

Mech 1801

Chapter 1801 Unacceptable

The story got really confusing from there. In order to allow Ves to take Gloriana's place as the lead designer of the classified design project, something needed to happen to Gloriana.

Not only that, but the transition had to be done with such haste and priority that his status as a male foreigner should never have an opportunity to hinder his promotion!

Calabast laid out an elaborate scheme that involved misclassifying the classified design project, taking advantage that the mech designers were 'stationed' in the distant Ylvaine Protectorate instead of somewhere in the Hegemony.

After all of this preparation and more, a critical step had to be made.

"Gloriana must die."

"What?!"

Ves almost jumped out of his office chair! What was Calabast talking about?! He would never allow his girlfriend to come to any harm!

"Calm down, kid!" Calabast sternly admonished him. "We're not really killing her. We just need her to be clinically dead for less than a minute to transfer her deceased status to some headquarters in the Hegemony. Ranya Wodin has agreed to induce Gloriana in a state of death and will revive her right away regardless of the results. The goal is to make her dead long enough for you to automatically be promoted from contributing designer to lead designer under emergency rules that happen to neglect some checks, including inspecting your gender and your origin!"

"Unacceptable!"

This sounded like an excessively risky step in the plan! Was this commission truly worth the risks? All kinds of complications could take place! Even if her body survived unscathed, what about her spirituality? The mind, body and spirit were intimately connected to each other! Damaging one would definitely damage the other two!

Yet Calabast didn't know all that. She didn't see the potential risks like he did. "Ves, you're blowing this matter up. With someone as capable as Dr. Ranya and some other doctors by her side, the life of your girlfriend is guaranteed! We would never gamble with Gloriana's life if we weren't confident we could revive her under our care!"

"I don't agree!" Ves shouted. This time, he was determined to put his foot down. "I'll refuse this commission if you need to perform this harebrained scheme for me to take over the design project!"

The two argued back and forth about this topic until Calabast finally accepted that Ves would remain unreasonably stubborn!

"Fine." She spat out. "We'll just have to resort to the backup option, then. You're lucky I anticipated your stupid objection to this step in the plan."

"What is the backup plan?"

Calabast regained her poise all of a sudden. "If we want to make things easier, we need to do something about your status as a boy or a foreigner. As long as we amend one of these two traits, it will be a lot easier for us to pave the way for you to take over the project."

He had a bad feeling about this. "What are you proposing?"

"Why, turning you into a Hexer, of course!" She grinned and waved her arm. "Aren't you rather divorced from your home state recently? There's little point in sticking to your identity as a Brighter. As long as you are willing, we can arrange Hexer citizenship for you. Normally, this is extremely difficult to arrange as they're only granted rarely to exceptional females and very handsome males. However, with the Temple of Hexism's backing, we can turn you into a full Hexer citizen within a week!"

"NO!"

Ves did not even have to think before uttering his refusal! He was horrified by the very idea of becoming a Hexer! There was no way he would join their ilk and subject himself to the deplorable treatment that boys like him deserved!

"Hear me out, Ves. It's not as bad as you think. Once you become a Hexer, you will enjoy the backing of our entire state. This is useful as the backing of a second-rate state is very useful and affords you a lot of protection whenever you are in a third-rate state. In addition, once you become a citizen, you will enjoy all of the other rights a Hexer is entitled to, such as access to institutions, permission to buy and sell property and so on. You can't imagine how good it is to be a second-class citizen!"

He sneered at Calabast. Did she think he was stupid? Well, she probably did, but right now she was outright insulting his astuteness!

"I'm already a galactic citizen, which already affords me enough of a status to protect me against certain abuses. Even if it's not as good as the support of a second-rate state, at least my galactic citizenship doesn't come with many strings attached! Once I become a Hexer, I'm not only gaining a lot of rights, but also a lot of obligations. I bet

worshipping the ground that women walk is definitely one of them. If you think you can hoodwink me with this offer, then think again!"

"Wait! There is one more benefit. Becoming a Hexer will also knock down the biggest hurdle that is preventing you from advancing your relationship with Gloriana. Just think about it! You don't have to go through an insane amount of effort to earn their approval. The Wodins are very devout, and they respect the Temple of Hexism greatly!"

"I don't need this handicap." Ves scoffed, growing more and more impatient at Calabast's dangerous proposals. "I doubt that becoming a citizen is enough to make me qualified in the eyes of Madame Constance Wodin. If I want to gain her respect, I need to prove my worth by showcasing my own abilities!"

The former spy looked more and more frustrated. Ves guessed she was truly annoyed this time. She started tapping her heel against the floor. The cadence of those taps distracted him somewhat.

"It's a shame." She eventually sighed. "Letting you become a citizen of the Hegemony would solve so many problems and advance our cooperation. You're passing such a great opportunity. Many third-raters would kill to become a citizen of a stronger state!"

To someone who already set his mind on the largely-untamed Red Ocean, citizenship became increasingly meaningless to Ves. Whether he called himself a Brighter, Ylvainan or Hexer, soon he would only consider himself a galactic pioneer!

"Just drop this stupid suggestion. Is there any other way to accomplish what we need?"

"Well.. if you don't want to change citizenships, then the other alternative is to change your gender. While gender-change operations won't change your status within the Hegemony, we can make use of certain exceptions that—"

"—STOP!" Ves interrupted her explanation. "No further nonsense from you! My name is Ves Larkinson, not Veronica Larkinson! I'll never turn into a woman, even if it's just a trick!"

Calabast looked incredibly sour now. Being stifled over and over by a boy was not something she was used to. It wasn't as if she was kidding!

Sadly, Ves was too proud and touchy to accept her suggestions. With her last backup plan shot down, Calabast found herself without any alternatives.

She directed a glower at Ves. "It seems we've hit a snag. You've rejected all of my proposals. We won't be able to proceed if we don't overcome this hurdle."

"Don't look at me like that. You're asking way too much. In fact, I'm half-suspecting that this is some sort of scheme for you to turn me into a Hexer! Feh. Keep dreaming! I'm

happy with the way I am right now. I highly suggest you stop thinking about imposing all kinds of unreasonable conditions on me and find another solution!"

Without his cooperation, this plan couldn't proceed, and the calculations of Calabast would certainly fall through. Ves smelled that there were a lot of interests involved in this commission for some reason, so his partner should certainly work hard to salvage this situation.

Ves believed that Calabast was more than capable enough of solving this problem! She wouldn't be so formidable if she was easily stumped by setbacks.

"Fine. Have it your way." She spoke acidly at Ves. She was truly annoyed, and she had no desire to hide that from him this time! "You're being a big goof, Ves, but I guess that's why you need someone like me. I'll be around for the being. Not only do I have to fix this mess, I'll also be busy with keeping tabs on nearby Fridaymen movements. Right now, the biggest risk to your safety is the threat of meddling or more direct action from the Coalition."

Now that they moved away from the previous topic, Ves subsided a bit. There was no need to show any further attitude towards someone he was likely going to be stuck with for the rest of his life.

"Will the Fridaymen assassinate me or something?"

"Unlikely." Calabast shook her head. "The Friday Coalition sends assassins against targets that are worth their notice such as matriarchs or valuable researchers. A kid like you is not worth risking its assets, especially since you are partially enjoying the protection of the Glory Battalion."

"Then what will you be guarding against?"

"I think you are already aware that the Friday Coalition might grow desperate and induce the surrounding states to invade the Ylvaine Protectorate. I believe the possibility that this will happen isn't great, but we can't rule it out. This is why it's important to keep an eye on the movers and shakers of the Bright Republic, the Star Faith Collective, the Independent State of Pillis and so on. Since these states directly border the Protectorate, one of them will definitely be involved in a possible invasion attempt!"

Ves agreed with her caution. He had been worrying about this possibility many times.

"You won't get blindsided this time, right?"

"Relax. I've learned from my lessons and I've expanded my intelligence organization to a point where it's possible to infiltrate the government institutions that govern a state. While it's difficult to touch the top level of any state, it's no problem to keep tabs on the middle layers of an administration."

It sounded as if Calabast had everything well in hand. Ves wasn't really interested in hearing the finer details.

"You're not going to disappear soon, right?" Ves tentatively asked.

"Not this time. I'll be residing elsewhere in the city for a couple months until I'm urgently needed elsewhere. At least someone has to babysit you. Who knows what you will get up to when you act without restraint on this planet. Last time, you almost got executed by the Ylvainan Inquisition!"

Ves shrugged. "I managed to come out better in the end. Without going through that ordeal, I would have never become their Bright Martyr!"

"Be careful with that, Ves. Don't abuse your status as a Martyred Follower and don't accept any invitations from the Ylvainans. You'll be safe if you stay at home or work quietly in one of your new facilities."

"Why."

Though Ves agreed with her advice, he was surprised she wanted him to avoid taking advantage of his fame and status in the Protectorate!

"You don't want to become too attached to the Ylvainan people." She pointed her finger. "You also don't want to make the Ylvainans become attached to your personal identity. If something bad happens to one of you, the other will certainly suffer! Therefore, to avoid as many unnecessary entanglements as possible, I highly recommend you deny any offer from the Ylvainans to attend a public gathering or do something else that will close the gap between you and the state."

He understood her argument and had no objections. He agreed without another word.

After discussing a few security-related matters, Calabast finally adopted the persona of Madame Cecily Curin and calmly stepped out of his office as if they had just concluded an important business negotiation.

Ves watched her go, his gaze inadvertently glancing towards her pencil skirt, before turning back to his own priorities.

He briefly studied his agenda. "I guess enough time has passed for me to settle the Larkinsons. We can't keep calling ourselves the new family!"

Chapter 1802 Weight of Responsibility

A few days went by as Ves continued to hold meetings and get all of his balls rolling. Since he had already addressed the most acute issues preventing his organizations

from going forward, he began to spend an increasing amount of time on an issue that was very dear to his heart.

The Larkinson Family, at least the branch that followed his departure from the Bright Republic, needed to transform.

Now that Ves tentatively managed to gather hundreds of trueblood Larkinsons and their dependents, he needed to take care of them and provide them with a new structure.

Right now, the Larkinsons were numbly residing on Kesseling VIII without a clear idea of what they should do. This was not necessarily a problem, but it would definitely lead to cracks if the confusion persisted.

For this reason, Ves paid an increasing amount of attention into forming a new structure for the new family. He already thought long and hard about this subject during his travels aboard the Scarlet Rose.

Though he wanted to implement his blueprint for the new family immediately, it was not as simple as that. While he deeply desired to grasp total control over the new family, Ves could not afford to alienate his relatives.

For this reason, the Larkinsons who followed him were granted a say in how to shape their future structure as a collective entity.

The elders and other notable family members formed an assembly to discuss and vote on the proposals that would permanently alter their branch of the family.

Some thirty-odd middle-aged and older Larkinsons all gathered in a conference hall at the Friedhold Estate, which housed all of the members of the Larkinson Family.

The Friedhold Estate was almost as boisterous as the old Cloud Estate to Ves. Each time he attended an assembly meeting, he passed through the grounds where numerous young children played with each other.

Their laughter and joy always seemed to refresh his mood and remind him of what was at stake.

He was fighting for their future.

The changes to the Larkinson Family should not only advance his interests, but also the interests of his other relatives! His children and their children must benefit from the sacrifices made by their parents!

Only such a cohesive family entity would be able to stand the test of time!

Ves did not wish to preside over a family that allowed selfishness and infighting to run rife.

Perhaps other families believed that internal competition was the key to maintaining their internal vitality, but Ves never believed in this nonsense!

The original Larkinson Family may have failed to live up to its potential, but its stability and harmony provided every Larkinson with a comfortable living environment.

He did not wish to lose this harmony! If their children grew up in a competitive environment where each of them had to fight and learn to be cruel to each other, then they might grow stronger out of it, but at what cost?

"Family is important! This must never change!"

Fortunately, most of the other Larkinsons agreed with this principle as well. There were very few objections towards maintaining a harmonious structure within the family. The Larkinsons ought to foster cooperation as opposed to competition, and contests for attention and resources should be minimized as much as possible.

