

Mech 1881

Chapter 1881 Humble

It seemed so strange.

Ves, a Journeyman Mech Designer who designed over two-dozen mech designs in his short but illustrious career, was questioning his motivation.

Why did he become a mech designer? What was he working towards? Did these questions even matter at this time?

"They do."

The principal reasons why he took up this profession determined his entire outlook and approach towards mech design.

Ves suddenly realized that he had gone astray lately.

Ever since he explosively shot up in success, his ego subconsciously grew larger. He began to consider himself as someone who was special, if not outright better than his peers!

It was easy to get caught up in his own hype. So far, Ves hadn't encountered anything that could outdo him at his own game. His spiritual component monopoly was a potent way to empower a mech design, and only he held the keys to its secrets!

Yet... since when did mech design revolve around the wants and desires of the mech designer?

Mechs existed to fight. Mech pilots were the people who had been chosen to pilot them. They were the protagonist who bore all the risk and glory of battle.

In comparison, mech designers took on a background role.

Certainly, they played an essential role in facilitating the jobs of mech pilots. A good mech designer could play a huge role in enabling and enhancing the battle prowess of his customers.

Yet just like mech technicians, mech designers ultimately existed to support the efforts of the real heroes of the battlefield.

Was it wrong for a mech designer to harbor ambitions? Was it wrong for Ves to act selfishly and chase after his own goals?

Not really.

The key was that he should never compromise the ultimate purpose of mech designers. Serving mech pilots always came first! Ves had to justify each of his actions according to the needs of mech pilots!

"It's surprisingly difficult to maintain sight of this purpose." He muttered.

Mech designers pursued careers that were just as glamorous as mech pilots. Though their overall popularity was a bit less, the mech industry was filled with stars and celebrities.

Ves considered himself to be a celebrity as well! Ever since he gained the moniker of Devil Tongue, it was very easy to fall in the mindset of a superstar!

Though his fame, reputation and prestige significantly aided his own career, they were only useful to himself and the LMC.

The only way these intangible assets aided mech pilots was if he genuinely delivered a superior product.

While Ves believed his products possessed an undeniable edge over the competition, this was not a healthy viewpoint. It could easily lead to a state of mind where the entire multiverse revolved around his needs.

His recent resolve to keep any possible masterwork mech to himself was a typical consequence of a producer-oriented mindset.

When Ves studied mech design, his teachers continually emphasized the need to put the needs of the consumer first. Mech designers were marketers as well and product makers. Leaning too much on the latter risked putting him in an ivory tower, making him increasingly more detached from the actual needs of the users of his products!

As he made all of these realizations, his mentality continued to experience a small but profound evolution. He felt as if he was going back to his roots as a mech designer.

While his ambitions and desires still mattered a lot, it was the context in which he pursued his goals that changed.

Rather than pursuing his goals with a completely selfish mindset, he shifted to a more humble mindset which included his desire to serve and empower mech pilots!

"Mech pilots matter the most! Their needs come before mine! I should never do anything that detracts from the interests of my customers! That is not the mech designer way!"

Mentality affected everything when it came to creative pursuits. The outcome of a design or fabrication run was not a mathematical formula where Ves just had to follow the right steps to come to the right answer.

His mood, attitude, emotions and feelings all affected the output of his efforts!

In recent times, Ves pursued many different ways to improve all of those factors in order to increase the chance of making a masterwork mech.

Yet unwittingly, he continually eroded his basic foundation as a mech designer! If he continued to chase blindly after his own ambitions and increasingly neglected the needs of his customer base, then he didn't deserve to become a Senior or Master!

"It's pretty shameful for me to lose sight of my purpose when I'm already a Journeyman."

Even Novices and Apprentices knew better!

Fortunately, he corrected himself. As his mental sublimation came to a close, Ves felt incredibly at peace with himself. It was as if he undid something that had warped his personality to become more self-centered, to the detriment of what truly mattered!

With clearer eyes than ever before, Ves locked his gaze towards the production equipment he was controlling.

The parts he produced and the mech he planned to build were not meant for him. All of his efforts should instead be dedicated to the mech pilot who would be privileged to pilot the end product!

Ves began to think of the target audience of the Bright Warrior. The Larkinson Clan, the Avatars of Myth, the Living Sentinels and even the Battle Criers all awaited a better machine that would serve them well in the times to come!

"They are the reason why I designed the Bright Warrior!"

To whom should he dedicate the first production model?

A specific face and name entered his mind. For some reason, he wanted to dedicate the very first copy of the Bright Warrior design to Joshua King, his undying fan and one of the best mech pilots of the Avatars of Myth!

If not for the recent addition of Jannzi and Tusa, Joshua would have definitely cemented his status as the champion of the Avatars!

"Jannzi and Tusa are already following their own paths."

Neither expert candidates needed the Bright Warrior. His current mech design was a medium modular mech platform, which generally fell outside of their respective specialties.

Ves already did his part in serving Jannzi by upgrading her Shield of Samar. Tusa was already content with the light skirmisher the Avatars bought from the market, though Ves planned to design a better mech for him when he had the time.

Thinking about his family centered him. He initially conceived of the idea of forming the Larkinson Clan in order to provide him with a loyal cadre that could strengthen his control over his increasingly-sprawling enterprise.

Yet ever since the Larkinson Clan actually came into being, Ves began to care increasingly more about his responsibilities. As the founder and patriarch of his clan, he actually began to put its needs on top of his own selfish desires!

Ves initially considered this to be an unnatural and undesirable change. Since when did he want to go back to following someone else's demands?

"Yet that is essentially what a mech designer does. We abide by the demands of mech pilots all the time!"

There was nothing shameful or humiliating in this statement. This was the essence of his profession. If he wanted to become a superstar, then he should have pursued a job where adopting a self-centered mentality was a virtue instead of a sin!

Once Ves resumed his work, he became a lot more serene. While he still possessed his old desires, they all seemed to fade in the background. Regardless of whether he managed to produce a masterwork mech or not, it was not that consequential to him anymore.

If he failed to make a masterwork, then so be it. He always had other opportunities.

Right now, his primary motivation to produce a masterwork mech was no longer about increasing his reputation and propelling him to greater prominence.

No. Those needs were secondary compared to the needs of his clan and mech pilots!

Ves decided to dedicate this mech to Joshua King, the person who long waited for a mech to pilot that he could truly call his own!

By coincidence, Joshua just happened to be a mech pilot who could fully make use of the complete modular capabilities of the Bright Warrior!

Having piloted numerous virtual and physical mechs designed by Ves, Joshua developed a varied set of skills that encompassed multiple specialties.

Joshua was just as proficient in piloting landbound mechs as spaceborn mechs. His swordsmanship was practically as good as his marksmanship! He piloted practically every standard mech that Ves designed that wasn't a competition mech or a private commission.

A fairly diverse and versatile modular mech platform sounded like a match made in heaven for Joshua. Though the Bright Warrior was not a mech customized for any single mech pilot, Ves had to admit that the young prodigy possessed the highest fit.

Whether Joshua pelted his enemies from afar with the Illuminating Warrior, charged a superior mech to death with the Shining Warrior, shielded his comrades with the Solar Warrior or outdueled a champion with the Nova Warrior, he could do it all without breaking a sweat!

As Ves continued to imagine how well Joshua could make use of the Bright Warrior, his work proceeded at a brisk and pleasant pace.

While his serene mood didn't improve his work by a significant margin, he was nonetheless content with the parts he made.

Time continued to pass until the fabrication stage was done. Ves and Gloriana both took a longer break before resuming their work.

First, they thoroughly inspected all of the parts, paying extra attention to the more critical ones such as the power reactor and the neural interface.

Everything was in order. Gloriana delivered high-quality results as usual while Ves was not that far off in terms of maintaining consistency.

It fell a little short of what they expected from a masterwork, though. While that didn't necessarily mean that the possibility to produce a masterwork mech was gone, it certainly reduced their chances.

Though Gloriana began to feel upset about this, Ves calmed her down.

"Just do your best." He patted her back. "We are making this mech to satisfy our mech pilots, not ourselves. Our needs come secondary. Whatever mech we produce at the end, we should have no regrets."

She looked at him in curiosity. "Ves? You're.. different. Is this the special state you were talking about?"

Gloriana knew him too well. She quickly figured out that Ves was different from his usual self.

He smiled at her. "I just had a realization about the core purpose of a mech designer. I think I recently started to forget what it meant to take up this profession."

"I see. Are you better now?"

"I am. I feel much more at ease with myself. Let's begin the assembly phase. Make sure to keep in mind that we are building this mech for our mech pilots, not ourselves."

"I always kept that in mind, Ves. The needs of the mech pilots are core to my own design philosophy."

Gloriana was much better in this regard, he admitted. She never needed a reminder, unlike him. He was much more selfish than his girlfriend!

When they moved to the assembly system, they began the laborious process of putting their mech together.

Technically, the Bright Warrior came with four different configurations.

Though Ves and Gloriana had the option of fabricating just one configuration, they decided to produce all four in the same run!

This entailed a lot of work. Not only had their workload increased, they also needed to ensure that each of the configurations fit in place with the base platform. This was not a given as small misalignments could easily lead to mounting problems.

Both mech designers quietly manipulated the heavy-duty arms and tools of the assembly system. Bots and lifter platforms continually brought parts out of their temporary storage and placed them into position.

As the base platform came closer to completion, the elusive chance that both of them had been waiting for was nowhere to be seen.

A shadow cast over the underground workshop.

Chapter 1882 Tower of Babel

In the end, the quality of the Bright Warrior and its four sets of configurations reached a very high level.

Compared to a typical gold label LMC mech, the quality of the mech that Ves and Gloriana produced was clearly better.

They should be proud of what they accomplished!

Yet.. they only felt a mild sense of disappointment. As they put in the final parts and performed a final inspection, nothing about the mech transcended the level of an ordinary product. At most, it contained a lot less production-related flaws.

Though Ves had made peace with the outcome, Gloriana was not resigned to this outcome. Unlike him, the quality of her products was a lot more central to her design philosophy!

Producing a masterwork mech was literally one of her primary ambitions! After all of the effort she invested into designing the Bright Warrior, she was unwilling to let the mech in front of her be the definitive version of the first production model!

A part of her felt tempted to scrap the mech entirely and try again. She dropped it, though. According to Ves, the first time was special. If they fabricated the mech again, they would be able to lean on the lessons they learned before, but lose most of the meaning that came with fabricating the very first complete copy of the finalized design.

The latter was far more important than the former in determining whether the mech they created became a masterwork!

"It's not to be this time." Ves attempted to soothe her frustration. "Almost everything fell in place for this passion project. We stacked the deck in our favor as much as possible. There was scarcely anything we could have done to increase our odds of realizing our ambition even further. It's just that reality doesn't work according to our desires. I fabricated well over a couple of dozen mechs, but I only managed to luck out in creating a masterwork once. The odds were never in our favor."

"I know that!" Gloriana shouted as her frustration boiled over. "We did so much! We especially kept ourselves awake to finish this marathon session in a single continuous run! I expected us to be rewarded for our efforts!"

Ves shook his head and turned away. "Let it be, Gloriana. The first production model is complete. It's not what we hoped, but it is still a mech to be proud of. We can still try again in the future. One day, the stars will align and everything will fall in place."

"You keep hammering on about 'chance' and 'serendipity' as if they are graced by gods! Isn't there a way to make our own chance?!"

"Serendipity is fleeting, but not a fantasy. It exists and operated by its own rules. I'm sure there is a way to demystify it, but neither of us are equipped to decipher its mechanisms. All we can do is roll the dice and hope we get the number we want."

Such a helpless approach basically amounted to a surrender to Gloriana. As someone who wanted to exert as much control as possible, she detested the notion of relying on something as ephemeral as luck or destiny to achieve the outcome she desired!

Gloriana forcefully poked her finger against his chest. "All of that is easy for you to say. You've already succeeded once! You have taken one step closer to attaining the elusive mech touch, while I'm still stuck at the starting line! You did it once. You can do it again!"

He wasn't in a mind to linger at the workshop any longer. Though his body could still hang on for a couple of days, his mind was worn out. All of the work he performed in the preceding days required utmost concentration.

Even if Ves happened to be good in this aspect, he was not a bot!

