

Mech 2019

Chapter 2019 Discharging Energy

A momentous change took place. The Larkinson Clan only existed for a couple of months, but already it was in the process of morphing into an entirely different beast!

The opening of the clan was such a radical change that the members of the Larkinson Family reacted with shock and outrage when they heard about it! What gave the clan the right to redefine the very meaning of their name?!

Though the members of the clan couldn't fully explain why their assembly passed this proposal in the first place, what was done was done. Due to the extraordinary incidents that took place during the assembly session, every clansman instinctively felt that this was the right course of action!

One thing was for sure. The clan had not prepared any procedures to process the applications. The Executive Council went into overdrive in order to erect an administrative unit to review the applications and manage the adoption process in the event of approval. Thousands had already submitted their applications and the backlog only grew every day!

A practical problem related to the adoption ritual was the necessity of the ancestral heirloom. When Joshua swore his oaths, Ves lent the Larkinson Mandate to Jannzi Larkinson in order to provide the Golden Cat an opportunity to take a close look at the mech pilot.

The close proximity also enabled the formation of a new spiritual bond. While Joshua was already highly attuned to the values of the Larkinson Clan, other applicants may not be so highly attuned!

If the alignment between the candidate and the Golden Cat wasn't good enough, the formation of a spiritual connection might fail!

That would be a disaster for the applicant. By now, every clan member recognized each other by the faint sensation akin to a glow within each other. A tiny part of the Golden Cat existed within each of them due to their bonds.

While her presence didn't provide them with any meaningful spiritual strength, it was sufficient to allow the clansmen to sense each other when they were close.

A lot of Larkinsons questioned what was going on. None of them missed the similarity between this phenomenon and the glows of the Bright Warrior!

Despite the rumors and speculation, Ves never elaborated on it aside from describing it as the 'unique strength of the Larkinson Clan'.

Over time, the clansmen slowly stopped asking questions and took the phenomenon for granted. Though its origin was shrouded in mystery, the Larkinsons all began to appreciate the positive vibes they sensed from each other!

That said, to form this bond in a new person, the Golden Cat had to exert some effort, and that represented a problem.

"I can't pass on the Larkinson Mandate willy-nilly." He muttered during the shuttle ride back to the Scarlet Rose. "It's too vital to leave my sight. If someone manages to steal or destroy the book, our clan will surely take a hit!"

He also had to account for the future. Decades or centuries from now, the Larkinson Clan might be a hundred or a thousand times larger! With millions of clansmen spread across several fleets and star systems, it was impossible to ferry the Larkinson Mandate around to meet every recruitment need!

After a bit of thought, Ves suddenly thought up a good idea.

"The Larkinson Mandate is the heart of the Larkinson Clan, but it is not the only object that holds Goldie's presence!"

Ves instantly recalled the Bright Warriors in the Redfeather's mech hangar! Their glows were identical to that of the Larkinson Mandate!

Nyaa?

Goldie curiously looked up at Ves.

"Can you do the same thing you did with Joshua to others through the Bright Warriors?"

Nyaa...

Though Goldie sounded a bit reluctant, she expressed at least some confidence at his suggestion, and that was sufficient.

Even though her presence in the Bright Warrior mechs was a bit weaker because they only contained a projection of her existence of some sorts, it at least enabled their use as a surrogate for the ancestral relic!

Therefore, when Gavin asked how they should solve the relic problem, Ves idly waved his hand.

"The Larkinson Mandate will remain within my reach." He declared. "The Larkinson Clan can utilize the Bright Warriors to administer the oath. There are a lot more of them than the book, and best of all they can be passed to numerous different star systems and still retain their effects!"

Certainly, there was probably a range limitation on the effectiveness of their glows, but Ves believed that only applied to distances spanning star clusters!

With all of the newcomers about to join the clan, the Golden Cat would probably experience an explosive growth in strength, allowing Ves to worry even less about the range problem!

Gavin reacted with skepticism. "Are you sure that a mech is able to do what your book managed to do? It's completely unprecedented!"

"Just try it out and see what happens. If it works, then we'll spread some Bright Warriors around so that every major ship carries a copy."

"What if your guess is wrong, boss?"

"Then get back to me and I'll figure out another solution."

Ves recalled the time he crafted the Banner of Vulcan in order to inspire the dwarves of Desala X.

Even though he developed his glows to differentiate his products, Ves wasn't limited to applying them to mechs! The successful empowerment of the Pride of Dusk, the Larkinson Mandate and the Banner of Vulcan all proved that this particular spiritual application could be used on all sorts of objects!

Ves made a mental note to explore this avenue of creation further. He already labelled it as spiritual totem creation. Compared to other spiritual engineering techniques, Ves thought it was a lot more suitable to him! From the beginning, he always attempted to blend spirituality with the material realm. This was something that was highly compatible with his inclinations.

The reason why he thought of this technique was the possible demand for an alternative for his mechs.

Relying on the Bright Warrior mechs and other future Larkinson mechs was the most ideal outcome. Wherever the Larkinson Clan went, their mechs were quick to follow. Using these imposing machines to facilitate the adoption process was a lot more impactful because everyone would be impressed if they came close to one of his machines!