"It's not possible to do without competition entirely." An ambitious elder Larkinson stood up. He had been one of the proponents of introducing more reasons for the younger generation to fight each other. "If every Larkinson can breeze through their youth with a silver spoon in his mouth, then how will he end up when he grows up? I bet you that he won't be able endure any hardship!"

"Will you have our children beat each other up, then?!"

"I'm not saying that. I am just suggesting that we should introduce some.. incentive programs. Didn't we already hold a small search some time ago to determine which lucky young Larkinsons get to intern at the LMC's design department? All of the seeds we've chosen have all demonstrated their intelligence and talent! Since it worked out this time, why not hold multiple programs set up to cultivate our brightest talents?"

"And what of the Larkinsons who fall short or bloom late? Will you deprive them of their share in the resources provided by the family?!"

"They will still get their share! The LMC is prosperous enough to support the upbringing of millions of children, let alone a couple of hundred! Rather than see it as taking away from the majority, we are instead concentrating our most potent means on cultivating a small number of elites. Only through these means will we be able to raise qualified successors for our family!"

"That's a waste of money! We already did fine with giving each child an equal amount of attention! You can't control who can become a wolf and who will end up as a dog. Let us leave our descendents to sort that out on their own when they graduate and embark on

their careers. This is how Ves Larkinson and all of our expert pilots came to be! We couldn't have predicted that any of them would become remarkable before they were ready to prove their ability."

This issue was one of the most contentious one in the family. The proposal by the elder who wanted the Larkinsons to be more proactive in cultivating elites was a softer and more acceptable alternative to his earlier proposal.

Even Ves felt sympathetic for it. While he still wanted to spread out resources equally and without bias, he also wanted to motivate the younger Larkinsons to work hard and never take their current gains for granted.

He waited until the argument started to lose steam.

One of the lessons he learned in preceding over the assembly meetings was that he should let the ones with strong opinions expend their energy. If they thought they hadn't finished laying out their arguments, they would not hesitate to expound on their views!

Rather than attract their ire, Ves would rather stay silent and let the cantankerous elders throw their spittle at each other until they all became doused in saliva!

As Ves sensed the intensity of the argument dropping to a point where most Larkinsons were more than ready to move on, he finally issued his own view.

"I think both sides have merit. Any Larkinson that is raised within our family should never grow up deprived. Our children shouldn't have to struggle to enjoy their best and happiest moments of their lives. As long as the Larkinson Family is financially secure, it should dedicate a basic level of resources and training to every member of the younger generation without any prerequisites."

"At what level will you set the baseline?" Clinton Larkinson asked as he looked in concern.

"It depends on the level of prosperity of the LMC and the Larkinson Family. I think we should determine a formula to decide the family's budget on this spending. However, it is important to keep the welfare 'basic'. By that, I mean that it should be enough to give every descendent a significant advantage over ordinary people, but not much more."

"Does that mean you want to allocate half if not more of the budget on raising a handful of elites?"

"Not quite. That's a bit extreme, even for me. Rather than choose a reward structure that is bound to make most average Larkinsons resent the chosen descendants, I would like to institute a regime that gives every Larkinson an equal chance to gain more resources. The key is that they will have to work for their rewards. There should be no bias. Everything must be fair in order to maintain the integrity of the system!"

This was something that Ves thought up when he silently listened to the two sides arguing. Both of them had their good and bad points, but that also made him feel uneasy in adopting either of them. No matter what he chose, he felt as if he would condemn the new family to an unhealthy future!

Desperate to reconcile the two sides, Ves eventually came up with this suggestion.

Most of the Larkinsons looked intrigued. Though it didn't quite suit either sides, it wasn't unacceptable for them to embrace this compromise solution.

"A fair competition." Raymond Billingsley-Larkinson said in support of Ves. "I think this solution will work very decently. The key is to maintain both fairness and competition at the same time. The most useless ones amongst our descendants will still be able live well, but they won't be unjustly taking away too many resources reserved for more deserving youngsters. Meanwhile, those who are talented will definitely be able to rise up the ranks and gain the rewards they reserve without depriving other Larkinsons of their own opportunities."

Each Larkinson deserved the same opportunities! This became the core creed of this particular subject matter!

Every elder had already tired of this discussion. They already heard the two sides out and were more than willing to embrace a decent-sounding proposal that just happened to be acceptable to most!

Ves felt very pleased when he managed to resolve this matter in an acceptable direction. While outcomes like these didn't happen all the time, at the very least he managed to enhance his prestige and prove his ability to lead the new family.

He not only showed his ability to listen to the opinions of others, but also impressed everyone by showing he was creative enough to come up with novel compromises!

While Ves found these assembly meetings to be tedious and not very efficient, he persisted through them. Not only did he wish to convey himself as an acceptable leader, he also wanted to guide the future direction of the family!

After another long assembly meeting that lasted for an entire afternoon, Ves stepped outside the conference hall and took in the grassy gardens and the children, some of whom were playing with mech figurines.

He couldn't help but smile at the sight. Even after a very abrupt departure from Cloudy Curtain, the youngest of them quickly adapted to life at the Friedhold Estate.

However, Ves did not wish for these children to attend Ylvainan schools or become friends with Ylvainan peers.

The Larkinsons never needed to pray for victory! They earned it themselves! That was what a true Larkinson should be in his eyes! Depending on others was for the weak!

Determining where to settle the Larkinsons and how to shape their growth environment was another contentious subject that Ves did not look forward to discussing.

"What are you thinking, Ves?" Clinton Larkinson asked.

The old man was chewing some kind of minty stimulant that stirred Ves' nose.

"Nothing much."

"Don't lie."

"Well, we still have a lot of matters to settle." Ves said. "Some of them are bound to leave many Larkinsons unhappy. We are literally deciding the future of our branch of the family. Decades, centuries and even millennia from now, our family will continue to be shaped by the assembly meetings held over a couple weeks. Don't you think that is... frightening?"

Clinton slapped his aged and skinny hand on the younger Larkinson's back.

"That's responsibility for you, kid. This is nothing compared to leading your company or the issues you need to deal with in the future. The fact that you are uncomfortable with holding so much responsibility is a good sign. It tells me that you're not letting your power go through your head. It also tells me that you care enough about us that you don't want to make a mistake."

That was quite insightful of the elder Larkinson!

"Power, huh..."

One of the main reasons why he wanted to split off from the old family was to embrace greater power. Yet now that he was wielding more influence over the Larkinsons than in the past, he had become timid all of a sudden.

Why didn't he feel this way when he led the LMC? Why was he much more willing to take risks with his mech company but not with the future of his family?

Chapter 1803 Three Hexers

Ranya, Brutus and Gloriana all gathered together aboard the Serendipity.

The sleek light frigate hovered above the city of Krent like a watcher in the sky.

From the observation chamber, every structure and monument on the ground looked like a collection of bricks. Every person was like a speck of dust. All of the mechs and vehicles moving about resembled a colony of ants.

"These Ylvainans are so small and narrow-minded." Ranya dismissively said as she idly watched over the city while sipping a glass of wine. "Their so-called prophet presumes to foretell the future of both humans and aliens. Declaring us kin to the barbaric aliens who used to dominate the galaxy is ludicrous."

"They're kind of cute, in a way." Gloriana said while she was cuddling with Clixie while lying on a sofa. "Some of their beliefs aren't so much different from ours, and their hearts are in the right place."

"They're unenlightened brutes following the words of a delusional boy. It is one thing if their Great Prophet was a woman. It's unfortunate he's of the wrong gender! I'm not surprised the Ylvainan Faith encountered so many problems and setbacks. We'll have to enlighten them properly once the Fridaymen are dealt with. I really can't stand how they pay so much respect to boys."

"Including my boyfriend?" Gloriana paused her cuddle session to glare at her cousin.

Before an argument could erupt, her brother held up a hand. The change in the air instantly caused the two women to subside.

"Peace, please. It is not up to us to determine what must happen to the culture and religions of the lesser states. Any change we wish to implement will likely happen over decades, if not centuries in order to minimize backlash and disruption. Besides, it is not wise to meddle too much in the affairs of these lesser states even if we eventually achieve dominion over our star sector."

There were many rules, some of them unwritten, that governed the relations between a lesser state and a greater state.

The Big Two rarely intervened in the affairs of a state, but they were certainly keeping score of every significant event. As soon as a state crossed an invisible line, they came under intense scrutiny, which was not a very pleasant experience.

It was mostly better for greater states to encourage lesser states to change on their own accord.

As long as a state became dominant enough in a star sector, cultural osmosis would take place where a third-rate state increasingly adopted the customs of a more powerful state in order to curry more favor and foster trade.

The third-rate states that aligned the fastest to a powerful state would gain a lot of advantages compared to those who were more reluctant to embrace the changes.

This was very bad as the lack of favor and trade income would certainly weaken these recalcitrant states! This made them vulnerable to the predations of the states that grew stronger by hugging the thigh of a mighty patron!

This has happened in many star sectors in the past. Vicious Mountain for example was home to a very powerful second-rate state called the Garlen Empire.

Due to the Empire's dominance, Garlen's martial culture and extreme emphasis on mech pilots bled over to the surrounding states. This caused the latter to turn into partial copies of the former!

The Hegemony wanted to replicate this phenomenon in the Komodo Star Sector. It should have been able to spread its distinctive culture if not for the obstacle in its way.

The existence of the Friday Coalition counterbalanced the Hexadric Hegemony's attempts to turn the rest of the star sector in its image!

One of the reasons why the Coalition Reserve Corps dispatched monitors to the lesser states was to gauge their willingness to embrace the values and customs of the Coalition or the Hegemony.

While it was possible to monitor this development from afar, sending real people and having them interact with various layers of society was a more direct way to gauge the changes in a lesser state.

"I really don't know what we are doing here." Ranya muttered as she casually studied a data pad containing in depth information of the Archimedes Rubal implant. "The Ylvaine Protectorate may technically be on our side, but it's clear that they're only paying lip service."

"I'm concerned as well." Brutus glanced at his sister in worry. "We shouldn't stay in this for too long. The Ylvaine Protectorate is surrounded by states that are in the pocket of the Friday Coalition. If our archenemies ever turn their attention in this direction, this place will become very dangerous!"

"I'm not leaving the Ylvaine Protectorate until Ves is ready to go." Gloriana harrumphed. "Don't think of dragging me back to Scimitar before then! Ves has too many things to take care of before he's ready to depart!"

Ranya threw a skeptical glance at her lovestruck cousin. "Does Ves even want to travel to the Hegemony? He doesn't seem very eager to meet your mother."

"Ves loves me very much. Of course he would love to visit my home! He has to pay respects to my mother if he wants to marry me! He'll definitely accompany me back to the Hegemony!"

Of course, Gloriana hadn't discussed this topic with Ves as of yet. Whether he would actually go along with her suggestion was a complete mystery.

The conversation soon shifted to a more immediate matter.

"You haven't made any progress at all, sister?" Brutus asked.

"I tried, but my people and I haven't found any trace of this supposed hidden superbase. If the Fridaymen have really set up a secret anchoring point, they're being very careful about it. My data analysts went through all kinds of shipping records but we failed to find any significant amount of supplies going nowhere. Either the Fridaymen already prepared a stockpile that will last them years, or this base doesn't exist in this region of space."

Her brother crossed his arms and let out a deep breath. "I don't think the Fridaymen have overlooked the possibility that we would search for their base. It's most likely that they are truly prepared to hide for a number of years before they spring their offensive when the Hegemony's flanks are at their most vulnerable."

"It could be that the intelligence is wrong and this secret superbase doesn't exist in the first place." Ranya offered. "It wouldn't be the first time the Fridaymen are leading us on a wild goose chase."

No one was sure whether the intelligence was right, but the Hexers couldn't let down their guard. At the very least, Gloriana wasn't the only Hexer trying to search for the whereabouts of this base. In fact, as a mech designer, she wasn't expected to succeed, though that still rankled her. She always aimed to succeed!

