

Mech 1671

Chapter 1671 Sandman Emperor

Zonrad paced behind the gunners with his back arched straight and his arms folded behind his back. His commanding demeanor caused them to be on their best behavior as they supervised the positron beam turrets.

Right now, an enormous swarm of sandman drones attempted to attack the flagship Archangel Battle Group.

Unfortunately, they were so weak that a single destroyer could wipe them all off the face of the galaxy!

The only reason why the sandman drones were allowed to approach the battleship to begin with was because the CFA needed to make a show out of crushing the sandmen.

Though the CFA did not really care too much about public relations, it didn't hurt to remind the space peasants who protected them at night.

The states that governed much of humanity could only play their games as long as the CFA remained vigilant and continued to fulfill its noble mission.

Lieutenant Zonrad Reze twitched a smile as he observed the performance of the positron beam turrets shooting down the sandman drones.

To deal with a swarm of small craft analogues, the Karaton Dwight possessed better means of wiping them out. If Admiral Teyrach wanted to, he could have just ordered the launch of a number of burst missiles to deal a huge amount of area damage!

Though the damage of these missiles was very dispersed, it was more than enough to wipe out billions of sandman drones in an instant!

Since this star system was the capital of the sandman empire, no one was surprised to encounter so much opposition.

In fact, they already expected something of this nature. From the beginning of this retribution mission, the Archangel Battle Group encountered far too little opposition.

The star systems under the control of the sandman race had been stripped to the bone. Every sandman leader that used to occupy these star systems were nowhere to be seen.

The exobiologists and other experts in charge of analyzing the sandmen made some conclusions.

Much of the sandmen had been sent to assault human space. This much was already obvious.

However, there was a significant possibility that a portion of their strength would be diverted to protect the sandman emperor.

The opposition the Karaton Dwight and her escorts faced proved this prediction right.

The sandman emperor apparently concentrated a huge amount of sandmen in this single star system. Evidently, it was smart enough to prepare for the inevitable response for its actions.

Unfortunately, it looked down on the CFA. Even if Admiral Teyrach dispersed some of the elements of the Archangel Battle Group to sweep through every sandman star system, what he brought to this location was enough to crush all opposition!

Zonrad stepped behind one of his subordinates and slapped the man behind the head.

"Straighten your back and pay more attention Mr. Johnson! We are making history here by crushing the center of the sandman empire!"

The gunner suppressed his fear and frustration towards his superior and straightened his posture.

In fact, Johnson had only slumped as much as anyone did when they sat behind a bank of terminals for over three hours.

It didn't help that the positron beam turrets didn't require their input. Monodwell automatically targeted the sandman drones and operated the weapons to shoot down swathes of them with unerring accuracy!

The gunners could never come close to matching the extreme accuracy and efficiency exhibited by this super intelligence!

Therefore, the spacers in charge of servicing and operating the positron beam turrets mostly stood by and allowed Monodwell to exert complete control over them during battle.

Naturally, the gunners could always override Monodwell's control the moment something anomalous took place.

Humans must always be in ultimate control of their own weapons. This was a basic principle that the CFA never forgot.

Zonrad and every other Fleeter did not expect the sandmen to be able to interfere with Karaton Dwight's state-of-the-art systems. Even if no human spacer manned their stations on the battleship, Monodwell would easily be able to take over their roles!

One of the gunners sneezed.

"Mr. Arzo!" Zonrad stormed over the offending spacer and slapped the man in the face! "Your conduct is unbecoming of a Fleeter! You have just earned yourself a demerit!"

He continued to watch over his men like a hawk, preventing them from relaxing during the entire engagement!

Though every spacer of the CFA enjoyed a lot of enhancements, it was impossible to treat them too extravagantly. None of them possessed the focus and concentration to remain attentive for over eight hours!

It took this much time to wipe out the sandman swarms orbiting the capital planet of the sandman empire.

Even Zonrad had begun to see this operation as a chore.

The sandmen were unimaginably weak. Though they had the power to overrun many third-rate states, their lack of development and intelligent direction wasted much of their potential.

The crude sandman drones never stood a chance of scratching the coating of the Karaton Dwight!

As the final tide of sandman drones met its end, the Karaton Dwight and her escort ships moved into a lower orbit of the capital planet.

The large, heavy gravity planet beneath the warships looked overwhelmingly barren at first glance. If not for the strange artificial-looking cubes, spheres and other geometric structures dotting the landscape, Zonrad might have mistaken it as a lifeless ball of dirt!

What happened next was out of Zonrad's area of responsibility. While the starboard positron beam turrets were able to fire upon targets on the surface, they weren't the best tools for the job.

This time, Admiral Teyrach evidently decided to speed up the extermination, because the Karaton Dwight and the other escort ships all opened fire with their kinetic cannons!

Instantly, the artificial sandman structures on the surface were wiped out from settlement to settlement!

With all of the warships in the star system splitting up the work, it did not take too long to demolish each and every settlement.

Finally, an enormous pyramid had been left for last. According to prior intelligence, the enormous, six-sided amalgamation of sand was the 'palace' of the sandman emperor!

The CFA expected the pyramid to lift up in the air to meet the Archangel Battle Group in battle.

The pyramid was so large that it would have forced the Karaton Dwight to resort to other weaponry if it joined the attacking sandman swarms!

Yet during the entire time the battle group wiped out the defenders, the sandman on the surface remained dormant and unmoving.

This strange pattern of behavior disconcerted Zonrad and some of his fellow spacers.

Was the sandman emperor really so stupid to leave itself defenseless against the CFA?

Zonrad didn't know. He wasn't involved with the affairs concerning the sandmen, and he hadn't bothered to read up on them because he knew they were too weak.

He graciously gave his men some reprieve, though only because his superior ordered him to rotate the shift.

In any case, most of the Fleeters long lost their excitement about destroying the capital of the sandman empire.

A weak opponent never excited them. This was because the Independent Evaluation System always rewarded the minimum amount of merits when bullying weak opponents!

Only by fighting the strong would the Fleeters be able to earn an abundant amount of merits!

No matter their backgrounds, the only way for them to augment themselves and rise up the ranks was by earning lots of merits.

With the Independent Evaluation System in place, those participating in battles always received the exact amount of merits they deserved.

His scowl deepened as he observed the final moment of the pyramid's existence.

Through the data presented by the terminals, Zonrad learned that every single grain of material consisted of an exotic substance.

Not a single piece of mundane sand or other junk could be found in the pyramid's structure.

The closer to the center, the greater the quality of materials.

Ordinarily, bringing so many energetic exotics together would doubtlessly lead to explosions, energy discharges and other anomalies.

However, the sandmen were somehow able to contain the effects of their own bodies and prevent the exotics from interacting with each other!

This was a very curious quirk about the sandmen, but sadly the CFA had already researched this property to death.

There was no reason to keep the pyramid intact. The abundant amount of high-grade exotics concentrated in the center did not attract their interest at all.

The sandmen emperor must be crushed, and it was better to do it sooner rather than later!

Once the Karaton Dwight orbited straight above the pyramid, the large structure finally reacted.

An enormous energy beam shot out from the top without any warning! The beam instantly crashed against the keel of the Karaton Dwight!

Such an energy discharge was enough to scour the life of an entire continent!

Even though the battleship endured an enormous blow, Zonrad did not even blink at this response.

It would have been strange if the sandman emperor did not strike a last blow.

Against an attack of this magnitude, the Karaton Dwight did not even bother to activate her shields or other active defensive measures. Her armor, which consisted entirely of high-grade exotics, was more than sufficient enough to resist this attack!

Once the energy beam pattered out, the stricken surface displayed no damage at all aside from some damage to the coating.

Even then, the coating automatically regenerated once the attack was over.

The sandman emperor failed to inflict any meaningful damage to the battleship!

"It's time to end this." Zonrad whispered in a bored tone.

After showing off her invincibility, the Karaton Dwight finally launched her counterattack.

A main cannon turret aimed downwards and targeted the pyramid. A huge projectile spat out from one of the ship-sized gun barrels without any warning!

The pyramid and the surrounding surface instantly blew up as the projectile thudded deep into the surface of the planet!

The enhanced defenses of the pyramid amounted for nothing against the awesome firepower of a battleship!

In fact, Zonrad already knew that the main cannon deliberately held back much of its damage. It only fired at a fraction of its power in order to launch the simplest and cheapest projectile.

The effect was already enough. The surface of the planet looked as if an enormous asteroid impacted the surface!

The entire heavy gravity planet underwent huge ecological changes due to this enormous impact!

If the Karaton Dwight had fired on a planet inhabited by humans, then the Big Two would have instantly condemned the entire battle group!

Such awesome power should never be directed against humans!

Of course, the Karaton Dwight already scanned the planet for possible human lifesigns. If the sandmen captured and brought back even a single living human, Admiral Teyrach would have never ordered his battleship to attack the surface so unscrupulously.

Now that the sandman emperor was presumed dead, the warships began to scan the entire planet down to its core.

A few small concentrations of sandmen managed to live, but none of them possessed the energy of a high caste member of their race.

There was no need to bother with cleaning up these remnants.

The CFA could just issue some missions to the space peasants to sweep up the remains of the sandman empire.

Just as Zonrad received an order to lock the positron beam turrets, an alarm suddenly screeched across the entire battle group!

The Karaton Dwight detected a huge amount of energy from the planet!

As Zonrad tried to make sense of what was happening, the planet exploded into pieces, turning into countless streams of sand that instantly approached the orbiting fleet!

The warships of the Archangel Battle Group instantly activated their defenses and discharged some of their main armaments!

However, there wasn't enough time to fire some of their main armaments! The planet was also far too close for the ships to launch their antimatter missiles and other planet-destroying weapons!

The streams of sand were not only vast and numerous, they also converged extremely fast upon the warships! Though the Karaton Dwight alone managed to diminish a third of the total mass of attacking streams, she simply hadn't been prepared to kill an entire heavy gravity planet's worth of sandmen!

Within just fifteen seconds, the seemingly-living planet succeeded in gulping the entire fleet in orbit!

Chapter 1672 Disgrace

Every human who watched the broadcast of the CFA warfleet witnessed the planet coming to life!

Not only that, they saw how quickly the enormous mass of sand and other substances engulfed the majestic battleship and her powerful escorts without being stopped!

Though the CFA's desperate, AI-driven counterattack managed to wipe out enough sandmen to constitute two standard planets, the sandmen had plenty left to complete their sneak attack!

"How could the CFA have failed to detect that the planet consisted entirely of sandmen?!" Miles Tovar wailed. "Their scanners are cutting edge! The sandmen are too primitive! Such a huge mass of sandmen should have never been able to hide their energy signatures!"

"Maybe you aren't giving the sandman enough credit." Ves replied in a muted tone. "Since the sandmen were willing to provoke our race, they should have been prepared for our response! We should never underestimate our enemies no matter how weak they appear!"

Though he looked numb, he was anything but unaffected. The huge reversal shocked him to his core!

Unlike most people, Ves instantly associated this massive trap to Sigrund!

Was this what the sentient AI prepared all these years since it escaped the Starlight Megalodon?

All Ves could say was that this attack was far too bold! Only an inhuman artificial entity like Sigrund would have the guts to target a powerful element of the CFA!

The planet managed to engulf an entire battleship and all of her escorts by virtue of its enormous amount of sandmen!

Ves didn't even know how the sandmen managed to form so many sandmen and sustain them all in a single place! The requirements to sustain so many sandmen and keep them in a dormant and undetectable state was unimaginably difficult!

The sandmen never exhibited such a high degree of sophistication! This was why Ves instantly concluded that Sigrund was the mastermind!

As a former super processor adapted to perform human research from the Starlight Megalodon, Sigrund doubtlessly possessed a high degree of mastery of human technology!

Not only that, the AI was intimately familiar with the CFA!

Perhaps Sigrund launched the entire sandman invasion in a gambit to capture a CFA battleship!

The thought of Sigrund gaining control over the Karaton Dwight frightened Ves out of his wits!

What was Sigrund trying to accomplish? Was he plotting the downfall of the CFA?