He turned around and held the hand that was poking him in a firm grip. "Drop it, Gloriana. We made an attempt and it didn't work out. We are no different from 99.9999999 percent of mech designers in this regard. What I managed to accomplish back then was a fluke! Maybe that's the crux about masterwork mechs. You'll never attain them by desiring them! You're trying too hard!"

Gloriana was practically gnashing her teeth. Quality was one of her top priorities. Unlike the ease in which Ves humbled himself and adopted a more tolerant mindset, it was impossible for her to drop her obsession for masterwork mechs!

She pressed closer to Ves and grasped his work uniform!

"You! You! YOU! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! THIS IS EVERYTHING TO ME! I HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT THIS ALL THE TIME AND YOU JUST TELL ME TO DROP IT?! I HAVE BEEN PATIENT WITH YOU AND TOLERATED ALL OF YOUR ANTICS, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN TRAMPLE ON MY DREAMS LIKE THEY ARE TRASH!"

"I-I-I didn't mean it that way!"

"WELL FIX THIS THEN!"

"I can't!" Ves raised his hands in surrender. "Don't you think I would have tried something if it got us closer to our goal? The fact of the matter is that the quality of our mech is merely good instead of stellar. There is nothing about it that breaks any boundaries or ascends the realm of an ordinary product!"

'THIS SHOULDN'T BE IT! AREN'T YOU GOOD AT CREATING MIRACLES, VES? I KNOW YOU CAN DO SOMETHING! PUMP THIS MECH WITH DIVINE ENERGY, CREATE ANOTHER PROTO-GOD, SACRIFICE SOMEONE'S LIFE TO MAKE IT ALIVE, JUST DO SOMETHING!"

"It doesn't work that way!" Ves shouted. "The Bright Warrior already possesses a distinct spiritual foundation with its own unique attributes! Our respective spiritual energies don't conform to the mech! Besides, spirituality is a different attribute of mechs

that don't cause mechs to become masterworks. There are other factors at work that don't have anything to do with spirituality!"

"No no no! I can't accept this!" Gloriana pounded her fists against his chest as tears began to spill from her eyes. Her voice broke down as the disappointment of the situation settled into her mind. "Don't you love me, Ves?! You can fix this! You can make this moment perfect! Isn't there anything you can do to make this right?"

Though it pained Ves' heart to disappoint his girlfriend, there was really nothing he could do to make her happy. The option that he had been contemplating in the back of his mind was embedding one of Lucky's greater gems in the mech to bump its quality past the masterwork threshold.

Yet for that option to work, the quality of the mech had to reach high enough to put it within reach of the masterwork threshold!

It was as if they were trying to build the Tower of Babel. Even if Ves and Gloriana failed to make the tower high enough to reach the heavens, Ves could still pull out a ladder from his pocket to reach their goal, but only if the top floor of the legendary tower almost brushed the clouds!

As it was, even if Ves brought out his ladder and planted it at the top of their current tower, there was no way that Ves could climb on top and stretch out his hand and expect to touch a fluffy white cloud!

"It's not possible. Sorry." He lamely replied.

"YOU LIE!" She went back to pressing her head against his own! "I can spot when you are lying, Ves! The way you avert your eyes and soften the tone of your voice in just that manner are tell-tale signs that you aren't telling me the truth!"

Ves inwardly cursed. Since when could Gloriana sniff out his lies?! To what extent did she study and analyze his mannerisms for her to be able to recognize that he was being less than truthful?! Why was there no justice in this galaxy?!

"I'm telling you over and over again. There's nothing I can do! If I did, I would have done so already!"

"THAT'S NOT AN ACCEPTABLE ANSWER! I know you have a lot of tricks on your sleeve. A young and inexperienced Journeyman like you can't possibly fabricate a masterwork mech so early in your career! Was it truly a fluke like you claimed, or did you pull something off that enabled your success? TELL ME, VES!"

She continued to cry as she sought to grasp any chance of salvaging this day. She put so much hope in this fabrication run that failure hit her much deeper than normal!

It pained Ves to see his girlfriend in emotional distress. He really didn't want to see her cry! It was one of the most painful sights he had ever seen!

"I.. I may have a trick, but...it won't work this time."

"WHY NOT?!"

"I can bump the quality of our meck a little higher, but not enough to reach our desired standard."

"THEN APPLY YOUR TRICK AGAIN!"

"I can't! It doesn't work that way! The trick I have can only be applied once per mech! I already tried to find out if I can stack it, but there is a hard rule against it! One time is the limit!"

"VES! YOU STUPID BOY! LOOK AT OUR BRIGHT WARRIOR!" She grabbed his head and tried to yank it to the freshly-fabricated mech. "DOES THAT LOOK LIKE A SINGLE MECH TO YOU?! IT'S NOT! IT'S A MODULAR MECH PLATFORM WITH FOUR DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS! IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S FOUR MECHS IN ONE! CAN'T YOU APPLY THIS SECRET METHOD OF YOURS ON EACH CONFIGURATION?!"

"This.."

Her suggestion astounded Ves! He had never considered this option before!

At first, it sounded ridiculous. Ves had already tried beforehand to embed multiple gems in a single mech, but there was some sort of interference between them that caused them to interfere with each other's effects. The first gem was the only one that took effect! Anything else that Ves added afterwards would only look pretty, nothing more!

Yet.. Gloriana had a point. The Bright Warrior was not a conventional mech design! The name stood for an entire system that encompassed a base platform as well as multiple different modular add-ons that turned it into different mech types!

In short, the Bright Warrior was both a single mech design and multiple mech designs at the same time!

The most crucial aspect about modular mech platforms was that the different configurations weren't mounted on the base platform at the same time! Only one of them was mounted onto the mech at any single time, with hardly any interchangeability between them due to their specialized parts!

This theoretically made it possible for Ves to apply as many gems as the different configurations could handle! He just had to make sure the gems stuck to the specialized parts instead of the common base platform!

Gloriana blinked up at him with an intensity that could burn a mech!

"I know that look of yours. It's viable, right? You wouldn't be contemplating so many ideas if what I said was wrong! IT WILL WORK, RIGHT?! RIGHT?! RIGHT?!"

"I don't know! I don't know if it will stack up the way we want!"

"Then try!"

"I.. don't know. I might waste some very valuable resources if we fail!"

"WE DON'T KNOW IF WE DON'T TRY! JUST DO IT, VES! GET TO WORK AND FIX THIS MESS!"

Being harried so much by Gloriana sent his mind into muddle. He really couldn't maintain his composure when Gloriana was subjecting him to her volatile mood swings!

The reason why he hesitated was because there was no guarantee that the gems would collectively elevate the quality of the entire modular mech platform. It didn't make much sense if that were the case!

What was much more likely to occur was that only a single gem would be active at a time. Depending on which configuration was mounted to the base platform, only that single gem took effect!

With such a disappointing outcome in mind, Ves was very pessimistic about his odds of success! He really wanted to save his stash of greater gems for better opportunities than salvage an outcome that was already doomed!

Gloriana didn't let him, though!

"WHY ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT HOLDING BACK AT THIS STAGE?! FIX THIS NOW!"

Chapter 1883 Placing Ladders

The entire mechanism on how Lucky's gems improved the quality of a mech was hard to explain.

Ves would have to define the quality of a mech and explain what variables influenced this parameter.

There was no precise, numerical measuring stick for quality. Just like the much-despised mech performance index, it was a bit simplistic to boil down the quality of mech by a single word, number or description.

Mech designers developed both a theoretical and instinctual understanding of quality when it came to mechs. Their judgement might differ from each other depending on how they ranked the aspects they cared about the most, but in general their opinions didn't diverge too much.

The quality of the Bright Warrior and the four sets of add-ons that made up its modular configurations were quite good. Ves would even call the end product fantastic.

Yet that was still separate steps too far from the insanely high standard that was called masterwork.

Implicitly, a masterwork was a work that was worthy to be called the magnum opus a master in a respective craft.

What this meant was that Ves and Gloriana both had to fabricate a mech that was so good that a typical Master Mech Designer on a very good day could not deliver anything better!

This was simply an unreal standard! It reflected how rare it was to create a masterwork mech when a mech designer was still short of reaching Master.

It reflected the exceptional nature of masterworks and ensured that they remained rare throughout the mech industry. So many mech designers attempted to achieve this stellar goal, yet few ever did! The few Seniors who managed to reach this standard always relied on exceptional circumstances and random chance to hit the jackpot and luck out!

For a Journeyman like Ves to assume that making another masterwork mech was just a matter of time was very arrogant.

No other Journeyman would possibly hope for creating a masterwork because the foundation of a mech designer at this stage was simply too shallow!

This was also the reason why Ves pursued an unusual strategy. The only way for him to realistically make a masterwork mech was to rely on one of his strange but exceptionally potent moods that always seemed to supercharge his fabrication run.

As far as Ves could ascertain, he always seemed to have a lot at stake each time he entered into those productive moods. He theorized that he could increase the chance of grasping an exceptional mood if he kept raising the stakes.

Adding more meaning to his mech design while adhering to a strict and cramped schedule all served to raise his sense of urgency and increase his emotional investment in the success of his project.

Did all of this work?

Ves would argue yes. Compared to the first attempts of fabricating the Deliverer and the Desolate Soldier, the first production model of the Bright Warrior clearly took the crown in terms of overall quality.

Yet the mech that Ves and Gloriana finished today was still within mortal limits. Its quality failed to get close to the unreal level where masterworks and other great works reigned!

For this reason, Ves really didn't want to do what Gloriana was pushing him for the last five minutes. She kept shouting and haranguing at him, but it wasn't until she started crying and pouring out her wounded heart that Ves really couldn't remain impassive anymore.

He cared about Gloriana! He didn't want to see her in this sad and tear-stricken state!

After a bit of consideration, he decided to shove aside his doubts and bury his hesitation. Even if what he was about to do was doomed to fail, he at least owed it to Gloriana to make an attempt.

"Okay, okay. I'll do it!" He said, interrupting her unhinged tirade. "Just stop crying, okay? It's not the end of the galaxy here. Come on, Gloriana. Please don't be sad."

He kissed her on the lips, causing her to calm down from her hysterical mood. Though tears still streaked across her cheeks, she began to look at him with a hopeful expression.

"You'll do it, Ves?"

"I'll try."

"TRYING IS NOT ENOUGH!" She warned him while pounding her fist against his chest. "YOU HAVE TO SUCCEED! I WON'T ACCEPT ANY OTHER OUTCOME THIS DAY!"

"I get it, Gloriana! You don't have to harry me any further!"

Ves walked up to the finished mech with Gloriana following right behind him like a persistent barnacle.

He first paused at the base platform and admired its form. Since this mech was meant for the Avatars, he coated it in a brilliant gold-and-black color scheme with a dash of navy blue to accent its overall contours.

The third eye enveloped by a hexagon sat prominently on the forehead while the emblems of the Larkinson Clan and the Avatars of Myth proudly adorned its upper left chest.

The Golden Cat and the Vitruvian Mech both marked the allegiance of this mech! This was a mech that was solely made to serve the Larkinsons, not the market!

Yet as impressive as the base platform appeared, it was still devoid of many essential elements. It lacked a complete armor cover and distinctly possessed no arms.

Ves turned towards the sets of modular parts that formed the different configurations. Each represented a different role, and each consisted of different parts and gear.

He studied the different configurations before deciding to start off with the Illuminating Warrior.

The rifleman mech configuration consisted of the smallest sets of parts. This was because the configuration did not add any additional armor plating onto the base platform.

Ves and Gloriana wanted to preserve as much mobility as possible in order to allow the Illuminating Warrior to reposition itself quickly and evade pursuit.

Both a laser rifle and a ballistic rifle had been added to the set. The Illuminating Warrior could opt to bring either or even both weapons to the battlefield.

"This is a pretty powerful configuration." He said. "The Breyer alloy we've incorporated in the construction of the frames of these rifles has done much to strengthen them and increase some of their parameters."

Gloriana snorted and placed her hands on her hips. "Why are you babbling about something irrelevant, Ves? STOP STALLING AND GET TO WORK!"

It seemed like his girlfriend was not in the mood to reflect on their work!

He helplessly withdrew a pouch he made out of a portion of Synthra Umbra fabric.

"You always carried that in your pocket." Gloriana noted with an intensely focused expression. "I always wondered why you never left it in the vault."

