

## Mech 1871

### *Chapter 1871 The Sane Wodin*

Dr. Ranya Wodin was a conflicted woman.

She spent months preparing for an implantation surgery. This was not necessarily unusual in her profession, but she was doing all of this work for a boy!

A boy!

How could she ever imagine that she would labor so much in order to please a boy, and a foreigner at that? Her entire being recoiled at the thought of serving a boy!

Her Hexer friends and colleagues back in the Hegemony would definitely laugh at her if they could see her now!

"Damn you, Gloriana!" She angrily hissed. "Damn you and your stupid boyfriend!"

She had nothing against Ves Larkinson. He was just a foreign boy who tried to make the most out of his relationship with Gloriana. Though the gulf between their respective stations was as vast as the gap between the Milky Way and Andromeda, Gloriana paid no mind to it at all! She would willingly marry a pig if the beast was capable of boosting her design philosophy!

As resentful as she was with Gloriana, a part of Ranya also felt a little jealous.

Despite the mismatch, Gloriana genuinely got along with Ves. Not only that, but their work-related specialties also seemed to fit like a puzzle!

It was difficult to find such a great professional match. It was even more difficult for Hexers as females like her usually developed an uneven relationship with boys.

Their male counterparts were hardly able to contribute to any collaborative projects with women! The latter always took over all of the reins!

This was why collaborations in the Hexadric Hegemony mostly centered around women. Many female professionals even sought to marry other female professionals in order to gain an edge in their careers.

"I should find a woman myself." She idly murmured. "I'm getting sick of feeling jealous at Gloriana."

Unfortunately, she wouldn't be returning to the Ylvaine Protectorate anytime soon. Not only would she lose most of her income, she also wouldn't be able to pursue any of her research interests!

For better or worse, Gloriana was the best employer that she could get at this stage. Ranya already tried to find better employment opportunities in the Hegemony, but pretty no one offered her as much remuneration or autonomy as her own cousin!

Since her early accomplishments defined the rest of her career, it was vital for Ranya to make the most out of her early years as an exobiologist!

Though Ranya devoted far more than she wished on the Archimedes Rubal, she still found some opportunities to hand over some of her responsibilities to Dr. Lupo Guernica.

It was too easy for Ranya to direct a boy like Lupo. Prominent female Hexers like her took master classes in manipulating boys. Gloriana used what she learned to good effect on Ves! Ranya could hardly afford to fail in her manipulation!

Sadly, it hardly mattered whether she managed to gain control over Lupo. Her fellow exobiologist possessed a much worse foundation due to his inferior background.

Perhaps his only redeeming quality was that he was fairly bright. Ranya found to her astonishment that the speed in which he absorbed knowledge was not much worse than her own!

How could he be so smart?! She surreptitiously analyzed his genes and his implants and nothing indicated that he should be so quick learning new knowledge!

Regardless of this mystery, Ranya still looked down on the boy. At most, she was willing to admit that he was qualified to be her assistant.

In the moments she freed up time for herself, she spent most of her time checking up on her long-running experiments aboard the Frozen Leaf.

"Grow well, my plants." She smiled as she leaned over and tapped the transparent surface of her cultivation chambers.

Aside from spending time on her studies and keeping track of her experiments, she didn't have a lot to do. Kesseling VIII utterly bored her. While the planet offered more activities than Cloudy Curtain, that didn't mean she liked any of them. The Ylvainans were utterly heretical in their beliefs!

"Disgusting alien sympathisers." She scowled.

The lesser states were lesser for a reason. Their prosperity and cultural development was equivalent to a backwoods village in the standards of the Hegemony! The splendor she enjoyed back home was completely absent in this podunk little state!

The only ones who could lift her boredom were Gloriana and Brutus.

Of the two, Ranya felt more and more ambivalent about Gloriana. Her cousin had always been.. intense in her youth.

Ranya thought that Gloriana would have matured over time and grow into her responsibilities.

Instead, she deviated from everyone's expectations by spending lots of time outside the Hegemony. Her relationship with Ves practically made everything worse as Gloriana continued to adjust her demeanor to please her boy!

"Urgh. What is it about Ves that warrants so much care from us? Is he really as impressive as Gloriana claims all the time?"

There were plenty of anomalies surrounding Ves. His rapid and unusual ascension as well as his colorful track record were the subject of much study from Ranya and the Glory Battalion.

They found many points of suspicion. Though there were a lot of holes in the information they found, it was enough to hint at some great and unspeakable secret behind his success!

Gloriana's outlandish claims didn't sound as ridiculous in this light.

As Ranya finished her inspection, she sat down behind her desk and prepared to jot down some notes.

Before she could do so, she paused.

She suddenly noticed that someone was sitting on the opposite side of the desk!

"You! Who are you! How did you get here! Guards, Guards!"

She pressed the panic buttons built into the underside of her desktop as well as to the foot of her chair!

Nothing happened!

"Don't bother, Dr. Ranya." A smooth female voice uttered. "This compartment is completely isolated from the rest of your ship. Every security system in this lab is under my control."

"Your accent.. You're the former Vraken that has partnered with Ves!"

The intruder dressed in an infiltrator suit grinned and crossed her legs. "Correct. You can call me Calabast. In formal terms, I'm Ves Larkinson's strategic partner. In practice, I act as his babysitter. He's an amazing mech designer, but he's such a boy sometimes.

He completely neglected the possibility that his lovely girlfriend of his would spill his secrets to her relatives. Well, I've come to clean up his mess as always."

The woman sitting in front of Ranya immediately intimidated her. The Vraken Matriarchal Dynasty was one of the most powerful influences in the Hegemony. Aside from that, there were a lot of rumors and mystery surrounding DIVA. For a Hexer to leave both of these organizations in order to bet all of her chips on Ves was a testament to her decisiveness!

"Calabast." Ranya uttered the name with a hint of apprehension. She tried her best to maintain her composure! "If you want to talk about Ves, then you've approached the wrong woman. Gloriana isn't on my ship."

"I'm not looking for Gloriana." Calabast grimaced. "Your cousin is so obsessed with Ves that it's impossible to talk normally with her. If anything related to her boy comes up in a conversation, well... I'm sure you've witnessed her changes plenty of times."

"You could have approached her brother instead. Brutus can't speak for Gloriana or our dynasty, but he is still an expert pilot worthy of respect."

The former spy sneered. "Expert pilots. I hate them. They are so resolute and principled that it's impossible to persuade them to go against their nature. While that makes them easy to exploit, it's a mistake to underestimate them. I would much prefer to talk to someone sane. Out of the three of you Wodins, only you fit the bill!"

"Am I supposed to feel flattered by this compliment?"

"Nah." Calabast shook her head. "Just think of it as desperation on my end."

"Well, you wanted to talk to me. Here I am. What did you want to talk about?"

Calabast leaned close. "I already mentioned my problem. Gloriana, in her desperation to stay with Ves, resorted to sharing some of his secrets with you and Brutus. This is dangerous. Very dangerous. The secrets you are bandying about is enough to throw our entire star sector in disarray if the public believes they are credible."

"They're.. They're all true?"

So far, Ranya tried her best to withhold her judgement. Whether Ves was able to create gods or whether he came up with a method to turn mech pilots into expert candidates, Ranya wasn't sure whether Gloriana was lying!

Ranya half-expected the claims to be groundless, yet that was before Silent William departed from Ves! Outside most people's expectation, this strange and foreign mech pilot had advanced to expert candidate!

If Gloriana didn't tell her what Ves was capable of, Ranya would have dismissed this development as a coincidence.

Yet because of that conversation, Ranya couldn't help but ascribe Silent William's promotion to Ves!

This wasn't the first time that a mech pilot around him advanced to expert candidate. Jannzi Larkinson managed to promote as well after participating in a high-profile reveal event where she piloted one of his own mechs!

All of these observations were starting to win Ranya over to Gloriana's claims. The unexpected visit of Calabast practically pushed her over into her cousin's camp!

Ves was definitely special if he merited so much attention from the likes of Gloriana and Calabast!

Though Calabast hadn't answered Ranya's question, the silence and the uncomfortable eye contact were more than enough to form an answer.

Ranya released a weary sigh. "I get it. Ves is not just a simple mech designer. What do you want me to do? What do you want us to do?"

"My demands aren't much." The spy said mildly. "I simply want you Wodins to keep what you've learned under wraps. Don't share Ves' secrets to the Glory Battalion and don't pass them to Constance Wodin."

Ranya crossed her arms. "Why should I listen to you? From what Gloriana told me, you're no longer a Vraken and no longer a DIVA agent."

"Just because I set out on my own doesn't mean I'm powerless. I still have connections, and I'm more than capable enough to infiltrate your ship. Do you believe I'm incapable of repeating this feat? I might not come for a friendly visit next time."

The edge in the voice was absent, but Ranya nonetheless began to sweat. Calabast's threat was very blatant in her ears!

"I'm not looking for trouble." Ranya hastily replied. "Regardless of what Ves is capable of, I'm just a exobiologist. My main research interests are plants."

She brushed her fingers across her leafy green hair to emphasize her point.

"I know. You aren't invested in Ves. This is both good and bad. I prefer it if you focus on the benefits that you can gain. Ves is already a very successful mech designer. He is continuing to improve as we speak. Even if he isn't chasing after profits, he is still a great earner! So far, Gloriana has subsidized your research, correct? Do you realize

that she is actually in debt? All of the money you've received has actually come from the boy!"

"What?!"

"And this is just the start." Calabast grinned. "Ves will continue to reach greater heights. I'm sure of it. In a couple of decades, he will probably reach a height that you can never imagine! While the future is never set in stone, it's very worthwhile to continue to work with him. Do you think you can gain any better opportunities in the Hegemony?"

"No..."

The Komodo War truly came at a bad time for someone in her profession. Most funding was diverted to war-related expenses.

Even if the war came to an end, the money wouldn't be coming back. Instead, Ranya could already tell that the Hegemony would definitely pour most of its resources into reconstruction!

With that in mind, maybe seeking to work with Ves on a more permanent basis didn't sound like a bad idea...

#### *Chapter 1872 The Clever Dynasty*

The fabrication of the prototypes proceeded less than smooth. The design was one of the most complex one that Ves had designed yet. Not only did it contain countless nuances, it also incorporated a lot of Breyer alloy and its derivative materials.

Trying to rework it into armor plating, structural supports and other shapes took a lot of effort. The materials weren't easy to work with and neither the mech designers nor mech technicians ever worked with such high-end materials before!

Suffice to say, a lot of fumbling and spillage occurred before the fabrication teams managed to complete the prototypes.

Ves and Gloriana deliberately kept their distance from them until they were finished. They wanted to save their 'first time' when they finally completed the final iteration of the Larkinson mech. Fabricating it early would diminish this magical moment.

Letting their subordinates take the lead in the next phases was beneficial for other reasons as well. Vess received detailed reports that outlined all of the problems encountered during the fabrication stage. Learning about all of the pitfalls of this stage ahead of time would definitely help prepare for his own attempt at the end of the project.

As for the design teams themselves, they received some much-needed practice in the more hands-on side of mech design. The Larkinson mech definitely pushed each of

them to their limits and beyond. The more inexperienced mech designers such as Mayer Torto soaked up lessons like a sponge!

Even if the younger members of his design teams failed to contribute, just witnessing how a mech was being put together would definitely enrich their future design activities!

All in all, Ves expected more from his design teams next time. The Tovar Design Team was in a pretty good spot as far as teamwork was concerned, but the high uniformity and lack of diversity came at the cost of ingenuity and differences of opinion. Every Tovar mech designer pretty much possessed the same starting point.

This was different for the Ylvaine Design Team. With Merrill O'Brian and Mayer Torto breaking up the Ylvainan uniformity, the mech designers argued a lot more with each other than usual. Merrill definitely had a lot of strong words to say on how to deal with many issues.

The situation was exacerbated when the teams had to split up in order to fabricate four prototypes at the same time. With a smaller amount of mech designer in each fabrication team, the weaknesses of any single individual became very evident.