That was pure madness!

Even if the AI managed to capture a battleship, the counterattack from the CFA would doubtlessly be fierce!

It would be hard for Sigrund to hide all of its traces!

While Ves and everyone else remained horrified, the huge streams of sand piled up on each other and formed a new, diminished planet, encapsulating the CFA warfleet like a coffin!

"Is this the end?!"

"How could a mighty warfleet fall into a trap?!"

Several minutes passed as the onlookers observed the new planet with horror. Hardly anyone questioned why the broadcast kept running. A disaster like this should have compelled the CFA to cut off the feed.

While several people already started panicking for all kinds of reasons, Ves pushed down his speculations and waited for something to happen.

Eventually, the planet began to shake. Earthquakes started to form over the surface while energy escaped from the cracks.

Soon enough, the entire planet blew up yet again!

This time, the violent explosion was much more uncontrolled! A wash of energy vaporized or pushed out all of the sandman with incredible violence!

Not a single sandman managed to recover! The broken chunks flung away into space as not a single grain of sand managed to retain any signs of life!

In the center of the former planet, a familiar fleet reemerged.

Bright white energy shields enveloped the Karaton Dwight and all of her escorts, shielding them from damage! Thick lines of energy connected them together, appearing to spread the burden between all of the vessels so that no single shield risked getting overloaded!

"The warfleet is intact!"

Hardly anyone could have imagined that even the smaller destroyer class vessels managed to escape getting crushed by an entire planet's worth of sandmen!

As someone who understood the power and technology of the CFA a little better, Ves was not surprised the warfleet managed to survive this surprise attack.

Every CFA warship was built to withstand the toughest weapons employed by humans and aliens.

Even if the surprise attack managed to destroy the smaller escorts, a battleship like the Karaton Dwight would never have fallen so easily!

An outdated vessel such as the Starlight Megalodon was not as comparable as a modern battleship in terms of defense!

With the connected shield technology demonstrated by the CFA, it was no problem for the Karaton Dwight to lend its abundant defensive power to her escorts and vice versa!

The energy shields eventually flickered off, causing the ships to reveal their true appearances.

Compared to before, none of the vessels escaped unscathed this time.

Some of the destroyers showed some tears and deformations. A few compartments had doubtlessly been breached, which meant that the CFA had definitely suffered some casualties this time!

The cruisers were better off. Aside from some dents and missing surface modules, the hull armor of these warships mainly remained intact.

As for the Karaton Dwight, not a single imperfection marred her surface.

Ves sighed with envy. The power of a peak mech could not be compared to the might of a human battleship!

"Not even god mechs can match this performance!" Pachtold Tovar exclaimed.

"Idiot!" Cherie slapped Pachtold's back. "God mechs are unfathomable! According to the rumors, they have the ability to destroy a planet as well!"

"Nonsense!" Gilbert Tovar threw up his hands. "A mech can only hold so much power. Can't you recognize that the MTA deliberately hypes the power of god mechs? No god pilot can stand up to a battleship!"

Ves couldn't help but pitch in. "The true power of a god mech piloted by a god pilot is unclear. Technology is constantly advancing. What was true fifty years ago might not be true today. However, the same applies to modern battleships. Both god mechs and battleships are constantly getting better over time as long as humanity keeps innovating!"

The Tovars all fell into silence at his insightful words.

"Which side are you leaning on, Mr. Larkinson?" Miles Tovar curiously asked.

"From my limited experiences and understanding of mechs and battleships, I think they both have their merits. However, comparing the battle power of a single god mech to the battle power of a single battleship isn't necessarily useful. Think of how many god pilots are known to exist and think of how many battleships the Big Two managed to build over the years."

Every member of his design team looked uncomfortable.

Regardless of the might of these two weapon platforms, everyone knew that one was much less prevalent than the other!

It took an unimaginable amount of resources to construct a battleship. Practically the entire structure consisted of high-grade exotics with amazing properties!

Building a single battleship consumed as much resources as several first-class mech corps!

Nonetheless, these battleships lasted for centuries without a problem. As long as they received continuous upgrades, it was no problem for the CFA to field older battleship classes.

By drawing upon a portion of the gigantic amount of resources in human space, the CFA managed to build a considerable amount of battleships!

No one knew how many battleships and even larger warships the CFA managed to accumulate. Some guessed that the number surpassed a million, while some lowered their estimates to a hundred-thousand or less.

Regardless of the truth, there was no doubt that the CFA could easily protect the extremely lengthy borders of human space!

"The CFA can easily construct a thousand battleships in a matter of years." Ves spoke with certainty. "Can the MTA elevate enough mech pilots into god pilots in the same period of time?"

Everyone helplessly shook their heads.

The advancement of high-ranking mech pilots was always difficult. Only a small amount of lucky and talented mech pilots managed to take the next step.

Only around a hundred known god pilots existed throughout human space. It took four centuries to facilitate the rise of so few god pilots!

Even though mechs were rather new and immature compared to warships, no one believed the mech community would be able to boost their emergence rate!

Since everyone at the design lab were mech designers, they didn't want mechs to lose out against warships.

This time though, everyone felt relieved that Karaton Dwight managed to survive this disaster.

At the battleship, Lieutenant Zonrad Reze was barking out orders to keep his men busy.

"Inspect the integrity of every single component!" He shouted and gesticulated his arms in fury. "I'll have your hides if you have missed any damage!"

As an officer of the CFA, he was indignant that the sandmen managed to humiliate the Archangel Battle Group!

He knew that this action was being broadcasted to the public. To allow the space peasants to witness this disgrace was intolerable!

"We're lucky that we managed to salvage some of our pride." He muttered under his breath.

Conrad had no doubt that the Karaton Dwight would be able to endure an attack of this degree. This was one of the reasons why he wanted to serve on a battleship in the first place.

However, it was a very real question whether the smaller ships would be able to survive unscathed. The connected shield technology could only lend out so much protection at a time.

The eventual outcome was worse than he hoped. Some of the destroyers patrolling in the periphery of the formation received less protection than ideal, causing the sandmen to penetrate their shields to a modest degree.

"Monodwell, how many casualties have we suffered?"

[You are not privy to this information.]

"Tch."

It was worth a try.

"Monodwell, how have you judged my performance during this combat action?"

[You have demonstrated the pride and valor expected of an officer of the Common Fleet Alliance. Your calm and exercise of authority has made your section in one of the best-performing units of the Auxiliary Gunnery department. Since the current combat action has not yet concluded, the calculation of merits awarded for your exemplary performance is still forthcoming.]

"Huh?!" Zonrad scratched his head. "Please confirm, Monodwell!"

[Rest assured that you are 100 percent certain to receive merits and additional rewards, lieutenant.]

"This.." Hope began to well up in his eyes.

Zonrad was not entirely sure whether his conduct deserved distinction. He did not behave much differently than usual today. It was just that this time he faced a serious alien threat.

"This is it!" He hissed and grinned! "I'm no peacetime officer! As long as I'm in the thick of battle, I'll surely be able to vindicate myself!"

Only battle allowed him to rise up the ranks! This was the conclusion he reached after Monodwell informed him that he received a positive evaluation!

While nothing was set in stone yet at this point, Conrad did not doubt the super AI at all! Monodwell was completely honest and impartial! Its programming made sure that it was literally incapable of lying to humans! At most, it could only withhold information if the Fleeter lacked the necessary permissions.

"Monodwell! Keep an eye on me! I'll surely be able to prove myself again!"

[Please endeavor to commit your heart and soul to the glory of the Common Fleet Alliance!]

While Zonrad started to fantasize about his future success, back at Cloudy Curtain Ves switched off the projection of the broadcast.

"There's nothing more to see here." He spoke. "Although something unexpected happened, the CFA has succeeded in destroying the capital of the sandman empire. It won't take long for them to sweep the outlying star systems of the aliens, thereby causing the invading forces to lose long-term support!"

With the completion of the CFA's mission, every human pulled in the Sand War finally spotted a light at the end of the tunnel! The endless flood of sandman fleets must surely reach a limit at some point!

The question was how long the Bright Republic and other beleaguered states had to hold the line.

Chapter 1673 Prayer

No one knew how much control the sandman emperor exerted over his entire race.

Some believed the death of the sandman emperor would make the invading sandman fleets directionless.

Others suspected that the rest of the sandmen would continue to obey their instructions regardless of what happened to their highest leader.

Evidently, the latter appeared to be the case. Like cleaning bots that continued to clean up a house after their occupants had died, the sandman admirals continued to drive their fleets head-first into sandman space without any pause!

The jubilation from seeing the sandman empire meeting its end quickly made way for grim resignation.

The mission of the CFA only ensured that the flow of reinforcements would eventually stop. What happened until then was anyone's guess.

Ves already knew that the Bright Republic was enduring an unimaginable amount of pressure.

When everyone realized that nothing had changed, everyone soon forgot about the incident.

While the CFA managed to show off their might, it hadn't said anything about wiping out the sandman invaders assaulting human space.

The MTA was still in charge of defending the interior of human space. Even if the Association refused to discharge its responsibility, it would certainly object to the CFA intruding onto their turf!

For this reason, many people found it hard to care about the CFA's service.

Perhaps if the Big Two wouldn't have been so dismissive of the Komodo Star Sector if it was a lot more prosperous.

A few days after the fall of the sandman empire, Gloriana finally returned to work. While she didn't look as energetic as Ves had been accustomed to, she wasn't as tired as he expected.

"Gloriana! Have you settled in your new condition yet?"

She nodded and smiled at him. "I managed to find a way to cope."

They drew close and hugged each other for a moment. As Ves became enamoured by her scent, he discreetly inspected her spiritual state.

"Huh?"

Ves quickly concentrated some more in order to observe her mental state better.

The coy smile on his girlfriend's face showed that she already guessed what he was doing. She straightened her posture as if to preen herself in his view.

"This.. how can this be?" Ves gasped. "Your condition is much better than I expected!"

He expected Gloriana to require at least two months to recover after she exerted her energy to help birth their new spiritual product Bravo.

Although more than a week had passed, she still had a long way to go before she regained her optimal state.

However, in contrast to his expectations, her spiritual energy level had somehow recovered remarkably quickly!

He estimated that it would only take a month before her spiritual energy reached saturation!

That was an amazing accomplishment for someone who didn't possess a Grand Dynamo!

She wasn't able to exert conscious control over her spirituality! How could she have found a way to accelerate her spiritual recovery?!

"How.."

"Hehe." She drew back and wiggled her body in a teasing manner. "That's a secret~!"

Ves openly scratched his head. Did Gloriana possess a better aptitude in spirituality than him? Was that why her spiritual energy regenerated faster?

He wordlessly shook his head. From his extensive interactions with Gloriana, he firmly believed that she did not possess any remarkable ability in this aspect.

Though Ves felt very ambivalent about his mother, he was pretty sure he inherited her aptitude in spirituality. Out of every person he met, no one else besides his mother and himself could perceive and manipulate spiritual energy so adeptly.

That was not to say that no one else possessed this talent. He had seen some extraordinary applications from the Five Scrolls Compact or the groups affiliated with the cult.

Clearly, spirituality was something that was deeply intertwined with this secretive organization.

Still, as far as he knew, Gloriana was not a part of their lineage. She was a pure Hexer whose family line stretched back all the way to the original founders of the Hexadric Hegemony.

Unless the Hegemony was founded by the Five Scrolls Compact or something, Gloriana should just be ordinary in this aspect!

"Come on, Gloriana. Please don't leave me hanging."

She smiled wider and leaned in to peck his cheek. "You're so cute sometimes, Ves! You're not the only one who can come up with brilliant ideas."

"Let's head somewhere more private."

They entered an isolated office in the design lab in order to talk more freely.

As Gloriana made herself comfortable, she couldn't wait to gloat about her success!

"The truth is that I merely stumbled upon the solution." She began. "While I tried to busy myself with my studies and other activities, I'm not reconciled with my lengthy recovery time. It's unacceptable for me to be so tired and uninspired for months at a time, especially when we repeat our earlier miracle!"