Ves shrugged but refrained from explaining. He didn't want to tell her that Lucky was the source of the gems he was about to use.

She would definitely pamper his cat silly if she found out he was the source! This meant that Ves would continue to receive gems revolving around gaining the affection of women!

After briefly rummaging through his pouch, he pulled out the gem he wanted.

[Remnant Supernova]

The remnants of a supernova that wiped out an entire alien race is contained within this gem. Increases the damage inflicted by directed energy weapons by 25 percent.

Though this gem only favored energy weapons, this wasn't a big deal for Ves. The current mech generation was already being called the laser generation due to the strength of lasers over many other damage types.

Of course, this mainly applied to third-class mechs. Higher classes of mechs utilized a much greater variety of weapon systems which made it difficult for laser weapons to dominate the conversation.

Regardless, for a mech like the Illuminating Warrior, Ves clearly favored its laser armament over its ballistic armament. He only included the latter to the design as a backup option in case they encountered another foe like the sandman race that was immune to energy weapons.

He needed to decide where to mount the gem. Ordinarily, he embedded the gem in the cockpit of a mech, which was ordinarily its most safest place.

That wasn't possible. His choices this time basically amounted to the left arm or right arm.

Ves chose the left arm because this limb was the closest to the emblems painted to the chest of the base platform.

He partially disassembled the arm portion with the help of some tools and bots. Gloriana assisted him when she saw what he was trying to do. With her help, it didn't take long before Ves reached a well-protected portion of the mech.

He mounted the gem and fixed it into place.

Nothing immediately happened, but Ves already expected that somehow. He withdrew from the innards of the mech arm and put it back together.

"Alright, let's go to the next configuration." He told Gloriana.

He repeated the same steps for the other configurations, embedding a different gem in similar locations.

For the Shining Warrior, the lancer mech configuration, he used the Fist of the Faithful.

[Fist of the Faithful]

The memory of a punch that changed the course of the galaxy resides in this gem. Increases the impact damage inflicted by a mech by 30 percent.

For the Solar Warrior, the space knight configuration, he used the Horned Devil's Visage.

[Horned Devil's Visage]

The echo of an extinct alien race is captured within this gem. Increases the sensor range of a mech by 40 percent.

Finally, for the Nova Warrior, the swordsman mech configuration, he used the Furnace of Regret

[Furnace of Regret]

The anguish of a forgotten terror is encapsulated in this gem. Increases the output of a power reactor of a mech by 30 percent.

Ves winced at some of the choices he made. The handful of greater gems he possessed didn't entirely fit the primary needs of the respective configurations.

He felt most pained by the decision to add the Furnace of Regret to Nova Warrior instead of the Illuminating Warrior.

He didn't have a choice, though. The Remnant Supernova was practically useless to every other configuration, so it had to be paired with the Illuminating Warrior.

Once Ves finished planting the gems in the arms of each separate configuration, he took a step back and looked at the resting base platform and the pile of parts.

As expected, he failed to attain his goal.

"..That's it?" Gloriana frowned. "Your secret weapon.. was just a bunch of gems?"

"They aren't regular gems. They're special!"

'WELL CLEARLY THEY AREN'T WORKING!' She burst out and kicked his shin!

"I-I don't know why! This was our best chance of making it work! I really don't know what is going on or why it isn't working! Maybe we need to mount a configuration on the base platform to make it mesh together!"

They attempted to do just that. They utilized the assembly system to mount the parts for the Illuminating Warrior onto the base platform.

Nothing happened. Outside of Ves' expectations, he saw nothing that indicated that the Remnant Supernova had set in! It was as if the gem had become inert!

"What!? How can there be no effect?!" He puzzled.

Ves decided to remove the Illuminating Warrior configuration and mount the other three configurations in turn.

The same result happened each time. The Bright Warrior turned into a different mech type, but Ves saw no indicator that proved that the gems had magically improved its attributes.

The expected increase in overall quality didn't occur either!

What was going on?"

"I don't know why it's not working!"

"If four gems aren't enough, what about five?! You added those strange gems to each of the different configurations, but you left out the base platform!"

"I already told you it doesn't work that way! The gems conflict with each other! Either one or the other takes supremacy!"

"This mech is different! Whatever you just did, you need to tie them together somehow. The base platform is the one common element that ties them all together. Just try it! I won't forgive you if you don't!"

Gloriana continued to pelt him until he did what she wanted. He helplessly approached the base platform and climbed up and entered its cockpit. With Gloriana squirming her way inside, they both squeezed inside the cramped space surrounded by consoles and other gizmos.

Ves sat down on the seat and held a multitool. He looked at the startup button and pried it off before taking out his pouch again.

Not a lot of gems remained in the pouch. He felt extremely pained at how Gloriana forced him to bet all in on turning this Bright Warrior into a masterwork! He gambled so much that even he couldn't stomach the thought of failure anymore!

As he contemplated his choice, his intuition nudged him towards a gem that Ves had always looked down upon.

[Accumulation of Spirit]

Allows a mech to bear a small quantity of spiritual energy.

He retrieved the small, opaque white gem and mounted it to the start button position.

As soon as the gem took its place, a reaction finally took place.

A profound spiritual glow seemed to form within the gem!

Soon enough, more reactions took place after the gem became active. Ves somehow felt the other gems embedded in the different configurations coming online as well!

It was as if the Accumulation of Spirit was all that needed to start a chain reaction! One that both activated the other gems and connected them all together!

"What is happening, Ves?!"

"I don't know, but there is something very familiar about these reactions!"

Through some indescribable sense, both Ves and Gloriana felt as if the mech they were in was undergoing a very profound transformation!

Chapter 1884 Altered Reality

An extraordinary transformation took place that Ves could hardly fathom. He saw and felt the Bright Warrior changing through several senses.

All of these reactions started off with the insertion of the Accumulation of Spirit. This seemingly insignificant gem somehow managed to either activate or connect with the other four gems, causing them to become active as if they had all been attached to a whole mech!

The weirdness of it all struck Ves like a sledgehammer. After becoming exposed to Lucky's gems for so long, Ves realized he knew almost nothing about their workings or mechanisms.

He barely even figured out its rules of operation!

How could he possibly think of applying multiple gems onto a single mech by exploiting a loophole in their rules? He never thought about 'splitting' up a mech to allow for multiple gems to take effect onto a single mech!

Regardless of whether the gems became active at the same time, the fact that it was possible to boost the quality of a mech by stacking the effects of the gems this way was inconceivable!

He recalled the descriptions of the gems. Did it turn out that the System wasn't telling nonsense, and that the gems actually contained some remnants of past entities?

Were they unable to get along with each other on the same mech due to their conflicting or overlapping properties?

Was using some gem with neutral or binding options a way to get around this conflict?

Whatever the case, Ves learned plenty of new rules about the operation of Lucky's gems! He was very astonished by the realization that there were more sophisticated ways to utilize them! Just adding a single gem to an individual mech was not the end of the story!

As the transformation continued, Gloriana became enthralled while Ves maintained a sober mind.

This wasn't the first time he saw Lucky's gems improve a mech through unknown means. Instead, he paid close attention to the differences between this empowering event and prior instances of upgrading a mech through embedding gems.

One thing was for sure. This transformation was a lot more drastic and potent than the ones that Ves witnessed before!

What was a masterwork mech?

The answer was difficult to say. The textbook definition described them as mechs whose 'quality' had reached physical wholeness and soundness beyond the reach of what should be possible.

This description implied that a mech somehow reached perfection or beyond in terms of physical quality, but Ves already experienced first-hand that it was too simplistic and incomplete to describe the profound existence of masterwork mechs!

There was more to a masterwork than just an elevated physical quality!

Due to the extreme reaction that Ves was witnessing right now, the changes experienced by the mech were much more visible than with the Devil Tiger!

This gave Ves a much clearer opportunity to observe what the gems exactly did to the Bright Warrior mech to elevate its quality and improve its other properties!

One thing that stood out to Ves was that the changes affected its spiritual quality as well! Whether it was due to the Accumulation of Spirit, the nature of the transformation or both, the spiritual foundation of mech strength improved remarkably!

Amongst other effects, the Golden Cat glow grew significantly stronger, causing the mech to embody her presence to a greater degree!

This wasn't all. In his spiritual vision, he also saw something that he hadn't really noticed before.

The spiritual foundation of the mech integrated much more extensively with its physical frame! It was as if they were loose friends beforehand but turned into bosom buddies!

Ves never knew that the spiritual foundation of a mech could mesh so well to the physical frame. Ideas began to circulate in his mind. Perhaps he could replicate this phenomenon on his own without relying on this exceptional reaction!

In particular, the way the spiritual foundation adopted the overall shape of the Bright Warrior suggested to Ves that his fanciful notion of combining an imaginary mech with a physical mech was not as pointless as he thought!

Plenty of other interesting phenomena took place. While Gloriana was unable to witness the spiritual transformation of the mech, she had become completely obsessed by the physical transformation of the mech!

It was not as if the mech changed shape or something like that. The effects worked a bit more extensively than that. The best way to describe it was that if reality was being overwritten in real-time!

Normally, such reality-defying transformation shouldn't occur at all because the mech designer or fabricator already shaped the mech to the standard of a masterwork mech.

The introduction and activation of Lucky's gems broke all of those rules! Their mysterious properties caused the Bright Warrior mech to literally self-correct itself to the standard of a masterwork mech!

In Gloriana's words, it was a genuine miracle!

Ever since she conceived her design philosophy, she had always been chasing after the ideal of a perfect vessel. In her opinion, creating a masterwork was her best chance of realizing her seemingly-impossible dream!

Now that she finally accomplished it for the very first time, she stood to gain a huge amount of insights that would definitely advance her design philosophy by leaps and bounds!

"I can't stay in this cockpit! I have to witness all of the changes!"

This dream come true was such a precious moment for her that her design seed became excited beyond belief!

For this reason, Gloriana quickly squirmed out of the cockpit and activated her antigrav clothing to float in the air and observe all of the physical phenomena with her very own eyes!

As Gloriana experienced one of the greatest moments of her life, Ves became fascinated by the physical transformation for a different reason.

What kind of properties defined a masterwork? What was it that made them masterwork, and how could Ves reach this standard without relying on a shortcut like Lucky's gems?

Compared to the previous time he made a masterwork, Ves observed a lot more details. Part of this was because he was already prepared beforehand, but another part was due to his high affinity for mechs!

It didn't escape his attention that due to making another masterwork, his affinity for mechs rose once again! Gloriana was also the recipient of this effect, thereby vaulted her to the exclusive rank of masterwork mech designer!

Raising her affinity for mechs was one of the principal reasons why she wanted to succeed in making a masterwork mech!

The benefits a mech designer gained from increasing their instinctual understanding were already very good as Ves had already experienced. Yet to someone like Gloriana, the boons she gained was of much greater importance!

It was not surprising for her to lash out at Ves when they had initially fallen short of making a masterwork. She obsessed so much about masterworks that it didn't surprise Ves that she would do anything to attain her goal.

He was like that too, sometimes.

Ves felt very pleased that this gamble somehow worked out. Making Gloriana happy made him happy as well.

It was just that the price was a bit too much! Wasting five gems to create a single masterwork was an awful return on investment!

If he had a choice, he would rather create five masterwork mechs with the help of these gems!

All of this was moot now. Now that the gems had been used, they became permanently bound to the mech. In prior tests, Ves already figured out that the gems weren't reusable for some reason. Removing them and putting them into a different mech didn't work because the gems lost effect.

It was yet another unexplainable phenomenon that Ves hadn't figured out!

Whatever the case, the gems were stuck for good, so Ves could no longer make use of them to empower other mechs!

He lamented over their loss. Did he regret giving in to Gloriana's demands? Partially.

It wasn't as if Ves only incurred losses. The drastic transformations that took place due to the combined effects of five gems acting together already taught him a lot about the nature of masterwork mechs.

He doubted he would be able to make so many remarkable observations if he used a gem the regular way!

On top of that, with the elevation of this Bright Warrior mech, Ves could finally apply for a masterwork certificate. This meant that he stood to become a formally-recognized masterwork mech designer just a few years after he advanced to Journeyman!

The amount of mech designers who managed to accomplish this feat in the earlier periods of their careers was miniscule! This was a club reserved only for the very exceptional, very lucky or very talented!