Some of the mech designers definitely needed remedial lessons as far as Ves was concerned!

However, that was for later. Ves only had eyes for the Larkinson mech project at the moment.

When he finally received a message that all four prototypes were complete, Ves instantly headed to the enclosed warehouse where the mechs awaited transportation to orbit.

"Do the mechs match your expectations?" Gloriana asked when she arrived.

Ves silently gazed up at the four similar but different-looking mechs. The tall machines each exuded a slightly different impression of power and might.

Just as with the minor revision of the Shield of Samar, Ves applied a standard visual scheme to the exterior of his design.

Though the fabrication teams left much of the prototypes bare, the appearance of all-encompassing high-quality Breyer alloy already made it clear that these weren't average mechs!

The only significant markings on the mechs consisted of the Larkinson Clan Emblem on the upper right of the chest portions and the third eye affixed to the foreheads of the mechs.

The latter would mostly remain dormant while the design remained unfinished. Without the Golden Cat assuming her function as the Larkinson mech's design spirit, the luminosity of the crystal embedded in the forehead wouldn't be able to rise.

Even without instilling a design spirit, Ves could already sense the X-Factor of the mech. Even though his eclectic group of subordinates messed it up, the spiritual foundation of the prototypes still hinted that there was a little life hiding inside their frames.

Overall, Ves was fairly satisfied with how the prototypes turned out. Each of them had already been outfitted in four different configurations.

The slimmer rifleman mech, the beefy space knight, the momentous lancer mech and the balanced swordsman mech each accentuated the common base platform in significantly different directions!

"It's kind of strange." He muttered as he continued to experience the mechs with his senses. "The four mechs both fulfill radically different roles, but it's obvious that all of them share the same DNA. I've never designed a mech like this before. It's certainly a novel experience."

"Novel is a good way to describe our work." Gloriana remarked. "Whether the revolutionary additions you've integrated into our design will actually work is still in question."

"They will work." Ves spoke with conviction. "Though we're not able to test its special features during the upcoming tests, I'm sure the mech will work fine."

Ves hesitated whether he should instill the Golden Cat as the Larkinson mech's design spirit at this point. The problem was that Qilanxo was still monopolizing much of the Golden Cat's time.

From his previous experiences, instilling the design spirit at the end of the design process was for the best. Something fascinating always occurred during this time. If Ves rode the waves of this spiritually-impactful moment, then he would definitely gain a boost when he fabricated the first production model immediately afterwards!

Besides, of the two spiritual abilities imparted to the design, Ancestral Possession was a very burdensome ability. Not only did it take a lot out of the Golden Cat, but it also diminished the spiritual energy of every Larkinson connected to the spiritual network!

Performing Ancestral Possession too often would weaken the Larkinson Clan as a whole. Not only would the Larkinson mech pilots lose some of their battle vigor, their potential advancement to the next rank might also be delayed!

As for Ancestral Assistance, this was something that Ves already implemented in the Devil Tiger in a lesser form. He already knew it worked, though not at this scale. Testing this ability would definitely be useful, but it wasn't a necessity.

Instead, Ves was much more interested in the general performance of the mechs.

The main function of the Larkinson mech was to be a competitive or even superior mech on the battlefield.

It had to be able to fight!

Therefore, gathering data on the performance of the configurations in general usage was essential! Every gimmick was meaningless if the basic foundation of the Larkinson mech was terrible!

Though Ves and Gloriana both expected their mech to do fairly well in the upcoming tests, it was best to be sure.

As Ves finally signalled for the impressive prototypes to be sent to space in order to put them through their paces, he left the site together with Gloriana.

His girlfriend smiled with contentment as she walked alongside him. Their two cats trailed after them like dutiful attendants.

"Now that you've seen your mech in the flesh, have you thought about a proper name for current design?" She asked and bumped his side with her elbow. "Calling it the Larkinson mech might be accurate, but it will lead to a lot of confusion on the battlefield. Using the same name for both the mech and the mech pilot will definitely lead to misunderstandings in the heat of the moment. This can be fatal!"

"You're right. Calling it the Larkinson mech is just a placeholder for a proper name. I just needed some time to form my thoughts on this matter. I wanted to progress the design project further in order to gain more inspiration."

"Well, have you made up your mind yet, or do you need to wait until you finalize the design."

Ves smirked. "I have some ideas in mind, but I'll leave this decision for later. I think that naming our designs upon the moment of completion will maximize the significance of that moment."

"Okay." Gloriana blinked. "Now that we have passed the harder phases of our design project, shouldn't we begin to talk about our next project? The commission from the Penitent Sisters is still open. There's a mech waiting to be designed!"

He snorted. "No one else picked up this commission while we were working on the Larkinson mech?"

"It's a bit.. difficult to find a boy who is willing to design this mech." Gloriana sheepishly replied. "We can't get one of our own male mech designers to lead the design project. They're conditioned to let women take the lead."

"Hahahaha!"

His amusement didn't sit well with Gloriana. She scowled and pinched his arm. "This isn't funny, Ves! The Temple of Hexism hasn't managed to find a good solution at this time. While we've managed to find some male foreigners who are willing to accept this commission, there are many rules that make it difficult for them to be assigned to the project."

"None of them were willing to undergo a gender change operation?"

"That's not the only option available, you know."

"Every other option sounds equally as bad to me. Well, I still find it hard to believe that none of those other men accepted the temple's stringent conditions. Haven't you Hexers found at least one chump who is willing to bark on command?"

"It's.. complicated."

Gloriana didn't actually know much more than that. Ves would have to get in touch with Calabast in order to hear more details.

The spy remained as elusive as ever. Ves knew that she was near, but his recent preoccupation with his design caused him to lose track of what his strategic partner was up to these days.

"Are you getting along with Calabast?" Ves curiously asked.

This time, it was Gloriana's turn to grimace!

"We have an understanding. That's all I want to say. We aren't friends, so don't entertain any unrealistic fantasies. Just because we're both women who come from the same state doesn't mean we're automatically comrades. It's not as if you instantly become friendly with a random Brighter."

"She comes from a different faction from the Hegemony, right?"

"Yup. The six matriarchal dynasties are jointly in charge of the Hegemony. None of them have primacy over the other. A balance exists where each matriarchal dynasty keeps the other in check. At least, that is what is supposed to happen in theory."

"Oh? Are some of them weaker than they ought to? How are the Vrakens and the Everbs faring these days?"

"They're both fairly strong. They represent the polar opposites of Hexer society. Vrakens like Calabast think they're better than everyone else because they like to think a lot."

"Isn't that a good thing?"

"No." She shook her head. "They plot and scheme a lot. They like to meddle with the other dynasties as well as other states. They're heavily represented in the Hegemony's intelligence agencies. They're also present in many major institutions."

"Do they have a weakness?"

"The Vrakens are not as enthusiastic in other areas. They're indecisive in battle and they don't do well in creative pursuits. Not every Vraken is like this, but their standardized upbringing makes them much more inclined to become spies than warriors.."

"I see. There should be Vrakens that break the mold, right?"

"Of course. There are so many of them that there ought to be at least some who become excellent mech pilots. The vassal dynasties that serve under them also provide a lot of assistance in this regard. Overall, the Vrakens have always been leading the Hegemony a little more than the other matriarchal dynasties. It's in their nature to be smug."

"That sounds just like Calabast."

"Now you know why I don't like her. Whenever I met with her, I always felt she withheld too much information from me. She never shows her true self to anyone. I can't trust a Hexer who tries to treat me like a fool. I'm a mech designer! I can be smart as well!"

Ves wasn't too sure about that. He encountered plenty of mech designers who turned out to be absolute morons in person.

#### *Chapter 1873 Presumptuous Gloriana*

While Ves did not observe the prototype testing in person, he kept tabs of the entire process.

Each test pilot reported several unusual sensations when they piloted one of the four prototypes. Regardless if they piloted the rifleman mech configuration, the space knight configuration or the other two configurations, they all experienced a vague feeling that reminded them a lot of a glow!

He smiled at this response. His mech pilots were already becoming more sensitive to the X-Factor. After piloting his LMC mechs for such a long time, his men became more attuned to the intangible properties of his products.

This was an evolution that was long in coming. Even if his mech pilots didn't believe that his mechs were alive, unconsciously they were moving in this direction.

One day, more mech pilots like Joshua King would show up! Once his Avatars truly embodied this truth, their strength would likely reach a greater height!

Of course, it would probably take years for Ves to see a qualitative difference. Right now, the Avatars still awaited their promised mech.

As the prototypes started to deploy in space for the first time, Ves keenly paid attention to the responses of the test pilots.

Due to various reasons, none of them were familiar with the properties of the first iteration of the Larkinson mech. They hadn't even practiced with a virtual version of the mech!

As expected, the pilots all experienced difficulties in trying to control their respective prototypes.

The test pilot assigned to the space knight configuration had it easiest. Its relative simplicity combined with its plodding mobility meant that there wasn't much for its pilot to screw up. In fact, piloting a second-class space knight was not that much different from piloting a third-class version of the same mech type!

Of course, second-class often incorporated secondary armaments or auxiliary modules that increased their complexity.

To the Larkinson mech, that happened to come in the form of the low-profile shoulder-mounted missile launchers.

Their addition to the mech did not increase the complexity of the Larkinson mech all that much. Much of their workings were automated, so the mech pilot only had to designate a target and pull the trigger before turning his attention back to the primary capabilities of his mech!

Therefore, the main burden in piloting his Larkinson mech came in the form of trying to control its basic properties.

Many of the components such as the power reactor and the flight system were far more powerful than the mech pilots were used to. They incorporated many more options with the assumption that the mech pilots were able to cope with the added complexity.

Cheap components were often paired with weaker mech pilots!

Stronger mech pilots always demanded more out of their mechs!

Component developers therefore segregated the market in terms of budget and skill level. The two almost always went hand in hand because expensive mechs would just be a waste in the hands of awful mech pilots!

This made the piloting experience rather difficult for the test pilots. Aside from the space knight, all of the other mechs showed obvious signs of lack of control. From overcompensating the thrust of their flight systems, to an inability to coordinate their limbs when performing standard maneuvers, there was much to complain about!

It took time for the test pilots to get accustomed to the expanded power and functionality of the prototypes.

Fortunately, each of them already possessed prior experience in piloting the four second-class practice mechs. Lady Curver's mechs were far more powerful. The mech pilots could forget about controlling those mechs without a firm foundation in high-performance mechs!

Though no one, not even Joshua, managed to exert sufficient control over the practice mechs, the practice runs had already prepared the test pilots for what they had to deal with. This practice showed as the test pilots soon began to correct their mistakes.

It took a couple of days for their familiarity with the prototypes to reach a level that was good enough to put them through the actual tests!

Suffice to say, all four prototypes showed mismatches between their theoretical performance and their actual performance.

As Ves continued to observe the tests in the comfort of his design lab, he began to frown.

"The prototype testing isn't going well." Gloriana flatly noted. "Your mech pilots require far more time to draw out the potential of their mechs."

"This is actually by design." Ves calmly replied. "We designed the Larkinson mech to be more difficult to pilot than regular third-class mechs. The fact that our test pilots have failed to master their mechs in such a short time is proof that we succeeded in creating a bridge between third-class mechs and their second-class counterparts."

"You're right, but that only satisfies one of our goals. We still need to gather lots of data on how the configurations perform at their limits. Your mech pilots are simply too awful."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"Replace your mech pilots with my mech pilots. I've already asked the Glory Battalion to dispatch some pilots to the testing ground in order to take over from your inadequate test pilots."

"What?!"

"Don't give me that look, Ves. This is the best course of action and you know it. If you continue to stick to your own mech pilots, then we'll definitely miss our deadline!"

She was right. Though Ves felt a bit annoyed that she took action before she explained herself to him, he agreed with her choice.

"Don't do that."

"Do what, Ves?"