Ves had already described and summarized what they did during the creation of Bravo. Gloriana pretty much made up her mind that what had happened was nothing less than a miracle!

"So you tried to find some way to solve this problem?"

She nodded vigorously, causing her hair to flutter. "Solving problems is what engineers do. As a mech designer, I've never resigned myself to a loss. There is always a way to overcome a problem!"

"What did you do, then?"

"Many things." She said. "I tried some hobbies such as cooking, flower arrangement, painting, piano practice and so on. That didn't go so well. Everything that I used to think of as fun now feels flat and boring. I was only going through the motions. Without inspiration, how can I enjoy any creative pursuits?"

"That makes a lot of sense. The exhaustion you are suffering from mainly impacts your passion and creativity. Any activity that relies on those traits won't interest you anymore." Ves concluded.

"I took a different direction. Since creative pursuits are no good, I tried to engage in my professional pursuits, mainly by reading a lot of academic literature and keeping up with the latest developments in the industry."

"Did it work?"

She shook her head. "Mech design is inherently creative, as you very well know. Even when I try to stay away from anything that strays too close to mech design, I can't avoid it. Mech design is all about exercising our vision and imagination to design a distinctive product. I can't divorce my desire to design a custom mech while I'm shoring up my expertise in mech locomotion or something."

"Maybe you need to tighten your focus." Ves suggested. "I didn't have much of a problem when I was in my low state back then. As long as you study something that is more abstract, you'll be able to divest yourself from thinking about mechs."

"I can't do that." She shook her head. "Everything I learn for my profession is about designing mechs. I thought you would be more like me. Are you really a mech designer, Ves?"

He glowered at her. "Don't joke around."

"Hihi! Just kidding! Anyway, after I tried and failed to get what I wanted from studying, I turned to something else."

"And that is..?"

"Hexism!"

"Uhh.."

"I'm telling you, it works! My faith has not forsaken me! In fact, it has saved me from wasting my precious time by languishing under this state!"

Ves was caught off-guard by her answer. How could her faith possibly make her recover faster? Did some kind of female god take a fancy to her when she was praying?

As a Brighter, he simply couldn't believe that the answer was so simple!

"Tell me how you managed to recover faster." He demanded with gritted teeth.

Despite making Ves crazy, Gloriana continued to smile coyly at him. It wasn't often that she managed to outsmart her boyfriend. She was enjoying this moment very much!

"Instead of explaining it to you, let me show you instead."

She briefly exited the office and received a box from Melody. After she reentered, she opened the box and retrieved a six-sided altar.

He recognized this altar. It was something that Gloriana sometimes prayed to at weird times of the day.

Each side of the altar depicted one of the six phases of existence described by hexism.

Life, death, godhood, damnation, dust, woman. Ves recognized each of these faces from the six facets of the miniature altar.

Gloriana often prayed to a specific facet of the altar according to some rules that Ves didn't even bother to understand.

"Hexism isn't what you think." She spoke after she read his face. She was becoming increasingly proficient in figuring out his thoughts. "We don't literally elevate the six phases of existence or treat them as exalted. It is more about paying respect to the truth of reality."

"And this 'truth' just so happened to place women on top of men." Ves sardonically remarked.

"Of course, Ves. This truth has been proven over and over again!"

Neither of them wanted to rehash their differences of opinion on this matter, so Gloriana quickly moved on and decided to proceed with her demonstration.

"Please don't disturb me while I pay my respects."

She retrieved a luxurious mat from the box and unfolded it on the floor. The mat was so high quality that Ves couldn't spot any creases!

She placed the altar on the mat and sat down on the other end of the surface in a cross-legged position. She calmly placed her hands on her hips and closed her eyes.

At this moment, Ves had the illusion that something exceptional was taking place. The air in the office grew stagnant. The stillness of the moment expanded to envelop the entire room, as if Gloriana's ritual demanded complete silence!

For the current session, she decided to pray in front of a small statue that depicted a crumbling monument.

This was the phase of dust, which in Gloriana's words described a state that was worse than death!

At least someone would still remember you when you died. When you reached the state of dust, no one remembers your existence anymore!

To Hexers, dust was one of the scariest and most unfathomable phases of existence. To avoid it, each Hexer strove to be remembered in some way. They pushed themselves to achieve something in their lives and strove to leave behind a legacy to be remembered for the ages!

Ves believed that this was one of the reasons why the Hexers had been unusually successful in founding a second-rate state in the Komodo Star Sector.

Gloriana's lips wordlessly moved as if she was speaking something. Ves wasn't proficient in reading lips so he had no idea what she was saying. He was probably better off not knowing either.

He instead tried to observe her mental and spiritual state. As she started to get more immersed in her ritual, Ves noted some abnormalities in her head.

Her spirituality had entered a different state! Just as Ves tried to guess what was going on, he no longer needed to do so because the answer was clear.

While the difference was small, with his sensitivity he immediately managed to detect a difference in how fast her spiritual energy recovered!

It was recovering at least fifty to a hundred percent faster!

After a bit of thought, Ves finally found out the truth.

Gloriana was meditating!

Through meditation, she entered a peculiar state where her mind and spirituality both became more in sync. At the same time, the clutter in her thoughts had temporarily settled down, causing her mind to become unprecedentedly clear!

Her entire mind focused solely on a small number of thoughts associated with her beliefs. Even emotions stopped affecting her state when her meditation reached a deeper state!

Ves was relieved that no gods or other external forces aided her in recovering faster.

She was purely relying on her own efforts to accelerate her recovery!

If he wasn't afraid of disturbing her mediation, he would have hugged her and thank her for coming up with this method!

Although it was useless to him now that he possessed the Grand Dynamo, her discovery solved a lot of problems related to her own use of spirituality!

Chapter 1674 Faithless

Gloriana spent around 40 minutes in meditation. Throughout the entire experience, she completely ignored Ves and anything else. It was as if she had completely closed herself from reality!

The extraordinary state of mind she achieved exuded a degree of solemnness and devotion that Ves had only witnessed from the most devout Ylvainans.

While he was aware that Gloriana had always been a strong adherent of hexism, she normally restrained this aspect of hers when she was with Ves.

However, now that Ves observed her earnest prayer or meditation up close, he realized that her faith was a much bigger part of her than he thought!

The sincerity that Gloriana displayed towards her beliefs frightened him. She was so devoted to them that her mind completely transformed into a different mode!

Ves utilized his perception to the fullest degree. He not only observed her from the outside with his spiritual senses, but he also borrowed from the induction of his dormant spiritual fragment which was orbiting Gloriana's design seed.

After patiently observing her wondrous state of mind, Ves somewhat figured out what was taking place.

The moment she began to meditate, she exercised some deep-rooted habits that cleared her mind of all distractions.

It was as if she had activated a couple of software programs in her mind!

These programs not only shoved all of her distracting thoughts aside, but also amplified her focus towards her faith!

She even started to forget herself. Her sense of self had diminished as if she naturally diminished herself in the face of greater beliefs.

There were plenty of other nuances at work, many of which seemed to facilitate the recovery of her spiritual energy!

Ves noted that her mind did not appear to be proficient in this aspect. Before, her spiritual energy levels had never been touched, which meant that her mind never had a need to improve this aspect.

Yet now, Gloriana was weaker than she had ever been. She instinctively sought to develop solutions to facilitate the restoration of her spiritual energy reserves!

All of this took place on an unconscious and uncontrolled level. If not for the lack of distractions, letting her mind manipulate her spirituality to this degree was extremely dangerous!

Spiritual energy was very potent and possessed remarkable properties. If misused, Gloriana could easily hurt herself!

This was why he possessed some scruples towards what Gloriana was doing. It was only by accident and coincidence that she managed to leverage her meditation to increase her natural recovery rate.

As long as she completed her meditation session, she would probably be okay.

However, any interruption might lead to a severe disruption of her current mental state. Ves observed that her mental balance was a lot more fragile than before!

Ves was not entirely sure how much damage she would incur if someone interrupted her meditation, but he was sure it wouldn't be light!

This was something that his intuition told him. Any thought about pulling Gloriana out of her meditation made his heart very restless!

Therefore, he patiently waited for more than half an hour before Gloriana automatically ended her prayer. Her lips stopped whispering silent words and her mind slowly turned back to normal.

The clutter of thoughts and emotions in her mind reasserted themselves. That was when Ves was sure that Gloriana returned back to normal.

She opened her eyes, revealing clear windows that completely conveyed her certainty and conviction in her beliefs!

"Do you see, Ves?" She smiled adoringly at him. "As long as you believe in something, you will certainly get closer to the truth that governs our lives!"

Ves automatically ignored her attempt to convert him to her faith. There was no way he would ever follow hexism as long as he was a man!

When Gloriana rose from her mat and took back her altar, Ves sat down on her place.

"Let me try something."

"Do you need me to return my altar?"

"NO!"

After Ves made his refusal clear, he began to imitate Gloriana and attempted to enter the same mental state.

He concentrated his mind and tried to rid himself of every distraction. It helped that he was already very practiced in this regard.

However, Ves quickly encountered obstacles. Emptying his mind of all thoughts and emotions fluctuated his mood in a way that he found very disconcerting!

This was not a natural human state! Ves felt as if he was hollowing out his humanity, leaving him as a soulless, immoral machine who only cared about executing instructions!

Normally, when Ves designed a mech, he never emptied his mind to this degree. The most he did was to shove aside his distractions instead of displacing them out of his immediate reach!

The thoughts and emotions he set aside weren't irrelevant when he was focused on designing a mech. They still played a role whenever he had a need for them! After all, his design seed intricately incorporated some of his thoughts and emotions when he initially advanced to Journeyman.

His humanity played a core role in expressing his passion in mech design!

Ves initially failed to comprehend how Gloriana managed to do anything productive while she was in this empty state.

However, he soon realized that her faith and beliefs served as vital anchors!

Realizing the answer, Ves tried to focus his mind on something that allowed him to take the next steps.

Unfortunately, nothing worked.

He first tried to 'worship' mechs. While he possessed a strong affection for them, he didn't necessarily elevate them into unfathomable existences.

His design seed became more active as soon as he tried to center his thoughts around mechs, which instantly caused him to abort this attempt!

While he was very dedicated towards mechs, he was too used to entering into a productive state, which was completely different from the extraordinarily empty state of mind that Gloriana adopted.

He tried to worship something else. He attempted to worship the Bright Republic, but his patriotism was very jaded. He could not summon much sincerity at all towards his home state.

He didn't give up. He tried to worship various other entities and concepts. He switched from worshipping the Larkinson Ancestor, humanity and the Milky Way Galaxy.

Nothing worked! He simply couldn't summon enough sincerity and devotion to worship something greater!

In his mind, his arrogance and confidence in himself had reached a very high level!

Even though Ves did not like to call himself a Holy Son of the Five Scrolls Compact, he knew that ever since he obtained the System, he was not inferior to anyone!

This kind of pride along with his secularist background made it virtually impossible for him to mentally diminish himself in front of other entities!

In an act of desperation, Ves attempted to worship two of his design spirits.

He first made contact with Ylvaine's spiritual fragment and attempted to devote his mind to it. However, the fragment instantly cut off the connection on its end as if Ves' prayers tainted its purity!

"Goddammit! Am I really that bad?!" Ves whined, causing Gloriana to look at him oddly.

In truth, he could guess why the spiritual fragment rejected his worship. He did not respect the fragment as a powerful entity at all. How could he when he literally took a tiny spiritual remnant and somehow managed to revive it into a strong and growing entity!

Though its strength was not comparable to when the spiritual remnant was locked inside Ylvaine's nutrient pack wrapper, Ves still placed himself above it as if he was its parent!

Since Ves essentially created Ylvaine's spiritual fragment, he decided to turn to a more powerful spiritual entity which Ves did not look down on as its creator.

His selection was very limited.

On one hand, he could try to worship Nyxie, the tyrannical alien spiritual entity that was locked inside the Ancient Sarcophagus.

On the other hand, he could try to worship Qilanxo, a Sacred God who had been literally worshipped by the degenerated descendants of the crew of the Starlight Megalodon for centuries!