"The Fridaymen haven't begun their machinations yet." Brutus observed. "Right now, the timing of the outbreak of the war has caught them off-guard. All of their politicians and military planners are still scrambling to reinforce the frontlines. Once the main war theater heats up and turns into a contest of attrition, the Fridaymen will become increasingly desperate to blow up the stalemate by surprising us with a major gambit."

He studied his enemies extensively in order to increase his chance at beating them. Merely relying on his expert pilot prowess to win every battle was folly!

"We'll leave the Ylvaine Protectorate before the situation escalates to this point." Gloriana affirmed. "I want Ranya to finish Ves' implantation surgery first, though. He desperately wants this augmentation for some reason. How much progress have you made on that front?"

"The Archimedes Rubal is a fascinating bioimplant." Ranya could help but smile in admiration. "It's really undeserving for a boy like Ves to benefit from this valuable relic. If he had any conscience, he would have offered it up to you and allow you to gift him a serviceable Hexer implant."

"I'm not taking his stuff! This is what he obtained through his own efforts. Besides, I already have my Erestal-015 implant. It's not only a lot more modern than the Archimedes Rubal, but it's also the implant that my mother picked out for me after a lot of study and preparation. The functions of my Erestal fits me the best."

When it came to her mother, Gloriana's eyes turned worshipful. In her entire life, she always followed her mother's arrangements!

Only rarely did she act willfully. Hooking up with Ves was one of those cases.

After a short pause, Clixie sauntered away from Gloriana's lap and padded over to Brutus. "Miaow."

"Hey there." Brutus slowly picked the lovely-looking cat up and embraced her with care.

Male Hexers were obliged to respect every female, pets included!

According to some interpretations of hexism, female dogs and cats may not be as superior as their human counterparts, but they had gone through several phases of existence which clearly put them ahead of males.

While not every Hexer bought into this theory, the compulsion to respect females was ingrained in the bones of male Hexers.

They didn't dare to act presumptuously towards a female animal!

Clixie clearly adored Brutus' skillful scratches and started to purr in contentment.

Her owner looked over and smiled at the sight. The two looked so lovely together!

"It's too bad there's only one of her." She sighed. "Rubarthan Sentinel Cats aren't very rare or notable in the New Rubarth Empire, but they're really too difficult to obtain in our star sector."

"This isn't the only cat in your company. There's also the mechanical cat."

"Lucky belongs to Ves, remember?!"

"Can you buy him for me, then? From what we've managed to ascertain from the Scarlet Rose, most of the crew who died fell at the hands of this cat. He's really remarkable! It is such a giant waste for such a powerful combat partner to accompany a mech designer. Lucky deserves a better owner!"

"Ves would never give Lucky away! You should stop dreaming about taking him away, Brutus. I won't allow you to bully him with your status as a Hexer and expert pilot!"

Besides, he's not the type of boy who gives in to such intimidation.. at least I think so. He can be a bit of a weasel sometimes."

"I really don't see why you are so crazy about that boy."

"That's because you're not a mech designer. You'd be able to realize his brilliance in full if you knew what kind of wonders he can accomplish. I'm so lucky to be working alongside a mech designer like him! Our next mech designs will definitely astound the entire star sector! I can't wait until he's fully fired up! Hihi!"

Though Brutus still possessed a lot of doubts about Ves, this was not something a boy like him could meddle in. Though he cared a lot about his sister, he still had to know his place!

Perhaps to others it might seem strange for a strong-willed expert pilot to defer so readily to his sister and other women, but this was the natural state of being in the Hexadric Hegemony.

While this didn't mean that any random Hexer on the streets could order a male expert pilot around, the latter still had to show a lot of respect to the former!

A chime suddenly sounded from Gloriana's comm. She interrupted her musings and read the message.

"What is it, sister?"

"It's a message related to our upcoming design commission. It seems like Ves is up to his old ways again." She sighed.

"You should really rein in your boy toy, cousin." Ranya spoke. "It's a bit odd that he is showing so much attitude. What would other Hexers think? Keeping your boys obedient and well-behaved is an essential responsibility for women like us! If I was in your place, I would have rid him of his attitude by now."

"You don't understand." Gloriana impishly smiled. "It's exactly because he's so wild and uncontrolled that he's so great. Whether professionally or personally, his boldness is the main reason why he's so much better than the boys back at home! I'm in no hurry to temper his attitude."

"You will pull back his leash eventually, right?" Ranya frowned.

"...Maybe."

Chapter 1804 Compartment G-13

Ves took a rare excursion to orbit. A hefty guard force consisting of both Avatar and Kronon mechs surrounded his heavily-armored shuttle as it climbed from the surface.

Neither the Avatars nor the Ylvainans were complacent when it came to the safety of Ves! Past events had already shown that his life was far from secure.

With over a hundred mechs acting as an honor guard, every other traffic automatically made way as they received new instruction from traffic control.

The shuttle eventually docked with an orbital shipyard. Though it wasn't particularly large or impressive, it was the best that Ves could hire in the Kesseling System.

After Ves, Lucky, Nitaa and a lot of other guards emerged from the shuttle, they moved to the heart of the shipyard.

A director met them on their way.

"How long will it take to complete the overhauls to the Scarlet Rose?" Ves asked.

"Four months at the very least."

"That's too long." Ves frowned. "From the size of your shipyard and the amount of people who work here, a typical overhaul shouldn't take more than two months."

"The proposals offered by your men are very difficult to work with, Your Excellency." The director nervously admitted. "Our engineers and shipwrights have never worked on a ship so advanced. Just the issue of shipping the rare exotics and other materials to us is a significant burden. Both the Sand War and Komodo War have disrupted the supply and transportation of many critical materials."

Ves remained unmoved. "I didn't come all the way up here to listen to your excuses. Trade may have disrupted, but it hasn't stopped entirely. I think there should definitely be a way for your shipyard to obtain the materials you need. Perhaps you can correspond with the Curins, starting with Madame Cecily Curin. I'm sure they'll be able to expedite the necessary procurements."

"Thank you, Bright Martyr!"

"Please don't call me that."

They finally entered the massive drydock hall where the Scarlet Rose rested in the very center.

The hall was designed to accommodate much larger ships up to massive freighters and cargo haulers. The Scarlet Rose looked fairly compact for this reason, but only from afar. Once they came close, the grandness of the mobile supply frigate became evident.

Though a frigate was a fairly small class of starship, the Scarlet Rose still towered over humans as well as mechs!

The tonnage of the starfaring vessel was astounding, and the materials that made up her structure and armor layers could all be used to produce enough second-class mechs to form a full mech company!

The value of the Scarlet Rose was inestimable to Ves. She became an essential asset to him ever since he managed to steal her from the Fridaymen.

The sheer utility and prestige he gained from owning such a potent vessel was enough to make Ves ecstatic.

The potentially-infinite Breyer alloy production loop skyrocketed the Scarlet Rose's value by at least a hundred times, if not more!

There was no way Ves could afford to neglect the Scarlet Rose! The constantly-renewing mysterious escape pod had become an absolute point of focus for his future plans!

Due to the extremely sensitive nature of the mysterious escape pod, only his most trusted subordinates were allowed to approach the mech workshop and the surrounding compartments.

The shipyard engineers and technicians were only allowed to work on the periphery of the ship! Everything else that Ves and his underlings deemed sensitive could only be accessed by the Battle Criers!

While this slowed down much of the work, Ves would rather be safe than sorry. Perhaps it wasn't unreasonable that it would take at least four months to complete the renovation of the ship.

She was worth the wait, Ves thought as he looked up and admired the half-exposed ship. Plenty of workers and bots crawled over the Scarlet Rose's surface in order to remove the damaged armor plating.

If the damage was light, then the holes and other damage could still be reversed to some extent. If the damage was too deep, then the shipyard had no choice but to send the broken parts to a recycling plant in order to recover some of the materials needed to build replacement parts.

As Ves was technically literate, he understood most of the processes that had to take place to renovate the Scarlet Rose.

The main goals of these overhauls was to increase the security of the ship and to remove as many Fridaymen systems as possible that possessed a high risk of containing backdoors.

Michael Crindon played an essential role in reforming the security systems of the ship. He also became the main person in charge of cordoning off and increasing the security of the production loop.

Ves met with his Kinner security expert near the original compartment which held all of the escape pods.

The structure already looked much different from here. New bulkheads had been erected where there was previously empty space. Access to the site where Cassandra Breyer's escape pod appeared over and over again became a lot more difficult.

"I'm glad to see at least some work has already been done." Ves commented with satisfaction.

"Meow."

"Go ahead." Ves sighed.

Lucky instantly raced off and phased through the bulkhead in order to access the small stockpile of Breyer alloy in the next compartment.

"Tell me what you've managed to accomplish."

"We directed most of our Kinner technicians to rearrange the layout of this deck." Crindon explained and swept his arms towards the newly-added structural components. "We have cut off almost every path between the site of importance and the rest of the ship, including the mech workshop. In order to maintain and increase the 'loop', we've cleared out all of the escape pods in the original compartment. This provides us with enough space to add the forging machine as well as an independent power supply to keep the machine going without drawing a suspicious amount of power elsewhere."

This meant that a bot programmed to haul the mysterious escape pod to a forging machine didn't have to cross through multiple compartments and corridors anymore.

The process of retrieving the escape pod and chucking it into a forging machine happened in seconds now that the distance between them had shrunk!

Ves left behind most of his guards and only brought Nitaa with him as he entered the area known as 'Compartment G-13'.

"G-13 here not only offers enough space for the forging machine and a power supply, but also some storage space, but not that much." Crindon waved at the stacked bars of alloy.

Naturally, Lucky was already there and munching on his first bar as if it was made out of chocolate!

"What if this space runs out?"

"There is an exit there leading to adjacent compartments which we have also cleared out for the sole purpose of storing the Breyer alloy. Furthermore, we're planning on constructing an entirely new corridor that will connect to a new lift that will go straight down to the cargo bay. From there, the Breyer alloy can be securely shipped away as long as the workers follow a tight procedure."

To Ves, it wasn't the best way to keep the production loop a secret, but Ves didn't have the time or resources to implement a better arrangement.

If Ves wanted to keep the production loop absolutely secret, then he would turn the Scarlet Rose into a massive vault and replace most of her structure with the densest sensor-blocking exotics he could find. Then, he would stash it deep underground in a chamber made of even more sensor-blocking materials!

However, that was not only prohibitively expensive, but also made it difficult to move his ship if some kind of emergency took place.

Therefore, after a discussion with Crindon, Ves decided to hide the Breyer alloy production loop in plain sight by operating the Scarlet Rose as his new flagship.

Ves and Crindon had already planned ahead to explain the supply of Breyer alloy. They would simply dispatch the Scarlet Rose to an undisclosed location. From there, the ship returned with a batch of Breyer alloy.

They didn't have to explain anything further. Those who watched the movements of his ship would conclude that the Scarlet Rose had been dispatched to pick up a shipment from some trader or black market organization. The latter was much more likely because the conventional supply of Breyer alloy was very limited!

In other words, those who questioned where the Breyer alloy came from would simply fill up the gaps with their own guesses.

Since the Scarlet Rose was a very fast ship, it was extremely difficult for most watchers to keep up with her.

Those that were able to do so would definitely be noticed by the Scarlet Rose.

All of these arrangements meant that there was a high possibility this ruse might work?

As for how Ves could possibly pay for all of those valuable exotics.. that was another matter that he intended to keep in the dark.

Perhaps he paid with all of the cash he earned from the LMC. Perhaps he designed secrets mechs for insanely lucrative rewards. Perhaps he made a connection with a very powerful organization.

In this way, Ves and Crindon set up a strong but not too complicated ruse that 'explained' where all of the Breyer alloy came from. People would never suspect the alloy was actually being 'produced' right inside Compartment G-13!

Ves inspected the loop in action. After the forging machine underwent a round of tests and self-diagnostics and found nothing amiss, it became open for business again.

Once the inner chamber heated up, a specially-designed bot remotely lifted the mysterious escape pod from the tube, which had been completely blocked on the other end, and dropped it into the forging machine.