Still, if his Bright Warriors weren't suitable, then Ves supposed he might build smaller totems to serve as smaller and more portable stand-ins. Not every site could fit an enormous mech.

Ves took inspiration from the mini-altars that Gloriana used to make her daily prayers. The size of the object wasn't as important as the meaning invested in their creation.

At his current level of craftsmanship, creating these totems was as easy as pie. Ves looked down at the Larkinson Mandate resting on his lap. The large, eye-catching medallion adorning the front cover of the book should probably be sufficient to serve as a totem. The fierce cat head that served as the emblem of the Larkinson Clan practically personified the Golden Cat!

"Yet another task to add to my long to-do list."

He hadn't even started his research on imaginary mechs and already intended to investigate another avenue of spiritual engineering!

Even with his implant, Ves had way too little time to explore all of his interests. More and more, Ves began to envy the Seniors and Masters who raised up dedicated students and apprentices.

All Ves could rely on to supplement his design philosophy was raising Maikel and Zanthar Larkinsons into his image.

He still wasn't sure whether that was a good idea.

A part of Ves wanted the two Larkinson seeds to develop their own original design philosophies. This was the approach he applied to Ketis.

However, a larger part of him wanted to raise the two boys as his research assistants! This entailed exposing his core trade secrets to someone other than Gloriana though, and Ves was far too paranoid to pull the trigger on this decision!

"I have plenty of time to make this choice." He muttered. "It will take at least six to seven years before the two kids mature into actual mech designers."

The shuttle eventually reached the Scarlet Rose. After answering Gavin's inquiries and providing various suggestions, Ves embraced his girlfriend and walked back to their stateroom.

That night, the Scarlet Rose's engineering bay hosted additional guards. Ves enjoyed a very good night, so much so that he donned a silly smile as he woke up the next morning!

"Meow."

"Miaow."

Lucky and Clixie lazily greeted Ves as he opened his eyes.

"Good morning, lovelies."

With his girlfriend resting on his shoulder, he felt inordinately pleased with himself! It was times like these when he felt like he had become a true man!

Soon enough, Gloriana stirred from his movement. She yawned and cracked open her eyes.

"Had a good night?"

"Do you even need to ask?"

"Hihi.. you were as eager as ever back then. If I didn't tell you that it was time to sleep, I'm afraid you would have stayed awake all night!"

"What can I say? My energy cells were brimming with energy! You know, they wouldn't be overloaded all the time if I can discharge their energy more frequently."

Gloriana giggled and rubbed his chest with her hand. "Keep dreaming. Work is more important. I would much prefer it if you discharge your energy in mech design! You can get your reward after you have done a good job, not before."

He frowned at this answer. Why did it seem like he was being treated like a little kid who had to do his homework before receiving his sweets?

They woke up and returned to work. Even though the Larkinson Clan was undergoing a lot of upheaval, Ves and Gloriana didn't immediately notice anything different due to their long bouts of isolation in their design labs.

Ves did try to keep up with the ongoing expansion process. Every morning, Gavin briefed him on the latest developments.

"One of the biggest issues that have emerged is the naming of the new clan members." Gavin reported. "During the historical assembly meeting, Miss Jannzi Larkinson unilaterally decided to replace Joshua's surname."

"Is there a problem with that?" Ves asked.

"Do you know how many Joshuas we have in the fleet? Over a dozen! If all of them suddenly get to call themselves Joshua Larkinson, we'll have to resort to serial numbers or nicknames to distinguish them from each other!"

"That.. is indeed a problem." Ves murmured. "What does the Executive Council have in mind?"

"They would like to employ compound names to distinguish the new clan members from each other. There are already existing cases in your family. Raymond and Tusa Billingsley-Larkinson are the most prominent examples."

Ves fell into thought.

While Gavin was right, Ves feared that the use of compound names would hinder the integration of the new Larkinsons.

"Is everyone okay with this option?"

"In most cases, it's not a problem." Gavin answered. "In fact, a lot of applicants prefer to carry their old names. While it doesn't fully fall in line with the promise to forget their old allegiances, they still want to remember their origins."

"What about the ones who just want to carry the pure Larkinson name?"

"For now, the Executive Council wants to reserve that for trueblood clansmen and exceptional cases."

Ves frowned. "That sounds like a sneaky way to implement a class or tier system within the clan."

"Unless you address the assembly or council in person, this policy will become the new standard. There is too much support for this proposal."

"What do you think, Benny?"

"It's not a big deal." He shrugged. "Regardless of how they are called, a Larkinson is still a Larkinson. The ones with compound names still enjoy the same opportunities and privileges as trueblood Larkinsons. As long as this is ensured, there won't be any objection from the newcomers."

"I see. Well, if there aren't any problems, then I suppose I'll let it be. The critics from the Larkinson Family will probably be a little placated by this decision as well."

Ves had already gotten his way in the issue he cared about the most. Right now, it was vital for him to draw back his influence and let the regular institutions of the clan exercise their powers.