Naturally, Ves instantly opted for the latter, especially considering that he possessed a very friendly relation to the former lizard.

He adjusted his posture on Gloriana's prayer mat and began to make contact with the powerful entity.

As soon as he did so, he began to feel the strength and richness of her radiant spiritual strength!

While she was merely the design spirit of the Aurora Titan, which didn't sell nearly as well as his Soldier product line, the quality of spiritual feedback was still incomparable!

Before he prayed to her, he communicated his intentions to her without obscuring his main motivation.

She replied with an amused emotion. It was as if she didn't think much of his prayers!

Ves was relieved that she allowed him to pray to her. Qilanxo used to be a creature who received a lot of worship from all kinds of people. She wasn't as picky as Prophet Ylvaine in this regard.

As Ves began to empty his mind and worship Qilanxo, the outcome he hoped for hadn't taken place.

Just like before, he didn't look up to Qilanxo as a greater entity! At most, he thought of her as an equal who was worthy of respect!

Not only that, but Ves instinctively felt that his prayers fell on deaf ears! Qilanxo remained completely unmoved by his attempts to grow closer to her on a spiritual level!

He wasn't sure why his prayers weren't being received. It actually didn't matter what Qilanxo thought about him. As long as he convinced himself that he was being sincere, he could sink himself deeper in his meditation.

It was too bad that he got stuck at the door without any hope of entering inside!

In the end, either his method was wrong, or unsuitable!

He couldn't replicate one of the essential conditions that Gloriana easily managed to attain!

"I can't do it!" Ves lamented as he opened his eyes and stood up from the mat.

"Of course you can't, Ves. You're faithless! As long as you don't recognize how small you are, you won't be able to surrender yourself to something greater! You've never prayed to something in your entire life, right?"

"I'm a Brighter."

"Exactly. Do you think it's easy for you to be sincere in your prayer? Like most Hexers, I learned how to pay my respects to the six phases of existence when I was young! I received instructions from fellow followers who are much more devout than me! A

layman like you can't comprehend the glory of praying with people who share the same beliefs!"

Ves sighed and lowered his head in defeat. "You're right. It was disrespectful for me to look down on your prayers."

In the end, he gave up on trying to imitate her achievements in meditation.

They were two completely different people in this regard. Gloriana's faith made her exceptionally suitable to rely on this method to accelerate her spiritual energy recovery.

As for Ves, he already benefited hugely from his Grand Dynamo. While he was essentially relying on an external object to address one of his shortcomings, the Grand Dynamo was simply too potent!

His spiritual energy recovered so fast that Ves did not have a very strong desire to develop an alternative means of speeding it up. At most, he would develop a backup solution in the event the Grand Dynamo stopped working for some reason!

With all of the work that Ves had to do, exploring this direction was a very low priority.

"Cheer up, Ves." Gloriana soothingly patted his back. "I can keep up with you to an extent! This is just the start! I'll definitely improve in the future!"

Both of them exited the office after a few hours. Strangely, Ves looked a little down while Gloriana appeared more energetic!

It was a complete reversal from before!

The pleasure exuded by Gloriana was so strong that she partially managed to overcome her mental exhaustion!

Chapter 1675 Hexagon

Gloriana benefited immensely from meditation.

The main advantage was that she could reduce her low period by accelerating her spiritual energy recovery.

However, Ves discovered that meditation conveyed another advantage.

For a few hours after a successful prayer session, she entered a clear-minded state where she was a lot more attentive and certain than before!

While her mental exhaustion continued to drag down her mood, the short-term benefits she gained from her prayer session was enough to mitigate her negative state!

This meant that she was able to work a lot more closer to normal than Ves anticipated!

While she was still lacking in creativity and imagination, she at least managed to restore some of her passion!

That was enough to make their collaborations more pleasant. There was nothing worse to Ves than working alongside a mech designer who wasn't as passionate as him in developing mechs!?

Fortunately, Gloriana's method successfully prevented this potential conflict and allowed them to work more harmoniously.

Of course, Gloriana was also self-conscious enough to let Ves take the lead. Right now, they still needed to pool their strengths together to make the Deliverer design more flawless and complete.

While Ves could easily complete the Deliverer design by himself, the lack of synergies would make the design a lot less potent than he initially envisioned.

Since the Deliverer was his most important statement of the year, Ves wanted to make his passion project as successful as possible!

He cared so much about this project that he unconsciously adopted some of Gloriana's perfectionist tendencies!

"The Deliverer has to be able to end the Sand War in one fell swoop!"

This was his ultimate ambition. As long as he could borrow Gloriana's strength, he possessed a lot of confidence that he could fulfill his vision!

Unfortunately, Gloriana wasn't able to persist in her temporary state for long. After two or three hours of intensive work, the boost of energy she gained from completing a prayer session had faded.

This turned her into a lethargic work partner. Everytime they tried to do something together, Ves felt as if Gloriana was dragging his heels.

Neither of them liked to collaborate in this awful fashion.

"I'll go supervise the testing of the Adonis Colossus." She suggested with a tired smile. "I'm clearly not fit to add anything to the Deliverer design in this condition."

Ves raised his hand and patted her head. "Don't look so down. You're in a much better condition than I used to be when I exhausted myself."

"Is there a way to avoid this state entirely?" She asked. "Don't think I haven't noticed what you are doing with those so-called P-stones of yours. They're repositories of energy, right? Can't you just give me one of those exotics and teach me how to deposit some of my energy into it? As long as I have a battery on hand, I don't have to exhaust myself again!"

Her suggestion surprised him a bit. Though he hadn't hidden what he was doing with his P-stones, he didn't exactly explain much either. For her to figure out the potential uses of the P-stone was pretty clever!

While Ves wanted to keep his P-stones to himself in order to accumulate as much excess spiritual energy as possible, he already gathered more than he needed for most applications.

Diverting a single P-stone for Gloriana's use brought him a lot more benefits than increasing his already-abundant reserves.

"That's a good idea." He responded. "Only, we'll have to wait until you return to your peak condition. You're in no state to build up a reserve when you still have to take care of yourself."

"I understand. While the energy you're manipulating is very divine in nature, it still obeys some conventional rules! We can still treat it like regular energy in some ways!"

This was the engineer in her speaking. Ves approved. She needed to develop the mindset that she could comprehend and control spiritual energy in order to make active use of it. Even if she wasn't as talented as him in manipulating it, he still wanted her to develop more tools.

The more tricks she mastered, the more she elevated their collaborative design projects!

Helping Gloriana was like helping himself. Since his own interests were at stake, Ves did not mind lending her a hand!

Of course, he wasn't willing to sacrifice his own growth for hers. He also didn't want her to grow too fast. It would be a tragedy for him as a man if Gloriana advanced to Senior first!

"By the way, Ves, we haven't properly talked about your third eye yet." She pointed at the head of the Deliverer projected by the terminal.

"You didn't object to it, right?"

She nodded. "My opinion hasn't changed. I think it's a fine way to express the strength of your design philosophy. I like how it's more than just a simple ornament. I'm curious

how the market will perceive the variable glow and vapor of this third eye. I hope they recognize its mystical nature!"

"Likely, only religious states such as the Ylvaine Protectorate will see something more in the third eye." Ves shrugged. "As for the Bright Republic, I know my home state well enough that consumers will dismiss it as a flashy but meaningless component."

It didn't really matter to Ves. Regardless of consumer attitude, the third eye was still distinctive enough to serve as his signature look. That was the most basic function it was supposed to fulfill.

Anything else was extra. That the more faith-minded people interpreted the third eye in a different way was not his concern.

Making the third eye reactive to the X-Factor and the connection between the mech and mech pilot was just a creative exercise to him. He would only explain its true significance to his Avatars and most trusted mech pilots.

"I think it's time I develop my own signature look as well." She spoke. "I've been holding it off because I usually like to customize every aspect to the needs of my customer, which makes it difficult for me to add a universal element to my products."

"Will this be a problem?"

"I don't want to be left out on this! How can I take credit for collaborating on a mech design when only you add your signature look to your products?! It will give consumers the mistaken impression that I'm only a contributing designer instead of a lead designer!"

Only the lead designers had the right to add their signature looks to their mechs. This was a long-standing unofficial custom in the mech industry.

A mech design represented the design direction of the lead designer. They held the ultimate decision on what to add to a mech design.

As for contributors, while their input was certainly valued, they didn't have the power to impose their own views on the design. It was inappropriate for them to add their own signature looks to a mech which only represented a small portion of their style.

"What signature look have you settled upon? Did you come up with it recently?"

"It's something I've thought about long ago." She smiled. "You don't have to be afraid that I came up with a feeble idea during my low period. I only adapted it when I found out that you settled on a third eye."

She didn't explain any further, but instead stepped to the terminal and loaded up a predesigned addition from the databanks.

Under her efforts, the head of the Deliverer design underwent a cosmetic alteration!

Ves saw that some glowing lines surrounded the third eye placed in the forehead of the mech. They formed an elegant hexagon made out of the same crystal material as the third eye!

The hexagon possessed many strange associations. Surrounding his third eye with a hexagon added an occult quality to the mech!

He became speechless for a moment. For Gloriana to adapt her signature look with his own was a very powerful statement!

How could he not be blind to the meanings of her hexagon?

To make her signature look complimentary to his own conveyed the meaning that they were destined to work together! Their signatures wouldn't look nearly as complete if one of them was missing on their mech designs!

The hexagon shape was also a deliberate choice on her part. It expressed her identity as a Hexer and her devotion to hexism!

While the hexagon was just a curious geometric shape in most parts of the galaxy, it conveyed a very different meaning in the Komodo Star Sector.

Every hexagon was inescapably associated with the Hexadric Hegemony!

Adding a hexagon to a mech was therefore very polarizing! Not a lot of people liked the Hexers. Ves could be sure that if he assented to this addition, his products would probably repel a lot of customers!

"Are you sure about the hexagon?" He asked. "It's not really unique enough to turn it into a distinctive aspect of your brand."

A part of him wanted to dissuade her of adopting this controversial shape as her signature look.

"I'm very sure, Ves. You don't necessarily know this, but a hexagon is a common signature of Hexer mech designers. It's a way of asserting the common identity of our mechs as Hexer mechs!"

In other words, the hexagon surrendered the opportunity for a mech designer to develop a personal brand in order to join a shared Hexer brand!

"Isn't a hexagon too simple? It only consists of six lines."

"That isn't necessarily bad, Ves. It's easier to perfect something simple than to perfect something more complicated! The hexagon is already the most perfect geometric shape! I'm proud of adopting it as my signature look!"

He eventually decided to accept her signature look. While he wasn't exactly keen on reinforcing his association with Hexers, it was impossible to hide Gloriana's role in designing his mechs.

He might as well make the truth more clear to his consumers. This was what a transparent mech designer ought to do. Ves possessed enough principles to abide by it despite the substantial price he paid.

Ves had already retreated his intention to continue to serve the masses. He was much more passionate about designing niche, premium mechs which offered unequaled advantages!

Since he wasn't maximizing his sales, he didn't feel much pain in reducing the demand of his products yet again.

He was confident that the unique strengths of his products was enough to attract enough demand to run a profitable business!

If not, he could always step out of his comfort zone and design a mech for the masses.

Sometimes, it wasn't necessarily good for a mech designer to pursue passion projects all the time. Without keeping in touch with consumer demand, they would eventually grow out of touch with the mech market.

Ves couldn't afford to diverge his vision too far. However, he did not wish to compromise too much just so that he could earn a lot of money.

His progression mattered more than his wealth!

However, he didn't forget that wealth was still extremely important to him! Not only did he need enough money to sustain his growing organization, he also needed to accumulate enough money to form his expeditionary fleet!

Ves therefore fell into a difficult position where he needed to balance out his passion and his practical needs.

Fortunately, he still had some years to go before he needed to leave the star sector.

Gloriana was very happy when Ves accepted her hexagon. She was aware that the hexagon would not be well-received in states like the Bright Republic.