Regardless in which category that Ves and Gloriana fell under, there was no doubt that masterwork mech designer enjoyed an exalted status in the mech community! This was more so for those who managed to make a masterwork when they were young!

Essentially, the earlier a mech designer gained a valid masterwork certificate, the more prominent they became!

Most Masters never even accomplished such a remarkable feat in their Journeyman days! In fact, a lot of Masters still weren't able to create any masterworks!

While that didn't necessarily diminish their design prowess or their value to the mech community, such Masters still respected those who were able to create masterworks!

This was a given because every masterwork mech designer possessed a deep and intimate understanding of mechs. No matter how much other mech designers disagreed with their design approach, they couldn't help but recognize that masterwork mech designers had made an exceptional achievement in the field of mech design!

All of this meant that attaining the status of masterwork mech designer sooner was exceptionally valuable.

If it took a decade for Ves to make another masterwork mech, then he would rather pay an exorbitant cost to make one sooner.

A masterwork mech designer in his thirties was ten times more remarkable than a masterwork mech designer in his forties!

Of course, if he was already capable of making a masterwork mech within a year, then wasting five greater gems was a very large pity. Ves would never know whether the losses outweighed the gains. He had no choice but to roll with the dice and accept the consequences of the choices he had already made.

He shook his head. "Five gems or not, I'm glad the Bright Warrior I've completed today is something I can show off with pride."

This mech was a lot more significant than the Devil Tiger. The Bright Warrior design that Ves could choose to publish on the market if he wished!

There was no hindrance in applying for a masterwork certificate this time! Ves felt incredibly gratified that he could finally convert his de facto masterwork mech designer status into a de jure status!

The amount of fame, prestige and reputation he would gain if the MTA official recognized his accomplishment was significant!

In the vast and extremely competitive mech industry, it was incredibly hard for mech designers to raise their profile and stand out from the crowd.

Gaining fame this way was not about satisfying his vanity.

Instead, Ves wanted to take advantage of this new status to grasp opportunities that weren't open to him before and work with powerful partners who wouldn't pay him any mind if he was just a regular Journeyman!

More specifically, Ves anticipated that becoming an officially-recognized masterwork mech designer would open up a lot of lucrative missions from the Rim Exchange!

At this moment in his life, what Ves cared the most was earning lots of MTA merits!

Increasing his qualifications, racking up achievements and raising his profile within the mech community was the best way for him to increase his value in the eyes of the Rim Guardians and their affiliates. This in turn boosted his ability to earn merits, thereby bringing him one step closer to redeeming a beyonder ticket!

Being able to reach this point earlier made him feel a lot less sour about spending all of those gems. Regardless of their future value, in the short term, Ves would rather earn more merits, because that was the only way he could become a galactic pioneer within his original timeframe!

Chapter 1885 Bridge Mech

The transformation eventually ended, but the day wasn't over to Ves and Gloriana.

Both of them were immensely pleased at the first production model's successful elevation to masterwork standard. Even though they hadn't been able to reach this standard through their personal design ability, the gains they made were huge and manifold, especially for Gloriana!

All of her earlier resentment and contempt had disappeared. She was so ecstatic that it was as if she had died and gone to heaven!

Her earlier scowls and frowns were nowhere to be seen now. She was all smiles as she continuously basked in the insights she made from observing the physical transformation.

She also became more radiant due to her increased affinity for mechs. This was a very vague property that raised her intuition towards mech design, increased her instinctive understanding of mechs and boosted her chances of making another masterwork mech!

If Ves was in her place, he would celebrate as much as her as well!

As it was, Ves was the one who paid the bill for all of these benefits. Though he gained a lot as well, he still felt that Gloriana took advantage of him somehow.

He shrugged. It was not as if he took advantage of his girlfriend plenty of times.

"Ves!" She finally deigned to direct her attention to him again. "This mech is so wonderful! It changed so much that I can study it for months! It's all thanks to you that I've made a huge harvest today! Thank you!"

She glomped him and showed her appreciation towards him in an intimate fashion!

Their snogging only lasted for a short time before Gloriana pulled back. "Come on! We still have much to observe and learn!"

Though both of them were tired, they didn't want to go to sleep. Gloriana especially insisted on studying the newly-elevated masterwork mech while her mind was still fresh and inspired from the remarkable transformation she witnessed!

Ves played along as he was curious to see how the gems exactly worked now that the Accumulation of Spirit seemingly bonded them together.

They scanned the mech and fiddled around a bit by mounting a couple of configurations to the mech.

After turning the mech online, Ves discovered that only one gem was in effect at a time.

This meant that the Illuminating Warrior wouldn't be able to take advantage of the Nova Warrior's improved power reactor enhancement.

If all or at least some of the gems were in effect at the same time, then Ves would have no more complaints about expending five greater gems on a single mech.

As it was, the Bright Warrior mech hadn't actually grown more powerful than an equivalent masterwork mech boosted by just a single gem!

"Well, I can't have everything, I guess." He shook his head.

He still remained somewhat suspicious of the Accumulation of Spirit mounted in the cockpit of the base platform. He was absolutely certain that its effect was a lot more than being able to store a little bit of spirituality!

Sadly, Ves didn't think he could decipher their secrets anytime soon. They were simply too inscrutable for him. Neither Gloriana's scanners nor his own spiritual senses could decipher anything unusual behind their shiny facades.

"Don't ask me how they work. I have no idea how they enhance an attribute of a mech or how they elevate its overall quality." He told her. "Just consider them as consumable add-ons. I can integrate them onto any single mech to improve their performance or push them over the edge of masterwork."

That wasn't an acceptable answer to Gloriana! As she slowly came off the high of becoming a masterwork mech designer, she rushed up to him like a demon and grasped his arms!

"TELL ME WHERE YOU GOT YOUR GEMS! I NEED THEM! I NEED THEM! I NEED THEM!"

Ves gently but firmly shook her off and pushed her away. "Calm down! I can't answer this question, and I prefer to keep hold of what gems I have left. They're very rare and difficult to obtain. Don't worry though, I can obtain them periodically, so the gems I have left in my pouch aren't the only ones we can use to our advantage."

"Come on, Ves! Don't you love me? Aren't we together in this? Why can't you tell me anything more?" She pleaded to him while showing off her puppy eyes.

Though Gloriana appeared exceptionally adorable right now, Ves had enough of her for one day. With his thoughts lingering on the price he paid for this accomplishment, he wasn't in the mood to indulge her anymore!

"Just drop it. I love you, Gloriana, but just like you I've withhold some information from you. It's not that I don't trust you, it's just that what I know is far too dangerous to be spread around."

"—But—"

"—I'M BEING SERIOUS HERE!" He shouted back, his temper flaring due to her persistence! "If you know me as well as I suspect you do, then you must have figured out that my life is a bit unusual. This is partially because I'm caught up in events that are incredibly dangerous and involve parties that are inconceivably powerful! If I draw the attention of one of them, my life will definitely be over!"

She looked shocked at him. "I.. I didn't know it was that bad.."

"Please respect my privacy, at least for this." He sighed and calmed down. "Those gems are related to matters that are so significant that even the Big Two will pay attention to me once I become exposed!"

Though she looked unwilling, his girlfriend understood that Ves really didn't want to share the secret behind his reality-warping gems.

It was difficult for her to resist her urges. The shiny gems that Ves whipped out attracted her beyond all reason! Their incredible uses and immense potential aligned so much with her design philosophy that she thought it was unfair that Ves managed to obtain them. Where did he even get these sparkling treasures?!

Now that Ves and Lucky was done with their work, their cats approached their owners and begged for their affection.

"Miaow."

While Ves bent down to ruffle Clixie's silky soft fur, Lucky brushed his side against Gloriana's legs while curling his tail in a playful manner.

"Meow!"

"Hm? Do you want a hug or something, Lucky!"

"Meow meow meow!"

Lucky wiggled his rear end while calling out to Gloriana.

When Ves heard his cat, he froze while widening his eyes! What was Lucky doing!? He quickly moved away from Clixie and grabbed his cat!

"Lucky!" He hissed. "Remember who's your boss!"

"Meow! Meow!"

Lucky reached out to Gloriana with his paws!

"What's going on, Ves? What's wrong with Lucky?"

"Ah, he's just a bit too pampered these days. He needs some more exercise."

"Meow!"

"Shut up, Lucky!"

Even though Lucky kept meowing at Gloriana, she didn't understand what he was trying to say! Unlike Ves, she didn't have the ability to communicate with creatures!

"Lucky looks like he wants something from me. Why are you keeping him away?"

"Hehe, Lucky is a little naughty these days. Don't mind him. I'll be teaching him a lesson soon."

Though Lucky's distress increased, Ves kept a vice grip on his pet. He did not want Lucky to reveal that he was the source of the gems that became Gloriana's latest fascination!

Lucky was his cat, damnit! Gloriana would definitely try to convert him if she discovered Lucky's actual nature!

This brief incident signified the end of their preoccupation with their new masterwork mech. Before the pair left the underground workshop, they made sure to secure their new creation and arrange the base platform and its configurations to be sent to the current base occupied by the Avatars of Myth.

They also wrapped up the logs and files related to the creation of the masterwork mech.

Obviously, they left out the explosive footage where the gems took effect and transformed the mech.

They transferred only existing copy of the footage to a single secure data chip, to be put in Gloriana's care so she could study the all of the changes at her leisure.

"Make sure to view the contents of this data pad in a shielded room with a device that isn't connected to the galactic net." Ves told her. "I'm sure I don't need to explain to you how much trouble we'll attract if people know they can make masterworks with this method."

She nodded attentively. "I understand. I'm not taking this lightly at all. I really do need this footage to gain more insights. I haven't observed nearly enough to make me satisfied!"

"I understand. I trust you to keep the contents of this data chip secure."

Once they wound down the mech workshop and thoroughly cleared every single memory of what transpired, they boarded a shuttle and returned to the Austen Estate.

During the trip, both of them began to prepare for their applications to receive a masterwork certificate.

Due to the unusual nature of how they managed to create the masterwork, they weren't able to prepare all of the information the MTA usually needed.

"It's not that big of a deal." Gloriana reassured her. "The MTA will recognize that our masterwork mech is genuine. Attributing its creation to us is a little difficult, but I'm told that they have ways of verifying that as well."

"Do we have to send our mech to the MTA?"

"Not unless we want to certify it, which isn't necessary. Plenty of mech designers want to keep their masterwork mechs for themselves. The MTA will send an envoy to us to verify our claims. It's just that we'll attract a huge amount of attention."

"We're too young." He stated as he looked up from his projected interface. "We are one of the few mech designers in our early thirties who managed to accomplish this feat."

"Exactly. While this will do wonders for our fame, we'll also attract a huge amount of attention from nearly everyone. The Protectorate branch of the MTA will likely dispatch someone very high up the ladder to lead the delegation to inspect our masterwork mech."

That didn't sit too well with Ves. The less direct contact he had with the MTA, the better. If not for the fact he needed to earn a lot of MTA merits, he would have also tried to avoid the Rim Guardians as well.

"Well, we'll deal with whoever the Association sends. Hopefully, the envoy won't get too snoopy or demand custody of our mech."

Gloriana smiled and shook her head. "That won't happen. The MTA wants masterwork mechs very badly, but it can't be heavy-handed in their persuasion attempts. A fair number of masterwork mech designers submit their creations to the MTA to earn merits, but there are also those who keep them to themselves or negotiate a deal with a client or customer."

"How many merits do you think we can earn if we give up our masterwork to the MTA?"

While Ves would never actually make this decision, he still wanted to see what he was missing out on. He wasn't quite sure how many merits the MTA was willing to pay.

To answer his question, Gloriana had to browse the galactic net and pull up one of the countless voluminous rulebooks of the MTA.

After studying the terms related to submitting masterwork mechs, she look up to Ves with a shrug.

"I don't know. The MTA hadn't outlined any rules concerning bridge mechs. The MTA can either view our Bright Warrior design as a crippled second-class mech or a heavily enhanced third-class mech. Depending on the definition they adopt, we can either gain a million merits or just a hundredth of that sum!"

The disparity between the classes was huge. It showed that the MTA frankly didn't care about third-class masterwork mechs. Only the ones who could at least compete against other second-class mechs caught their attention!