A strange shockwave of discordant spirituality suddenly swept Ves' body. He became alarmed, especially when he figured out that the shockwave originated from the forging machine!

"Did you feel that?" Ves warily asked.

"I.. did not experience anything unusual, sir."

"Did you feel as if a wave of energy crashed through your body? Did you feel a spark on your body as if you were being shocked by static electricity?"

Crindon shook his head in confusion. "I have not experienced any of those sensations."

Ves turned to Lucky. "What about you, buddy?"

"Meoow.."

His cat only had eyes for his Breyer alloy! Lucky was already starting to devour a second bar! What a gluttonous beast!

"How is the rest of the overhaul going?"

"We've learned a lot from our prior overhaul of the Barracuda, sir. We aren't groping in the dark this time because we are already aware of which ship parts we have to alter or replace. Your.. partner.. has also been helpful in pointing out what needs to be

changed, particularly on the software level. Without this additional help, we would have been forced to hire extra security experts or downgrade the ship."

All in all, it sounded as if his men had the Scarlet Rose well in hand. While they weren't capable of fulfilling all of his wishes, at least nothing went wrong.

The only concern that plagued Ves was any changes relating to Cassandra Breyer.

What if she worked to free herself from this loop? What if she intended to exact revenge when she finally became free?

Just the spiritual shockwave emanating from the forging machine upon the mysterious pod's destruction was enough to prove that the situation could change!

Perhaps Ves couldn't be as hands off as he wanted. Was it really necessary to look into Cassandra Breyer?

As Ves stared at the forging machine decomposing the escape pod into its constituent materials, he had a hunch that Cassandra had to warm up and show her might.

What if she was able to exert more power? Ves would definitely have to endure some sort of spiritual attack, one that might be beyond his means to solve! He had no confidence in his simple spiritual shield!

Chapter 1805 Grandeur

The Scarlet Rose, Compartment G-13 and the Breyer alloy production loop weighed heavily on Ves. Though aware of the dangers of affronting a powerful spiritual entity, the possible gains were too great for him to give up on exploiting her continuous renewal powers!

No matter what kind of counterattack Cassandra Breyer launched, Ves would just have to endure it as best as possible.

This was the price he had to pay to secure a continuous supply of valuable materials!

Though Ves spent a lot of time on inspecting the work being done to the Scarlet Rose, he mainly devoted his time on the assembly meetings where the rules and regulations of the new family took shape.

The Larkinsons would soon be part of a new and more ambitious entity than the old Larkinson Family.

After several weeks of discussion, Ves and the other elder Larkinsons finally reached an agreement on how to run the new family.

They came up with an ambitious structure, and that was partially the fault of Ves. He was looking towards the future.

Rather than start with something modest and add more rules ad-hoc, Ves wanted to implement a solid framework that could scale as the Larkinsons grew in numbers and power.

Therefore, even if some of the reforms seemed excessive, Ves believed the Larkinsons would definitely be thankful a few decades from now on. With all of the rules they drafted, his family would be able to come up with an answer to most situations!

After voting on and finalizing the rules, the time had come to announce the changes.

To signal a new start and make the separation between the old family and the new family permanent, the announcement had to be done in public and with a certain amount of ceremony.

The Larkinsons booked the best auditorium in Krent while Ves spent some time to fabricate some props.

Once the fateful day had come, the Larkinsons all traveled to the auditorium in downtown Krent via aircar or airbus.

Even the local authorities got in on it by sectioning off the street and stationing some Holy Soldiers as an honor guard along the main avenue.

The Avatars of Myth and the Living Sentinels didn't want to be left out. Dozens of Desolate Soldiers and other LMC mechs flanked the main avenue that led straight to a temple-like auditorium.

The classical Ylvainan architecture of the circular building exuded a sense of class and tradition.

In order to obscure its religious theme, many banners and symbols related to the Larkinson Family covered up all of the murals, paintings and statues dedicated to the Ylvainan Faith.

It was as if the Larkinsons converted a temple of worship into a temple of war.

As curious, fancily-dressed Larkinson children holding the hands of their parents walked up the stairs to the auditorium, they became engrossed by the refined martial atmosphere.

The Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords, Aurora Titans, Desolate Soldiers and other LMC mechs placed around the auditorium each flooded the area with their distinctive glows.

Though blending so many glows in a relatively concentrated area made it difficult for people to experience their individual charm, something unique came into being.

The Avatars and Sentinels were already familiar with the blending of different glows. They often fielded multiple LMC mechs side-by-side or stored them in a single ship or facility.

"It's like.. we've entered paradise. A martial paradise."

"This is the power of our family. The Larkinsons are made to be heroes!"

"Our Larkinson mechs are destined to raise a storm. If this is what Ves can accomplish in less than a decade, what will his mechs become a century from now? We are at the cusp of greatness!"

Every Larkinson, both old and young, became enamoured by the majesty of the LMC mechs and the glory of their family's heritage.

The various banners each marked the participating of a major battle, of which the largest stood for one of the many wars between the Bright Republic and Vesia Kingdom!

Various projectors silently depicted dramatic footage of Larkinson mech pilots in battle. Many of these depictions looked familiar to many Larkinsons, but when displayed at this time and place, they gained a lot more significance.

The feats performed by the Larkinson expert pilots of the past attracted the most attention.

If there was one common element that made every Larkinson member proud, then it was the fact that they always managed to nurture expert pilots in every generation!

Over the course of four centuries, the Larkinson Family never failed in their duty to protect the Bright Republic and contribute to its strength. The expert pilots in the family always served in the Mech Corps for their entire lives or until they no longer became capable of piloting an expert mech.

Such a rich heritage was something that neither Ves nor the Larkinsons ever wanted to throw away.

Therefore, Ves completely ignored the objections of the old family and shamelessly drew upon this glorious past.

As hundreds of trueblood Larkinsons and their spouses entered the auditorium, they calmly took their seats.

Only Larkinsons were allowed inside, mostly. Aside from the press and some other necessary people, the family did not allow entry to the public because this event completely centered around their own people.

The local Ylvainans, who had already gathered in a crowd of hundreds of thousands, were kept well away. All of the mechs as well as a security cordon arranged by the Planetary Guard kept the onlookers well away.

This was not an Ylvainan show. It was all about the Larkinsons today.

Underneath the turbulent clouds that hinted at rainfall, Ves walked along the entire avenue flanked by Gloriana and their cats.

Both of them dressed at their best this time. Ves wore his full Pride of Dusk ensemble, though it appeared more regal and awe-inspiring this time.

The Larkinsons sent the entire outfit to the best tailor in Krent in order to turn it into a regalia that matched the new status of their leader.

Aside from a mech designer, aside from the owner of a prosperous mech company, Ves was about to add on a new formal identity.

Ves wanted to smile, but he kept his face solemn and impassive. Various journalists recorded the entire event for posterity. The regal golden flourishes and precious exotic jewels added to the Pride of Dusk turned him into an impressively regal figure!

Naturally, a king was always paired with a queen.

Queen Gloriana wore a gem-encrusted tiara. A billowing cape draped over her shoulders, doing a poor job at hiding her rose-themed dress. Some of the most exquisite Hexer jewelry adorned her neck, fingers and wrists. Many women among the Larkinsons couldn't help but grow envious at the wealth she put on display!

Due to the high import of this moment, both Ves and Gloriana dropped their customary smiles towards each other. They each looked utterly serious as they slowly ascended the steps and entered into the zone where all of the glows blended together.

Ves closed his eyes and basked in the mixed sensations. There was a complexity to the mixture that led to a spontaneous new spark of inspiration.

What would happen if he inserted multiple fully-fledged design spirits in a single design?

Would some sort of resonance take place? Would the design spirits be able to amplify each other just like Ves and Gloriana enhanced each other's strengths?

Ves sensed that there was a lot of merit in exploring this idea! Though a lot could go wrong, the reward may be worth the risk!

"You're thinking of another idea related to mech design, right?" Gloriana whispered.

"Yeah, though I don't have the time to explore it in-depth. I'm already juggling several research topics. I don't have the time to add another one to my long list."

The two stepped forward after their pause. Their cats trailed alongside them while remaining remarkably well-behaved. Both of them walked in cadence and matched the speeds of their owners like dutiful attendants.

"Meow."

"Miaow."

"What are they talking about, Ves?"

"Lucky wants to run ahead while Clixie threatened to disembowel him if he ruined this moment."

"Wow."

"I don't think Clixie can harm Lucky, but at least he's behaving."

"Oh, I think you're still underestimating what Clixie can do. She's not a regular kitty."

The two stopped talking once they finally reached the grand entrance. Once they stepped inside the tall and cavernous lobby, the pillars and frescos that used to sing the praises of Prophet Ylvaine and the Martyred Followers had made way for decorations that glorified the history of the Larkinson Family.

Each and every Larkinson that passed through all of these impressive displays couldn't help but feel a lot of pride.

An energy suffused their entire minds that caused them to become more intimate towards their identities as Larkinsons.

This was exactly what Ves aimed to achieve. In order to ensure as much acceptable as possible, Ves wanted to manipulate everyone's moods so that they were in the best state of mind to accept some of the radical changes that he was about to announce!

Both Ves and Gloriana waited for a moment until Nitaa and the guards cleared them to enter the main hall.

In a space built to house thousands, only a hundred seats were left. This made the interior of the auditorium look a little empty, but Ves did not consider that to be a bad thing.

As someone who considered himself to be an artist, Ves was aware of the concept of negative space.

Empty space could be manipulated to enhance the aesthetic qualities of real elements.

The huge hall had been designed to convey a lot of formality and grandeur by exaggerating the dimensions and raising the ceiling to an incredible height.

When the Larkinsons each took their seats, they felt as if their empty surroundings were as dark, cold and lifeless as interstellar space.

Only by huddling together and forming into a single, cohesive group would the Larkinsons be able to survive the unfeeling cruelty of reality!

Like twin stars lighting up the place, both Ves and Gloriana walked down the middle under the fascinated gazes of the Larkinsons.

There was no order to the seating arrangements aside from grouping close relatives together. Both young and old sat at the front, middle and back.

The Larkinsons should not pay too much attention to status. At the very least, it shouldn't dominate the interactions between one Larkinson to another.

Ves and many Larkinsons disliked the stratified hierarchy that formed in many different family groups. People such as Senator Tovar were so far away from the younger generation of the Tovar Family that many of their members never even met the old man in person!

Perhaps the Larkinsons might eventually evolve in this direction as well, but for the time being many of them would do their best to flatten the power distance between the strongest and weakest Larkinsons!

All of these subtle details each conveyed something important. The more astute Larkinsons managed to decipher the unspoken messages, while the more straightforward ones simply carved their subliminal thoughts and feelings in their memories.

Even if the younger Larkinsons weren't aware of all of the symbolism, they had already been indoctrinated without knowing it! A ceremony was nothing more than a highly-formalized show, and Ves happened to play the main character this time!

Once Ves and Gloriana reached the podium, some of the Larkinsons reacted with surprise as they continued to step up in unison.

Even their cats stepped up on stage!

This was another silent declaration by Ves. Though he hadn't tied the knot with Gloriana yet, he already considered her to be part of the family!

Where Ves went, Gloriana would always be besides him. This was what he wanted and what every Larkinson should accept!

Though there were plenty of Larkinsons who possessed a lot of doubts about Gloriana's Hexer origins, this was not the time to bring up this matter. The grand ceremony pressed so much on their minds that none of the Larkinsons ever possessed the impulse to stand up and ruin this historical occasion!

Chapter 1806 Historic Announcement

Both Ves and Gloriana seated themselves on the padded thrones. Ves sat in the very center while his girlfriend sat on a slightly smaller and less ostentatious seat.

Gloriana may be part of the family, but Ves was in charge.

Their cats sat proudly at the sides as if they were honor guards. Adopting this posture and remaining absolutely still came naturally to Clixie, but Lucky was already starting to lose patience.

"Sit still, you naughty bugger!" Ves quietly whispered to his pet.