However, the hexagon was too significant for her to ignore. Her strong prayer sessions already demonstrated how devoted she was to her beliefs!

Perhaps allowing Gloriana to add hexagons to their mech designs would improve the efficacy of her prayer sessions.

Certainly, her happiness already boosted her mood!

Ves to set aside his worries. Making her happy was already a reward in itself!

Chapter 1676 Lower Surprise

The prototype of the Adonis Colossus stood silently in the workshop attached to the LMC's spaceborn testing grounds.

Due to the sandman fleet that continued to play hide and seek with the Light Hounds, it wasn't entirely safe to test mechs in space.

This was because the testing ground in space was situated right besides an asteroid belt!

With too many Living Sentinels diverted to the frontlines and the system defense force, there weren't enough mechs to protect this facility.

For this reason, the prototype testing had to take place on land and in closer orbit of the planet. While this was a little inconvenient, the Adonis Colossus was not a difficult mech to test.

Some of the most difficult and nuanced aspects of a mech was its mobility. It took a lot of complicated props to adequately test a mech's mobility, especially under fire.

Fortunately, the hybrid mech was basically a sledgehammer in mech design. It possessed a high degree of firepower and defense and sacrificed a considerable amount of mobility to gain these advantages.

The piloting requirements of such a mech was lower as well. The mech pilot wouldn't have to devote too much attention on controlling the movements of the mech.

The basic role of the mech was to withstand a lot of damage and dish it out in return.

It also had to look good while doing that. The ostentatiously masculine appearance of the mech all met the needs of the client.

Ves stepped forward while Lucky lazily hung on his shoulder.

"Meow."

"I know. This is definitely one of the more tasteless mechs I've designed."

The belt-like codpiece that Gloriana designed may have saved some of their dignity, but it was still an attention-grabbing feature.

The muscle definition that defined the mech's front torso enhanced the mech's pronounced masculinity.

In fact, Ves had a sense that the masculinity of the mech was so exaggerated that it inspired ridicule instead of admiration.

Of course, Ves and Gloriana made sure not to make this aspect too obvious. The client had to be happy with the product, after all. He felt no guilt at all in deceiving a bastard like Vincent.

Gloriana walked up next to him while cradling Clixie. "This mech will be much more impressive once we build the final version. I can't wait to see our client's response!"

In order to make the first fabrication attempt as significant as possible, Gloriana insisted on letting others fabricate the prototype.

Even though Ves and Gloriana both identified a number of production flaws, they weren't significant enough to impact the test results.

It was still a bit uncomfortable to them. Gloriana especially had to rein in her compulsion to pick up some tools and fix the most obvious faults!

Ves reached out with his spiritual senses to explore its inherent spiritual foundation.

Without a design spirit, the System would probably grade the X-factor of the mech as C++ or something.

Due to his research direction, Ves came to rely on external spiritual entities to power up his mechs.

This made him neglect the spiritual foundation, which was an inherent quality of any of his products. It was part of their own strength, which meant that removing the design spirit from its position would not leave his mechs completely lifeless.

Of course, this was not the primary role of the spiritual foundation. It's main purpose was to facilitate the connection between the design spirit and the mech designs. If the spiritual foundation was weak or incompatible, the design spirit wouldn't be able to maintain a strong connection.

While Ves hadn't substantiated some of these guesses yet, he was pretty sure about his judgement.

Up until today, Ves still didn't fully know the rules governing design spirits and spiritual foundation.

That didn't stop him from fumbling around and taking advantage of his new discoveries. If he wasn't daring enough to experiment with design spirits, how could he have made so many achievements?

Therefore, despite the fact that relying on external design spirits was rather troublesome, Ves did not give up on his current direction. The most he would do was to nudge it in different directions to increase his versatility.

After he finished his inspection, he retracted his spiritual senses and evaluated the prototype on its technical merits.

By now, the prototype had already accumulated some signs of wear and tear due to being subjected to some intensive tests.

"It's a shame that this prototype is so expensive." Ves winced a bit. "Even if we can recycle most materials, some of the exotics will still lose their potency."

The Adonis Colossus cost as much as twenty Desolate Soldiers! The quality and specs of the custom mech was incomparable to the budget mechs.

Of course, that didn't mean the Adonis Colossus possessed the power to crush twenty mechs. It could only defeat a couple of mechs at a time.

"Miaow!"

"Hm?" Gloriana looked down on her pet, who squirmed from her grasp and headed for the exit of the testing ground.

"Meow!"

Lucky followed suit and padded after the organic cat!

"Don't mind them, Gloriana. Clixie is disgusted at the mech."

She frowned. "How so?"

"She says it carries the scent of a deplorable person."

"Oh. Well, it's true."

Clixie was no ordinary pet. Ves did not underestimate the ability of the Rubarthans to develop an exotic breed. It was just that Clixie always acted like a proud and spoiled housecat in their presence.

Ves was very curious what a Rubarthan Sentinel Cat was capable of. For this breed of designer pet to become the favored companions of little girls in the New Rubarth Empire, it was probably capable of killing assassins!

He found it rather strange that Clixie stated that the prototype of the Adonis Colossus carried a foul scent. As far as he knew, Clixie did not possess the same type of nose as Nitaa.

Did she possess spiritual potential?

No. Ves played with Clixie often enough to detect that she lacked this quality. She was just a sentient cat.

The two spent some time on inspecting the integrity of the mech. They paid particular attention to the armor plating and the weapon systems. Vincent would have to rely on both of them to fight the sandmen.

Fortunately, their inspections matched the earlier scans. The mech did not show any signs of premature failure due to faults in the design.

Delivering a defective product was a big taboo in the mech community! This was especially so for custom mechs!

"There's something missing on this mech." Gloriana frowned in thought. "Ah! It's missing our signature looks! Without them, this mech doesn't fully express our identity!"

"Uhh.. I don't think Vincent appreciates our signature looks."

"Why not, Ves?"

"Vincent is a client who is very particular about the image his mech conveys. Adding a third eye to the Adonis Colossus has the potential to ruin its masculine appearance. It might instead make it look like a freak! As for the hexagon, I don't think Vincent will appreciate a brand that is highly associated with Hexers on his mech."

Gloriana innocently blinked. "I don't see the problem."

"It directly clashes against his preferences! Do you know how he would feel if his proud, masculine mech carries the mark associated with female supremacists?"

Ves was sure that Vincent would blow up as soon as he saw the hexagon!

"I can't stand leaving out our symbols! I still want to add them to the Adonis Colossus! Our signature looks are meant to promote our product identities starting from the new generation! Making an exception right away is extremely grating!"

After a quick discussion, they decided to compromise.

"Let's add our signature looks to the mech in a way that isn't immediately obvious." Ves eventually suggested. "We can place it in the cockpit or place our marks on the back of the mech."

Gloriana grinned. "I have a better idea!"

She activated her comm and activated a design program before loading in a schematic of the design. She temporarily peeled off the broad V-shaped codpiece from the mech and began to add his third eye and her hexagon at a very sensitive spot!

"This.." Ves was speechless.

Once she tweaked the placement and size of the additions, she added back the codpiece which covered them from view!

"I call this the lower surprise!"

Ves scratched his smooth-shaven skin in shock. "Gloriana... your humor is much more wicked than I thought!"

"Hihihi! I can have some fun too, you know!"

"Isn't this a violation of our responsibilities, though? If Vincent finds out that we added something extra to the lower portion of his mech, he will not be pleased."

"Relax, Ves. Few people should inspect our mech design in detail. In the schematics, the codpiece will conveniently block the addition of our signature looks."

"What if an enemy shoots the codpiece into pieces?"

Gloriana smirked. "If there is one thing I can say about boys like Vincent, it's that they would rather die than get shot in their lower parts!"

Surprisingly, Ves agreed with her assertion! He could very well imagine that Vincent would do anything to avoid getting his manhood shot!

Though it wasn't entirely proper to prank Vincent with this peculiar design change, Ves and Gloriana already bent some rules. It was no big deal to bend the rules some more.

The fact that Gloriana took the initiative to act playful at work was a sign of progress in his eyes.

He did not think it was a good idea for her to remain stiff and exacting in her work. Making her more flexible and adaptable like him was much more preferable.

"This mech is missing something else I think." Gloriana pressed her finger to her lips. "I just can't quite figure out what. I still haven't recovered yet, or else I would have been able to come up with an answer by now."

"This mech is still missing its most essential spiritual component."

"I know that, Ves, but there's something else about our work that doesn't seem right."

Ves puzzlingly looked up at the tall and expensive machine. As far as he knew, it did what it was supposed to do, and pretty well at that. While the custom mech was not as capable as the Transcendent Messenger or the Loquacious Raphael, it possessed its own strengths.

"I know!" She gasped! "A cape! A rich, red cape that conveys the full majesty of this mech! Isn't that what you added to Vincent's first custom mech?"

Ves grimaced. "Yes. I hoped that all of you would have forgotten about it, though. Adding fabric to a mech isn't exactly the best idea. It's especially foolish to do so when the mech is meant to withstand a lot of laser fire. The cape will surely end up in tatters by the time a battle is over!"

"I really think you should reconsider. Instead of adding a cape made out of fabric, why not make use of the Rescue Particle Generator that you like so much?"

That was actually a decent idea. Making a cape out of glowing red vapor particles would enhance the stature of the mech while preserving its dignity during battle. This was because as long as the additional module remained intact, the cape would not incur any damage!

Ves borrowed the active design suite projected by her comm and quickly added the particle generator. He tried to program the module to project various fluid red capes.

"The cape isn't big enough." Gloriana shook her head. "Don't forget that this mech is supposed to inspire the public. It won't be able to do that if the mech and its cape isn't distinguishable enough in wide-angle battle footage where there is a lot of clutter in view."

"How big do you want to make it, then?"

"Vincent is a very insecure boy, so he needs an extra-large cape. How about this!"

She manipulated the interface and stretched out the cape to an exaggerated degree! It was so long that it partially made the Adonis Colossus look like a snake!

"It looks as if Vincent is overcompensating for something if he pilots this mech!"

"Exactly! According to my understanding of his personality, he should definitely love this addition!"

Chapter 1677 Crumbling Infrastructure

The Sand War escalated to a point where the Bright Republic's infrastructure constantly came under threat.

The pressure exerted by the sandman invaders hadn't faded at all after the CFA warfleet killed the sandman emperor and demolished the capital of the sandman empire.

Like bots following their programming to the very end, the sandman admirals constantly drove their fleets into human star systems and did not hesitate to fight unwinnable battles!

The lack of self-preservation exhibited by the remaining sandman leaders cast a very dreary cloud over the Bright Republic.

If they faced a human opponent like the Vesians, then the war would have ended by now. No one liked to wage war where the price was higher than the cost.

Only the sandmen, who did not appear to value their lives at all, were crazy enough to drive their race to extinction!

With the fall of several important resource-providing star systems in the Bright Republic, it became harder and harder to produce mechs and high-quality war materiel.

Critical exotics which many mech models depended on suddenly came in short supply.

The Mech Corps requisitioned many of the remaining sources of exotics, thereby squeezing out the private sector in order to meet their own needs.

Not a single mech company could offer an objection. The Mech Corps had to be reinforced with mechs and supplies above all else!

Most of the production facilities that used to mass produce mechs had already started transitioning to producing starfighters and lesser goods.

Unlike military mechs, the starfighters were deliberately designed to incorporate as little exotics as possible.

A lot of star systems were capable of supplying large amounts of common metals such as titanium, palladium and transuranic alloys.

It was just that the exploitation of these common materials had always been enough to meet the daily needs of consumers and producers of the Bright Republic.

Now that the production of starfighters became a priority, many mining companies explosively expanded their operations.

Even the LMC received the offer to produce starfighters, though so far Ves rejected it because there was still enough demand for his Soldier mechs.

"While it's not economical anymore to produce your Soldier mechs at the Mech Nursery, that isn't the case for our newly-built manufacturing complexes in Bentheim." Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson reported. "Even if we are pretty much breaking even, the Bright Republic will never have enough Desolate Soldiers, Proudful Soldiers and Peaceful Soldiers."