"Making a move before discussing your choice with me! This is my project as well as yours! We agreed that you should follow my lead with regards to our current project. At the very least, we should make a joint decision before we move any further!"

"You would have agreed anyway." Gloriana huffed and petted Clixie's fur. "Rather than waste time to get your agreement, I decided to skip this needless step. Don't you think that's more efficient?"

Her cat luxuriated in the attention. She directed a smug glance at Lucky, whose back was being utterly ignored by his owner!

"Miaow."

"Meow."

"Miaow miaow."

"Meow!"

Lucky began to bat his paws at Ves until he finally got his head scratches!

"Meow~"

While their cats were up to their usual antics, Ves grumbled underneath his breath. This was not the first time Gloriana acted presumptuously on his behalf.

Though he didn't actually mind her decisions most of the time, it was her attitude that annoyed him. She was treating him in the same way a Hexer treated a boy.

Of course, he didn't blame her too much for her behavior. She grew up in an environment where women always took charge. It was hard for her to shake this ingrained habit!

That didn't mean that Ves was pleased with her though. If this pattern of behavior continued, who knew how far she would go next time!

He raised his hand and bonked her on the head with his fist.

"Ouch!" Gloriana dramatically held the top of her head in pain. "What was that for, Ves?!"

"New rule, Gloriana. I'll tap you again whenever you do something that concerns us both without my say. Each time you transgress, I'll punish you again!"

To be honest, Ves wanted to do something worse, but her guards would definitely intervene! Tapping her on the head like she was a naughty kid was the most he could get away with! Any further and he would probably get dogpiled by Melody and some very angry Hexer guards!

Fortunately, Gloriana really didn't like to be rebuked. The humiliation of getting punished was a bigger blow to her than the sting of his tap!

"I'll keep your wishes in mind, I promise!"

"Good. Don't pull off this kind of stunt again, or else!"

As Ves turned away to analyse the data gathered so far, Gloriana raised her fist to her mouth and tried her best to stifle her giggle.

Ves was too cute!

Once the mech pilots from the Glory Battalion arrived at the testing ground in space, the difference immediately became clear.

The prototypes performed much smoother once they came under control of genuine second-class mech pilots!

To the Glory Battalion, the Larkinson mech was like a simplified second-class mechs. They were barely better than the trash that third-class mech pilots piloted on a daily basis. It was too easy for the well-trained Hexer mech pilots to become accustomed to lesser mechs!

The disparity between the different classes of mech pilots was very discouraging to both the previous test pilots and Ves. The gulf was too wide!

Perhaps the only quality the Glory Battalion lost out on was the fit between the mech and mech pilot.

Ves paid a lot of attention to the telemetry related to the mech pilot and the man-machine connection.

Though the control exerted by the Glory pilots surpassed that of their predecessors, their immersion was actually lower!

None of the arrogant mech pilots respected the Larkinson mech! They didn't consider it alive. They also had no direct relation to Ves or the Larkinson Clan, so the mech didn't resonate with their hearts.

Ves already expected this response. It was similar to the rejection his Deliverer model exhibited against any mech pilot who didn't believe in the Ylvainan Faith!

Naturally, this feeling of rejection was very weak as it was only based on the spiritual foundation inherent in the unfinished design. Once Ves invested the Golden Cat as the Larkinson mech's design spirit, the feeling of rejection would probably become an actual hindrance to outsiders!

"Hehehe. This will become my very own brand of security restriction! Hardly any mech pilot can circumvent this feeling of rejection!"

Only expert pilots and strong-willed mech pilots could overcome the pervasive sensation of rejection from their own mechs!

There wasn't anything Ves could do about them except to lean even harder on the Golden Cat.

"Well, it's not like an expert pilot is bored enough to pilot a standard mech." He muttered before he dismissed this concern.

If an expert pilot designed to pilot the Larkinson mech, then Ves should feel flattered! It was an honor for any mech designer to receive the endorsement of a role model in the piloting community!

When the actual tests started to record some useful data, every mech designer soon started their analyses.

After a few days of observation and analyses, some results soon became evident.

On the whole, all four configurations were sound in design. Their actual performance largely matched their theoretical performance. There weren't many deviances, and most of them resulted from flaws that emerged during the fabrication of the prototypes.

Of all of the configurations, the space knight and the lancer mech stood out as the overall best performers.

Ves already expected the space knight configuration to do well. It was by far the simplest configuration, and it was also the most robust one as well due to all of the armor and structural reinforcements incorporated in this version of the Larkinson mech!

As for the lancer mech, even the Glory pilot became impressed by its surprisingly powerful charge!

In truth, it wasn't difficult for third-class lancer mechs to reach the kinds of speed and momentum the lancer configuration had reached.

It was what happened afterwards that often went awry.

If the lancer mech wasn't sturdy enough, the mech would get crushed upon impact like an egg hitting a wall!

If the lancer mech was resilient enough but wasn't able to absorb the forces released by the immense collision, then the mech pilot's body would probably get squished!

These limitations restrained the power of every regular third-class lancer mech!

Now that Ves overcame these inherent problems by relying on various versions of Breyer alloy, the lancer configuration performed no worse than genuine second-class mechs in terms of punch!

This was a really impressive achievement!

"It's too bad that this lancer configuration is several times more expensive than the other configurations!" Ves lamented.

There was always a price! Even Ves couldn't bear to produce more than a handful of this configuration at this time!

#### *Chapter 1874 Weakest Configuration*

Once the first round of testing came to a close, Ves and Gloriana gathered the design teams to discuss their impressions.

"Each of you have analysed at least some aspects of the Larkinson mech and its configurations." Ves spoke when everyone gathered in a conference room at the design labs. "While I'm aware that we haven't processed all of the data, we should have learned enough to form an informed opinion about our work. Let's take turns. Miles Tovar, you are up first."

Miles looked a bit nonplussed when he was put on the spot. His training and upbringing quickly kicked into gear. He soon regained his composure and gathered his thoughts.

"As an aerial mech specialist, I have mainly focused on the flight performance of the Larkinson mech." He began. "From a mobility standpoint, the four configurations are all average in terms of acceleration and agility. Obviously, the space knight configuration is the slowest due to all of the armor weighing it down."

"Do you believe the mobility of the four configurations are adequate?"

Miles hesitated for a moment. "For a regular third-class mech, they're quite mobile. They can all move around in space and reach their destinations in a reasonable amount of time. It's just.."

"They're not exceptional on this front." Gloriana filled in the silence. "There is no qualitative difference between the mobility of the Larkinson mech and a premier third-class mech. It's better than average, but nothing boundary breaking."

"This is a deliberate design choice." Ves explained. "Increasing the mobility of a mech is one of the most surefire ways to increase the difficulty of piloting it. In addition, increasing the mobility of our current design any further will drastically increase the production cost of our mech. I've already incorporated plenty of expensive materials and components in the Larkinson mech design. Adding even more will strain our finances!"

Even though the LMC was making a lot of money these days, Ves was already spending those earnings on other investments.

Most notably, Ves had to pay a hefty price for every light carrier! Ever since he decided to order a considerable batch of light carriers, Ves had to spend the bulk of his savings!

He reserved his remaining money for other necessities, which included the need to produce the first batches of the finished product. Ves wanted to field at least some Larkinson mechs in the near future!

"Let's move on." He said and turned to Cherie Tovar. "You're mobility-focused as well, right?"

The female Tovar nodded. "My specialty concerns the flexibility and range of motion of mechs. Due to the way that modular mech platforms work, the Larkinson mech doesn't score well. The swordsman mech configuration will never be able to match a genuine swordsman mech in a contest of finesse."

Ves and Gloriana showed no surprise to this answer. They already made a conscious choice to sacrifice this aspect in order to boost the other attributes of the mech.

"We already know this." Ves said. "What we want to know is whether you found something new or formed a strong opinion that is worth sharing."

"Well... I don't think I have anything to add that isn't already known." Cherie replied.

"That's okay. What about you, Vela?"

"I've been diving in the performance of the rifleman mech." The ranged mech specialist replied. "I have plenty to say about its performance. Overall, it's a decent mech, though it's very unbalanced in nature. The primary role of a rifleman mech is to output damage at a distance. The Larkinson mech doesn't do a good job at that. The rifleman mech configuration is far more powerful in terms of defense than offense!"

This was upside down. While a strong defense was a boon to the survival of the mech and mech pilot, its relatively weak offense meant that it wouldn't be able to punch through second-class mech armor at all!

The only way to do so was to rely on the shoulder-mounted missile launchers, but they could only fire a couple of salvos before they ran out of reloads!

"The rifleman mech configuration doesn't pose much of a threat against second-class mechs. That is true." Ves conceded. "However, we won't be putting our hopes on this configuration to punch through the armor of second-class mechs. Pascal, what's your feedback on the lancer mechs?"

"I would much prefer to talk about the fantastic armor system." Pascal Curin from the second design team replied.

"We're all familiar with how well the Breyer alloy protects our mechs. I'd like to hear your input on whether our lancer mech configuration is capable of defeating superior mechs with comparable armor systems."

"Well.. as long as the lancer mech configuration can build up its maximum allowable charge, then it is more than possible for it to be able to punch a hole through the space knight configuration. It depends on whether the space knight has its shield. Without a shield, it's possible for the lancer mech configuration to knock out the space knight with a well-aimed charge. This requires a lot of skill as well as knowledge of the space knight's weak points."

"Understandable. How well do you score the lancer mech's lethality against second-class mechs?"

"As long as they aren't interrupted in some way? Quite good. The lancer configuration is perhaps the closest to a second-class mech than we can get. Aside from its average mobility, its offense and defense are both impressive."

That didn't mean that the lancer configuration was a genuine second-class mech. The average mobility meant that it took a lot more time for the lancer configuration to build up a lethal charge.

Other aspects also left a lot to be desired. The endurance, energy efficiency, redundancy and other criteria could not keep up with the strengths of the lancer mech configuration.

Regardless, Ves was pretty happy with what they managed to design. They couldn't have everything with all of the limitations they were working with. Getting to this point was already an accomplishment!

The feedback session continued. Every junior mech designer had their say. If they weren't willing to speak up, Ves would simply force them with a question.

He wanted to gauge everyone's opinion of the Larkinson mech. While the design teams only played an auxiliary role in the design process, their sense of belonging in the design was real.

This was good. If his subordinate mech designers took pride in the results of the projects they participated in, then they would be much more committed to the LMC!

This was particularly pertinent to the Tovar mech designers. Though they were officially a part of the Tovar Family, Ves noticed that they had become increasingly more content with their current assignments.

Ves hadn't made up his mind yet whether he wished to retain the Tovar mech designer on a long-term basis. Currently, they were all on loan, but this could change at any moment in the future.

"The swordsman mech configuration is the weakest version of the Larkinson mech." Pachtold Tovar explained. "Aside from lancer mechs, melee mechs are a lot less useful in space combat due to the distances involved. Our swordsman mech configuration may have the defensive strength of a second-class mech, but the force it can bring to bear against its opponent isn't impressive."

"The lancer mech configuration is in the same boat." Gloriana nodded in agreement. "When an opponent forces it into a dogfight, its inferior flexibility, acceleration and mechanical strength will severely hamper its close combat capabilities."

Her point was clear to Ves.

"The redeeming factor of lancer mechs is that they can amplify their mediocre offense by preparing a charge. That is not an option for swordsman mechs."

Unlike the lancer configuration, the swordsman mech configuration wasn't able to absorb the shock of a charge. Therefore, any mech pilot who tried would definitely regret it for the short moment they remained alive!

The weakness of the swordsman mech configuration weighed heavily on Ves. Every other role had a redeeming factor that proved their worth.

The rifleman mech configuration provided valuable ranged support. When massed, they posed a serious threat against superior mechs!

The lancer mech was their only answer against superior mechs.

The knight mech was the defensive bulwark that defended more vulnerable mechs and assets against enemy firepower.

In the face of all of these vital functions, what was the *raison d'être* of the swordsman configuration?