While Ves readied himself for the speech, the audience of Larkinsons became affected by the grand and solemn atmosphere. It was as if this event signalled a completely new start instead of some changes.

Not just the Larkinsons on Kesseling VIII, but also their relatives elsewhere paid close attention to this occasion.

Benjamin Larkinson sat in the back garden of the much-emptier Larkinston Estate at Rittersberg. A mixture of pride and resignation marred his face as his channels with some of the elders of the new family already clued him in on what was about to come.

"The Larkinson Family will never be the same again." He sighed.

There was so much energy in the new family. All kinds of initiatives and long-overdue reforms would come into being that served to unleash the potential of their Larkinson identities!

As for Larkinsons they left behind, the departure of the most dynamic and forward-looking Larkinsons left the old family robbed of its vitality.

Benjamin Larkinson already sensed some listlessness among the other Larkinsons. Recent events caused the old family to question much of its values and principles.

Were the Larkinsons truly right to stick to their traditions?

Was the Bright Republic truly worthy of their selfless dedication?

Should the Larkinsons be seeking to exercise more power?

Even though it appeared the old family wanted to reject everything the new family believed in, the truth was that a lot of neutral and traditionalists Larkinsons were already losing faith in some of their values.

Perhaps the old family would not be the only branch of the Larkinsons to initiate reforms.

Aside from Benjamin, every other Larkinson from the old family tuned in to the broadcast.

Most notably, Venerable Ark and Venerable Ghanso each took a break from duty to watch the announcement from their respective posts.

"You've grown, cousin." Ark smiled as he loosened the collar of his mech colonel uniform. "My brother would be proud of what you have become."

He wished nothing but the best for Ves and the Larkinsons who were about to embark on an entirely new direction. To Ark, branching out the Larkinson bloodline was not something regrettable. If the old family ever fell, the new family would still be able to carry forth their legacy, and vica versa!

Not everyone adopted a charitable stance, though.

Venerable Ghanso Larkinson looked on with a touch of resentment in his eyes. His fists clenched as he realized that the new family would never go back to the old family again after this historic day.

"Ves.."

His worst nightmare had come true. The Larkinson Family had splintered, and many of them broke off to form a separate branch.

What offended Ghanso the most was that the new family still had the temerity to borrow the heritage of their shared predecessors! The new family had no right to do so ever since they decided to break from tradition!

Their predecessors were probably rolling in their graves if they heard how their duty and sacrifice were being misused for self-aggrandisement purposes!

"We are the true inheritors of their legacy!"

It was too bad that no one except his closest supporters within the family listened to him. His earlier actions, from butchering the mechs piloted by his fellow Larkinsons to selling out his own flesh and blood, all turned him into a pariah within the old family.

Benjamin and Ark had already told him in very stern terms that it was best for Ghanso to remain secluded within the Mech Corps.

No one wanted to welcome him back to the old family right now!

With his influence at its lowest since he advanced to expert, there was nothing Venerable Ghanso could do to influence this course of events!

As every Larkinson watched with baited breath, Ves finally decided the time was right.

With his Pride of Dusk emanating Zeigra's aura at full strength, a regal and aggressive aura overcame him. Every member of the audience as well as everyone watching a projection of the live broadcast experienced the effect deep within their bones.

Ves appeared larger than life after this change.

Pride exuded from his body, so much so that Ves even had a sense that his father was watching over him. What would it be like for Ryncol Larkinson to see his son now, sitting on a throne in front of hundreds of obedient Larkinsons?

Over two-hundred trueblood Larkinsons and their dependents gathered in the auditorium today to listen to his words.

With all of the pomp and ceremony, his audience entered into a receptive mood that Ves could use to his advantage.

He could state practically anything without being challenged! As long as he didn't say anything too outlandish, the Larkinsons would almost certainly accept what he said!

Of course, Ves was not so short-sighted to chart his own course. He made the decision to court the support of the most influential Larkinsons within the new family.

Though Ves had to give up a lot of control, he still retained enough power to satisfy his purposes.

Sharing power was the only way to ensure the long-term viability of the Larkinsons!

"It's time." Gloriana whispered.

Ves nodded minutely and concentrated his mind in order to mobilize his Spirituality. He began to burn his spiritual energy at a very gradual rate to amplify his gravitas!

"Larkinsons." He began with a voice filled with an indescribable charm. "I welcome you here today to unveil a new start for ourselves and for our family. We do this not to break from our Larkinson heritage, but to honor it by taking the next step!"

All of the previous displays and decorations had already filled the audience with stories about their family's glorious legacy.

The Larkinsons had reasons to be proud!

"We are Larkinsons." Ves stated. "No matter how we develop in the future, we must never forget our shared past with our fellow Larkinsons who chose to remain in the Bright Republic. It is because of the centuries of accumulation that we have gained the opportunity to step out of the corner of the Bright Republic and enter a wider stage!"

Many Larkinsons, particularly the older ones, reacted with approval. Though no one clapped, Through his spiritual senses, Ves clearly sensed positive emotions emanating from the crowd.

It was in these kinds of settings that crowds all shared the same emotions. If they became strong enough, then some kind of collective resonance occurred where the emotions of the whole bled through the minds of everyone present in the group.

"Starting from the Larkinson Ancestor, his descendants have diligently inherited his mission and fought on behalf of the Bright Republic with unfailing distinction. Over the centuries, our name has become synonymous with honor, loyalty and dedication. One of our greatest contributions to the state was to supply the Mech Corps with a continuous supply of expert pilots, each of which have never failed to answer the call for duty!"

The amount of Larkinson mech pilots and Larkinson expert pilots who served in the Mech Corps could take up an entire book!

Ves clasped his hands on his lap. "Our Larkinson Family has many grounds to be proud of our heritage and ourselves. The honor we have accumulated over the years has turned us into one of the greatest role models of the Bright Republic! With all of these

accomplishments, perhaps you are questioning why we have decided to break with tradition. What is our reason to separate from the original Larkinson Family?"

Every Larkinson had their own answer to this problem, though for some, it wasn't very articulate.

After giving the audience a few seconds to sort their answers, Ves raised his arm and clenched it into a fist!

"Our main goal is to grasp more power!"

His blunt admission was much more direct than the audience expected!

It sounded a bit crass considering the current context, but the shock value emphasized their new root!

"The galaxy is dangerous and filled with threats." Ves spoke, speeding up his cadence to lend a war-like momentum to his speech! "Countless states exist that could pose a threat to the Bright Republic, and by extension the original Larkinson Family. Some states are so powerful that even the aftershocks of their fighting can ruin everything our family has built!"

This was a not-so-subtle reference to the Komodo War. No Larkinson could possibly resist the actions of the Friday Coalition and the Hexadric Hegemony! In the face of these titanic powers, how could the trivial Larkinson Family ever make a difference!

The helplessness of the old family stemmed from their lack of power!

No matter how much honor and reputation the Larkinson Family accumulated, the Fridaymen and Hexers still considered them as ants!

When the power disparity was too great, all of these soft, intangible assets were worth nothing!

Only concrete power mattered!

"We live in a time where humanity is ascended. Yet how long will this period last? It is not in our nature and the nature of the aliens to embrace peace. War will engulf us sooner than later. Whether we face an overpowering human threat or an alliance of alien empires, we won't be able to defeat them and preserve our lives if we keep focusing on building up an endless amount of honor! Acquiring and maintaining an excellent reputation is good, but it should never be an end in itself!"

The Larkinsons sitting in front of him became more and more absorbed in his words. Right now, he was voicing some of the unpleasant truths that needed to be said in order to justify the changes.

"Well, no longer! We have had enough of slaving away for the benefit of others. The Bright Republic has nurtured us and provided us with a very pleasant living environment for many years. Yet every child must grow up. Now that we have reached a limit to our development in the Bright Republic, we must leave our homes and find our own way to better our lives!"

By describing the separation in this fashion, Ves essentially equated the new family as a child who grew up and wanted to make its own way in life.

"Our departure from the Bright Republic was just the first step. I appreciate the Ylvaine Protectorate for hosting us with great enthusiasm, but this is not our home! We Larkinsons do not belong here. Our original hearts have always resided with the Bright Republic, and now that we have left the state that has made our predecessors, we are essentially left without shelter."

A darkness seemed to emanate from his voice. Plenty of Larkinsons fell into a melancholy as they thought back of all of the joys and pleasures they experienced in their home state.

Now that they had left the Bright Republic on a permanent basis, many Larkinsons felt lost!

Ves was right! The Ylvaine Protectorate would never be their new home! Their strange culture and stranger religion were simply not compatible with the character of the Larkinsons.

They may have left the Bright Republic, but the Bright Republic has always stayed within their hearts!

Ves recognized this fact. It was for this reason that he came to a novel solution.

"Through our departure, we have deprived ourselves from our homes. Yet does this mean we have nowhere else to go? I say no! We are Larkinsons. We have endured tougher challenges! Since we can no longer find succor in other states, we must build our own home, wherever we may go!"

The older Larkinsons who had taken part in the assembly meetings sat up straighter. They knew what was coming, and anticipation flowed within their creaky bones!

The air became charged with some sort of energy. The audience paid so much attention to Ves that it took several seconds for them to notice the giant, floating emblem projected over the thrones!

A round symbol with a black surface and a golden rim greeted their eyes. In the center, a stylized golden cat head gazed forth with glowing red eyes!

"It is for this reason that we have decided to form a new entity, distinct from the Larkinsons who have decided to continue our family's original legacy. From this day onwards, we are no longer members of the Larkinson Family."

The projection of the golden cat head on the emblem opened its mouth to release a growl!

At the same time, Ves spiritually prodded his regalized Pride of Dusk to release a pulse of Zeigra's potent glow!

"After this day, we will all be part of the Larkinson Clan!"

A rush of excitement swept through the audience!

Chapter 1807 Heirloom

The Larkinson Clan!

No matter what a family member thought about the separation, many of them became excited when Ves finally announced the founding of a new entity of Larkinsons!

Adopting the guise of a clan represented a clear and significant departure from their old ways!

Taking on this new identity definitely transformed the so-called 'new family' into a group that could stand on its own!

The change came with many implications. Though most of them were symbolic or implied, each of them mattered to Ves and those who wanted the Larkinson Clan to prosper.

In legal terms, a family was not that different from a clan. There was no law or rule that governed the usage of these terms.

However, over the course of human history, an informal distinction emerged between families, clans, dynasties, houses, tribes and so on. Each of these words came to describe a different structure with common customs.

A family was the most basic form. There was nothing inherently wrong with that, as a family organization was fairly flexible up to a certain scale.

Compared to the flexibility of a family, a clan organization was a lot together and more cohesive.

The interests of the clan came first. That was the general rule when it came to clan organizations. Bloodline was important, but clans sometimes adopted talented outsiders in order to maintain some dynamism within their ranks.

To be honest, both families and clans came in so many variants that they could practically be intermingled.

There was one part about clans that set them apart.

Many clans were nomadic, and considered the sea of stars to be their home!

This implication currently dominated every Larkinson's mind!

As the initial burst of energy from announcing the formation of the Larkinson Clan subsided, Ves resumed his speech.

"We Larkinsons have done our duty to the Bright Republic. We have sacrificed so much of our blood to our former home that we do not owe anything to it anymore. Rather than see ourselves as exiles, we should embrace this turning point and unshackle ourselves from the bonds that tie us down to individual states!"

The emblem of the Larkinson Clan that Ves designed spun over his head like a spinning coin. Though the animal it depicted was just a stylized cat head, its ferocity made it as formidable as one of the huge cats of Felixia!

"With this Golden Cat, our Larkinson Clan shall set forth under a new emblem! No longer will we be content to linger in a single frontier star sector. Human civilization is much vaster than the small corner of the galaxy that we have grown too familiar with. Not only can we find prosperity and accumulate more power in the rest of the Milky Way, an entirely new dwarf galaxy is ripe for exploration! The Red Ocean shall be our first true baptism of fire that will make or break our clan!"

Both dread and excitement welled in the minds of the audience. The thought of leaving the Milky Way and traveling all the way to the Red Ocean was a huge step for many Larkinsons, but those who followed Ves this far had already accepted the risks!