Even with all of its gem-provided upgrades, the mech they made still fell short to the likes of the Paravin or Selzer in every aspect except defense!

Chapter 1886 Amadeus Clae Molien

When Ves and Gloriana returned to the Austen Estate, they were more than ready to crash into their beds and catch up on the sleep they missed.

Before they left to their own bedrooms, Gloriana held her boyfriend's arm.

"There is one more issue I want to address before we retire for the night. Our masterwork mech deserves its own name."

"That sounds like a good idea."

He agreed with her, though he failed to come up with a suggestion so far. He was still preoccupied with everything that took place today to think of a good name.

"How about the Quint?" She suggested. "It's a short and succinct name. While it doesn't sound as impressive as some of the other names attached to masterwork mechs, it will give our mech the opportunity to define its own identity."

Though Ves initially thought her suggestion sounded too plain and simple, he became swayed by her argument.

Calling their new masterwork mech something that sounded conventional such as the 'Fading Star' or the 'Zopharis Eon' didn't satisfy Ves. No description could ever fully describe the splendor of their new masterwork mech!

With four different configurations empowered by their own gems, the Bright Warrior mech they made was both versatile and powerful in different ways.

Masterwork mechs didn't have to remain stagnant in order to retain this special state.

Anyone could repair a masterwork mech once damaged as long as they restored it to its original state with matching materials.

They could even make some modifications or adjustments without breaking the quality that defined it as a masterwork!

Otherwise, Ves wouldn't have let his Devil Tiger go! The MTA wouldn't have valued masterwork mechs that much if they lost what made them special after participating in a single battle.

Still, it was best to let the masterwork mech designer perform these changes himself, as he possessed the closest connection to their extraordinary creation.

Why this was so, Ves didn't entirely know. This was just what the MTA made public about masterwork mechs. There were still many questions and myths surrounding the nature of these kinds of products.

Due to his mental weariness, Ves didn't think much further before accepting her suggestion. "Quint it is, then. I hope this masterwork mech will stay with Joshua and the Avatars long enough to develop its own fame."

"Great! I'll put that in our applications and take care of the rest of the paperwork! Have a good rest, Ves!"

She pecked his cheek before she left with a giggle.

Ves kept hold of Lucky and moved to his chambers. Once there, he lectured his cat on what he was allowed to do. Under no circumstances should Lucky ever 'produce' a gem in Gloriana's presence!

"Meow meow!"

"No! This is non-negotiable!"

"Meowwww~"

"Don't complain! I'm promising you a greater share of Breyer alloy in exchange for your silence! However, you'll have to increase the output of your greater gem production to keep me satisfied. Don't keep it all to yourself!"

"Meow.. meow."

"How many gems have you produced lately? I only received two, and both of them are completely useless! You have to do better, Lucky!"

After Ves set things straight with his cat, he finally retired for the night.

The next day, Ves woke up late but completely rested. After taking care of his morning routine, he discovered that Gloriana still needed more rest.

"My cousin has been through a lot. Her exhaustion reached a more alarming state than I anticipated." Ranya said when Ves called her over the comm. "For the moment, I brought her back to the treatment center in order to facilitate her recovery."

"When will she be back?"

"Not too long. It will take a day or two before she's ready to be discharged."

That didn't sound too bad. Once Ves ended his call, he decided to revisit the Quint and study it further.

For now, neither Ves nor Gloriana spread the word about their amazing accomplishment. It was such explosive news that it would definitely send shockwaves throughout his enterprise and beyond!

While Ves didn't mind that, he wanted to make sure he could leverage this news properly.

To assist him with this, he summoned Gavin to accompany him on his shuttle trip to the Avatar base.

"So why did you call me here for, boss?" His assistant spoke after Ves boarded the shuttle with Lucky.

"I want to hear your advice on our latest accomplishment."

"What is it? Is this accomplishment of yours related to the mech you and your girlfriend built?"

He nodded. He looked around and activated a signal jammer before revealing the details.

Once Gavin heard that Ves and Gloriana managed to succeed in making a masterwork, he looked shocked!

"I have no clue why everyone in the mech community obsesses so much over masterworks, but I definitely know that it shouldn't be possible for the two of you to succeed! Every source I've read on this topic states that only Seniors should be able to start making masterworks!"

"There's an exception for everything, Benny." Ves smiled ruefully. "Human space is immense and the amount of mech designers who created masterwork mechs are considerable. Some of them are even more talented in mech design than me and managed to do the same in their teens! I haven't broken any records in this regard."

The current record holder for youngest mech designer to receive a masterwork certificate was a freak from the New Rubarth Empire.

Around sixty or seventy years ago, the galactic mech community entered into a tumult when news came out that a seventeen-year old Rubarthan managed to design a mech and produce a masterwork copy by himself!

What was remarkable about this story was that Amadeus Clae Molien, the Rubarthan prodigy, received no assistance at any point during the design and fabrication stages!

In many cases, younger mech designers managed to receive a masterwork certificate by relying heavily on older and better mech designers.

This wasn't the case with Amadeus! The Rubarthans quickly moved to publicize and celebrate the freak's record-breaking feat!

It was too bad that Amadeus died before he reached twenty-five years old. The stories surrounding his death were shrouded with confusion.

No one knew who was responsible for assassinating Amadeus! Most of the rumors pointed the finger at the Terran Confederation, while others cast suspicion on the prodigy's rivals within the Rubarthan Empire!

Some even dared to accuse the CFA of the deed in order to deprive the MTA of a powerful future ally and partner!

Even crazier was the rumors that suggested that the MTA itself got rid of Amadeus for some inexplicable reason!

Whatever the case, Amadeus died because he attracted too much attention. His continued existence threatened many powers and his death benefited them considerably.

The tale of Amadeus Clae Molien weighed heavily on Ves. While his own accomplishment was nowhere close to that of the Rubarthan prodigy, it was nonetheless extremely exceptional in an underdeveloped star sector at the very edge of the galactic rim!

Ves and Gloriana probably set a new record for youngest masterwork mech designers from the Komodo Star Sector!

In fact, the entire Yeina Star Cluster probably hadn't produced a mech designer who surpassed the pair on this front!

The huge import of this news soon dawned upon Gavin. He couldn't restrain his shock that Ves and his girlfriend of all people managed to do the impossible!

"You're right to keep the news under wraps." He said softly. "You can't suppress it forever, though. Other people have already seen the masterwork mech, right?"

"Some of our guards were present inside the workshop, though I made sure to order them to look away from us. I did order some people to transport the Quint to the Avatar base. A lot of people have seen the mech during the way. I trust the Avatars to keep their mouths shut, though."

Gavin looked skeptical. "Secrets always leak. Especially when they are exposed to this extent. No offense to your Avatars, but at any time they can always slip some information. You shouldn't assume that the Avatars who know about your Quint will stay mute forever."

"That's why I need a plan, Benny. How should we announce our accomplishment? How should we take advantage of the publicity we'll inevitably draw, and what should we be concerned about? I don't want to end up as the second Amadeus Clae Molien."

"We can't stay in the Ylvaine Protectorate." Nitaa interjected. "This state has been a fine host to you, but it is in a precarious situation. The Friday Coalition remains a clear threat to you. Once your feat becomes known, the Fridaymen will no longer dismiss you as an inconsequential individual!"

"You're right. I already planned to leave the Protectorate after finishing this project." He said. "There is nothing in the Protectorate that is compelling enough to make us stay here. We need to move on to greener pastures soon."

After satisfying Nitaa, Gavin offered his own views.

"To be honest, the timing of the announcement is not very convenient. If you had sprung me with this news when we have reached somewhere safer like the Sentinel Kingdom, then I would have told you to invite a lot of prominent members of the mech community and hold a grand banquet where you can show off your masterwork mech with pride!"

Ves frantically shook his head. "That is way too extravagant to me! I have no desire to schmooze with other mech designers. I also don't like to be exposed to so many strangers."

"Then.. we can hold a more modest press conference. Just like with the Aurora Titan's reveal event but on a smaller scale, we can invite a number of journalists and friendly acquaintances to experience your Quint in person. This is necessary if you don't want your accomplishment to be called into question."

Doing so would successfully validate his accomplishment to the wider mech community and raise his profile.

While Ves sought to raise his fame and prestige, he didn't want to attract the wrong kind of attention. He asked Gavin what he should do to mitigate the risks.

"You need to find a backer." He replied simply. "In fact, you need one already in order to be ready in case the news leaks out."

"I see.."

So far, his only choice for backer was the Wodin Dynasty. Gloriana's mother and other relatives were strong enough to guarantee his safety and freedom to all but the most major threats!

That did not sit well with Ves. he frowned as he contemplated how much he had to rely on the Wodin Dynasty to further his own goals.

As unwilling as felt, he saw no other choice!

Fortunately, Ves believed that Madame Constance Wodin would definitely regard his relationship with her daughter in a better light.

Even if they hadn't managed to create a second-class masterwork mech that was usable by one of the Wodins, he was still the youngest masterwork mech designer in the star sector or star cluster!

Best of all, he also managed to bring Gloriana along for the ride! Such a contribution should be immensely valuable to the Wodin Dynasty! Ves didn't believe that Gloriana's notoriously demanding mother would continue to disregard his worth!

"Will the Hexers back you, boss? If not, we're in trouble."

"Don't worry." Ves waved his assistant down. "Gloriana will take care of this issue when she wakes. The Wodins are already friends from what I can see. If Brutus and Ranya's change of heart is anything to go by, it shouldn't be difficult to obtain their support."

"Okay.. we should still prepare for the worst, I believe."

"That's a given. For now, I want you to start making the arrangements for the press conference, but try and hold it off for as long as possible. I'm not ready to make this announcement so soon."

"Why the delay?"

Ves smirked and tapped the side of his head. "I have an implant waiting to be installed in my head!"

Chapter 1887 First Activation

The Quint stood imposingly in a restricted hall inside the Avatar base. No one was allowed to go inside except for a select few people.

Plenty of people had seen the Quint, though few knew what it represented. Though word about its masterwork status hadn't spread, a few people knew the truth.

At this moment, four people entered the hall. Ves stood in front of an interface to manipulate a set of bots and manipulator tools to load the Nova Warrior configurations onto the base platform.

For the very first activation, Ves opted to mount the swordsman mech configuration. This was the most balanced and neutral configuration of the Bright Warrior model, though its ranged options left much to be desired.

The Quint's only common armament, its low-profile shoulder-mounted missile launchers, hadn't been loaded with missiles yet!

The LMC had trouble procuring powerful missiles to make the missile launchers worthwhile. While Ves had already ordered a large batch of standard missiles from an Ylvainan munition supplier, their potency was lackluster.

While Ves worked to prepare the Quint for a very basic activation, Commander Melkor and Joshua waited patiently a few steps back.

Nitaa was present as ever in her imposing armor and her triple-type heavy assault rifle. The bodyguard continually swept every corner for threats and intruders like an inexhaustible sentry bot.

Lucky on the other hand was lounging on his back in the air as if he was lying in a hammock. He was the most unconcerned of them all!

"This mech.." Joshua trailed, his eyes wide with fascination.

As an aficionado of LMC mechs, he had seen and piloted many mechs designed by Ves.

Of all the machines he had the pleasure of seeing, the Quint that stood dormant topped everything else. Not even the vaunted Shield of Samar or the gold label mechs in the possession of the Avatars could match the indescribable splendor of the first copy of the Bright Warrior!

"This is a rare opportunity that Ves has prepared for you, Mr. King." Melkor told his subordinate. "The Quint may not be the custom mech that you have been hoping for, but it is by far the best standard mech that you will be able to pilot for the foreseeable time."

"Thank you for assigning this mech to me." Joshua sincerely bowed to Melkor and Ves, his piloting suit stretching over his lean frame. "I will strive to prove myself worthy to pilot this august machine."

"Ves has very high expectations of you. Make sure you continue to meet them. If we have cause to believe the prowess of the Quint is wasted on you, we won't hesitate to reassign it to a worthier mech pilot. Don't let it come to that. Always remember that the mech is not your personal possession. You are an Avatar. You fight on behalf of Ves and the Larkinson Clan."

"Understood."

Once Ves finished preparing the Quint, he withdrew from the work console and turned to the pair of Avatars.