"How much control do we have over our assets in Bentheim?" Ves frowned. "I'm not there, after all. I'm worried if someone harbors some ideas."

"Don't worry. We've already transferred a lot of personnel from Cloudy Curtain to Bentheim. Their loyalty to the LMC is still strong. I decided to transfer Calsie to our branch office to ensure the branch managers are kept in check."

"That's a good decision. I have faith in Calsie's loyalty. What about the security issues?"

"Due to the war, we haven't been able to transfer a sufficient amount of Living Sentinels to cover the full security needs of the new complexes. However, the risk of attacks should be very low because martial law has recently come into effect."

"What?!" Ves raised his head. "That will definitely impact the local economy!"

"Bentheim is already suffering from the drop in trade and production. Life can't go back to normal unless the sandmen stop flooding the Bentheim System with their fleets!"

Ves did not dare to underestimate the impact of these changes. Bentheim loomed so large over everyone's heads that even a minor shift was enough to stir the rest of the Bright Republic!

"What about the Holy Soldiers?" He asked, wanting to shift the topic away from his home state.

"The production of Holy Soldiers is fully in the hands of the Ylvainans. There are already enough of the mechs to meet their needs, so the Protectorate is simply stockpiling our mechs in preparation for a long slog."

"I see."

Though the Ylvainans exhibited a lot of appreciation for his Holy Soldiers, they weren't irrational enough to neglect their other needs. Defeating the sandmen came first. Indulging in their spiritual needs came second.

Raymond patiently explained the LMC's position in every significant mech market.

"The Reinald Republic is surprisingly holding on, though it has already lost half of its territory."

"Oh?" Ves raised his eyebrow. "How have they managed to persist?"

"What is left of the Reinaldan leaders have made huge concessions to the Vesia Kingdom and other states. While we aren't privy to the exact details of their deals, it's possible Reinald has already been carved up by its neighbors!"

"Good riddance." Ves sneered.

Whatever was happening in Reinald, the influx of foreign reinforcements from as far as the Sentinel Kingdom managed to stabilize the dire situation, if only barely.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from this briefing was that the production of LMC mechs by third-party manufacturers would soon come to an end.

"The sandmen continue to disrupt the supply of raw materials." Raymond concluded. "Even the states that aren't under attack have already reduced their exports in order to meet their own needs. Aside from the few states that are a little short on Desolate Soldiers and Proudful Soldiers such as the Vesia Kingdom, we have already sold enough mechs to satisfy the most acute demand for our products."

The LMC had quickly sold over a million mechs in just half a year!

This was a stellar accomplishment that was enough to enshrine a mech company! If not for the Sand War, Ves was tempted to hold a formal celebration.

As it was, the survival of the LMC in the Bright Republic couldn't be guaranteed at this point.

"Is there anything else that needs to be brought to my attention?"

"Aside from the usual friction with the government, no." Raymond replied.

"What about the Light Hounds. Are they still sniffing around in the local asteroid belt?"

"We haven't been able to gain any intelligence concerning their activities, including how much progress they made in hunting down the hiding sandmen."

The continued presence of two-thousand military mechs in the Cloudy Curtain System continued to worry Ves. Why were they taking so long to root out the hiding sandman admirals?

Though the rest of the locals celebrated such a strong military presence, Ves wanted the mech regiment to return to Bentheim as soon as possible.

"If that's all, I'll be heading down to my workshop. The time has come to finish my commission."

"To be honest, Ves, the war has progressed faster than any of us expected. The former members of the BLM are already fighting hard for their homes. The role of an individual celebrity is extremely limited."

"Regardless of that, I still have a job to complete."

Not only the Adonis Colossus, but also the Deliverer might arrive too late to fulfill its function.

Ves couldn't help it. Designing a mech required time. While he wasn't insensitive to the need for haste, he deeply objected to breaking his principles in order to rush his mech design.

At its current state, the Deliverer would only perform seventy to eight percent as well as Ves desired.

While that was already enough to make a critical difference in the war, Ves did not wish to publish a flawed and incomplete mech design in his name!

Of course, when the fate of the entire Bright Republic might be at stake, his decision weighed increasingly heavier on his heart.

He shook his head. "Maybe I'm being too conceited here. How can a single mech design change the entire course of the war? I was already lucky enough with the Desolate Soldier."

While the news from the front sounded bad, the Bright Republic was still hanging on for now.

When he reached the lab and workshop floor, everything had been prepared for the upcoming fabrication session.

The LMC had already disassembled the prototype of the Adonis Colossus and recycled all of the materials.

While it was more convenient to keep the parts of the prototype intact, Ves and Gloriana never considered such a lazy option.

To them, the custom mech had to be built from the ground up in one single session. This was what a custom mech deserved, especially one with a high price tag.

Gloriana already awaited him at the workshop. During this time, she meditated at least twice a day, accelerating her recovery to the point where she was already halfway towards returning to her peak.

"Ves." She greeted him while holding Clixie. "I'm just waiting for the right time to pay my respects. You go do your things in the meantime."

"Alright. Let's make sure to get everything done within the next few days."

The Adonis Colossus was a hefty and expensive mech. Its sheer complexity meant that Ves had to put all of his Assembly Skills to use in order to get it right the first time.

It was very inconvenient for them to attempt a second fabrication attempt if they somehow botched the first one. Due to the scarcity of some high-value exotics, it wasn't possible to buy more batches from the open market.

As Gloriana locked herself in an empty office in order to pray to her altar in private, Vincent and his media personnel entered the workshop as well.

"Ves! Why did your security block my buddies?! I promised to let them watch!"

"The workshop is a sensitive area to the LMC. I have already made a huge concession by allowing you and some of your media crew to witness our work."

This was something that Vincent had insisted upon from the start. While some mech designers were very reluctant to broadcast their work on the galactic net, Ves had no such scruples.

With his ability, Ves wasn't too worried about botching something up and embarrassing himself in the process. In fact, he saw this as an opportunity to showcase his new strength.

Gloriana would be participating as well. Her performance would definitely impress knowledgeable observers, thereby enhancing her prestige in the industry.

The second reason why he did not object to broadcasting the fabrication process was to show that he wasn't secretly messing with his mechs.

Due to the continued questions surrounding the glows of his mechs, Ves wanted to make it very clear that his mechs were still mechanical machines at heart.

Every observer would be able to watch him turn raw materials into mech parts. After that, Ves would assemble them together into a single machine in a single, continuous session.

Once everyone saw that Ves wasn't inserting any bones in his mechs or blessing it with holy water or something, their suspicions would definitely be allayed somewhat.

While this problem wasn't particularly pressing at the moment, it was best to nip it in the bud before it had time to bloom.

"So.. about my mech. Is it manly enough?"

"Why don't you see for yourself?"

Ves activated a nearby terminal and showed off the final iteration of the Adonis Colossus. The large hybrid mech instantly caused Vincent to fall into silence.

Different from last time, Ves had finally instilled his design with its design spirit!

With Bravo empowering the design, it instantly radiated a charm that completely conformed to its spiritual foundation!

This high degree of fit resulted in a strong external glow that completely managed to charm Vincent despite the limitations of projections!

"This.. I can't wait to touch this mech!"

"I'm glad our work is to your satisfaction." Ves smiled.

Even as he casually chatted with Vincent, his fingers already moved over the terminal in order to shut off the projection.

He did not wish to give Vincent an opportunity to quibble over the codpiece or demand last-minute changes.

In truth, Ves had already taken advantage of the flashiness of the Adonis Colossus in order to divert Vincent away from any possible complaints.

Once Ves completed the commission, he didn't have to worry about these demands anymore!

After an hour of waiting, Gloriana finally emerged from her meditation. "Let's begin!"

Chapter 1678 Work Division

Fabricating the Adonis Colossus was different in many ways.

It was the first new generation mech that Ves and Gloriana designed. It would also be the first new generation mech that they planned to craft by hand.

The Adonis Colossus carried a special meaning to Gloriana. It was the first true custom mech that she designed from the ground up with Ves. This should have been a joyful occasion.

Instead, part of her mood was ruined by the lingering mental exhaustion that affected her brilliance to this day.

It would take at least two more weeks for her to return to her peak condition.

Ordinarily, she would rather delay the fabrication of the Adonis Colossus in order to make sure she produced the best mech.

Ves insisted on hurrying up, though.

On one hand, he always disliked the mech he designed. While he was still trying to be professional enough to do the best he could, the current state of the war didn't allow for any further delay.

In his heart, Ves did not believe that the Adonis Colossus would be able to shift the war as much as his Deliverer.

He just wanted to get this project out of the way so he could put his full attention on his true passion.

As soon as Gloriana emerged from her prayer, they immediately began to fabricate the parts.

They didn't have any second to waste. According to previous instances, Gloriana would only be able to maintain her boosted state for up to three hours.

This was the time where she could offer Ves the most assistance. After that, she required at least half a day of rest before she was ready to pray to her little altar once again.

As for why she refused to meditate right away, she simply shook her head and told him that it wasn't the right time.

Ves was pretty sure that Gloriana could constantly refresh her state of mind by meditating more often.

However, she insisted on sticking to the rules of hexism, and Ves had no way of convincing her to change her mind.

This was a matter of faith to Gloriana. Ves feared that forcing her to pray more often would make her unable to enter her special state of mind.

Therefore, they worked with a bit more haste than ideal.

Different from last time, Ves had already gotten used to Gloriana's high-quality 3D printer and other fabrication equipment. He had learned his lesson from last time and thoroughly practiced with them until he understood most of their core functions by heart.

He could leave the more complicated and obscure functions to Gloriana.

Ves took care of the bulk processes, as it was no problem for someone of his skill to produce large batches of bigger components.

Meanwhile, Gloriana focused on fabricating the parts that required a lot of finesse to create. It was easy to fail in recreating these critical components and subcomponents. Even Ves feared that he might botch some parts.

His girlfriend was a lot stronger in this aspect. Not only was she intimately familiar with the second-class production equipment she brought to the workshop, she also excelled in minimizing flaws.

Her only shortcoming was that her concentration and endurance was not as impressive. She lacked the extreme physical augmentations of Ves, and her deficit in spiritual energy exacerbated this weakness.

"Sorry, Ves." She slumped her shoulders in exhaustion. "This is all I can do for now."

"It's okay. We expected this, remember? Just sit back for now and supervise my work. I'm still capable of doing the heavy lifting."

While he missed her direct involvement, he had already accounted for her absence.

They had already formed the right plan to divide their workload. They even made the commitment to skip sleep until they completed the mech in the fastest time frame possible.

Ves had no problems staying awake for an entire week.

The same could not be said for Gloriana. She only managed to insist after taking special stimulants that kept her awake for some time.

Though she made a considerable sacrifice, the price was worth it. By staying completely awake, they managed to finish fabricating all of the parts in just over thirty hours!

While this was a bit longer than expected, neither of them could help it as the Adonis Colossus was just too big and complex. Both of these qualifiers already increased the burden of reproducing a physical copy. To put them together made it a lot more difficult to produce the mech in a timely fashion!

Of course, part of the reason why it took so much time was because Gloriana was being even crankier than usual when it came to the quality of the parts.

"You idiot!" She yelled at him and pointed at a structural component despite her low period. "Look at how far you've missed the mark! A deviation of 0.025 millimeters will surely weaken the structural integrity of the left arm of our mech! Go back to the 3D printer and make another copy!"

A lack of creativity and imagination hadn't affected her judgement of existing elements. So long as she didn't need to come up with something new or apply a lot of expertise, she was still able to act like a Journeyman!

After being pecked over and over again by his picky girlfriend, Ves finally managed to

"Are you happy now, Gloriana?"

"They're.. passable." She reluctantly replied. "Let's just move on to the next step."

They began to move to the assembly system and put the mech together starting from its internal frame.

Just as before, Ves performed most of the work while Gloriana supervised from behind.

Ves felt as if this division of work was just like how a pair of Hexers approached their jobs. The male Hexer performed all of the mule work while the female Hexer imperiously gave out instructions from above.