Within their hearts, ambition welled. Some of them were not content to live the rest of their lives as cogs in the Bright Republic's machine. The Larkinsons not only desired greatness, but also possessed the confidence to reach this height!

No Larkinson was average! Time and time again, the way the original Larkinson Family raised its family members resulted in entire generations of talented and capable professionals.

What if the Larkinsons utilized all of their prowess to their own ends instead of a state?

As Ves had already proven, the support of a state and its rulers was fairly fickle. When a state was divided and when its leaders pursued benefits over principle, the Larkinsons could no longer afford to remain vulnerable to their predations.

Though there were upsides and downsides to forming a nomadic clan, it was the most suitable way to organize the Larkinsons to Ves. After all, he intended to explore the entire breadth of the Red Ocean, and to do so he needed a strong and loyal cadre in place. His fellow Larkinsons were the most suitable people to secure his control over his expeditionary fleet!

"I do not know what the future holds." Ves said in a gentler tone. "As I've mentioned before, reality is cold and full of danger. Yet danger often coexists with opportunity. The chance to propel our clan to greatness and reach a level of power and influence that is countless times greater than the Larkinson Family lies elsewhere! We only have to venture out of our comfort zone and fight for our benefits! We must do this not just to benefit ourselves, but also our children and their children! This is what it means to fight for our clan!"

His words along with the projection of the Larkinson Clan Emblem both caused the Larkinsons sitting in front of him to identify with the new clan.

Excitement and ambition sparked in the minds of many Larkinsons, particularly the younger and more energetic ones who yearned to be the protagonists of their action dramas!

Naturally, the risks were plenty and dangerous. Ves only emphasized the rewards so far. He deliberately mentioned little of the price they might have to pay in order to reach greatness!

There was a very good reason why the hierarchy of both human and alien civilizations were shaped like pyramids!

Only a handful of winners got to enjoy the benefits after stepping over the corpses of the losers!

Ves could tell that the older and wiser Larkinsons who already fulfilled their initial ambitions understood this truth as well.

Though it seemed reckless for them to go along with this risky new direction, in fact they all made a careful consideration beforehand.

First, they believed in Ves. He was an exceptional mech designer who had already reached Journeyman at a relatively young age. He had proven his competence in his profession over and over again. Anyone could tell that Ves was bound for greatness!

For someone like him to lead the Larkinson Clan meant that he was willing to share some of his gains. This furthered the interests of other Larkinsons, especially those who wished their children and grandchildren to live more meaningful lives!

Second, the Larkinson heritage was not at risk. No matter what kind of calamity might strike the clan in the future, at least the old Larkinson Family in the remote Komodo Star Sector would still continue their original legacy!

To the members of both the Larkinson Family and the Larkinson Clan, the separation between the two groups was not as total as it seemed.

Even when brothers who grew up under the same roof had separated and embarked on their own lives, they still shared a strong familial connection with each other!

It was due to this that the Larkinsons present in the auditorium adopted a devil-may-care attitude.

No matter what ills they suffered, the Larkinson name would still continue!

"Founding a clan is a significant event." Ves resumed after no objections came from the crowd. "Since we are splintering from the Larkinson Family we grew up in for our entire lives, we must take advantage of this opportunity to implement a changed regime! Old traditions which have held us back for all these centuries must go! If we are to propel our clan to a greater height, then we must not blindly follow our old ways. Questioning every assumption is the first step to reform the very structure in which we govern our clan!"

Ves raised his arm and snapped his fingers.

The snap exaggeratingly rang throughout the entire hall!

A bot appeared from behind the throne. The hovering contraption held a single object the size of Lucky if he was squished in a uniform rectangular shape.

It was a book. A hardcover book.

He designed and created it himself. Its ornate, eye-catching metallic cover depicted both humans and mechs, each of them impressive in their own way.

The entire cover was made out of Breyer alloy mixed with other metallic exotics for the embellishments!

No words marked the cover, but Ves embedded its center with a solid medallion depicting the Larkinson Clan Emblem in full glory!

The emblem was made of the same valuable materials as the rest of the cover, but Ves made an interesting adaptation for the eyes. Instead of inserting synthetic or exotic gems in the eye sockets of the Golden Cat, Ves placed two identical gems produced by Lucky in their places!

Their effects were fairly poor since these gems were one of Lucky's earlier products. Rather than waste them on a mech, he might as well apply them to the medallion as their appearance possessed a subtle charm despite their weak effects!

All in all, the book was a labor of love to Ves. He spent days fine-tuning its design! For a small object that was much smaller than mech, that was a significant time investment!

Ves picked up the heavy tome without a problem. Due to thick application of materials that made up the cover, the book possessed a considerable mass.

Fortunately, its weight was well within his tolerance.

Once he held the book, he raised it up and displayed its ornate front cover to his audience!

Every Larkinson became fascinated by this ancient book! Many Larkinsons never even encounter a physical book in their entire lives!

Ves had to thank Aisling Curver for giving him the inspiration to employ a physical tome as a prop. To modern humans, the appearance of such an object made a very great impact!

"This is the Larkinson Mandate." He revealed. His grave tone mainly conveyed the symbolic weight of the book as opposed to its physical weight. "Its contents are split up in three parts. The first part contains the annals of the Larkinson Ancestor as well as the deeds and honors of the original Larkinson Family from which we came from. This is a written record of our glorious heritage!"

Though Ves already expounded on the heritage of the Larkinsons many times, it was never enough!

If the Larkinsons forgot their past, then how could they maintain the essence of their character in the future?

Though Ves despised the traditionalists for stubbornly sticking to the old ways, their behavior also taught him the power of heritage!

Ves did not wish for his newfound clan to go off the rails. Remembering the past and glorifying parts of it was a way to steer the development of the Larkinson Clan!

However, simply harping on about the past was not enough to achieve meaningful change. That was the main reason why the Larkinson Family never developed after a certain point!

"The second part of this Larkinson Mandate contains all of the original rules and strictures that define the governance of our clan. Only by establishing a robust and well-thought-out structure will our Larkinson Clan be able to grow and expand in power without tearing ourselves apart!"

The bulk of the paper-like material contained printed words that neatly described all of the laws of the Larkinson Clan. While it was already assured that the rules of the Larkinson Clan would change over time, the original rules would always be immortalized in the pages of the book without change!

The Larkinson Mandate was not a book of laws. Ves designed it to be the defining heirloom of the Larkinson Clan.

The Larkinson Family had the Valiant, the ancient, heavily-damaged mech of the Larkinson Ancestor.

Ves did not insist on claiming this exceedingly precious relic. It was truly too fragile to endure frequent movement. Even if the clan did its best to shield the Valiant from shocks and other environmental changes, only one mistake could lead to irreparable damage!

In lieu of such a powerful heirloom that could unify the Larkinsons, Ves simply decided to make his own version.

The Larkinson Mandate was the product of his ideas! There was more to it than met the eye!

Chapter 1808 Larkinson Mandate

The Larkinson Mandate gained more significance in the eyes of the Larkinson as Ves explained the contents of its pages.

Its significance was much more than any Larkinson realized. Ves had not spent all of that time in designing the book in vain.

Not only was the Larkinson Mandate an attempt to create an heirloom for the Larkinson Clan, it was also an experiment of sorts.

Ves wanted to achieve multiple goals with the creation of this ceremonial book. One of his future plans and development directions hinged on the success of this experiment!

He couldn't help but release a faint grin as he showed off his book.

"The first part of the Larkinson Mandate records our glorious and honorable past. The second part describes the initial structure of our Larkinson Clan. However, all of these pages are worth nothing if they don't have our backing!"

He thumped his palm against the heavy surface of the book in emphasis!

"Written words are merely smudges on a surface while spoken words are nothing more than hearsay. In order to give the contents of this book the meaning it deserves, we must consecrate this tome and mark it with our blood and names!"

A mild shock went through the crowd. Ves did not tell anyone about the Larkinson Mandate. This was an initiative he conceived entirely on his own. While it was not quite proper, the sheer impressiveness of the ornate book was enough to stifle any objections!

"I mean this literally." Ves emphasized. "The third and final part of the Larkinson Mandate consists of pages that each bear your marks in the form of your signature and a drop of your blood! Only when every Larkinson who is present in this hall has left their marks will this object transform into something greater than a very fancy and expensive book!"

This latest announcement truly surprised both young and older Larkinsons. However, the latter soon comprehended the significance of this ceremony.

Participating in this ceremony would forever leave their names in the book that carried the identity of the Larkinson Clan!

If their ambitions came true and the Larkinson Clan achieved greatness, then it would be a supreme honor to every Larkinson present to have their name and a part of themselves immortalized in a supreme heirloom.

This was truly history in the making!

Ves became more and more satisfied with the increasingly enthusiastic response to the offer to leave their marks in the pages of the Larkinson Mandate.

He was not a natural leader. He was never hands-on in running the LMC and did not consider himself to be the best manager of the Larkinson Clan.

Each person had their own strengths and weaknesses. While Ves did not claim to know himself from inside out, he knew what he was good at and where his passion lied.

Ves was a creator. He was a mech designer, to be specific, but his accumulated knowledge also turned him into a very good engineer or creative artist.

He could design and build objects other than mechs.

Creating something like the Larkinson Mandate to unify the Larkinsons and center the newly-founded clan was well within his means!

As a mech designer, he had learned to gauge the influence an ornament or symbol could exert over people.

Every object had the power to manipulate the people that interacted with it in some way!

An ugly object elicited disgust, while a beautiful object inspired admiration.

Ves designed the Larkinson Mandate to elicit all of the right emotions and associations towards the Larkinson Clan.

In secret, he also shaped the ceremonial book in a way that vaulted him to an eminent status.

He was not only the initial catalyst to the founding of the Larkinson Clan, he was also everyone's principal backer!

This was enough to describe him as primus inter pares within the clan, but Ves wanted more.

He wanted to be venerated like the Larkinson Ancestor.

He wished to be respected by the Larkinsons beyond a mundane level.

He desired to remain relevant no matter how much the clan evolved or changed over the years. As the creator of the Larkinson Mandate, Ves would always be significant no matter how much power he held in the clan.

This was a consideration that was not immediately relevant in the present, but enormously valuable in the distant future. The greater the success of the Larkinson Clan, the greater Ves weighed in the minds of its clan members.

Not only was the Larkinson Mandate related to Ves because he was its maker, some of its visual elements also bore the mark of his touch.

The clan emblem for example was typically Ves. He was a cat person through and through and he couldn't resist drawing another cat for the emblem that stood for his clan!

The dog lovers, bird lovers and lizard lovers probably objected to his choice, but their opinions didn't matter this time! If Ves had his way, he would turn every Larkinson into a cat person!

Once Ves had made the latest announcement, some shuffling took place as the Larkinsons began to leave their seats in a predetermined order.

Each of them began to form a row that led up to the steps that brought them to the stage.

From there, the Larkinsons had to wait their turn until they were called to the front of the throne.

Ves continued to remain seated on the raised platform while Gloriana continued to sit diligently while remaining silent.

This was his show from beginning to end. It was very important that nothing related to Hexers spoiled this sacred ceremony!

Ves started off by marking the very first page.

The same bot that brought the book extended a pen.

He grabbed it after opening the thick book to the first blank page.

Ves wrote his name in a cursive, curly style before flourishing a sloppy signature underneath his stamped name.

If he held a regular pen, then he would have left a bunch of ugly scribbles behind. Despite his enhanced Dexterity and all of the control he gained over the course of manipulating precision instruments, his handwriting was atrocious.

Not every human learned to write these days. They mostly started off with typing and sometimes expanded to recited what they wanted to say and stuck to these methods for the rest of their lives.

With all of the conveniences provided by even the cheapest comms, there was no reason for anyone to learn how to write, let alone get good enough to make their writing appear pretty!

Fortunately, pen producers knew exactly what the current market was like, so they only designed and sold smart pens these days.

These nifty devices came with a myriad of assisting functions that 'beautified' every scribble made by their users.

