toppled sideways, scraping along the façade, tearing chunks of marble and ornamental detailing. Panicked shouts erupted among the guests.

Water lines tore loose under the stress, causing a sudden gush that flooded the lower courtyard. Dozens of guests leapt onto their chairs or scrambled back. Vandersmythe Prime rushed forward, urging the people to move away from the building.

Then came the unthinkable: a large section of the mansion's upper floor collapsed with a deafening roar, sliding down into the courtyard. Dust and broken tile spewed everywhere. Metal supports and gold trim tumbled in a cacophony of shattered dreams.

Amidst the debris, Vandersmythe scrambled to higher ground, soaked by his own ruined fountain system. Vandersmythe Prime, assisted by a handful of DOBU and ROBU units, guided guests to safety. Aurelia's camera drones buzzed overhead, capturing every moment of the catastrophe.

Through the swirling dust, the once-majestic façade now sat half-sunk in rubble. Water from the fountain system gushed unrestrained, forming a muddy, chaotic mess. The mansion's grand unveiling had devolved into a literal collapse of Vandersmythe's ill-planned ambition.

As the quake subsided, the audience stood in shock, many drenched and coughing. Pieces of the estate continued to crumble, echoing against the plains. Vandersmythe, chest heaving, stared at the wreckage that had been his pride and joy. All that gold, all that marble—destroyed in seconds.

While rescue operations commenced, several DOBU units spontaneously gathered near a fallen column and began a ROBU DOBU chant. Their voices carried a sing-song, moralizing tone—somewhat incongruous amid the dust and chaos, yet poignantly fitting:

*“Ro-bu, Do-bu, the lesson rings true,
A golden façade can’t hold when storms brew.
Pride in your wealth, but ignoring the ground,
Castles on shifting plains soon tumble down!”*

A second verse chimed:

*“Heed your Prime’s data and Earth’s advice,
Or watch all your riches come tumbling—twice!
Might we suggest a humbler design?
Vanity’s cost can be truly unkind.”*

The guests, half-stunned, witnessed the robots’ musical reflection. Cameras from Aurelia House caught every syllable, broadcasting the comedic condemnation live. Vandersmythe sagged, unable to protest. He coughed out dusty air, speechless. For the first time, perhaps, he grasped the scale of his incompetence.

In the hours and days that followed, ROBU units worked tirelessly to clear debris and salvage any intact sections of the mansion. The site was declared a hazard zone; even partial

rebuilding would require extensive reinforcement—and a fraction of the resources might not even be recoverable. Water lines had to be capped, as the colony could ill afford such waste.

Vandersmythe hovered near the site in the disaster's aftermath, his usually flamboyant attire dirtied and torn. His aides tried to comfort him, but he brushed them aside. He glared at the rubble with haunted eyes. No snappy comeback could mask his humiliation now. The entire colony had witnessed his gilded mansion crumble under the weight of arrogance and disregard for Gilligan 4's realities.

Planetary Prime arrived to oversee the cleanup, standing beside Vandersmythe Prime. They made no pointed scolding. The destruction spoke for itself. Vandersmythe occasionally opened his mouth, perhaps to defend himself or deflect blame, but no words emerged. The facts were undeniable.

One evening, when most cleanup crews had retired, Vandersmythe wandered among twisted beams and cracked marble. His reflection caught in a fractured gold panel—once the pride of his estate. He saw himself disheveled, dust-caked, a far cry from the regal image he projected.

Vandersmythe Prime approached gently. "Sir, the main structure is unsalvageable. The best course is to rebuild with practical design principles—"

"Yes, yes, I hear you," Vandersmythe muttered. His voice was subdued. He turned to look at the half-demolished fountain system. "Perhaps... I overdid things." He exhaled, eyes flicking across the ruin. "My father always said fortune favors the bold. But I guess I was just... foolish."

It was the closest to a confession of error that Vandersmythe had ever voiced. He shut his eyes, grimacing at the admission. Hollow business triumphs, inherited wealth—none of it had prepared him for the unforgiving frontiers of Gilligan 4.

Vandersmythe Prime, bound by loyalty, simply offered a measured nod. “We can still work to build a new estate, sir. A sustainable one. If you’ll heed the data.”

A hush settled between them. Vandersmythe stared at the darkening sky, tinted in the planet’s orange twilight. Somewhere in the distance, a faint chorus of ROBU DOBU drones was finishing up a cleaning shift, still humming the last lines of a cautionary tune. For once, Vandersmythe heard the lesson rather than dismissing it.

Thus ended the dream of a gilded mansion that was to dazzle all of Gilligan 4. Instead, it joined the colony’s growing list of cautionary tales—like Farnsworth’s meltdown—that revealed how riches and self-assuredness could crumble under the planet’s stark realities. With each House’s downfall, the robots’ reverence for humanity was tested anew. Yet the robots carried on, ever hopeful that the lessons might eventually lead to a stable, thriving colony.

End – Part 4