They couldn't help it, though. Gloriana was only able to work intensively for three hours at a time before needing to wait for an opportunity to meditate.

During the times when she was most active, she took up the most difficult tasks herself.

It was not as if Ves could perform those tasks just as well. They just wanted to maximize their strengths and minimize any potential waste. Letting Gloriana use her limited time and energy on simple jobs would not make much of a difference to the end product.

While they worked, their cooperation became a bit more harmonious. Vincent Ricklin and his crew observed the pair working together with quiet fascination while their recorder bots broadcasted the entire session without stop.

A mech pilot like Vincent was completely oblivious to the technical intricacies of making a mech. He could only judge the work by what he could observe, and so far he was very pleased with what he saw. The mech that was promised to him started to become more and more real!

At this point, neither Ves nor Gloriana paid Vincent and the public broadcast any attention. They didn't know how many people were observing their work, and they didn't care. They were too consumed in putting the Adonis Colossus together!

Unfortunately, Ves and Gloriana mostly performed their work with high concentration and dedication.

While that was enough to ensure a good outcome, it was difficult to go any further.

Both of them knew that they lacked the inspiration and serendipity to enter into an exceptional state.

As the Adonis Colossus started to take shape, they could already judge that it wasn't possible for it to become a masterwork mech.

Gloriana looked disappointed. "It's a pity."

"We have many more attempts." He patted her back. "Don't get too hung up over a single miss. We still have a lot to go before we are worthy to create a masterwork mech."

"I just feel so regretful that we have to hurry up. I really had a lot of hopes for this mech."

Ves didn't agree, but he didn't voice his doubts at the moment.

They resumed the assembly work.

One unexpected difficulty was the need to apply their signature looks to the mech without the observers getting the wiser. Obviously, affixing a hexagon onto the most masculine part of the mech was a very controversial move!

"We can just apply it on the inside of the codpiece first." Gloriana suggested.

"Good idea."

It wasn't possible to hide what they were doing when they were working on the frame of the mech. However, it was easy enough to assemble the codpiece components while making sure to keep the inside parts hidden from view.

Once they applied the codpiece with its hidden additions onto the frame, they successfully managed to overcome this hurdle.

As the mech neared completion, its glow became more and more evident. The X-Factor of a mech corresponded closely to how well it conformed to the design.

It was possible to modify and alter a finished mech over time while allowing its individual glow to adapt to the changes. Every form of life experienced some changes in its growth.

However, the starting point still had to conform to the original design. This meant that while the glow wasn't very evident when the mech was still made up of an internal frame, once it began to incorporate more parts, the glow started to become more evident.

Ves and Gloriana were very close to the Adonis Colossus, so they experienced the strength of its glow first.

"It's still pure." Ves smiled.

This was a deliberate choice on his part. For mass market mechs, it wasn't appropriate to expose a newborn spiritual product to thousands of mech pilots.

It was different for custom mechs. Ves wanted to experiment with pairing newborn spiritual products with a single mech pilot.

As long as the two developed a bond, the spiritual product would grow up by taking the mech pilot as its parent. The bond between the two would doubtlessly become a lot more intimate than usual!

In fact, Ves could have checked up on Lady Miralix Laterna and her Kinslayer in order to see how Vescas, its design spirit, had progressed.

However, due to the turbulence in the star sector, news of her was very hard to get, especially after she joined the military of the Sentinel Kingdom.

Switching his observation to Vincent and the Adonis Colossus was a lot more convenient. Since Vincent made a lot of media appearances, Ves would be able to observe how his mech fared. The increased proximity also facilitated frequent exchanges.

The masculinity radiated by Bravo impressed Ves quite a bit. It was a bit more coherent and stable than the glow of his soldier mechs at the start. Gloriana's intervention gave the design spirit a much stronger starting foundation.

With fewer flaws and imperfections, Bravo's glow immediately impressed the people observing the fabrication attempt.

Vincent, the bodyguards, the Tovar mech designers and even the observers watching the live feed of the fabrication process became impressed by what they felt!

Even if none of their sensors detected any radiation affecting their physiology, their emotions nonetheless became affected!

Of course, the live feed could only convey so much majesty. The one who really felt the impact was Vincent!

The moment Bravo's glow reached a certain level of strength, it already started to reach out towards Vincent.

Their mutual attributes attracted them together like nothing else!

"This mech.. is made for me!" He uttered breathlessly.

Before Vincent even stepped into the cockpit, the mech and design spirit already started feeling each other out. While this was just a surface interaction, the impact on Vincent and Bravo was already profound!

Vincent had never faced a mech as masculine as the Adonis Colossus. Even if other mech designers managed to make a more manly mech in appearance, only the mech in front of him was qualified to become his steed!

"I will be invincible once I pilot this mech!"

This was what his hindbrain told him! Whether it was correct or not remained to be seen.

Chapter 1679 Well-Equipped Mech

After a bit over two days of continuous work, Ves and Gloriana managed to complete the Adonis Colossus without encountering any significant setbacks.

They easily handled all of the complications and other problems that occurred during the fabrication process. This was in part due to their excellent skill and intolerance for imperfections.

By performing a thorough job from the start, all of the subsequent steps proceeded smoothly. Potentially catastrophic incidents never had a chance to occur because the pair of mech designers were simply too meticulous to allow them to break out.

Right now, Gloriana had stepped back due to her accumulated exhaustion.

She was tired to the bone. Not only did she exert herself mentally, but also physically. Though she managed to suppress her sleep through the use of stimulants, the fabrication of a complicated custom mech expended a lot of energy.

To Ves, it was as if she overdrafted some of her creative juices.

It was unavoidable for Gloriana to draw upon her imagination as she performed her work. To create an excellent mech, she needed to do more than rote fabrication and assembly.

Otherwise, they might as well leave the production of the mech to the Manufacturing Department of the LMC!

As Ves added the final touches to the Adonis Colossus, the mech was finally complete.

He stepped back and admired the huge mech with a touch of pride.

Regardless of his feelings towards its design, every product he designed and fashioned out of his own hands was a mark of pride.

As he continued to observe his finished mech, a grand feeling overcame his mind and spirituality. His design seed seethed with satisfaction as he managed to realize one of his creations.

This was why he designed mechs! As a creator, making something new brought him a lot of satisfaction!

Even Gloriana basked in their accomplishment. While Ves did most of the work this time, she was constantly involved in one way or another.

It was just a pity that her limitations prevented her from exerting her full ability. She would have been able to contribute much more substantially to the fabrication process.

"If only I was better." She sighed once her satisfaction made way for remorse. "We could have elevated the quality of this mech if I was fully involved."

Ves shrugged. "I'm not sure about that. It's too difficult to make a masterwork mech. I don't think this mech provided us with the right window of opportunity."

"Ves!" She growled and slapped his arm. "I thought you were better than that!"

He knew he wasn't entirely accommodating towards her, but the sight of the codpiece quickly soured his mood.

After swearing off on codpieces, he somehow designed and made another mech that possessed the same ornament!

Even though Gloriana managed to adapt it into a more inoffensive shape, it didn't shake off the impression that the mech definitely had something to hide in the lower waist!

Most mechs did not place much emphasis on the design of the pelvis section. While mech designers did not neglect this critical section which connected the torso to the legs of a mech, they never thought about making it more pronounced.

There was no practical reason to do so! For Ves to add a belt-like codpiece to the mech would definitely make people form some improper thoughts.

If this protective peace was the only masculine element of the mech, then Ves could still get away with claiming that it was just a form of reinforcement.

However, the muscle definition on the front torso of the mech made it more than clear that every aspect about the mech was meant to enhance its manliness!

Mechs ordinarily did not convey a specific gender. Most ended up shaped like a man because that was the most efficient form to fit all of the components of a mech.

However, that did not mean that mech designers explicitly assigned a gender to their mechs.

It was as pointless as assigning genders to a data pad or a fork.

His mind hadn't changed despite designing a mech that embodied manliness.

This was because the mech did not project pure masculinity. Instead, its glow possessed some very subtle undercurrents that expressed some of Ves and Gloriana's ridicule towards the theme of the mech.

As Ves threw a look at Vincent, the former rebel leader was already ecstatic about his mech!

"Perfect! It's perfect! This is my mech! No one else will ever pilot a more manly mech than mine! Hahahaha!"

That was Vincent's immaturity showing. He treated the Adonis Colossus like a vanity piece instead of a war instrument!

A more professional mech designer wouldn't be so taken in by the superfluous elements of a mech. Perhaps there was some merit to paying some attention to the glow of his mechs, but real soldiers never lost control over the appearance of a mech.

What truly mattered was what a mech was capable of.

The Adonis Colossus harkened back to the Caesar Augustus and Marc Antony in a vague fashion.

With the shoulder-mounted missile launchers, the Adonis Colossus could instantly output a large burst of explosive firepower.

While the capacity of the missile launchers wasn't impressive, they were fully capable of inflicting a lot of damage due to their potent if expensive warheads.

Of course, these missiles had to be rationed cautiously. If not for Vincent's importance, the government would never squander so many rare exotics to enhance the payload of the missile launchers.

Naturally, the missile launchers didn't protrude upwards. Ves and Gloriana cleverly recessed them towards the shoulders so that a frontal opponent wouldn't be able to snipe at them directly.

In case the Adonis Colossus faced an attack from the rear, the shoulder launchers could easily be detached from the mech. The missile launchers were also made of compressed alloys, which further enhanced its resilience against surprise attacks.

Ves did not trust Vincent to be competent enough to make the right decision. Investing in a more resilient pair of shoulder launchers should buy him some precious seconds.

The Adonis Colossus could accommodate any compatible missile type. However, considering the mech's relative weakness against distant opponents, Ves recommended Vincent to supply his mech with long-ranged missiles.

For medium-range encounters, Ves paired the Adonis Colossus with a Sandbreaker rifle.

The Avatars and Sentinels already adopted the Sandbreaker rifle by the hundreds. Ves already examined a physical copy in person.

"The Sandbreaker rifle doesn't really match the potential of the mech." He commented.

Gloriana frowned, though she did not refute his remark. "If Vincent didn't insist on pairing his mech with this rifle model, we would have had more leeway in pairing the mech with something better."

The Adonis Colossus was so expensive that it could easily adopt a more powerful weapon system. Why Vincent insisted on a rifle that was most commonly seen in the hands of budget mech was mystifying.

"The Sandbreaker weapon system isn't that bad, actually. Even if it's cheap and economic, it will at least allow Vincent to fire his weapon without any regard for cost."

As a medium-ranged weapon system, the Sandbreaker rifle already possessed many advantages while remaining affordable. Any alternate ballistic rifle models had to be much more powerful in order to exceed its effectiveness against the sandmen.

At this stage in the Sand War, many other mech designers and weapon developers developed similar weapon systems.

However, because they came afterwards, they failed to achieve the same degree of fame as the Sandbreaker rifle.

For this reason, Ves wasn't too disappointed with the weapon. A sloppy mech pilot like Vincent probably wouldn't be able to draw out the potential of more expensive weapons.

While the Sandbreaker performed best at medium range, it was no slouch in close range either. As long as the mech was able to bring the weapon to bear on an approaching enemy, it could still pose a threat.

The only problem was that all of the armor and other equipment on the mech reduced its mobility. This made the mech rather sluggish whenever it adjusted its aim.

A light skirmisher could easily circle around the mech to the point where the Adonis Colossus could no longer keep up with the movement!

For this reason, the nail drivers mounted at the wrists of the mech served as a last resort.

Due to the abundant budget of the project, Ves and Gloriana managed to integrate the weapon into the design and improve their power.

However, that did not detract from the fact that the mech could not supply a lot of ammunition nail drivers.

The power of a nail driver was limited due to the small size of the weapon system.

It was a lot better to affix compact laser cannons on the wrists. At the very least, the wrist-mounted laser weapons could draw its power from the internal energy supply of the mech.

The nail drivers lacked this convenience. The only way to provide ammunition was to load them into the weapon system and embed a small magazine into the wrist structure.

The physical limitations of this weapon system made it the worst ranged option of the mech by far.