Even a six-year old child could write a word that was as beautiful as the product of a calligrapher!

Though professionals could do way better, that was unnecessary in these circumstances. It was enough for the Larkinsons to leave their names and signatures in a legible and slightly pretty state.

Ves studied the page before him. His signature was large enough to dominate half the page. Almost none of it was to his credit. The smart pen had automatically beautified as they drew the lines, causing the end product to appear especially compelling.

To be honest, Ves had cheated by designing and programming the impressive into the smart pen beforehand. He hadn't actually signed something on the spot. His fingers were merely following the motions of the smart pen as its integrated antigrav modules moved the pen back and forth.

"It's time to shed some blood for the clan."

This was important for multiple reasons. The main intention was to emphasize the importance of their shared blood.

Ves envisioned the Larkinson Clan to revolve completely around those who shared the blood of the Larkinsons! By turning one's bloodline into a critical factor, the clan wouldn't be very welcome to adopting outsiders. This would definitely hinder the adoption and integration of extremely talented individuals who were never a part of the clan.

However, the internal cohesion of the clan should be very good. Just like the old Larkinson Family, the bonds between its members were very warm and tight due to the relative scarcity of outsiders.

Even the spouses that married into the family were considered Larkinsons in most aspects! While they themselves did not share the Larkinson blood, their children definitely would! This was enough to bind them into both the Larkinson Family and the Larkinson Clan!

Ves set an example by shedding a drop of blood.

Naturally, he didn't resort to a low tech tool like a knife to slit his finger. The bot that was standing by all this time merely extended a needle, pricked his arm, and extracted a tiny amount of blood. After drawing out the needle, the bot released a spray that rapidly closed the wound and accelerated its healing.

"The first drop of Larkinson blood will drip onto the Larkinson Mandate."

The bot drew out a sliver of blood from its needle. Ves held his breath as the drop finally reached the page he signed and expanded into a small but very vivid red splatter!

The first page had been marked! Ves smiled and gestured to Gloriana. "You're next."

She rose from her throne and walked over in order to repeat the steps he made.

Soon enough, the second blank page carried a drop of her blood, but not before leaving behind the most dazzling-looking name and signature!

Unlike Ves, her handwriting was impeccable! He didn't even dare to guess how much time it took for Gloriana to be so great in writing!

"Lucky, you're next."

"Meow?"

"I'm not kidding. Now get up here before you spoil the whole ceremony."

The third signer of the Larkinson Mandate was his cat!

Though this decision sparked off a wave of confusion from the waiting Larkinsons, Ves didn't care. He just wanted Lucky to be immortalized alongside him! In a way, Lucky contributed massively to Larkinsons by enabling his success. He definitely deserved to take up a place of honor!

Under the stunned eyes of the crowd, Lucky started off by inking his paw with the help of the bot and pressing it onto the page.

Meanwhile, Ves already wrote Lucky's name on the top of the third page. He decided to write in the stead of everyone who couldn't write.

In lieu of possessing actual blood, Lucky made do by dripping his saliva onto the bottom half of the page.

Once Lucky was done, Ves reserved the fourth page for Clixie.

Even though she was just Gloriana's cat and didn't contribute at all to his success.

No matter. If Ves wanted to give his girlfriend's pet this supreme honor, then just let him! At least the Rubarthan Sentinel Cat shed actual blood this time, though Ves spotted several unusual attributes with the naked eye.

Clixie's blood was a lot more potent than he expected!

It wasn't relevant to the current ceremony though, so Ves quickly shoved it aside and called up the next Larkinson.

The order of Larkinsons was very random. Ves did not wish to play any favorites and only made a concession by keeping close relatives together.

As Larkinson after Larkinson slowly followed the same steps, page after page bore their marks. Ves felt more and more pleased as an increasing amount of Larkinsons left their mark on his book!

A momentary pause occurred when a husband and wife brought their two kids. One of them was only three years old while the other didn't appear to be older than a year!

"Will our babies be left out?" The mother worryingly asked.

Ves offered her a reassuring smile. "That's not the case. I've already made accommodations for this possibility."

The parents were allowed to write the names of their young ones and leave behind a signature that would do them proud in the future.

The only thing the young children had to do was to offer up their blood. The baby didn't even cry as the bot applied local anesthesia and pricked the baby's skin in the gentlest fashion possible.

With that, even the youngest Larkinsons gained an opportunity to empower the Larkinson Mandate!

The more Larkinsons marked the book, the greater its power over the Larkinson Clan! The approval of so many Larkinsons in the form of their marks conveyed an indescribable legitimacy to the heirloom-in-the-making.

The more its pages filled up, the more the book took on an increasing sense of weight...

Chapter 1809 Bloodline and Spirit

A line of Larkinsons gradually moved up to the podium and the raised throne to take part in this historic moment.

The ornate tome covered by brilliant metallic alloys lay open while resting on a floating bot.

Each Larkinson at the front wrote their names, signed their signatures and infused the paper-like material of their own page with a drop of their blood.

Both anticipation and excitement suffused the moods of the Larkinsons.

Taking part in this ritual was a very novel experience! This moment would be commemorated years, decades and perhaps even centuries from this day!

As long as they and their descendants stood strong, the Founding of the Larkinson Clan would always be remembered as the beginning of a glorious record!

No matter how small, trivial or unimportant a Larkinson was, as long as he or she left their marks on the pages of the Larkinson Mandate, they became a founder of an illustrious clan of warriors and entrepreneurs!

Even the youngest of Larkinsons weren't spared! The babies happily gurgled in the embrace of their mothers as they instinctively sensed the joy and achievement among the Larkinsons attending this remarkable event.

As more and more Larkinsons kept marking the Larkinson Mandate, the hefty tome started to become increasingly more significant.

This was the book that defined the Larkinson Clan!

Its symbolic importance was very evident. By recording the annals of the original Larkinson Family as well as holding the original rules and strictures of the clan, it instantly became an heirloom beyond compare!

Not a mech, but a book!

Only a creator like Ves could develop an object and make his relatives accept it as an artifact without question!

The Larkinson who held this heirloom ruled the clan!

Its significance to everyone meant that only the clan leader had the right to bear this sacred relic!

The weighty ceremony and the close exposure to the Larkinson Mandate caused every Larkinson to form a myriad of associations to the newly-founded Larkinson Clan.

The more his relatives became invested in the clan, the more the heirloom became charged by their energy.

This was not a symbolic description to Ves. It was something that took place before his very own eyes!

As Ves remained seated on the throne, he maintained a reserved smile while observing the ongoing ritual carefully with his spiritual vision!

Each time the blood of a Larkinson dripped onto a page, a minute amount of spiritual energy empowered the surface.

Though he didn't know this beforehand, blood was a carrier of spiritual energy!

With hundreds of pages containing hundreds of drops of blood, the collective spirit and bloodline of the Larkinson lineage continued to deepen their imprints on the book!

Of course, if someone else attempted to replicate this ritual, the effect wouldn't be so drastic.

Secretly, Ves made several preparations to enable this experiment!

First, he sacrificed a significant portion of a P-stone in the creation of the Larkinson Mandate!

He processed a portion of the P-stone and blended it into the Breyer alloy and other materials that made up the metallic cover and medallion of the book!

Though this injection of foreign matter detrimentally affected the strength of the materials, Ves had already confirmed that they gained the ability to absorb spiritual energy from an earlier experiment!

Not only that, but Ves also crushed another chunk of P-stone into extremely fine dust and used it as the main component of the paper-like material that made up the pages of the book!

Ves did not waste a P-stone in vain. The sacrifice of this valuable strategic resource infused the Larkinson Mandate with the capacity to hold spiritual energy.

Technically, it was a waste since breaking up so much P-stone and processing them in various ways reduced their total efficiency. He should have been able to store more spiritual energy for the amount of P-stone he invested into the book.

It didn't matter, though. A P-stone already possessed a generous capacity. What mattered more to Ves was if he could leverage this added capability.

From what he had observed so far, the book functioned exactly as he intended!

Of course, the Larkinsons who walked up and marked the book weren't capable of separating a portion of their spiritual energy and infusing it into their blood.

Ves had to manipulate this procedure in the dark. This took quite some effort.

Though Ves appeared to sit idly on the throne like a figurehead, in truth he was exerting his mind and Spirituality.

Each time a Larkinson interacted with the book, Ves swooped in with a spiritual projection that gently coaxed a tiny mote of spirituality from the unsuspecting individual.

Performing this operation in a matter of seconds was a great test of his fine control. He not only had to harvest the mote of spirituality quickly, but also minimize the harm of the Larkinson as much as possible!

Predictably, his initial attempts were a little rough, though it got better over time. Practice made perfect, and as Ves repeated the same procedure over and over again, he became more refined in his spiritual manipulation.

Most of the Larkinsons that stepped up did not possess spiritual potential. Their spiritualities were so small and insignificant that Ves could only harvest the barest of spiritual traces from their minds.

Fortunately, Ves harvested so little from them that they only experienced some loss of energy or mood.

Though they would definitely become affected by his actions, Ves figured the ends justified the means.

He was doing this for the good of the Larkinson Clan! Strengthening the Larkinson Mandate by infusing it with the spiritualities of so many Larkinsons not only increased its spiritual quality, but also built up to another outcome!

He became more and more eager to proceed to the next step of this experiment.

Though none of the Larkinsons were aware of what he was actually trying to do, their reverence towards the Larkinson Mandate continually increased.

Those who approached the tome all sensed its increasing presence. The impact of the object on the Larkinsons at the end of the line couldn't be described! It was as if the Larkinsons were basking in the presence of a sacred relic, one that had been created for the sole purpose of serving their clan!

With such a fine heirloom in their possession, the Larkinsons looked forward to what they could do in the future!

As the long line finally came to an end, the last Larkinsons who donated a portion of their blood and spirit to the book returned to their seats.

By now, the remarkable nature of the Larkinson Mandate became evident to everyone attending the ceremony in person. The Larkinsons watching the proceedings via projection only received a hint of the relic's majesty, but it was already enough to make many of them regret staying behind in the old family.

Compared to the Larkinson Family, the Larkinson Clan appeared much more eager to move forward. The willingness to embrace change and to set forth into the unknown decisively separated the clan from the family!

Ves was about to address the crowd yet again as he picked the book. Its gold-and-black surface seemed to reflect a mysterious luster. The thick medallion protruding from the

surface of the front cover depicted the golden cat emblem with a remarkable degree of vitality. Its red cat eyes appeared to shine with an invisible inner light!

He was almost ready to proceed with the next phase of the experiment. However, the third part of the tome was not yet complete.

It still contained five empty pages at the very end.

"Before we proceed, I would like to introduce you to a couple of brave and heroic Larkinsons. Their strength is obvious to all, and their service to the clan will bless us with their protection! Please welcome Jannzi Larkinson and Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson!"

The massive double doors that had closed at the start of the event opened up yet again. Two Larkinsons still garbed in the dress uniforms of the Mech Corps strode forward with the confidence that only an extraordinary individual possessed!

As they strode down the center, the Larkinsons who sat at the sides each gazed at the newcomers with respect and admiration.

Both Jannzi and Tusa were expert candidates! To many of their relatives, it came as a complete surprise that this pair not only joined the Larkinson Clan, but also managed to leave the Bright Republic without finishing their full tours of service!

In fact, their joining was something long in the making. With the bargaining power that Ves possessed, he was capable of demanding concessions from the Bright Republic.

Though it was not entirely proper to allow Jannzi and Tusa to leave the service, the state had already shown a willingness to bend the rules whenever it suited its interests.

Since Ves wanted the pair of expert candidates, the Bright Republic might as well fulfill his wish!

Fortunately, both Jannzi and Tusa were just expert candidates for the moment. This meant that their participation in the Sand War wasn't significant enough to affect the survival of the Bright Republic.

The greater cost to the Mech Corps was that Ves essentially robbed them of two potential expert pilots. Ves had to offer some small promises to the state in order to secure this favor.