"This configuration is not as useless as you think." Ves declared to the other mech designers. "First, let's consider the overall use of swordsman mechs. Why do they exist? What makes them popular?"

A short pause ensued before Pachtold spoke again.

"Swordsman mechs are designed to defeat other mechs through a combination of power and technique. In space, their advantages are not as great, but they're decent all-rounders. They're resilient enough to act as budget space knights, they're fast enough to chase down ranged mechs and their ability to outduel superior opponents is amazing as long as the mech pilot is skilled enough."

"Good summary, Pachtold." Ves nodded to the Tovar in appreciation. "If we don't have the swordsman configuration, we would miss an all-round option. It's our best duelist option by far and it can plug many of the gaps in our lineup. That said, there is one important reason why I insist on including this configuration."

No one managed to guess his answer, which disappointed Ves.

"They're needed to counter light skirmishers." He said.

Realization appeared in some of the mech designer's faces.

Unfortunately, some of the mech designers didn't take this revelation seriously.

"DON'T UNDERESTIMATE LIGHT MECHS!" He shouted, startling his audience. "Look, I almost failed to escape the clutches of the Friday Coalition due to the power of light

skirmishers. Sure, their armor is as thin as a data pad and their weapons are usually just a pair of daggers, but their edge in mobility is enough to turn battles around!"

Ves personally lived through several battles where light mechs played a decisive role!

"Can't our rifleman mech configuration shoot them down?" Someone suggested. "Even if they are too fast, we can coordinate the fire of our rifleman mechs to form a cage of fire. Regardless where the light mech tries to evade, it will never be able to escape getting hit."

"That requires a lot of coordination and training, which isn't guaranteed right now." Ves shook his head.

"What about our lancer mech configuration?"

"It's only fast in a straight line, and it needs a lot of time to build up to this point. This is a stupid question."

Merrill O'Brian finally spoke up. "Swordsman mechs aren't ideal against light mechs. I've seen plenty of light skirmishers outmaneuvering swordsman mechs in battle. At best, it's a skill-based matchup, but swordsman mechs are at a definite disadvantage due to their inferior mobility."

Ves grunted in agreement. "You have a point. A better option would be to field our own light skirmishers, but that's not a realistic option at this point. A more defensive option would be to field striker mechs. Their shotguns and other wide-area weapons are excellent in area denial."

"Can't we swap out the sword and shield of the swordsman configuration for a shotgun?"

"We can.. If we want the resulting mech to run out of ammunition after five minutes of combat."

In short, better options existed, but they weren't very viable right now! Depending on the swordsman mech configuration to hinder enemy light mechs was a compromise solution.

Sometimes, a mech didn't have to excel in any single area, though that was often the norm in the mech market. Adding an all-rounder to a mech roster significantly increased the versatility of a mech force.

More importantly, many mech pilots initially started learning swordsmanship in the mech academies. It was one of the foundational skills of mech combat, which meant that any mech pilot that wasn't suitable to pilot the other configurations could still fall back on the swordsman mech configuration!

## *Chapter 1875 Optimistic Outlook*

Everything was starting to come together.

The Larkinson mech design project reached closer to completion. After testing the first iteration of the mech, Ves and Gloriana gathered a wealth of data which they used to refine the design even further.

Overall, they found plenty of small issues in the base platform and the four configurations. Due to the nature of modular mech platforms, most of the problems they ascertained originated from the mounting mechanisms of the configuration parts.

Due to the necessity of allowing the parts to be swapped by mech technicians during active engagements, Ves and Gloriana had to make a lot of compromises in terms of integrity.

If they wanted to make a more solid mech, then they had to sacrifice the modularity of the system.

If they wanted to make the mech even easier to switch configurations, then they would have to introduce even more vulnerabilities!

"In practice, hot-swapping the configuration of a modular mech platform almost never takes place." Gloriana remarked. "In the overwhelming number of cases, an outfit simply assigns a single mech pilot to a platform and chooses the most appropriate configuration that fits her skillset. If there is some need to swap configurations, then it will usually take place in the preparation stage of engagement, which can stretch for hours, days or even weeks!"

In short, there was no need to make the Larkinson mech be able to switch configurations within 5 minutes if it made the mech more susceptible to targeted attacks.

As it was, Ves and Gloriana decided to set 30 minutes as their target. This meant it would take a typical crew of mech technicians on a busy hangar deck to take half an hour to swap configurations.

This practically made the modularity of the mech irrelevant during short skirmishes and sudden battles. It did allow for interesting swapping or accelerated repairs during running engagements.

In general, space battles lasted much shorter than battles on land. There was nowhere to hide in space and very little room to retreat once the two sides converged on each other.

Perhaps a mech designer who never stepped onto the battlefield in his life would choose to emphasize the modularity of this design.

Not Ves!

In his own experiences, space battles lasted anywhere from ten minutes to an hour. Furthermore, battles were so chaotic and heated that the participants didn't care about finicky technical details! They just wanted to smash the other side as hard as possible!

"Have you ever been in an actual mech battle?" He asked.

Gloriana shook her head. "No. I'm not like you. My life isn't as exciting as yours. I really admire you for surviving so many incidents that would scar a mech designer for life."

"Oh, I didn't come away from all of those crises without accumulating some scars." Ves smiled sardonically at her. "They're not entirely bad, though. Each scar bears a lesson. My design style and my design approach are shaped from the lessons I've drawn from all of those battles. When mechs are getting blown up by the second and when the ship I'm in is in the crosshairs of the enemy, you tend to realize that a lot of fancy features added to mechs are just useless distractions! They're only good for getting in the way of winning a battle!"

"Your experiences are certainly very valuable, but don't discount the contributions that other mech designers can make. We are all good at something. Combining your practical experience with my higher education results in the best of both worlds! This is yet another indicator that we are made for each other!"

"Enough patting ourselves on the back. Let's get back to work in addressing all of these suboptimal implementations. We can still squeeze some more performance out of our design!"

At the same time the project came close to completion, everything else progressed nicely as well.

The LMC just completed a huge reorganization that fundamentally reshaped the main company and its subsidiaries. The main goal of the changes was to make the company leaner and less dependent on a single location.

Even if the physical headquarters of the company disappeared for whatever reason, the LMC would still exist! Its 'virtual headquarters' along with all of the far-flung branches founded in nearly every state where the company had a significant presence ensured that the company could survive during nearly any conceivable calamity!

The mech troops were growing apace as well. The Avatars of Myth and the Living Sentinels both ballooned in strength as they hired on a huge number of mech pilots,

spacers and support personnel. All of these new hires were needed to take charge of the new mechs and light carriers the two troops procured!

The only downside of this rapid expansion was the overrepresentation of Ylvainan employees and products. Though many people initially worried that the new Ylvainan hires would force their religion down the throats of the Brighters and other foreigners, their worries were laid to rest.

The Ylvainans, while unquestionably devout, all exhibited a fanatical degree of respect towards the so-called Bright Martyr. That made them unusually obedient to instructions, though they weren't bots who could go against their nature for too long.

While Ves had plenty of concerns about the Ylvainans, he vastly preferred to hire them over any other people aside from his fellow Brighters.

He valued their loyalty.

Even though it came in the form of imparted loyalty, which Ves equated to a double-edged sword, he would rather have a weapon in his hands than none at all!

With the homeless and dispersed state of his organizations, it was difficult to hire sound and loyal employees.

Not everyone wished to abandon their existing way of life in order to lead a life on a starship!

Not everyone applied to work for one of the foreign subsidiaries of the LMC in good faith!

Ves harbored a fundamental lack of trust towards these workers. Sure, the Larkinson Clan, the LMC and his mech forces all paid well, but who could tell whether any of these people were Fridayman plants?

The Ylvainans, for all their faults, had two things going for them. First, the Ylvainans didn't like the Friday Coalition and Ves could easily take advantage of their beliefs as long as he was in good standing of the Ylvainan Faith.

Along with progress on other fronts such as the gradual absorption of family members to the Larkinson Clan, Ves was quite content with his current state.

Not only did he recover from his hasty evacuation from Cloudy Curtain, but he also grew much further!

The vast increase in strength boosted his confidence. With the number of mechs under his command about to reach a thousand operational units, Ves no longer had anything

to fear from casual rabble-rousers! He could travel far and wide and even enter the frontier with little fear of encountering a major threat.

Of course, his combat assets were still a far cry from the old Verle Task Force he used to be a part of. Even if they fielded the same amount of mechs, there was a clear qualitative difference between their mechs, ships, training, technology and most importantly esprit de corps!

Ves was unsure now how well the Avatars and Sentinels would fare in battle. Though the Ylvainans exhibited a lot of fervor at their new jobs, who knew how much of their enthusiasm remained after they took part in a serious battle?

Regardless, their hearts were in the right place, and Ves was willing to work with that. He could slowly mold them into a different shape as long as he had enough time.

A bright new future was within reach. Once he finished the Larkinson mech project, Ves planned to accept a mission from the Rim Guardians in order to earn some merits. With how much he needed to earn, he couldn't afford to delay this matter much further!

"I also can't forget about the implant I'm about to receive."

Ves had high expectations for the Archimedes Rubal, especially after Ranya and Lupo upgraded nearly every aspect.

"I can finally start my research on imaginary mechs once I've integrated this implant."

The positive trends had a wonderful effect on his mood. His concerns grew less and he began to look forward to the future.

His good mood subsequently affected his design work. All of the exhaustion and mania of the previous months faded away as Ves slowly entered into a calmer, more sublime state. Once the second iteration was complete, he patiently awaited the results from the second round of tests.

The next batch of prototypes performed better than the initial batch. A lot of rough spots had been addressed, and while there was plenty left to nitpick over, the three-month deadline loomed close.

Ves had to make an important decision. Should he delay the completion of the project in order to iterate it further or should he call it day and settle with the current after applying a few tweaks?

"If we want to create a masterwork mech, then logically we have to make the mech as flawless as possible." Gloriana argued. "I'm not entirely pleased with the current state of our design. While it is a functional product that does the job we want it to do, there is clearly room for refinement."

Her logic was sound, but Ves felt there was more to the story.

"I have a different perspective on the matter." He said. "When I designed the Devil Tiger, I was working on my own and under similar time constraints. Yet somehow, I created a masterwork mech without even thinking about it. I can tell you now that my Devil Tiger design was definitely rougher than any of my subsequent mech designs. I didn't have you by my side, so I've probably overlooked countless tiny flaws and inefficient implementations."

"That.. is hard to explain." She conceded. "How did you manage to overcome the odds?"

"I entered into a special state. I don't know how or why I entered into this state, but it was as if my mood transcended its boundaries. Certain problems were no longer problems. Due to my special state, my instinctive understanding of my own design had reached a level that I can scarcely describe. I spotted many flaws back then, but I always tweaked my mech on the fly as I was fabricating it. While I addressed many questionable points, I ignored most of them as they weren't really material to the overall quality of the mech."

"That.. doesn't fit with the common definition of a masterwork mech. They're supposed to be the most perfect and flawless incarnation of any given mech design!"

He paused in thought. "I don't think you're wrong. There are always flaws in a design. They can't be avoided because many flaws are actually necessary tradeoffs. If you fix one flaw, you introduce another one. It is still possible to make a masterwork mech out of a flawed design. I proved it. To me, it's the meaning and significance of a mech that can truly elevate it into a masterwork. I entered that special state because of my emotional investment in my passion project. I've been chasing after it ever since."

The meaning mattered more than the nitty gritty details. That was his overall message. It also happened to encapsulate his approach towards mech design.

Gloriana frowned. As a technical and detail-oriented mech designer, she found it difficult to accept his message.

"I understand what you are saying, and I don't mean to neglect the meaning of our mech design. It's just.. sloppy if we finalize the mech design this week. I'll always feel as if I could do more to perfect it. It will be like an itch that I can never get rid of no matter how many times I scratch!"