At the very least, the shoulder-mounted missile launchers provided a lot of firepower at the press of a button. Vincent did not need to make any attempts to aim or tweak the

parameters of the missiles. Ves made sure to integrate some automation into the Adonis Colossus so that Vincent could pay attention to the big picture.

While the Adonis Colossus possessed three ranged options, Ves and Gloriana added something else at Vincent's request.

A sword.

Although the Adonis Colossus looked big and strong, the truth was that it wasn't suitable to wield melee mechs at all!

The structure of the mech was incredibly inflexible. It didn't possess the full range of motion expected of a melee mech. This will surely lead to problems to an actual specialist in melee mechs.

Fortunately, no one believed that Vincent was a maestro in swordsmanship. His proven skill in melee combat was too unexceptional to feel constrained by the limitations of his new mech!

Therefore, Ves and Gloriana treated the sword sheathed next to the legs as a toy.

Of course, it was still a real, high-quality sword. Ves even called Ketis to inspect the design of the sword. With her expertise, she provided her with a number of useful suggestions.

Since the Adonis Colossus possessed little agility to begin with, Ves decided to go for power. The sword was as large as a broadsword in mech terms. Anything larger risked burdening the mech.

All four weapons provided the Adonis Colossus with a lot of solutions. While all of them possessed some flaws, pooling them all together partially made up for their shortcomings.

"Can I try out this mech?" Vincent asked.

"Not now." Gloriana shook her head. "Let's bring it into orbit and test its performance in a vacuum condition. Piloting the mech on land will put undue stress on the structure of this mech."

"It's no good on the ground?" Vincent frowned.

Ves sighed. "It's a mech that is primarily meant to fight the sandmen. Adapting the mech to aerial or landbound combat requires a lot of compromise. Since our commission never mentioned anything about deploying the mech on a planet, we've specialized the mech for spaceborn combat."

Vincent looked disappointed. It was as if he never imagined that his impressively manly mech was as weak as a kitten in planet-based environments!

In truth, the Adonis Colossus was still able to perform on land, but that was an enormous waste. Its performance would be so constrained on land that it made more sense to substitute it with a true landbound or aerial mech.

It was still capable of walking slowly across the ground, at least. The mech had to be able to function within the artificial gravity environment of a carrier. Ves also made sure it would be able to participate in any parades.

"Let's call in a transport and bring this mech up to space." Ves ordered.

He was curious how Vincent and Bravo would react when they connected to each other for the very first time!

Chapter 1680 Spiritual Trinity

Upon fabricating the Adonis Colossus, Ves and Gloriana moved it into space.

On one of the light carriers of the Living Sentinels, everyone waited for the first activation.

Due to the importance of this event, Ves and Gloriana did not leave anything to chance. They thoroughly inspected the mech to make sure that nothing would malfunction.

Their close proximity to the mech exposed them to the glow of the mech. When Ves designed the mech, he deliberately attempted to maximize its aura.

While the Devil Tiger was a mech that completely locked its extraordinary quality within its frame, the Adonis Colossus followed the opposite direction!

The mech was like a god shaped in the form of a metal humanoid!

Its glow and its visual design completely complimented each other. Bravo, the spiritual product that inhabited the design, embraced the Adonis Colossus as if they were two sides of the same coin!

The fit between design spirit and mech had reached such an unprecedentedly close degree that Ves had no idea what kind of power this mech possessed!

"And it's still not complete." He whispered.

He thought back on his original theory of the X-Factor. He theorized that it was the power gained from aligning three different entities together.

The mech, the mech designer and the mech pilot.

By pooling the strength of three entities together, Ves believed that the combination would be able to exert a level of strength that was far in excess to the sum of its parts!

Now, Ves had come closer to aligning these three elements together than ever before!

The starting point was Vincent Ricklin. The commission compelled Ves and Gloriana to design a mech that completely fit a single mech pilot.

They did so. If its spiritual components were left out, the Adonis Colossus already conformed to Vincent's requirements. The mech completely fit his personality and piloting style. From a technical and visual standpoint, the mech would only be able to exert its full strength in the hands of its destined mech pilot!

This was the essence of a custom mech. A mech designed from the ground up for a single mech pilot was much more compatible than a variant customized from a standard mech design.

Ves completely understood now why Gloriana showed disdain towards the Resentful Soldier.

They may have done a lot to customize the Resentful Soldier for Silent William, but its basic DNA couldn't be changed!

Ves acknowledged that there was a gap between the two. However, now that Ves completed the Adonis Colossus, he realized he underestimated the difference!

There was no comparison!

He realized what Gloriana aimed to perfect! Designing custom mechs like the Adonis Colossus brought her closer to an ideal where her works were elevated to gods!

Of course, the mech and the mech pilot were only two legs of a three-legged stool.

The design spirit acted like the glue that fit them together. It animated the mech and empowered the mech pilot. While its role was the most obscure, its existence transcended both the mech and mech pilot.

A new trinity formed in his mind. Aligning the mech, mech pilot and design spirit as one might result in something unprecedented in mech design!

Ves wasn't sure why he gained this impression. While he intended to design an impressively masculine mech, he hadn't fully taken into account what might happen if those three elements were closely aligned!

None of his mass market mechs could meet this standard. Mech models such as the Desolate Soldier were designed to be compatible with a wide variety of mech pilots. It was impossible for any single mech pilot to fit the Desolate Soldier perfectly.

So this strange form of spiritual trinity could only be achieved by custom mechs.

Not every custom mech would do, though.

The Transcendent Messenger was an entirely different type of custom mech. Calabast commissioned Ves to design a mech for six mech pilots.

While the elite Kronon mech pilots possessed a lot of similarities, they were ultimately different mech designers.

Back then, he also lacked Gloriana's assistance and expertise, so the Transcendent Messenger was very lacking in this area.

As for the Resentful Soldier, aside from being a variant, its design spirit was a combination of the Solemn Guardian mixed with Nyxie's mote of spirituality.

This meant that the design spirit was out of step with the mech pilot. After Ves performed spiritual surgery on William Urbesh's mind, the man from another star sector experienced a huge personality change.

No matter what had changed, Ves was very sure that his new personality was still very much different from the Resentful Soldier's design spirit!

Therefore, from a spiritual standpoint, the Resentful Soldier was an awful custom mech. Ves hadn't worked hard enough to create a good fit between the mech, mech pilot and design spirit.

"It was just that I was ignorant of this defect until now! Only when I have come face to face with something better do I realize how awful my previous works turned out!"

He was aware that Gloriana strongly impacted his views on custom mechs.

Just like her, Ves felt tempted to abandon mass market mechs in order to completely dedicate himself to designing custom mechs.

The Adonis Colossus he designed opened an entirely different path! As long as he pursued this option, he would doubtlessly be able to design an epoch-shattering custom mech!

"This mech is already potent despite being paired with a normal mech pilot. What if my subsequent products are paired with expert mechs? What if I eventually get to the point where I can design a god mech?"

A shudder ran through his spine.

Ves believed he could design the most powerful mech in reality as long as he continued to explore this direction!

However, he quickly shook his head in order to clear his mind. The insights he gained from finishing the Adonis Colossus had momentarily overwhelmed his composure.

"I have to remember who I am! I have my own ambition!"

He wanted to design mechs that came to life. Whether those mechs were standard mechs or custom mechs didn't matter. He didn't want to exclude certain types of mechs from his range.

Both types of mechs had their own charm. Ves was someone who was very adventurous and easily got bored if he worked on the same types of mechs all the time. Alternating between standard mechs and custom mechs was a good way to keep his passion alive.

As for the direction he just identified, Gloriana already followed a similar path. Ves did not intend to usurp her ambition.

If their design philosophies converged, they wouldn't be able to complement each other as well anymore. The point of collaboration was to cover each other's weaknesses with their strengths.

Gloriana was good in perfecting the physical design of a mech while Ves excelled in breathing life to machines.

As long as both of them stuck to their domains, they would continue to reap the benefits from their specialization.

Once he realized this, he no longer felt any urge to dedicate himself to designing custom mechs.

After half an hour of checks, the Adonis Colossus was finally ready to be activated for the very first time.

Vincent stepped up in a tight piloting suit that stretched so tightly over his body that his muscles were clear to see! His pants even showed a subtle bulge that stretched the rules of decency!

"How vulgar." Gloriana frowned and turned away.

Even Ves couldn't stand the sight. Vincent and the Adonis Colossus were two peas in a pod! Both of them wanted to show off their 'manhoods'!

Before he entered the cockpit, Vincent made a big show out of it. He held a boastful speech in front of his mech with his buddies clapping his back.

Ves wasn't sure how many people actually followed Vincent. Due to the intensifying war, few people had the time and leisure to indulge in watching entertainment.

"I've waited so long for this moment! Let my legend begin from this day!"

Like a hero mounting a great steed, Vincent hovered up to the chest and entered the cockpit.

Once Vincent disappeared from view, Ves activated a projection that streamed the interior of the cockpit.

Vincent didn't activate the mech immediately. He first took in its luxurious interior.

Just like with his other mechs, Ves had made a habit of decorating the interior of the cockpit with the theme of the mech.

The strength of his products depended significantly on how a mech pilot approached the mech.

Decorating the cockpit was a way of priming the mech pilot into adopting the right mindset.

Of course, not a lot was needed to align Vincent with the Adonis Colossus. The custom mech was already tailored for him, so strictly speaking Ves didn't need to decorate the cockpit.

He did so anyway. To boost Vincent's mood, Ves added many reliefs to the free space of the interior. He depicted all kinds of ancient mythical men such as Zeus, Heracles, Ares, Achilles and so on. All of these men exemplified a distinct aspect of masculinity.

Vincent became enamored by the sights. While he was never educated in the ancient classics, he had consumed enough entertainment to identify these timeless ancient gods and heroes.

"These are true men!" He grinned and gripped his fists. "As long as I have this mech, I'll be able to join their ranks one day!"

He no longer wanted to delay his satisfaction. The thought of becoming a hero was so tempting to Vincent that he interfaced with his mech without any further delay!

As a wireless connection formed between his head and the antenna built into the ceiling of the cockpit, his mind suddenly blanked out as he opened up an intimate connection.

Outside, Ves no longer observed the projection of the interior of the cockpit.

Instead, his senses and his vision had switched to an entirely different mode. He no longer perceived reality from his mundane senses.

Instead, he observed the spiritual interaction between Vincent, Bravo and the spiritual foundation of the Adonis Colossus.

Three different spiritual sources connected together. Immediately, Ves sensed some sort of strength emanating from the combination!

A spiritual pulse swept over the entire light carrier!

Everyone paused for a moment. No one knew what made them pause all of a sudden. Only certain people such as Gloriana and Nitaa suspected the truth.

She looked at him. "This is our first true custom mech. The Adonis Colossus is incomparable to any custom mech we have designed before. None of the custom mechs I've designed in the past has ever equaled this machine!"

That was a very high evaluation! In her entire career, she designed more than a dozen custom mechs for Hexers! All of those machines were incredibly expensive and a lot more powerful than the Adonis Colossus!

Yet the inexplicable charm of the Adonis Colossus forced her to acknowledge that all of her prior works were far too lacking!

The spiritual component customized for a single mech pilot was incredibly potent!

Even now, the glow of the Adonis Colossus seemed to amplify, as if it was resonating with Vincent!

The close alignment between all three elements had no other outlet than amplifying the mech's already-potent X-Factor!

"A god." One of Vincent's buddies whispered. "This mech is practically a god!"

Ves felt very mixed when he heard that. He never intended to create a god, but somehow his collaboration with Gloriana brought him one step closer to making one.

Of course, even if the Adonis Colossus gained an unexpected level of strength, it was still a mech in his eyes. True gods didn't exist in his opinion.

Now that the Adonis Colossus came online, Vincent soon gained control.

"Open the hatch!" Vincent broadcasted. "I want to experience the power of my new machine!"

As soon as the cargo bay hatch opened, the Adonis Colossus passed through the energy screen and flew out into space!

A majestic red cape made out of glowing vapor formed behind its back!