"The mech is ready. Joshua, go ahead and enter its cockpit. The honor of its first piloted activation goes to you. Savor this moment, but don't get too caught up by the experience. I still wish to gather a lot of data and I don't have all day.

"Yes, sir!"

While Joshua marched over to the mech of his dreams, Ves and Melkor studied the young mech pilot.

"You're paying too much attention to Joshua." The Avatar Commander told Ves. "While he's an exceptional mech pilot, there are other talents in my troop that merits attention as well. I've been careful to temper his expectations to avoid inflating his ego. Assigning him the honor of piloting your first masterwork mech without earning a lot of merit is not a good precedent."

His opinion was sound. Ves did overreach a bit by selecting Joshua as the designated mech pilot of the Quint, but he had his own reasons for picking this young talent over other deserving Avatars.

One of the main reasons was that Joshua was a mech pilot with strong spiritual potential. While he wasn't the second coming of Venerable Foster or anything, the native from Cloudy Curtain possessed spiritual attributes that made him very compatible with LMC mechs!

Of course, Ves couldn't reveal this reasoning to his cousin, so he employed other excuses instead.

"Joshua is the most versatile mech pilot on our payroll." He calmly said. "Whether he deserves this honor or not, it's undeniable that he is skilled in both swordsmanship and marksmanship. He can pilot light mechs as proficient as knight mechs. With his diverse skillset, he can make adequate if not full use out of all four configurations of the Bright Warrior model. Can any other Avatar top him in this regard?"

"There are several Larkinsons on the top of my head that can give Joshua a run on his money." Melkor retorted. "You know how we train our own relatives. We always instill our mech pilots with a solid foundation and at least basic competencies in each fundamental field. Some of our Larkinsons have gone beyond the basics and developed well-rounded repertoires. While they are admittedly not as extreme as Mr. King, they're family."

Ves shook his head. "Joshua's loyalty is not less than our own clansmen. He's a plain kid and his motivations are clear to see. I don't see any harm in entrusting him with the Quint."

Though Melkor still disagreed with Ves, he didn't argue any further. Ves was the boss, and he was just his subordinate. The hierarchy was very clear.

Once Joshua entered the cockpit, Ves switched the interface to display a raft of telemetry as well as an interior view of the cockpit.

Both Ves and Melkor saw Joshua sitting on the piloting chair and looking at the silent consoles with rapt attention and admiration.

One of the smaller characteristics that Ves added to his mech was to decorate the interior of the cockpit. Reliefs of the Bright Warrior in different configurations fighting against different foes adorned the sides and back of the cockpit.

Each of them told a different story. Ves added them to the cockpit in order to influence his mech pilots and put them in the right mood.

Ves looked to the side where the Larkinson Mandate floated in the air. The brace he built for it was permanently active and followed him by default.

Several times, he contemplated the idea of trying to mate its controls to the Golden Cat. This allowed the ancestral spirit to decide how to move the book.

He quickly shot down this idea. For the moment, the Golden Cat was way too immature and would definitely be up to mischief! Ves did not wish to deal with a second Lucky!

"Get ready, Goldie." He whispered. "Make sure to channel yourself in the Quint and give Joshua an experience he won't forget."

Nyaaaa.

The Golden Cat playfully bopped her head at Ves before turning her attention to her many spiritual bonds.

In the meantime, Joshua was done admiring the interior. He mentally peppered himself up and slowly drew his finger forward to press the oddly-warm activation button.

The interior of the cockpit glowed.

Various systems of the Quint came online. Due to its overall quality, it only took seconds for many of its essential systems to become powered.

A hum and thrum emanated deep from within. Joshua momentarily felt a vibration shaking him through his very seat before the cockpit's inertial dampeners came online.

As his mind began to interface with the Quint, a vast presence welled within the center of the great machine.

Its glow started to come online.

To Ves, both the Larkinson Mandate and the Quint glowed in unison. For an instant, he had the illusion that the book and the mech were one and the same!

The formation of the glow signified the mech had become fully operational. Throughout the brief startup period, Joshua finally connected to the mech.

Many mech pilots dreamt of piloting a masterwork mech. Though its specs weren't necessarily better than a regular mech, there was always something about them that gave their mech pilots a profound experience.

There was even a myth in the mech community that piloting a masterwork mech was the best method for ordinary mech pilots to advance to expert candidate!

While the MTA and many mech designers rejected this unproven assertion, there was no doubt that piloting a masterwork mech was always special!

Right now, despite Ves' warning, Joshua couldn't help but become enthralled by the transcendent sensations he was experiencing through the Quint!

Its masterwork qualities combined with its potent spiritual properties combined in an activation sequence that amounted to a magical journey!

No one else knew what Joshua was experiencing now aside from the Golden Cat!

The ancestral spirit fell silent as the Quint interfaced with its first mech pilot. Ves frowned and switched his view from the Larkinson Mech and the cockpit view and back.

What was going on?

After two minutes of absolute silence, the spiritual activity levels emanating from the Larkinson Mandate and the Quint subsided. Joshua pulled himself from his trance and completed the initial boot-up sequence as if there was nothing wrong!

"I'm ready to move the mech, sir." He transmitted through the communication channel.

"Take a few steps forward." Ves quickly ordered.

The large mech moved forward. Its sword was currently mounted on its back at an angle to avoid bumping into the flight system.

The entire hall thundered with loud impacts and solid vibrations as each step brought the imposing machine forward.

Ves rid himself of most distractions and turned to the console. He carefully studied the telemetry and tried to contrast them with the typical performance of the prototypes.

One difference immediately stood out. The piloting activity was much higher, which suggested that Joshua exhibited a much deeper degree of immersion than any of the test pilots had managed with the prototypes!

Even Melkor couldn't help but take note!

"It is as if Joshua was born to pilot this mech!"

Ves smirked. "It seems my choice isn't wrong."

The basic testing session continued. The underground hall was large enough to hold a small duel, so the Quint had plenty of space to perform some motions.

As a spaceborn mech, the Bright Warrior model was not exactly suited for landbound operations.

However, Ves did not rule this option out entirely. While the mech model's mobility was severely curtailed in landbound operations, it was able to walk and jog under standard gravity operations without a problem.

The mech was even able to fly in the air, though its flight characteristics were vastly inferior compared to true aerial mechs!

Ves contemplated designing a variant of the Bright Warrior that was optimized for either aerial or landbound combat, but that was something to consider later.

Bolstering the spaceborn combat capabilities of the Avatars and Sentinels took priority! Only when Ves could ensure his safety in space would he be free to pursue other goals.

The inaugural piloting session of the Quint lasted an entire hour. Ves continued to command the masterwork mech to flourish its sword, hover in the air, perform attacks against projected mechs and test out its marksmanship by wielding a borrowed practice rifle.

As Ves gathered a wealth of data on the Quint's distinct performance, he asked a question to Melkor.

"Have you offered Joshua to become a retainer of our clan?"

Melkor shook his head. "No. He's too young. I felt that it is prudent to keep him under observation for a couple of years."

"You can skip that." Ves said and patted his palm on the surface of the floating Larkinson Mandate. "I can already tell you that he is a good fit for our clan. Extend the offer. He'll say yes."

"Ves.."

"Just do it. Joshua is a valuable asset. I want to bind him to our service in a more permanent arrangement than the one we have right now."

"Becoming a retainer of the Larkinson Clan is supposed to be a privilege!" The Avatar Commander threw up his hands. "Giving it away like candy goes against the spirit of our merit-based incentive structure! What else can we dangle in front of his face to make sure he continues to strive for the clan?!"

Ves turned around and smirked. "We can adopt him into the clan."

Chapter 1888 First Batch

Over several practice sessions, Ves obtained a decent baseline on the basic performance of the Quint.

While he hadn't subjected the masterwork mech to any comprehensive exercises of mock battles, Ves was more than satisfied with what he learned.

The gems were all working as advertised, though only one of them was active at the same time.

The only exception was the Accumulation of Spirit, which rested silently in the cockpit of the base platform. Ves imagined it as a spider sitting in the center of a vast web. The gem's ultimate purpose went far beyond just a vessel for spiritual energy!

As Joshua continued to get accustomed to the Quint, his entire mood and demeanor lit up. He became increasingly more appreciative of the masterwork mech and cherished any opportunity to pilot it around.

More than once, Joshua requested for the mech to be brought up in space so he could put it through its paces in the environment it was designed to operate in! The Quint was primarily a spaceborn mech, so piloting it on the surface of a planet was a huge disservice to the mech!

"It's not time yet." Ves ruled out the possibility. "Moving the Quint onto a ship will expose it to a significant portion of the crew. For now, the mech stays here."

Aside from supervising the Quint, Ves also spent some time at the production sites tasked with producing the initial batch of Bright Warriors.

The gold-and-black coated mechs that rolled off the production line in the next few days were all distinct from the Quint.

Unlike the first copy of the Bright Warrior design, the subsequent copies already came in one one of the four configurations.

The decision to leave the modularity aspect of the Bright Warrior aside was a decision made out of necessity.

Currently, the LMC was being bottlenecked by the limited supply of Breyer alloy! The Battle Criers were only able to 'supply' a given amount of Breyer alloy every so often.

It was impossible to fabricate hundreds of Bright Warrior and provide each of them with their own sets of configurations!

To save both time and money, Ves instructed the LMC to pretend that the Bright Warrior was a product line that encompassed four different models.

The first batch should go to the Avatar mech pilots who were uniquely suited to adopt one of the roles of the Bright Warrior.

Over the course of ten days, Ves worked to replace the old mechs of the 1st Spaceborn Mech Company of the Avatars of Myth with forty brand-new gold label Bright Warriors!

While Ves didn't have the time to fabricate the mechs in person, he regularly visited the local manufacturing sites. He corrected the spiritual foundation of the mechs in the making to ensure they met the standard of a gold label mech!

This was fairly exhausting work, and drained a considerable amount of spiritual energy from him, but it ensured that the first adopters of the Bright Warrior piloted the best edition of his new design barring the Quint!

Ves cared a lot about the first batch. For the times to come, these mechs would serve as the standard of his fighting forces!

Was there enough Breyer alloy to kit out all forty mechs? Yes. He could even begin producing the next batch, but there wouldn't be much materials left after that!

"The production loop is pretty fast, but it's not fast enough to meet my needs." Ves rubbed his chin.

The Breyer alloy expended in the last week expended a huge chunk of the stockpile that the Scarlet Rose accumulated in the last three months.

Ves already maximized the speed of production. It couldn't go any faster because there appeared to be a set time when the cockpit reappeared in the escape tube. While this time varied a bit due to random factors, there was no point installing a second forging machine or furnace machine in Compartment G-13.

At the current pace, Ves would probably have to wait for a year or so to supply a thousand Bright Warriors to the Avatars and Sentinels!

This was a very long time, but Ves believed it was worthwhile to do so. In time, this decision would pay off as many of his mech pilots developed a closer bond with the Larkinson Clan and the Golden Cat.

What concerned Ves the most was that he might not have the time to supply his forces with so many mechs.

While his Avatars, Battle Criers and Sentinels already fielded serviceable mechs, the exceptional defense and superior performance of the Bright Warriors could make a huge difference on the battlefield!

Comprehensively upgrading his mech troops by adopting the Bright Warrior as the new standard would definitely deter a lot of potential threats!

Considering the hot water that Ves and Gloriana dove into recently, improving their security situation was an extremely high priority!

With a bright but turbulent future ahead of them, Gloriana went to work as well after she recovered from her marathon fabrication session.

Once she got over the excitement of becoming a masterwork mech designer, she began to handle their correspondence with the MTA as well as their relations with various parties, ranging from the Wodin Dynasty to the Ylvaine Protectorate.

Though Ves questioned whether Gloriana was the right person to be in charge of their public relations, she turned out to be adequate in this role. She was able to reign in most of her eccentric aspects and present a dignified demeanor to others.

Of course, she was still a Hexer, so she didn't exactly come across as normal.

Ves didn't mind this. In fact, he was banking on it! The more unhinged she came across, the better!

The two of them needed to explain how they managed to defy the odds and fabricated a masterwork mech. Presenting a crazy facade was something that Ves had found useful many times.

As long as other people believed that they managed to luck out due to their unorthodox beliefs and crazy approach towards mech design, then they weren't inclined to investigate them any further to see if they relied on any secrets!