Ves placed his hands on her shoulders. "I get it, Gloriana, but please work with me. I did it once, and I can do it again. Besides, I don't think you'll be complaining for long."

"Oh?"

"You'll see."

### *Chapter 1876 Neglected Option*

After tweaking the second iteration of the design, the project reached the end of its three-month deadline.

Ves was unwilling to iterate the design once more. The clock continued to tick and Ves had better things to do than optimize a mech that was already in a pretty good shape.

Certainly, there was much to complain about. Gloriana certainly had a lot to say. She continually pecked him with rants on how he was unwilling to address the obvious imperfections of the latest iteration of their design!

He didn't take her complaints to heart. He was already familiar with her whining when they completed their previous collaborative projects.

The fact of the matter was that Gloriana would always find something to argue about! Not a single mech design was perfect, which meant that Gloriana could never be sated!

Ves really didn't know how she completed her solo projects. He imagined her clients forced her to deliver her projects regardless of how much she wanted to continue to tinker with her designs.

This meant that Ves shouldn't let her have her way this time. He stood his ground and forced Gloriana to quit her ceaseless design work.

Though she hurled many complaints at him, Ves paid no mind, knowing that she was just venting her frustration.

Some part of her recognized that Ves was right. Due to the law of diminishing returns, the performance improvements became less and less significant.

When a single tweak only resulted in a 0.05 percent improvement, then it wasn't worth the time to invest in this result!

Certainly, there were situations where such performance boosts were worthwhile, but this wasn't the time!

If perfection was attainable, then it was probably unaffordable!

Ves lived in a reality where time was a scarce and precious resource. More than money, more than Breyer alloy, more than expert pilots and more than MTA merits, time was the one resource that he could never replenish!

Once spent, he could never get a refund. The most he could do was to extend his lifetime so that he could accomplish more.

Yet eventually, time ran out. No matter how long someone was able to extend their life, true immortality didn't exist. At least that was what Ves believed.

Due to the preciousness of time, Ves constantly thought on how to extract the maximum possible value out of his time.

While he didn't always succeed in optimizing the way he spent his time, at the very least he was accomplishing more than most mech designers.

He credited some of his success due to his fast pace of mech design and his conscious budgeting of his time. As a resource that was far more precious than money, Ves always sought to minimize its expenditure whenever possible!

This was strongly related to the project he was involved in. Unlike situations where Ves worked for an external employer or client, he had full control over his work.

This was both a blessing and a curse.

Without a client setting a hard deadline, it was very tempting for Ves to loosen his boundaries and delay the completion of the Larkinson mech design project.

This was a temptation that Ves had to resist.

He believed that the emotional energy he invested in the design would diminish if he removed his sense of urgency.

He also kept Patricia's advice in mind. Mech designers ought to stick to the principles and promises. If he broke his own rule, how could he ever enter into a good state of mind?

Ves explained all of her thoughts to Gloriana. Though she understood his points, she was still inclined to stick to her own guns regardless of whether they were right or wrong!

When a mech designer advanced to Journeyman, many of their principles and outlook on life and their profession had been set. Just like expert pilots, it was extremely important for them to conform to their values and beliefs.

If they didn't, then a mismatch would occur between their minds and their design seeds. Such a situation was untenable in the long term. Either the mind gave ground, or the design seed gave ground!

Ves only witnessed the latter happening once. Gloriana shifted her core design philosophy to accommodate spiritual components. That was a very special moment and one that Ves had never witnessed again.

Though Ves would have liked for Gloriana to make another fundamental adjustment, that would be cruel to her as a person and disrespectful to her as a professional colleague.

In short, he had no choice but to bear with her nagging.

"Ves!" She slapped her palm against his arm. "This isn't over yet! We can still iterate once more! Just think of the improvements we can make! The Larkinson clansmen you care so much about will definitely have a greater chance of survival if I can reduce the vulnerabilities of our design!"

Bonk!

"Ouch! Vessssss~! Why did you hit me again?" She whined and nursed her forehead.

"As the client of this project, I decide when the project is finished. Right now, I'm ready to finalize it. I won't allow you to waste anymore time."

"DON'T CALL MY WORK A WASTE OF TIME!"

"I didn't mean it that way. Don't misinterpret my words." Ves crossed his arms. "I'm just stating that the costs outweigh the benefits if we delay the completion of the project any further. This should be a concept that you should understand. Besides, just because your involvement has ended doesn't mean our design can't be improved any further."

Gloriana threw a suspicious look at him. "What are you talking about?"

He smirked. "Wait until tomorrow. I'll guarantee you that you'll be pleased!"

He managed to get rid of her soon afterwards. What he was about to do was something he was very reluctant to share with his girlfriend.

For this reason, Ves sought a quiet, locked and enclosed chamber underneath the design labs and dismissed all of his bodyguards except for Nitaa.

"Stand guard in front of this door and make sure no one barges inside." He instructed.

The tall and heavily armed and armored woman nodded. "Understood. What should I do if you don't appear for a long time?"

"I won't take too long. If I haven't left in three hours, then you have my permission to go inside and check."

He said this mostly to ease her concerns and prevent her from barging in early.

After satisfying his bodyguard, Ves entered the chamber and locked the only entrance.

As usual, both Lucky and the Larkinson Mandate followed him inside.

The Golden Cat had just returned to the book after yet another session with Qilanxo. Whatever she was doing with the older Sacred God, it seemed to take a lot out of her. Each time she returned, she practically fell into a slumber that lasted anywhere from a couple of hours to a couple of days!

Ves caressed the surface of his book. Now that the Larkinson mech project had reached this stage, it was time to bestow it with a name and instill it with a design spirit.

Yet unlike his other mech designs, he wanted to add one additional step to the design process.

He extended his hand and materialized his System comm. It had been a long time since he last held it. He didn't mind it at all as his dependence on the System had decreased these days.

Still, even though he no longer spent half of his thoughts on the System every day, he still valued its utility.

After activating the Privacy Shield, he activated it and browsed the menu until it highlighted a single, long-neglected option.

Superpublish

[The Designer module has unlocked the Superpublish ability. When completing any designs, you are able to Superpublish them. In exchange for forfeiting all your current and future rewards, the Designer will automatically enhance your design by a factor of ten percent. You are only able to Superpublish a design once every standard year.]

"I almost forgot about this." He muttered.

Previously, Ves valued his personal integrity too much to use this option. He also wanted to earn a lot of Design Points and keep this option in reserve in case of emergencies.

Another reason for avoiding this option was because Ves feared that his ownership and his emotional investment in the mech design would take a hit. Superpublishing a mech design was essentially a cheat in how it improved the quality of his mech design regardless of his actual merits.

This was the main reason why he refrained from applying it to the Transcendent Messenger. He wanted to prove something when he designed that revolutionary mech. Boosting its performance and removing some of its imperfections were not very important considering that the mechs half-functioned as ceremonial symbols.

"It's different now." He muttered. "Performance matters in my current mech design. The success of my plans truly hinges on the quality of this design!"

He didn't entirely dismiss Gloriana's arguments. Quality did matter. The main point of contention between them was the price they needed to pay to achieve any further quality improvements.

While Ves rejected his girlfriend's suggestion to extend the deadline of the project, he did not refuse the option to Superpublish his design!

Though it was a precious opportunity that didn't come very often, Ves was just wasting it if he continued to keep it in reserve for years. Since he didn't need it before, there shouldn't be any harm in expending its yearly usage this time.

There was still a price, though. Depending on what happened, he might not identify as much with his work anymore. That would spell disaster for his chances of fabricating a masterwork mech.

Yet.. this was a price that Ves was willing to pay.

"A single masterwork mech won't make much of a difference on the battlefield." He stated. "Deploying one excellent mech is not as impactful as deploying a thousand fine mechs!"

That said, Ves didn't want to let go of this opportunity.

"I'm not the mech designer I was before. I've matured as a mech designer."

One of the lessons he learned was that his own mentality partially determined the prices he paid for his various decisions.

For example, in the past he would probably feel guilty if he shot someone in the head. Now, he felt absolutely nothing at the thought of killing some random bystanders.

In the same manner, Ves no longer regarded the Superpublish function as a foreign cheat. It was a resource that could enhance a mech design in the same way as other mech designers did when they invited their mentors or Masters to make a pass at their work.

"I'm not cheating!" He convinced himself. "I'm just making use of the resources I have at my disposal! This will still be my design!"

With this conviction in his mind, he hesitated no further. He decided to pull the trigger and finalize his project in the most explosive manner possible!

First, he needed to impart it with a design spirit.

"Golden Cat! Wake up! It's time for you to bind yourself to your first mech design!"

Nya...?

The Golden Cat sleepily looked up at him as Ves prodded her with his spiritual projection.

Once she understood what she wanted, she cooperated fully with his actions. Under his guidance, he coaxed her into leaving a presence in the spiritual space of his mech design!

The mech's spiritual foundation was highly compatible with her own trait. She easily found purchase in the design and successfully became its design spirit!

The moment she formed a bond with the design, Ves sensed plenty of changes. Not only did the Golden Cat leave some sort of duplicate presence in the mech design, the Larkinson Mandate also stirred in response!

To his astonishment, the Larkinson Mandate formed its first bond with a mech design! This was definite proof that the design formed an indispensable part of the Larkinson Clan!

"Excellent!"

His joy at these changes prompted him to make up his mind on how to name his work!

"From now on, my design shall be known as the Bright Warrior!"

Though the name wasn't the most imaginative one he came up with, it captured the sentiment of his design!

He designed the Bright Warrior to forge a path into the unknown and protect them against the monsters lurking in the darkness!

*Chapter 1877 Bright Warrior*

The Bright Warrior!

It was a fitting name for a mech that centered around the Larkinson Clan and the Golden Cat!

Its name reflected the heritage and identity of the Larkinson Clan.

A warrior was different from a soldier. For a very long time, the original Larkinson Family devoted itself to the armed forces of the Bright Republic. To become a military mech pilot was one of the greatest ambitions of a Larkinson!

"No more. That time is over."

The old family may have stuck to the old ways, but the Larkinson Clan followed a different trajectory!

A warrior was not a soldier. A soldier fought for a state and served its people.

That was not the case this time. The Larkinson Clan fought and struggled for its own desires and ideals.

The reason why Ves settled on a simple name like the Bright Warrior was because he wanted to preserve the strength of their Larkinson heritage. However, he also wanted to get rid of the compulsive desire to serve in the Mech Corps.

Reorienting the Larkinson Clan from soldiers to warriors was one of the ways he settled on to transition the clan into becoming a strong but independent group.

The essence of both the Larkinson Family and the Larkinson Clan was fellowship! Ves wanted to channel this pursuit in a way that made his clansmen want to fight on behalf of their fellow Larkinsons!

One peculiar aspect about the name was how similar it sounded to the Desolate Soldier. It followed the same naming convention as his most successful mech design, but also stood out by how it conveyed a different message!

"The Bright Warrior will light the way!"

The use of the word 'bright' was deliberate and alluded to multiple meanings.

The most obvious reference was towards the Bright Republic, the state where the original Larkinson Family originated.

While the Larkinson Clan severed most of its ties to its former state, many of its clansmen were still undeniably Brighters. This kind of connection could not be severed in its entirety.

Even Ves felt reluctant to stop calling himself a Brighter.

"I can leave my state, but my state still hasn't left my heart." He sighed.

Calling his mech the Bright Warrior also had another meaning. It alluded to the fact that he designed this mech with an aim to train his mech pilots and elevate them past their current limits.

As long as the Bright Warrior became ubiquitous in his mech forces, Ves anticipated that it wouldn't take long for his mech pilots to become qualified to pilot second-class mechs en masse.

"It's more than just a teaching tool. It's more than just a mech design. It's more than just a product."

The Bright Warrior was the culmination of most of his hopes and ambitions. In a span of three intensive months, Ves labored earnestly to make sure it embodied his vision as much as possible.

He didn't hesitate to stuff it with all kinds of toys, such as the expensive Breyer alloy or the very risky high-capacity neural interface model, in order to achieve his high expectation for this design!