The moment the two expert candidates reached the throne, they both repeated the same process. As they shed their blood, Ves had been on point and extracted a considerably larger amount of spirituality from the two young expert candidates.

As mech pilots who possessed developing spiritual potential, they were able to provide a lot more strength than the other Larkinsons!

While their sacrifice was greater, the rewards they gained would definitely pay off in the end!

"Please be seated, honored clan members."

Both Jannzi and Tusa nodded at Ves before leaving the podium and seating themselves on the chairs that emerged from the floor.

Three empty pages remained, but Ves did not invite anyone to mark the Larkinson Mandate.

Instead, he moved on. It was almost time for the climax of this ceremony!

"By participating in this ceremony, each of us have become the founders of the Larkinson Clan." Ves patted the surface of the book with affection. "Be proud. Be hopeful. Be ready. Each of you have decided to follow me when I needed your support the most. I will forever cherish the names written in this book. As the holder of this Mandate, I vow to you all that I will endeavor to led the clan to greatness as its patriarch!"

Ves swept his hand over a portion of the front cover of the book. Through unknown means, golden letters appeared on the surface which formed the motto of the Larkinson Clan!

PER ANGUSTA AD AUGUSTA

"Through difficulties to honors! This shall be the guiding principle of our clan!"

The Larkinsons all rose and clapped at his words! Some even released exultant roars as if they could already see the prosperous future of the clan! Their excitement was almost palpable!

"Each of you has formed a pact with us all by marking this book. From now on, the Larkinson Clan will continue to exist and prosper as long as you and your descendants hold true to our tenets! This book carries the will and spirit of our bloodline, and will protect us so long as we are loyal to the clan!"

The audience didn't need much prompting to say the right words.

"WE PLEDGE OUR LOYALTY TO THE CLAN!"

Their words thundered throughout the entire hall! Not only that, but due to their latent spiritual connections to the Larkinson mandate, their pledges practically energized the spiritual nature of the book!

As the Larkinsons shouted slogans and pledged their undying loyalty to the Larkinson Clan, Ves secretly infused the last three pages with spiritual marks.

He concentrated his mind in three different strains. Each of them made contact with three different design spirits!

"It is time." He mentally communicated.

Chapter 1810 Ancestral Spirit

The Larkinson Mandate was not a simple book.

It was more than an heirloom.

Though its symbolic importance to the Larkinson Clan reached an unprecedented height after the marking ritual, this was not enough!

In order to elevate the tome as the defining treasure of their clan and bloodline, Ves wanted to leverage more of his strengths.

He was not only an artist and an engineer, but also a spiritual sorcerer, if only a very rudimentary one due to his self-teaching.

Even though he only developed a modest toolbox of tricks, this was enough to give this ceremony some extra oomph!

What he was about to do was something he had envisioned at least a month ago.

Ever since he gained some insights from Aisling Curver's design philosophy, he began to yearn for something greater that could watch over the Larkinson Clan.

The Larkinson Clan should be more than a simple organization.

Perhaps the best way to describe his desire was that he wanted to make the Larkinson Clan come alive.

Yes, alive!

What better than to create a spiritual product that belonged to the Larkinson Clan as a whole?!

Ves had never created anything like this before. However, he figured that it wouldn't be so different from creating a custom-made design spirit.

The biggest difference was that instead of making the newborn spiritual entity become the spirit of a mech design, Ves would instead enshrine it as an ancestral spirit of his clan!

Did it sound crazy? Perhaps. Could it go wrong? Certainly. Did that stop Ves from proceeding with this experiment? Hell no!

Though it was anything but guaranteed that the experiment led to the desired outcome, he was determined to fight tooth and nail for its success!

Before this day, Ves already made arrangements with two of the three spiritual entities ahead of time.

Qilanxo readily donated a miniscule but extremely potent mote of spirituality.

The Solemn Guardian painfully separated a larger spiritual fragment from its hole.

Zeigra resisted the demand to no avail. Ves straightforwardly attacked the spirituality of the former Crown Cat and managed to carve out a small spiritual fragment!

Ves collected all three spiritual traces and infused them in the last three pages he prepared beforehand.

He had already prepared each of their pages with their names and a lively sketch of their appearances.

Qilanxo's page depicted the Sacred God in her prime when she was still alive.

The Solemn Guardian's page showed a humble Desolate Soldier as it drifted silently through space.

Zeigra's page displayed the ferocious Crown Cat roaring furiously at an invisible challenger.

No matter if they were willing or not, Ves had appointed each of them as the clan's inaugural guardian spirits.

In other words, Ves turned all three spiritual entities into honorary members of the Larkinson Clan!

He considered his options carefully before deciding on this selection. Each of them brought something unique to the table.

With Qilanxo, the Larkinsons gained a spirit of protection and nurturing.

One of the main goals of the Larkinson Clan was to protect its members. Not only that, but Ves also wanted the clan to provide an excellent nurturing environment for the subsequent generations that picked up where their predecessors left.

A clan without descendants was a clan without life!

The original Larkinson Family had always placed an immense amount of importance to the wellbeing of the young and old, and Ves wanted the clan to inherit this emphasis!

The addition of the Solemn Guardian served to remind the Larkinsons of the importance of duty. For centuries, the Larkinsons answered the call of duty and defended the Bright Republic and its citizens against the aggression of the Vesians.

With the founding of the Larkinson Clan, Ves sought to retain this noble calling. By selecting the design spirit of the iconic Desolate Soldier, the clan gained a simple but formidable guardian spirit that neatly kept the compulsion of duty alive!

There was one important difference.

This time, the clan members no longer pledged their duty to other entities.

Instead, Ves intended to steer this calling towards the clan! After separating from the old family, the clan members should only fight on their own behalf if he had his way!

As for including a furious and resentful spiritual entity like Zeigra, Ves hesitated many times before settling on this final choice.

The former Crown Cat never forgave Ves for his involvement in its slaughter. Even though he managed to salvage the huge cat's spirituality after death, no one liked to die! Though a lot of time had passed since the completion of the Crown Hunt, Zeigra still hated his guts!

The spiritual entity's unwillingness didn't matter. Ves was strong enough to manhandle Zeigra, and he managed to do so without any complication.

If the unwilling beast resisted more powerfully than he anticipated, then Ves was more than ready to draw upon the strength of the F-stone he stored in a hidden compartment of his throne.

Fortunately, it didn't come to this point, allowing Ves to preserve the exotic's precious charge.

Ves had a good reason to draw upon Zeigra's strength despite the risks of drawing strength from a hostile entity.

The Larkinsons not only embodied duty, but also courage!

None of his relatives had been raised to become cowards. Tales of heroism indoctrinated the younger generation into becoming daring individuals when they grew up! If not for fostering this courage, the Larkinsons would have never made as many achievements in battle!

The cost was great, though. Many promising Larkinson mech pilots met their end in battle. When Larkinsons continually took risks, eventually they suffered a bad roll.

There was nothing Ves could do about that. He merely accepted this as the necessary price to retain the vigorous and daring character of the Larkinson Clan!

Time passed as the three newly-appointed guardian spirits became intertwined with the fate of the Larkinson Clan.

No one was aware of their enshrinement except for Ves! Yet their influence could already be felt in many subtle ways with the Larkinson Mandate as the nexus of exchange.

Everyone who left their mark on the book began to feel a little odd. Though nothing happened, the Larkinsons became too engrossed by the faint sensations that swept their minds and bodies.

It was.. as if they noticed that something was connecting them to each other!

Even Gloriana who had also left a piece of herself experienced sensations that reminded her of the Aurora Titan and Desolate Soldier models.

As someone who played an integral part to the next step, Ves already clued her in on his intentions.

She threw a pointed glance at him while whispering a final request.

"Make it female."

Ves had no time to contemplate her last-second demand, as the book in his hands heated up in a spiritual sense!

With the hidden empowerment of the final three pages, the Larkinson Mandate appeared charged with energy. The infusion of the last three foreign elements in an already crowded mix seemed to spark to an energetic reaction!

This was the time for Ves to make his move!

In order to distract the crowd, he quickly addressed the crowd that he neglected for the last couple of minutes.

"Now that we have formed our clan and given our pledges, let us hear from the Larkinson Family that has decided to continue its original legacy. Even though we separated from the old family, we will always share some ties to our brother and sisters residing in the Bright Republic."

Ves waved his hand, causing the projection of the emblem to make way for the visage of a respected member of the old family!

His uncle, Colonel Ark Larkinson, appeared in view, gracing every Larkinson with his splendor!

"My fellow Larkinsons. It saddens me to see you leave, but it gladdens me to see you chasing after your dreams. As my nephew has alluded to, there is more to the galaxy than this tiny corner..."

The expert pilot's innate charm soon drew the attention of the entire audience.

In the meantime, Ves stopped paying attention to anything else but Gloriana and the book resting on his lap.

Normally, if someone brought a bunch of spiritual energy and fragments together from completely different sources, they would always clash or at the very least stay as far away from each other as possible!

It was not in the nature of spiritual energy to blend and mix with each other if their attributes were incompatible. Trying to merge them together did not result in anything except a violent reaction in ordinary circumstances.

Ves knew of a way to merge so many different spiritual elements.

He simply performed the same steps he used to make a spiritual product!

The first step was to shatter the fragments and any self-contained spiritual entities. This was fairly simple as he formed a powerful spiritual projection and infused it with a considerable portion of his spiritual energy.

He then proceeded to smash the motes and fragments donated by Qilanxo, the Solemn Guardian, Zeigra, Jannzi, Tusa and even himself!

Once he shattered everything into minute spiritual shards, he began the lengthy process of merging them back together while infusing the whole with the spark of life.

This was a very draining and burdensome procedure, especially when he had to do it while he was seated in front of hundreds of Larkinsons while his uncle was giving a speech!

Nonetheless, none of his manipulations were visible to the naked eye or any sensors present in the auditorium, so Ves proceeded without fear of exposure.

"Gloriana." He said. "Get ready."

She furrowed her eyebrows and tensed up as Ves turned his empowered spiritual projection from a hammer into a knife.

He then proceeded to cut a spiritual fragment from her mind, causing her to wince in pain!

Ves moved quickly once he obtained his prize. He stuffed it inside the mix of spiritual elements and quickly shattered it into shards.

Just as he finished, Gloriana's spirituality acted on her own and formed a spiritual projection that reached straight down at the soup of spiritual elements where Ves hid her stolen fragments!

Both of them went to work.

Ves began to merge the spiritual elements together as quickly as possible. In order to hasten the process, he didn't hesitate to deplete his spiritual energy reserves.

He burned his spiritual energy to increase his speed and effectiveness.

He infused the spiritual mixture with his spiritual energy in order to strengthen its spark of life.

In the meantime, Gloriana strained to keep her autonomous spiritual projection from lashing out. Even as it tried to recover her missing spiritual energy, it quickly sensed the imperfections in Ves' results.

Her perfectionist tendencies came into play as her projection soon began to devote more time in correcting the faults!

Soon enough, the spiritual product gained more and more coherence.

The large amount of spiritual influences caused it to gain a muddled and multifaceted character. This was not a spiritual product with a strong, singular focus!

Instead, it appeared to be developing into a more complex spiritual entity that inherited at least some of the traits of its ingredients!

After Gloriana finally couldn't bear the strain any further and retracted her spiritual projection, Ves continued to bull through the process while investing more spiritual energy than ever before!

It seemed that a complex spiritual product required much more spiritual energy to support its creation process!

Fortunately, Ves had already been prepared for this outcome. He expended as much energy as needed as he continually drew upon the stored reserves of the P-stone he also hid inside his throne.

After ten minutes of effort, the process finally came at an end. The spiritual products came to life when Ves finally fit the final pieces in a very unique puzzle.

The Larkinson Mandate released a spiritual shockwave that momentarily shocked every member of the audience and even took Ark aback for a sliver of a moment!

Time seemed to still as Ves witnessed the birth of his fourth spiritual product.

Both Lucky and Clixie no longer maintained their statuesque poise anymore. They interrupted their silent vigil by yowling into the air as if to herald the arrival of a great entity!

The Golden Cat was born!