Therefore, Ves freely gave permission to Gloriana to battle about 'proto-gods', domains and a couple of other concepts, because he knew that she would just confuse her audience!

The fact that she genuinely believed in these concepts was a massive advantage!

When Ves met with Gloriana at the Austen Estate after a long day of work, he was surprised she brought her relatives this time.

Both Ranya and Brutus joined the dinner table and enjoyed the varied dishes cooked by Dr. Lupo and the chefs.

As they ate, Gloriana shared some of the latest developments.

"The local MTA branch in Kesseling is too small to evaluate the Quint. The branch director referred our case to a larger branch, which decided to dispatch a delegation to our current star system. The envoys are already on their way and are scheduled to arrive in a couple more days."

"We'll have to be on our best behavior in front of these envoys." Ves remarked as he sipped his soup. "Did the MTA tell you what kind of people will make up their delegation?"

Gloriana shook her head. "They refrained from telling me, but given other cases, the delegation will certainly consist of at least one mech designer and one mech pilot. The former is needed to ascertain whether our mech is truly a masterwork, while the latter is needed to test the mech to see if there aren't any problems with the mech that a thorough inspection hasn't revealed."

"I see."

"Mind you, this isn't set in stone. Different branches adopted different policies, and our case is rather special. When I visited the local MTA branch to discuss our applications, the branch director was extremely shocked. I expect the local MTA presence to attach a considerable amount of importance to our claims."

"So they'll definitely send a larger-than-usual delegation." Ves concluded. "How long will they stay?"

"Not long. Strictly, they should only be here long enough to verify that our mech is a masterwork. However, they'll probably try and stick around longer and request to see the Quint in action."

"We can't reveal the Quint at this stage."

"The news will leak eventually." She retorted. "I think it's not bad to keep the MTA fascinated. As long as they are preoccupied with examining the Quint, we are under their implicit protection. Don't you think this is a good opportunity to undergo your implant surgery?"

The suggestion surprised him. "Shouldn't I be keeping the envoys company?"

Gloriana grinned. "I can do that in your stead. You already trust me, right? Don't forget that I'm the second lead designer of the Bright Warrior! I have a right to represent our product! Just let go of your worries and go install that implant of yours. You've been waiting for this for a long time. Let me tell you that working with a cranial implant is a completely different experience! Your productivity will soar since you'll essentially be able to use your mind as an internal computer!"

He was very attracted towards the possibilities that the Archimedes Rubal might bring. He could barely stand the thought of stalling the implantation surgery yet again!

"Dr. Ranya, how prepared are you to perform the surgery?"

"We can begin the operation at any time." The woman replied. "Just give us a few hours of preparation to make sure you are in a sound condition to integrate a cranial implant. Once we verify your actual state is good enough, we can proceed with the main operation."

"How long will I stay under, as it were?"

She shrugged. "We can't make any guarantees. Due to your complicated physical state and abnormal brain structure, the chance of complications and other issues are considerable. By my estimates, it will take a week at minimum for you to regain consciousness, and several more weeks to supervise the integration process."

"So I'll be out for a week?"

"We aren't sure. In the best case scenario, your self-healing and adjustment abilities might be powerful enough to cut this period short. It might also be that your body exhibits a stronger than usual rejection towards the implant. In that case, we will need to keep you under treatment continuously in order to train your body to accept the implant. Due to its sensitive placement and nature, we cannot allow you to remain conscious during this delicate period."

As Ves continued to pepper Ranya with questions, her answers followed the same trajectory.

Nothing was certain about the implantation surgery. The outcomes varied wildly depending on two major variables.

The first variable was how well the surgeons performed the procedure.

The second variable was how his half-alien body decided to react.

Both had the potential to mess up his recovery!

"You shouldn't be too concerned, Ves." Ranya tried to reassure him. "Gloriana has informed us of your latest deeds. We have been deliberating among ourselves and we have also been in touch with my aunt."

Ves widened his eyes. "Did you tell Gloriana's mother about our latest accomplishment?!"

"Not exactly." Gloriana quickly replied, knowing how much Ves might overreact if they told him the wrong answer! "We were very careful in our communications. We utilized a specific code that represented that you have made a massive contribution to our dynasty. This code is only known to my branch. My mother is smart enough to interpret the message I'm trying to convey."

"..What is her response?"

She offered Ves a brilliant smile. "The challenge she issued to us? We passed! She finally declared that she approves of our relationship, hihi!"

"What?!"

"It's true! Even though we didn't exactly meet her terms, what we have done at our ages is enough to bring us glory! My mother has promised us that the Wodin Dynasty will immediately move to support you! Congratulations, Ves!"

For some reason, Ves felt anything but happy. While he managed to pass a huge hurdle that prevented him from deepening his relationship with Gloriana, why did he feel so ambivalent?

Chapter 1889 Same Bed

It didn't surprise Ves that turning their first Bright Warrior into a masterwork mech was enough to win Gloriana's mother approval.

From a benefit standpoint, the boost he provided to Gloriana was enormous.

The Wodins invested a lot in her upbringing and expected a healthy return on investment.

Turning her into a Journeyman Mech Designer was not enough. She had to become a Senior in order to break even and advance to Master in order for her dynasty to earn a profit!

Normally, this took a very long time to come into fruition. As brilliant as Gloriana appeared to be, it was unlikely for her to advance to Senior before she reached fifty years old!

During this time, anything could happen. Gloriana might encounter a mishap that ended her career early. She might stagnate and stop improving.

In short, Gloriana's value to the Wodin Dynasty was anything but settled

Yet now that they made the Quint, the entire picture changed.

What did it mean to become a masterwork mech designer at her age?

Usually, it signified that she possessed a very high aptitude for mech design! Her chances of becoming a Senior was practically assured, while advancing one step further to Master had also been raised!

More than that, the worth of a masterwork mech designer was extremely valuable in itself, especially at the Journeyman-level and more so at their ages!

Once the MTA handed over a masterwork certificate to her, Gloriana would definitely become an existence that brought a great amount of glory and prestige to the Wodin Dynasty!

Her incredible success vindicated all of the money and resources her mother and the dynasty spent on her! As an investment vehicle, Gloriana's return on investment at this stage in her career already surpassed their most optimistic projections!

Therefore, even if Ves and Gloriana hadn't managed to make a proper second-class masterwork mech, it didn't matter.

Once Gloriana became capable of making masterwork mech, she could definitely do it again!

What surprised Ves was how quickly the Wodin Dynasty changed its stance on him! The transition from mild indifference and disapproval to open support was too abrupt!

Though Ves anticipated that the Wodins would have a change of heart, what his girlfriend told him next continued to surpass his expectations!

"My brother will be here to stay with us." Gloriana nudged her head to Brutus. "My mother has personally arranged him and the rest of the Glory Battalion to protect us both. Isn't that great? If the incident on Cloudy Curtain happens again, my escorts won't stand by anymore and let others take you away!"

Ves looked astonished for a moment before he started to chuckle. "Your mother sure has her priorities straight. She knows that I'm vital to your continued success!"

"Exactly!" Gloriana grinned at him. "I've been trying my best to convince her to see you in a better light, and now I've finally succeeded! My mother has finally blessed our relationship! Do you know what this means?!"

"Your mother won't force us to separate us at the end of the three-year deadline anymore?"

"Hihi! Not that, silly. It means we can sleep in the same bed from now on! You don't have to wait anymore!"

"Miss Gloriana!" Melody protested from the side. She looked aghast! "Please remember your decorum!"

Both Brutus and Ranya looked unsettled. Gloriana's brother even directed a glare at Ves, which was accompanied by a push from his force of will!

If Ves was a regular boy, then Brutus would have definitely been able to scare Ves until he was numb!

Unfortunately, Ves was no slouch in the spiritual domain. He easily brushed aside the intimidation attempt.

That said, Ves wasn't exactly sure how to take this new development. For some reason, the thought of sharing the same bed with Gloriana sent shivers through his back!

At this moment, he would rather stick to their old arrangement of sleeping in different beds!

"Let's not act too hasty here, Gloriana. What would your mother think?"

"Hehe, she's not here now. I'm in charge!"

Ves turned to Gloriana's assistant. "What do you think, Melody?"

The woman looked unamused. "Madame Constance prefers the two of you to act with restraint. She has conveyed a desire to meet Mr. Larkinson in person."

That caused Gloriana to jump. "This is a good opportunity for us to bring you to the Hegemony and introduce you to my mother in person! Once you become a masterwork mech designer, no Hexer will ridicule you! They will all envy me for believing in you when every other Hexer disapproved!"

"You know my stance on this matter. My opinion hasn't changed." Ves replied with a mild glare at her overenthusiastic girlfriend.

"Oh.. well.. I told my mother that. She.. responded much better than I thought."

"What does that mean?"

"She.. she's fine if you want to stay out of the Hegemony."

"Huh?"

Ves wanted to rub his ears. Did he hear that right? From what he heard, Constance Wodin was notoriously strict and old-fashioned. He never expected her to drop the demand that Ves should travel to the Hegemony and meet with her in person!

"I know you don't like the Hegemony, Ves." Gloriana said softly. "You made that abundantly clear."

"I.. I never thought you would remember that. I expected you to overlook my demands. You always have a habit of doing that when it suits your purposes."

"Oh, Ves. I am always trying to do what is best for you. I still think that you should visit my mother, but I accept your wish if you don't want to be surrounded by my own people."

He could hardly believe what he was hearing. While he thought it was plausible for the woman who knew him best to accept his desire to avoid the Hegemony, he never thought her mother would agree so easily!

"So what happens now?"

"My mother still wants to talk to you, though. While it's not convenient to do so at the moment, she decided to make an exception for us and is willing to talk to you on the galactic net!"

The very thought of it filled Ves with apprehension! He much preferred for Madame Constance to stick to her rigid ways and insist on a personal meeting that would never happen!

"Well, let's talk about it after I've integrated my new implant. Is there anything else that I should know?"

She nodded. "My mother is concerned about our safety. She prefers it if we depart the Ylvaine Protectorate as soon as possible and travel to the Hegemony or a region that is under my state's protection."

"Those are my thoughts as well." Ves replied. "I don't have a good destination in mind aside from the Sentinel Kingdom."

"Sentinel works. It's so far away from the Friday Coalition that its influence is non-existent in this state!"

"Alright, then. Let's set that as our next destination. I don't want to stay there forever, though. Once we get there, I think it's time for us to start earning some MTA merits. I plan to accept some missions from the Rim Guardians."

Gloriana frowned. "What about the Komodo War?"

He scoffed. "You Hexers don't need a 'boy' like me to win your battles. Look, I don't mind designing some mechs for the Hegemony, but I don't want to get too involved. The grand expedition is what's important to me. No matter what happens in our star sector, it's all inconsequential to me once I've left this galaxy!"

Though his remark upset the Wodins at the dinner table, they quickly schooled their expressions.

Ves observed their reactions and gleaned some clues from their quick response.

"I.. understand." His girlfriend said. "I'll do my best to support you, Ves. After everything you have done for me, you deserve to have your way. I'm sure my mother will convince the rest that we don't have to be in the Hegemony in order to contribute to the war."

"Good. In truth, I'm thinking about leaving all of the troubles of the Komodo Star Sector behind and travel to a different star sector. I can perform some missions for the Rim Guardians without worrying about getting hounded by the Fridaymen all the time. Is that okay?"

"As I've said, I'll support every decision you make."

She looked very reluctant when she said those words! Her brother and her cousin also looked upset!

Too bad Ves didn't care about their desires. He was more than done with the Komodo Star Sector. He wanted to pursue a fresh start while at the same time make a practice run at adopting a nomadic lifestyle.

As long as he had enough time, Ves wanted to tour several star sectors and acclimatize his clansmen and subordinates to the life of a spaceborn clan!

Staying in the same place all the time would do nothing to prepare his people for the trip of their lifetimes!

At this moment, Brutus decided to speak up. "It is dangerous for the two of you to travel once your accomplishments become known."

Gloriana nodded. "That's true. Masterwork mech designers as young as us will inevitably attract attention, and some of it won't be of the good kind! It's a good thing that we'll be receiving some reinforcements, then!"

That was news to Ves!

"Reinforcements?"