"I've succeeded!"

The prototypes proved that the design was not a failure! It not only met his expectations, but also surpassed it in the case of the lancer mech configuration!

That reminded him of something. Each different configuration needed a separate name. Otherwise, it would be highly confusing to ask for a rifleman mech but receive a space knight instead!

"The Bright Warrior only refers to the overall modular mech platform. Each different configuration is like a different variation of the same design!"

The rifleman mech configuration was the backbone of his mech forces. In space, distance was king, and ranged combat reigned supreme. It was practically a given that the Avatars and Sentinels would rely heavily on this configuration to form the bulk of their mech rosters!

Given the vital nature of the rifleman mech configuration, Ves decided to call it the Illuminating Warrior!

"With their bright lasers and their powerful rounds, the Illuminating Warriors will light the way forward!"

In contrast to the offensive role of the rifleman mechs, the space knight configuration served as the primary defensive assets on the battlefield.

They were most suited to be employed defensively by guarding his light carriers and other vulnerable assets from enemy attacks.

However, the defensive properties of Breyer alloy was so strong that the space knight configuration still retained sufficient mobility to go on the offense as well!

Regardless of how they were employed, it was undeniable that they were built to take beating no matter the circumstances!

To reflect their nature as enduring machines that inspired confidence, Ves dubbed the space mech configuration the Solar Warrior!

"With their constant and unshakable presence on the battlefield, the Solar Warriors shall warm the hearts of fellow comrades!"

The lancer mech configuration was the offensive powerhouse configuration of the Bright Warrior design. Though not as good in a dogfight as the other configuration, it was completely geared to excel in only one single mode of combat.

The charge.

Like a bright and furious comet, the lancer mech configuration possessed the potential to collapse a second-class mech!

Not only that, but the mech was capable of mitigating so much shock and force that the mech and mech pilot would actually be able survive the ultraviolet collision!

Even so, the lancer mechs constantly toyed with danger as it pursued constant extremes in combat!

As the Larkinson Clan's only hope of defeating superior mechs, Ves settled on referring to the lancer configuration as the Shining Warrior!

"With their indomitable charges and world-shaking collisions, the Shining Warriors must keep burning when all other lights have dimmed!"

Compared to the previous three configurations, the swordsman mech configuration was a little less illustrious. On land, its role was just as important if not more so than lancer mechs. In space, it occupied an awkward middle ground where it was decent in aspects but possessed few pronounced strengths.

Yet Ves did not look down on the swordsman mech configuration because of that. As a jack-of-all-trades, the sword-wielding version of the Bright Warrior could fulfill many possible roles. Not only was it decent against fending off light skirmishers, it also fared well against other melee mechs.

In the hands of an excellent mech pilot, the performance of the swordsman mech configuration had the potential to dazzle an entire region!

To encapsulate the potential of the swordsman mech configuration, Ves called it the Nova Warrior.

"Well, it's a more flattering name than the other options I had in mind."

The Bright Warrior. The Illuminating Warrior. The Solar Warrior. The Shining Warrior. The Nova Warrior.

Each of these names stood for different mechs or configurations. While distinct, all of them were part of the same mech platform!

By imparting the mech design with a design spirit and a set of names, this was ordinarily the time when Ves formally ended the project. Aside from filing some paperwork and handling some other administrative steps, the development of the mech should come to an end.

"Not this time!"

Now that he had reached this point, Ves firmly committed to his choice to use the Superpublish function on the Bright Warrior!

Whether the design deserved this treatment or not, Ves wanted his Larkinsons and other subordinates to pilot the best possible mech he could design! Utilizing the Superpublish ability would definitely boost the design in a holistic manner that accentuated its strengths while diminishing its weaknesses.

The result was hopefully a comprehensively better mech design that nonetheless conformed to Ves and Gloriana's original vision.

"Well, here goes nothing."

It had been a long time since he last used it. Once he loaded the design into his System comm and activated the function, a transformation occurred in real time.

Ves keenly watched as the design projected by his System comm changed in real time.

It was as if his System comm connected to a Master Mech Designer who casually adjusted the design from a much greater height!

While Ves had no clue how the System gained the knowledge or inspiration to perform all of these improvements, it was undeniable that each adjustment added something more to the design!

"How ingenious! So that is how I should have solved this problem!"

Ves tracked the results and tried to figure out their logic. Since thousands of small and subtle changes occurred at the same time, Ves could only capture a few of the more noticeable alterations at this time.

What he managed to pick up already surprised him beyond belief. He knew that the Superpublish function was strong, but the last time he used it, its operation was a lot more basic due to his inferior mech design ability.

Now that he became a mech designer and partnered up with a perfectionist like Gloriana, each of his mech designs became cleaner than the last. This meant that there was much less room to improve the performance of his designs by making some basic tweaks.

As a consequence, the System had to implement more inventive solutions in order to elevate the performance of the mech by ten percent!

Ten percent didn't sound by much, but in a mech that was already good, this was a huge jump.

This was especially so when the improvements came from pure design ingenuity as opposed to replacing the materials or components of a mech!

What Ves witnessed before his very eyes was a masterful transformation where the System reinvented his entire mech from the ground up! The Bright Warrior turned from a good mech into an excellent mech by the time the rapid cycles of improvement settled down.

"What a fantastic mech design!"

In order to elevate a design that was already high in quality, the System seemed to pull out all the stops and resorted to many different tricks that Ves never even learned of! Neither his experiences nor his book knowledge ever conceived of the dazzling methods that the System casually demonstrated!

Ves continued to study each and every angle of the improved design. He summoned a projection of the original version of the Bright Warrior and marked out each and every measure that changed the mech for the better.

There was a lot for Ves to go through! Ves couldn't afford to spend so much time locked up in a guarded chamber.

"I can't do this alone."

There was also another problem.

Witnessing the incredible transformation of the Bright Warrior humbled Ves so much that he began to lose his sense of belonging to the mech design.

Ves anticipated this response and shook his head. "I shouldn't think this way! This design is still my work!"

He forcibly attempted to shift his mentality. He wanted to resist the sense of alienation and rejection that threatened to ruin his chances of fabricating a masterwork.

Regardless how much credit he deserved for developing the Bright Warrior up to this point, Ves firmly believed that his role and implementations were essential!

"The Superpublish function may have added some icing on the cake, but I'm still responsible for baking it in the first place!"

He could lie to others, but he couldn't lie to himself.

No matter how much he tried to change his mentality, a part of him would always feel that he and Gloriana didn't deserve full credit for designing such a high-quality mech.

Ves decided to change tack. Instead of lying to himself, he decided to resort to excuses!

"It doesn't matter!" He turned to Lucky, who had been lounging in the air for the entire time. "Cheating or not, the mech is still significant and meaningful for all of the right ways!"

"Meow?"

"You believe me, don't you, Lucky?"

"Meow."

"Yes! I'm the lead designer of the Bright Warrior! It bears the unmistakable character of the Golden Cat and the Larkinson Clan! No other mech designer can add those qualities to the Bright Warrior!"

"Meow meow."

"You lie!"

*Chapter 1878 Elevated Design*

After Superpublishing the design, Ves forfeited all of the DP gains he stood to earn from his work.

Three months of design work pretty much entered into black hole as far as the System was concerned.

Ves felt mildly disappointed at that, especially because DP was much harder to come by these days. The stingy System continued to deny him opportunities to earn more DP ever since he started ignoring its Supply Missions.

"Well, it's not like I can buy something that can't be found on the galactic net." He muttered.

Aside from MTA merits, Ves also sought to earn DP so that he'd be able to get back up to a million DP again. Once he reached this sum, he had the option of granting guest access to Gloriana.

While he hadn't made up his mind yet on the decision to reveal the System to his girlfriend, having the option available at any time would ease his mind.

"That is still too far away, though."

For now, he focused on the present. The Bright Warrior design and its four different configurations projected in front of his face like a lost treasure that Ves uncovered from a dusty alien ruin.

It might as well be a relic considering the incredible quality of the design. That little bump in ten percent performance was as if a Master applied a bit of his ingenuity in optimizing and elevating the Bright Warrior to an entirely new height!

The solutions applied by the System showed that Ves and Gloriana had a lot more to go before they matched the standards of their betters. Many of the solutions hadn't even come up to them in the first place!

The value of Superpublishing was not just in elevating a design. Its true value lay in how it essentially offered him a guide on how to increase the performance of his designs through pure design!

With such a cheat sheet at his disposal, Ves could study and incorporate the methods used to squeeze out more performance out of his original design and apply them to his future designs!

In essence, a succession of Superpublished designs could act like a roadmap where Ves could constantly develop his design ingenuity at a rapid pace, thereby skipping years or even decades of constant puzzling!

"There is a price, though."

Aside from forgoing all DP and losing his sense of ownership in the design, Ves also risked growing lazy. By avoiding the opportunities to develop his problem-solving skills in an organic manner, he risked losing this ability entirely!

This was why he planned to use the Superpublishing function sparingly. At the very least, he should make sure he designed plenty of mechs the old-fashioned way without depending on external help.

"It's alright to make use of it occasionally." He reassured himself.

Once he emerged from his enclosed chamber, Nitaa followed behind him as they left the design labs.

One day passed as Ves kept the Superpublished design to himself. He sequestered himself from everyone and refrained from showing off the improved design to his girlfriend.

The next day, Ves believed enough time had passed to offer Gloriana a plausible story. When they reached the design labs, he took his girlfriend aside and revealed the Superpublished version of the design.

The moment he projected the full schematics in front of her face, she entered into a daze.

"This.. Ves... what the.. Is this our design? Why..."

"I felt bad about the quality of our mech, and I don't want to spend more time on refining it further, so I cashed in a favor from another mech designer to make a pass on our work."

"What?! Who did you ask? Professor Ventag? Professor Velton? Professor Jimenez?"

Ves grew alarmed when she mentioned that last name! Professor Jimenez was a very taboo name in the regional mech community! How did she find out about his association with the Skull Architect?!

"It's not important." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "All I can tell you is that the mech designer I consulted is very skilled but doesn't want to be credited with the design."

"Oh. Okay."

She easily accepted this excuse, much to his relief. Cases like this happened a lot where a better mech design would make a pass on the work of their juniors.

"So.. do you approve?"

Gloriana paid no attention to him anymore. The moment she saw the design, her breath grew heavier and heavier. The hunger in her eyes increased and Ves even felt her spirituality becoming more active as her design seed went into overdrive!

"This... this mech design.. These solutions are BRILLIANT! They're PERFECT! Not even my teachers from Kelma have displayed so much elegance in resolving the contradictions in our designs."

"So.. you approve?"

"Approve?" Gloriana finally turned to Ves with an ecstatic grin. "I LOVE IT! THANK YOU, VES! THIS IS THE BEST PRESENT EVER!"

She subsequently glomped him and showered him with some of the most passionate kisses that he had ever experienced!

Once they finished their all-too-brief makeout session, Gloriana went back to ignoring Ves in order to devote her complete attention to studying the Superpublished design. Just like Ves, she summoned a raft of projections that allowed her to compare her original work to the uplifted version of the design.

Soon, she became completely absorbed in her own little universe. She exuded a sense of devotion and intensity that suggested that nothing could pull her away from her need to absorb all of the insights she could glean from the improved design!

Ves understood her enthusiasm. As a fellow mech designer, he appreciated good craftsmanship as well. He was always eager to learn more, though from a philosophical standpoint he preferred to innovate.

Since Gloriana became unresponsive, Ves decided to follow her lead and sit down to study the Superpublished design as well. Just because he didn't share her obsession for perfection didn't mean he wanted to let this opportunity go to waste!

The two shared a comfortable moment together as they each broke down the various improvements made to their original design. To mech designers like them, they could glean all kinds of insights from the 'before' and 'after' picture.

It wasn't until the day had passed that Gloriana finally managed to claw herself back from her obsessive fascination!

To Ves, it was as if she was glowing twice as bright! The grin on her face was so wide that it could stretch across a cavern!

"Ves! I love this design! Whoever improved it has taught me a lot! I really appreciate this opportunity, Ves. I think I'll be able to progress my design philosophy two or three steps further once I internalized what I've learned. This is truly revolutionary!"

As Gloriana continued to babble about the gains she made, Ves honestly felt perplexed.

She didn't ask any of the questions that Ves was worried about, such as why he felt the need to seek help from another mech designer.

Not that he complained. He didn't really have a good way to explain the System's Superpublish function. If Gloriana pressed him any further, he might slip something up! She was quite good at ferreting out his secrets, and Ves didn't want to prove her with any more loopholes than he had already revealed!

"So what do you think about the names?"

"They're okay." She replied, her mind still lost in her dreams. "Calling the overall design the Bright Warrior is a good decision, though I'm less enthused about the names for the configurations."

Ves shrugged. "I had to call them something."

"Well, even if their names don't entirely represent the design, with how good it is, they'll definitely have a chance to burnish their credentials! I just love this design!"

As they continued their discussion, Ves noticed that Gloriana didn't even bother with the fact that the design was not entirely their work anymore. While Ves constantly worried about losing their sense of ownership in the design, Gloriana didn't seem to care that much about this issue!

While Ves regrettably lost some of his emotional investment in the design, Gloriana was the opposite. She truly reveled in the solutions the Superpublish ability introduced into their work.

In her perspective, it didn't matter how these improvements came about. She only cared about delivering a result that was closest to perfection! The fact that she wasn't responsible for designing such a fantastic mech was compensated by the valuable opportunities she gained to evolve her design ability!

Due to her unexpected optimism, Ves began to rekindle some hope in his heart.

Perhaps it might be possible to fabricate a masterwork mech after all!

Ves would have to make sure that Gloriana was in the best possible state to fabricate the mech. In fact, he wanted to start off right away!

Unfortunately, it was the end of the day, and Gloriana still needed to stick to her regular sleep cycle. Though it was possible for her to ingest some pills to force her to stay awake for a couple of days, now was not a good time.

He still wanted to begin as soon as possible.

"We should strike while the iron is hot." He proposed. "We should rest and prepare for our upcoming attempt to make a masterwork mech. If possible, I want to complete this fabrication run in one, continuous session. Can you do that?"

She nodded. "No problem. I'll ask Ranya to prepare the necessary treatments to keep up with you. It's not good for my health if I keep it up, but it shouldn't be an issue to forgo sleep just this time."

Some people attempted to reduce their need to sleep. Most of the time, it was to make better use of their time.

Whenever someone slept, they wasted valuable time which they could have used to progress their career or create a new product!

For example, Nitaa hadn't quite gotten rid of her dependence on sleep, but her physical augmentations cut her sleep cycle by half!

However, there was a reason why this wasn't popular. Aside from being a fairly expensive and difficult treatment, humans needed sleep for multiple reasons. Those who skipped sleep for years at a time tended to become very odd!

In any case, the MTA performed plenty of surveys and concluded that skipping sleep for an extended period of time did more harm than good.

This was one of the reasons that Ves still tried to stick to a regular sleep schedule whenever possible. He had the faint notion that once he stopped sleeping, he would lose his humanity!

"To sleep is to be human." He spoke and held her by the shoulder. "I know you are tempted to stay awake to study the improved design even further, but make sure you have a good rest tonight. I believe that we are close to achieving one of the goals we have always been aiming for. As long as we succeed in fabricating a masterwork, our affinity for mechs will definitely increase! This will certainly allow us to design and fabricate a masterwork mech that is worthy to gain your mother's appreciation!"

She nodded. "You're right. I can study these improvements later, but our chances of creating a masterwork of the Bright Warrior is fleeting!"

Once they settled on a plan, they left the headquarters and returned to the Austen Estate to go to bed early.

Both of them wanted to catch as much sleep as possible before they embarked on their marathon fabrication session!

Before Ves went to sleep, he held the Larkinson Mandate in his hands and did the one thing he never imagined doing again.

He prayed.

"I beg of you. Help us fabricate a masterwork mech tomorrow. Do whatever you can to assist us and boost our chances to create the best possible version of the Bright Warrior. Once we succeed, our fortunes will massively increase! Once we receive recognition from the MTA, we will instantly be able to stand out from the crowd and receive countless new opportunities! This is not only good for us, but also the Larkinson Clan! Will you help us, Goldie?"

Nyaaaa.

The Golden Cat looked up at Ves with huge, unblinking eyes.

### *Chapter 1879 Blessed Attempt*

The next morning, Ves and Gloriana woke up and followed their morning ritual with more solemnity than ever before. They dressed for work and met up at the dining room to enjoy breakfast.

Gloriana had already instructed Dr. Lupo and her chefs to prepare the most sumptuous breakfast they could manage.

As the two mech designers filled their bellies with appetizing meals, they began to talk about their upcoming design session.

"Just like last time, we'll have to fabricate the first production model by ourselves." Ves told her. "We should make sure our mech workshop is closed off so we'll be left undisturbed. Can you get your Glory Battalion to form a security cordon around the site? I've also asked Melkor to dispatch his Avatars to guard the outer perimeter."

"I doubt there are any threats on Kesseling VIII that can force their way past your Avatars."

"You can never be sure." Ves shook his head. "I don't want their mechs to get too close to the workshop. I'm very sensitive to the glows of the Blackbeaks, Crystal Lords and other LMC mechs. While I normally enjoy their presence, they'll only interfere in my attempts to visualize our design as we try to turn it into a reality."

To fabricate a good Bright Warrior, he had to immerse himself in it as much as possible. His other mechs were great products, but their glows and identities were different from his latest design!

Everything started to fall into place. Ves and Gloriana both paid plenty of attention to the smallest of details. Nothing was allowed to ruin their upcoming moment!

As they boarded a shuttle and traveled to the mech workshop they prepared, the pair cuddled together along with their cats.

Both Lucky and Clixie knew that the next days were crucial to their owners. Neither of them fussed as much and simply offered themselves up for petting and scratching.

"Meow."

"Miaow."

"I love you, Ves." Gloriana smiled as she leaned her head against his shoulder. "It's times like these that I enjoy the most. Sharing my passion with you and working together to design novel creations is one of my greatest joys. I don't want this to end."

He looked down in her eyes and took in her scent.

Due to the importance of their work, she applied lighter and less oppressive perfume this time. Ves still found her as intoxicating as ever. Her adoring eyes and her infectious smile made him all the more eager to please her desires.

Fabricating a masterwork mech was not just about furthering his goals. A part of him wanted to do his best so that he could make Gloriana into the happiest woman in the galaxy!

Both of them understood each other. They didn't have to share any words to express how much they cared for each other and how much they wanted their upcoming session to succeed.

A part of Ves was very pleased with this moment. Their affection and investment in the Bright Warrior meant that the stakes rose even further.

They both ascribed another meaning in the outcome of the fabrication run!

"We have to succeed."

If they failed, then not only would their chances of gaining Constance Wodin's approval decrease, but also make each other sad!

Ves did not want to disappoint his girlfriend! Making her happy was one of the greatest joys in his life, and he felt the urge to do his utmost to ensure that they would be celebrated as some of the youngest masterwork mech designers in the mech industry!

With the sheer amount of mech designers in the galaxy, there were obviously freaks who managed to fabricate a masterwork even earlier in their careers!

That didn't diminish the value of gaining a masterwork certificate. It was simply too rare for Journeymen to touch this magical boundary which seemed to have no logic behind its mechanisms.

Countless mech designers tried to invent a sureproof and replicable method to fabricate masterworks. None of their attempts succeeded.

Not even the brightest minds from the MTA and the galactic center managed to crack the code!

The mech industry only figured out a couple of rules, such as that higher-ranked mech designers had a higher chance of making one, or that their creation was always accompanied by chance and serendipity.

No matter how they came to be, it was undeniable that the mech designers responsible for creating them received a huge amount of accolades.

It was difficult to describe the admiration and respect that fellow mech designers directed towards the possessors of a masterwork certificate.

This simple acknowledgement was proof that the mech designer in question possessed an affinity for mechs! They understood mechs at a deeper level than most of their colleagues, and their works were always a little bit more superior in terms of quality than their peers.

To be honest, Ves didn't entirely understand why the MTA celebrated masterwork mechs so excessively. The sole reason why the mech industry valued masterwork mechs so much was not their exquisite construction, their indescribable presence or their unsurpassed degree of optimization.

For all of hype, the actual performance of a masterwork mech was barely better than a bog-standard copy of the same design!

Considering that fighting was the primary purpose of a mech, the perceived value of masterwork machines was incredibly overinflated!

Even though they were worth roughly the same, a single masterwork mech could never defeat a hundred regular mechs!

From this, Ves deduced that masterwork mechs possessed a quality that made them incredibly wanted by the MTA.

The fact that they rewarded 10,000 MTA merits for any third-class masterwork mech and a whopping 1 million MTA merit for a second-class masterwork was quite remarkable.

As far as Ves was concerned, the MTA always looked out for itself. The Association always made sure to gain the upper hand in any transaction. Incurring losses was against its nature!

This meant that the actual value of a second-class masterwork mech should be way more than just a million merits!

The MTA had to be buying them up and hoarding them for a reason! Ves just couldn't figure out why. He hadn't spent much time in studying his Devil Tiger to figure out what exactly stood out from a masterwork mech.

Hopefully, he would have another opportunity soon. As long as they succeeded, Ves would definitely keep the masterwork mech in his possession this time! He wouldn't even let the Avatars pilot it in battle and risk its premature destruction!

"We've arrived."

The shuttle and its escorts reached an underground work site in the rural parts of Kesseling VIII. A large number of mechs from the Avatars of Myth and the Glory Battalion already secured the entire surroundings.

Nothing was allowed to disturb their work!

As they entered the tightly-guarded workshop, the pair inspected the facilities.

Ves had already shipped several batches of materials to the workshop. He wouldn't be short of Breyer alloy or any other essential materials!

Meanwhile, Gloriana inspected each and every tool and production machine with utmost attention. All of the tools and production equipment belonged to her, so she knew exactly how to calibrate them. She had already serviced them before, so she didn't need to perform any maintenance on her gear.

"Everything is okay." She eventually said. "The production equipment is in the best possible shape that I can manage. I wish we could do this in the Hegemony, though. The facilities are much better."

"Calm down, Gloriana. The tools don't make the mech. We do. I managed to make a masterwork mech in a rented, shabby workshop using half-worn tools and highly-used production machines. If there are any misalignments in our gear, we can just compensate for it with our skill and judgement. That is what matters the most in fabricating a masterwork mech."

She didn't entirely believe him, but refrained from arguing any further. This was an important moment for them. She was keenly aware that they needed to be in the best mood possible. Quibbling over minor issues would do nothing to improve their chances of making a masterwork!

Before they began, Ves felt as if there was something missing. If they just began to fabricate the Bright Warrior in their current state, he suspected that they might fall short of their goal!

"Wait a moment." He held her arm.

"What is it, Ves?"

"Do your best. A lot is at stake. I'm sure I don't have to reiterate why. I just want you to keep our goals in mind. Don't pay any attention to anything that isn't related to the Bright Warrior. Don't obsess too much over details and trust in your instincts. Your intuition is one of your most powerful tools in fabricating our mechs. When all else fails, choose what your heart thinks is best!"

"I.. alright. I'll keep your advice in mind." She solemnly nodded.

His words carried a lot of weight to her because Ves had actually succeeded once. She didn't dare to dismiss his advice, but she developed her own approach towards her work. What worked for Ves didn't necessarily work for others.

Each mech designer was different!

As Gloriana began to turn around, Ves stopped her a second time.

"Wait. There is one extra step."

He stretched his hand towards the floating tome at his side and brought it close. The Larkinson Mandate in all of its brilliant splendor glowed brilliant in his spiritual vision as the Golden Cat stood by to do her part.