"Yup!" Gloriana smiled. "My mother arranged some additional protection for us. It will take some time for them to rendez-vous with us, so don't expect our security to be bolstered immediately."

Ves appreciated the assistance. Anything that made him safer was a boon in his book. He was just unsure whether the reinforcements would listen to Gloriana's orders.

The conversation continued long past dessert. Ves continued to ask questions while Gloriana patiently answered his questions.

At some moments, either Brutus or Ranya would interject.

Only after Ves ran out of questions did they separate for the evening.

"Excuse me, Ves. I still need to make some arrangements. I also have to prepare your bed so that I can sleep in it tonight, hihi!"

"You don't have to do that!"

"But I want to!"

Once Gloriana skipped away, Ves retreated to his private office and settled down behind his desk. He sighed and glanced towards Lucky, who was staring back with glinting eyes.

Ves patted his cat on the head. "Do you think this is funny?!"

"Meow."

"You don't understand! You have Clixie while I have Gloriana!"

"Meow meow."

"I don't have time for that! Not with everything that is going on! Ask me again when we have left this star sector and escaped the reach of the Friday Coalition."

"Meow."

Ves crossed his arms and turned his head away from his insolent cat. He instead directed his attention to his silent but loyal bodyguard.

"Nitaa, what do you think about the conversation earlier? Are the Wodins sincere?"

"Your girlfriend masks her intentions well." Nitaa stoically replied. "Even as a woman, I have always found it difficult to decipher her true thoughts."

"You're not the only one." Ves sardonically replied.

"Brutus is very disciplined. He always maintains control over his body language and mannerisms. The only Wodin who I can read with a reasonable degree of certainty of Dr. Ranya Wodin."

"What did you find out?"

"The Wodins value you, that is for certain. Dr. Ranya's attitude towards you has shifted significantly from the beginning. She is much more amenable to your company. I believe she even respects you in the same way she respects Miss Gloriana."

"That's good. I guess I have a few less concerns about my upcoming implant surgery now. I suspect that is not the extent of what you wish to say, right?"

Nitaa grunted. "I don't have any solid reason why, but I am not entirely at ease with the Wodins. While I have always known you are a great person, it is surprising that your girlfriend's relatives have turned around so quickly. This does not conform with their prior attitudes and stance towards you. Something smells."

"Is that your extraordinary nose talking?"

The bodyguard grimaced. "No. It is my intuition that is warning me. The Wodins are pursuing their own agenda."

Ves shrugged. "Aren't we all?"

Chapter 1890 Roving Headquarters

"Hihihi! We finally get to sleep together! Isn't that great, Ves?"

"Yeah.. great..."

At the Austen Estate, his bedroom received a minor makeover. Gloriana had ordered a team of bots to bring some closets and furniture from her old bedroom.

Ves felt as if his bedroom was no longer entirely his bedroom. While he hadn't bothered to decorate and personalize a chamber that he would soon be leaving, he still felt a bit bothered at the abrupt change in scenery.

As Gloriana emerged from the bathroom in pajamas, she dove into the bed.

"Miaow."

Clixie, who was laying on a cushion, began to roll towards her owner.

This prompted Gloriana to grasp her cat and hug her cozily against her chest. She giggled and kissed Clixie on the forehead.

When Ves, clad in his own pajamas, slid into the other side of the king-sized bed, he stared at Gloriana and took in her rosy, bath-scented presence.

He never really thought this day would come so soon. He had become so used to sleeping in his bed by himself that he hadn't really fathomed lying alongside someone else!

The only times when he slept in a bed with others was when he was just four or five years old! He remembered being scared of the dark and heading to his parents' bedroom in order to beg his mother to protect him from the menace of the shadows!

"What are you thinking, Ves?"

"Oh, ummm.. is it really okay for you to sleep with me? I.. wouldn't want to bother your mother."

"It's fine, Ves!" She sleepily grinned while cozying up to the furball in her arms. "I already told you that the old rules don't apply anymore. Becoming a genuine masterwork mech designer at your age is enough to make my mother and those stiff matriarchs from my dynasty regard you in a different light!"

Even Hexers recognized the accomplishments of exceptional males. Naturally, they also continued to regard them as boys. People like Ves were just similar to child prodigies in that regard.

Though Ves disliked such treatment, it was better than being disregarded, so he would take what he could get.

That didn't mean he developed any sort of appreciation for the Hexers. He was still determined to stay as far away from the Hegemony as possible!

"Lights, off." He spoke.

The lights in the bedroom faded out, leaving the bedroom in near-darkness. Only a small amount of light filtering through the darkened windows.

"Goodnight, Ves."

"Goodnight, Gloriana."

As Gloriana started to doze off while clinging to Clixie like a stuffed animal, Ves felt a bit awkward.

A part of him felt that he should be doing something more, but...

"Miaow."

Clixie was in the way! Even as Gloriana snuggling against her back, the cat's round eyes glinted at Ves with a wary expression!

"Meow."

What was more, Lucky was watching curiously from the foot of the bed!

On top of that, Ves could hear the small movements of the combat armor worn by the guards keeping them safe!

Aside from Nitaa, who was always present in his vicinity, over a dozen guards from the Glory Battalion silently stood guard from all directions.

How could Ves possibly cozy up to his girlfriend with all of these onlookers present? His excitement instantly dropped at the thought that all of them possessed night vision capabilities!

Seeing that Gloriana started to fade into slumber with a content smile, Ves realized that she didn't intend to do anything more than sleep with him today.

He shrugged helplessly. He felt as if he had been hoodwinked somehow. Was this how his nights with Gloriana would proceed from now on? Would he ever be able to share the same bed with her without the peanut gallery watching his every move?

He was not a public performer! He was just a mech designer!

"Forget it." He muttered and turned around.

Sleep came slowly. After a turbulent night of rest, Ves woke up the next morning feeling only half as refreshed as usual.

As the morning light poured through the automatically-cleared windows, a gentle ray of sunshine landed on Gloriana's smiling face.

"Miaow."

Clixie had squirmed out of Gloriana's grasp at some point. She was wide awake and rested on the table next to where he put the Larkinson Mandate.

Of course, Lucky and the guards were around as well. They had stood guard and patrolled throughout the spacious chamber without taking any break! The dedication they showed to their guard duty was admirable!

As Ves and Gloriana showered in separate bathrooms and readied themselves for the day, they met again at the dining table to discuss their upcoming agenda.

"You plan to start your implantation surgery shortly after the MTA delegation arrives?" Gloriana curiously asked as she partook a cute-looking bunny-shaped tart.

"Yup." He nodded. "I don't think the MTA envoys will appreciate it if I avoid them entirely. They have to verify that I'm a masterwork mech designer as well. Once they complete this part of the inspection, I plan to go under as soon as possible."

Gloriana briefly paused. "Are you trying to avoid the MTA or something?"

"No!" Ves quickly shook his head. "I just want to make the best use of my time. Besides, we both know that our enemies will definitely steer away from us while we are hosting an official delegation from the MTA. I can't let this opportunity pass!"

According to the schedule, the ship carrying the delegation from the main MTA branch in the Protectorate would be arriving at Kesseling VII the next day. This meant that there was not much time left before he had to appear at his best while at the same time starting the operation that would significantly increase his cognitive functions!

Just thinking about the Archimedes Rubal's formidable data storage capacities and virtual connectivity options made him drool.

Not only that, but after almost half a year of studying and tinkering with the bioimplant, Dr. Ranya and Dr. Lupo extensively upgraded the implant in almost every way with modern solutions!

One of the most important addons to the bioimplant was a small dedicated mini processor that added some much-needed processing power. This would allow Ves to perform rapid calculations in his mind without having to consult any conventional software solutions!

On top of that, Ves also spent some time to engineer some protection for the implant. He built a small shell of modified Breyer alloy that was extremely thin but still very strong. He surrounded it with a small amount of Synthra Umbra fabric to make it invisible from nearly every type of sensor or remote hacking system.

Of course, Ves couldn't close it off entirely. He added small, curling canals to the stealthed shell that allowed for specially-cultivated biothreads to connect the implant with his central nervous system.

All of these complications significantly raised the difficulty of integrating the implant with his brain tissue, but Ves didn't care.

He didn't want his bioimplant to become vulnerable to hacking, data siphoning or or nasty tricks!

While the risks were significant, the rewards were even more so. Gloriana had already described more than once how her own Erestal-015 doubled or tripled her design capabilities. She wouldn't have been nearly as good at spotting and resolving flaws in her designs if not for her formidable cognitive functions.

They even aided her off the job! Ves deeply suspected that one of the reasons she knew him too well was because she stuffed all kinds of data about him in her implant and ran analytical software whenever they talked!

Once the pair finished their breakfast, they went about their day. Gloriana split off to babysit the design teams while Ves began to prepare his organizations for departure.

When Ves finally announced the news that he intended to move, Raymond, Gavin and Calsie all looked perplexed.

"We knew we wouldn't be staying here forever, but..." Calsie hesitated. "We aren't ready for this. Not truly."

"You knew what you were getting in when you continued to remain in the company." Ves stoically pointed out.

"Saying is one thing, doing it is another. I think we all didn't mind your initial intentions because the Ylvaine Protectorate is right next door to the Bright Republic. Now that we are moving further away.. I expect a lot of employees to have a change of heart."

Ves grimaced. "Leave them behind, then. We don't need them. You can station them in the local branches or let them go entirely. Right now, I only value the people who are willing to accompany me no matter my destinations."

"The LMC can handle it." Raymond said. "Our overhead has decreased ever since we have decided to outsource almost all of our production to external partners. Many positions have become redundant. Along with all of the Ylvainans that are eager to take the place of the old guard, we won't suffer any staffing problems. The only difficulty I'm concerned about is that transitioning to the mobile headquarters and virtual headquarters models will lead to a lot of disarray at first. We won't be in the position to undertake any major activities for the next couple of months."

"That's fine." Ves dismissively waved. "I don't plan to design any commercial mechs for the time being. The LMC can continue to manage the marketing, production, sales and support of our legacy products."

Gavin looked concerned. "You haven't released a commercial mech design for some time, boss. The Desolate Soldier is our last major success if you count out the abnormal Deliverer. While it's by far our best-selling product in the company's existence, a single breakout success does not define a company. The hype has already faded and our brand awareness is already fading. If you don't want our hard-earned fame, reputation and brand value to fade, then you should really think about generating some excitement by releasing a new mass-market product."

He had a point. Ves did work hard to propel the LMC into the forefront of his customers. Yet the market was always fleeting and fads always wore out in time.

Eventually, his Desolate Soldier would no longer be a mech that turned heads whenever someone saw them. The LMC had to prove that it was not just a one-hit wonder and that it was absolutely capable of generating constant value.

Ves wasn't very concerned with the state of the LMC though. Commercial mech design was still an important money-making vehicle to him, but he had other priorities these days. As long as the LMC's cash flow remained healthy, he was more interested in earning merits rather than credits.

"How will the Larkinson Clan cope?"

"Frankly, half of us are rather glad to leave the Protectorate." Raymond replied. "No offense to the Ylvainans, but we never managed to feel at home on this planet. It's odd for any of us to go on an excursion in Krent due to all of the open religious expression around us. The people and the architecture are all marked by the Ylvainan Faith, and the Holy Soldiers and Deliverers walking around everywhere doesn't help matters either!"

That was what Ves felt as well. As much as he appreciated the Ylvainans for supporting him so much, he would rather hang out in the Sentinel Kingdom which was just as secular as the Bright Republic.

"We employ a lot of Ylvainans these days, right? Will they be fine with moving away from their home state?"

Calsie smiled at that. "I've been liaising with the Ylvainans every day. We explicitly adjusted our hiring criteria to recruit only those who are willing to go on an adventure, so there aren't many local citizens who insist on remaining in their home states."

That surprised Ves. He thought it would be much more difficult to convince the insular Ylvainans to travel abroad.

Even if they believed they were on a mission to support the Bright Martyr or something, Ves would take what he could get!

"Continue to keep a close eye on the Ylvainans then, Calsie. If there are any unusual developments regarding this group, inform me immediately."

"Will do, sir."

As Ves continued to ask questions, he generally received satisfactory answers.

His subordinates hadn't been sitting on their thumbs all this time! Transitioning their core operations to a roving fleet was a massive endeavor, but Raymond and the rest of the leadership had months to prepare!