"The Bright Warrior is a mech designed for the Larkinson Clan." He said. "The Golden Cat is the spiritual representation of my clan and the mold which shaped our design!"

"What are you trying to do, Ves?"

"Open your mind and don't resist. Let the Golden Cat bathe your mind with her presence. This is good for our upcoming attempt!"

Upon receiving his instruction, The Golden Cat excited a part of her spiritual energy and began to channel her presence through the bonds she formed with Ves and Gloriana.

The pair of mech designers soon began to exhibit identical glows as the Golden Cat showered their minds and spirits with her blessing!

"Yes!" Gloriana's eyes widened. "This feels amazing! I can feel the Golden Cat much clearer than before! She's... she's so lovely!"

Ves grinned. He was enjoying the same sensation as well! "I'm glad you enjoy her presence, but don't get consumed by it. Make use of what you perceive to shape your mood and guide your work. The Golden Cat is just as invested in the Bright Warrior design as us! She'll help you as long as you trust her guidance."

"I'll... keep that in mind."

Now that they finished their mental preparation, they began their work.

The hollow workshop hall soon began to get noisy as Ves and Gloriana brought all kinds of production machines online. They divided the work amongst them with hardly any need for discussion.

Each of them were already aware of what the other was capable of. Ves no longer fumbled with Gloriana's advanced production machines and operated them with a level of fluency he hadn't shown before!

No distinctive moods overcame them both as they began to fabricate the initial parts of the Bright Warrior and the four configurations.

Ves tried not to worry about that, knowing that any frustration would only make it even less likely for him to enter into an exceptional state.

Instead, he devoted his complete attention to his work. With the Golden Cat paying attention and his vision for the Bright Warrior seared into his mind, he tried his best to fabricate the parts in the highest possible quality that he could manage!

While Ves quickly immersed himself into his work. Gloriana was slower to adjust.

She had never designed or fabricated a mech while hosting a design spirit in her mind!

Even though the Golden Cat only extended a portion of her presence, Gloriana was still distracted by all the novel sensations she experienced! It interfered with her work, causing her to halt her work lest she botch the batch of parts she was trying to make!

*Chapter 1880 Self-Centered*

Three cats observed the pair of mech designers pour their hearts and minds into their work. The mech workshop hummed and clanged with various noises as the massive

production equipment began to process various materials or turn them into various parts.

A succession of bots silently flew back and forth, carrying parts to various different places in order to subject them to scans before placing them aside.

"Meow." Lucky turned towards the Larkinson Mandate that lay seemingly forgotten on a random table.

The Golden Cat, who resided in the book, continued to observe the proceedings while extending her powers through the bonds she shared with Ves and Gloriana.

She had been spending less time with Lucky and Clixie lately, and it showed. A bit of her playfulness and immaturity had faded. In their place, a sense of majesty and responsibility began to take shape.

The Golden Cat was slowly beginning to follow the footsteps of Qilanxo!

The ways of Sacred Gods were powerful and varied. The huge, anomalous exobeasts of Aeon Corona VII developed their own system of harnessing the spiritual might they had at their disposal.

An essential part of their repertoire was the symbiotic relations their species shared with their human worshippers.

Though much of it was shrouded in mystery, the Golden Cat had already learned some tricks of the trade from her spiritual mentor!

Nyaaaaa.

"Meow."

"Miaow?"

While the Golden Cat's awareness and understanding of humans were still in question, one thing was clear.

She wanted to make Ves and Gloriana happy.

The Golden Cat felt a lot of affection for them due to the strong bonds she shared with them. She especially looked up to Ves, but Gloriana also had a place in her intangible heart!

While Ves, who worked with many spiritual entities over the years, easily embraced her radiant presence, Gloriana was not as quick to adjust.

This was a problem. The Golden Cat looked upset and tried to employ another trick that Qilanxo had taught.

Utilizing the bond between them, the ancestral spirit began to convey actual feelings and impressions to the recipient.

For a moment, Gloriana yelped and inadvertently botched her fabrication attempt!

She frowned and paused as she tried to process the interruption.

"Is that you.. Goldie?"

An affirming sensation entered her mind. Her eyes widened even further. She was actively communicating with one of Ves' proto-gods!

Just as she was about to get caught up by the novelty of this development, she quickly remembered Ves' words.

This was not the time to become fascinated by the Golden Cat. Fabricating the best possible copy of the Bright Warrior mattered the most!

Working with mechs was her passion and joy. She would never forgive herself if she ruined this moment because she couldn't get her mind off the Golden Cat!

"I'm pleased to meet you, Goldie. Can you.. adjust yourself while you make contact with my mind. I'm sorry, but your presence is kind of distracting. I can't concentrate on the matters that require a lot of focus. Can you.. do something to increase my focus instead of the opposite?"

The connection conveyed a feeling of anticipation and curiosity, which Gloriana interpreted as a positive response.

Soon enough, the Golden Cat didn't loom so large in her mind. Gloriana felt as if she was able to regain more control over actions.

When she began to redo the task she botched, she tried to focus as much as possible on the details of her work.

This time, the Golden Cat did better. The approach she adopted for Ves didn't seem to work for Gloriana.

Ves was a mech designer who reveled in anything related to spirituality. His Spirituality attribute was very high and his sensitivity towards spiritual energy was extremely high compared to other people.

Due to his advantages and his abundant experiences in this field, Ves easily embraced the Golden Cat's presence, allowing her to act as a co-pilot in his mind. The degree of closeness they exhibited towards each other was very high!

In contrast, the Golden Cat discovered that she needed to adopt a more low-key approach for Gloriana. The Hexer mech designer was someone who naturally gravitated towards greater control.

She was not like Ves, who was willing to leave some of the outcomes of his work in the hands of his design spirit!

One of the many principles that Gloriana adopted over her career was that if she wanted something done right, it was best to do it herself!

While she trusted Ves as a collaboration partner, that did not mean she was willing for him to take the lead in everything. In areas where she was clearly better than her lover, she preferred to take charge!

This was also why the two divided the work amongst themselves so that Gloriana was responsible for all of the difficult and delicate tasks. All of the work that Gloriana took upon herself required a considerable amount of skill and finesse to complete.

Therefore, the Golden Cat puzzled for a time before she understood that Gloriana didn't need a partner, but a supporter.

Once the cooperation between the two smoothed out, Gloriana became a lot more comfortable with hosting a foreign presence in her mind. She relaxed and let herself go, paying no more mind to anything but the tasks at hand!

Time passed by as part after part continued to emerge from the 3D printer and other machines.

Processing the Breyer alloy was something that Ves took upon himself. As the source of this wonderful material, he wanted to shape it into armor plating in person.

To think that all of this high-quality alloy came from a reality-defying spiritual production loop!

Ves felt very grateful to Cassandra Breyer. If the undead mummified witch hadn't decided to haunt him for some reason, he would have missed out on this windfall and be unable to design a mech as great as the Bright Warrior!

In his perspective, Cassandra Breyer deserved at least half of the credit for making the Bright Warrior possible!

"I won't let you off, though." He snorted.

Just because he was grateful to her didn't mean that he was willing to let her off! She had already proven herself hostile to Ves with her earlier actions. The humiliating dream he experienced and the unexpected intervention in Silent William's correctional surgery definitely proved that she was definitely out to get him for whatever reason!

He pushed these thoughts aside a moment later and went back to his work. With the Golden Cat watching over him, he didn't fear Cassandra's untimely interventions as much anymore!

If she attempted to ruin his efforts again, she would have to beat both Ves and the Golden Cat!

Guarding the Larkinson Clan from unfathomable spiritual threats was one of the principal reasons why Ves created the Golden Cat! She was made to be the guardian of the Larkinsons in more ways than one!

"Keep up the good work, Goldie." He muttered as his mind continued to embrace her active presence. "This mech will certainly become a machine that will make us proud!"

As they fabricated the parts, neither Ves nor Gloriana entered into a different state.

Whether they were lacking something or whether the serendipity wasn't there, Ves wasn't sure.

Though a sense of disappointment crept into his mind, he didn't allow it to consume his consciousness.

Even if their fabrication attempt resulted in failure, at the very least Ves was committed to creating the best possible copy of the Bright Warrior that they could manage! This was a matter of pride as well as principle!

Therefore, regardless of the slow start, Ves still persisted as if the entire Larkinson Clan depended on the results.

Two straight days passed by as Ves and Gloriana worked continuously. They only took breaks in order to relieve themselves and to drink some water and eat their prepared meals which mostly consisted of compact, high-density nutrients.

Neither of them spoke to each other. Instead, they became lost in their own universes as they tried to reach the apex of what they were capable of. Both of them were doing pretty well so far, but the magical moment that both of them had been waiting for continued to remain elusive.

Though Ves tried his best not to feel bothered by it, he couldn't help but think they were doing something wrong.

Maybe dividing their work wasn't the best course of action.

He briefly glanced at Gloriana, who seemed to be having the time of her life. Though she didn't appear to have entered into any special state, Ves was very loath to interrupt her enjoyment.

"I can't give up!" He hissed to himself. "This still isn't over yet! I have to believe in myself! I have to believe in my design!"

Yet that was the mental stumbling block that Ves continually failed to overcome. His sense of ownership in the design had dropped. Whenever he worked on a part which had been affected by the many changes wrought by the System's Superpublish function, he felt as if he was working on another mech designer's creation instead of his own!

This was a very annoying and persisting feeling which Ves simply couldn't get rid of no matter how many times he tried to delude himself into thinking otherwise.

Lying to himself never seemed to work. Ves was not someone who forgot such transgression easily.

The fact of the matter was that he cheated. The Bright Warrior certainly became a better mech design, but the cost was great as Ves continued to feel alienated by a design that should have been his passion project!

"The worst part about it was that only Ves seemed to care. Neither Gloriana nor the Golden Cat showed any sign of feeling disturbed by the breaking of a principle that only Ves took to heart!

"I'm too professional!" He realized.

This was a very odd complaint to make. Ves always prided himself on his professionalism and his integrity as a mech designer.

Though he was by no means a poster boy for the MTA, he liked to think he abided by the main ideals of his profession.

"A mech designer exists to serve mech pilots, not the other way around."

This seemingly unrelated phrase randomly floated through his mind when he thought about his professionalism.

For some reason, Ves continued to linger over this characteristic phrase.

"A mech designer exists to serve mech pilots, not the other way around."

Once he repeated the words, he began to make another, more profound realization.

Didn't he plan to sequester the masterwork mech if he managed to create one out of the Bright Warrior design?

Didn't he resolve to keep the masterwork Bright Warrior locked up in his vault, only to be taken out whenever he wanted to study its properties and ascertain what made it so valuable to the MTA?

Didn't he promise to never allow his masterwork mechs to be fielded in battle, lest a single scratch might ruin what made them special?

"These intentions do not conform to the spirit of a mech designer!"

Mechs were not relics or toys. They weren't made to serve as display pieces or metal statues.

"Mechs exist to fight!"

Ves realized he was going astray. Did he ever think about keeping the Devil Tiger from getting used? No! He obviously wanted it to be used hard and often in order to gather as much data as possible!

He succeeded then, so the approach he adopted back then wasn't wrong!

"Mechs exist to fight, not to look pretty!"

The declaration made it clear that prior to this moment, he wanted to fabricate a masterwork mech for all the wrong reasons. None of them had anything to do with the primary purpose of a mech!

Now that he was aware of his error, he shifted his mentality and began to resume his work with a different kind of intensity.

He no longer emphasized his own wants and needs as much. Instead, he shifted his motives towards his mech pilots, who would have to entrust their lives to the Bright Warrior model in the future.

Ves owed it to the Larkinson Clan to deliver the best possible mech that allowed them to achieve victory in battle!

His mental shift significantly boosted his mood. Not only did he work with greater motivation than before, he also resonated even greater with the Golden Cat!

By devoting his work to the Larkinson Clan, the Golden Cat was supremely pleased by his commitment!