Chapter 2020 The Clan of the Golden Cat

Weeks passed by. Every day, hundreds of applicants acquired a compound name. Each of them found a Larkinson to endorse their entry in the Larkinson Clan. After passing the review and successfully swearing the oath while touching the foot of a Bright Warrior mech, they became a new addition to the clan roster!

Ves didn't have to call up the list from his terminal to keep track of the clan's explosive growth. His bond with the Golden Cat allowed him to inspect the spiritual network as it changed before his spiritual senses!

A steady amount of new connections expanded the size and scope of the Larkinson Network as he began to call it. More and more, the Golden Cat became occupied with forming all of the new bonds.

He worried that the ancestral spirit would quickly exhaust herself, but his fears turned out to be unfounded.

Though Goldie always had to expend a bit of energy to form a bond, she received an increasing amount of spiritual feedback as the network grew larger! She was able to continuously invest her new-gained spiritual energy into forming more bonds, which soon paid back her initial investment in the form of spiritual feedback!

Of course, this cycle wasn't completely profitable. She slowly had to dip into more and more of her reserves, especially when the new applicant wasn't as aligned to the Larkinson Clan as the most dedicated newcomers such as Joshua Larkinson!

The addition of so many new people not only increased Goldie's strength, but also affected her character!

Every adopted Larkinson brought something different to the table. Their diverse origins directly exposed the Golden Cat to different values, principles and perspectives on life.

Ves noted that Goldie had become a little more introspective in the days to come. He checked on her every day in order to monitor her evolution. If she ever developed into a direction that caused her to shed her Larkinson identity, then he would immediately put a stop to the adoption rituals!

Fortunately, the Golden Cat managed to endure remarkably well. With Qilanxo's guidance, she found a way to accept the new influences without allowing them to overpower her core Larkinson traits.

As an experienced sacred god who enjoyed the worship of humans for centuries, Qilanxo was a veritable authority when it came to managing spiritual feedback!

Fortunately for Ves, his suggestion to utilize the Bright Warriors as the totems for the adoption ritual worked out for the clan. As long as the new applicants touched the surface of one of the mechs, the Golden Cat gained enough proximity to form her connections!

In fact, this newly-discovered purpose of his Bright Warriors also led to an unanticipated side effect.

The True Believers started to worship the Bright Warriors! They treated the mechs just like their altars and started to prostrate and pray to the mechs!

To many Brighters, this newly-developed custom from their more religious-minded clansmen was highly disturbing!

Ves received a hail of complaints from his trueblood relatives. He sympathised with their views, but it wasn't as if he could order the True Believers to stop their current practice!

"What do you think those fanatics will do if I ban the worship of our mechs?" He responded to Gavin. "They'll just worship the mechs in secret or come up with something worse! The former Ylvainans aren't harming anyone by kneeling in front of the mechs in prayer. As long as they don't get in the way of the mech technicians servicing the machines, just let them do whatever makes them happy."

"Your trueblood relatives won't like that, boss. Of all of the new groups joining the clan, the Ylvainan-born members are the most problematic of the lot! This strange ritual is just one of the sources of tension between them and the rest of the clan."

"If our clan can't even handle this problem, then how is it supposed to navigate a diverse and varied galaxy?" Ves shook his head. "If you ask me, then I prefer to keep my clan secular, but we can't always get what we want. People are going to believe in something regardless of what we want. Right now, the followers of the Living Prophet have become an inseparable part of our fleet. Accommodating their needs to an extent is not that bad as long as we make sure they are reciprocating towards us. There's no point in joining our clan if they aren't willing to adopt our ways!"

With the Golden Cat watching over them, Ves wasn't too worried about this problem. The True Believers were already fanatical towards him in his guise as the Bright Martyr to begin with, and James was astute enough to instruct his followers to integrate smoothly into the clan.

In fact.. His recent instructions to switch their worship seemed oddly prescient!

"Goddamn charlatan." Ves cursed under his breath.

There was another reason why he did not bother to rein in the True Believers. When Ves observed their actions, he noticed that the Golden Cat actually benefited from their practice!

Worship didn't do anything to a mech designer such as Ves, but it was different to a spiritual entity like the Golden Cat!

While Ves wasn't entirely sure why the Golden Cat preferred active worship, he didn't want to interrupt a beneficial process.

What Ves worried the most about the True Believers was that their loyalties would remain with the Living Prophet instead of the Larkinson Clan. Turning their worship to

him and the Golden Cat was a lot more reassuring, especially if it persisted for decades! By then, no one would remember their old practice of worshipping the Living Prophet!

Of course, Ves wasn't naive enough to believe that James would fade into obscurity. The clone had seemingly struck a partnership with Calabast. The successful enactment of their proposal was probably just the first of many successes!

A lot of other changes ensued during the mass adoption events. The Larkinson Assembly passed a range of proposals to meet the emerging needs of a clan that was ballooning in size!

"The Executive Council wants a new uniform." Gavin passed on during another daily briefing. "There are so many new Larkinsons that it's more important than ever to foster greater cohesion. If everyone wears the same outfits, it becomes a lot easier to create a sense of unity."

The Larkinson Family never adopted a uniform. It never needed it, but the needs of the clan were very different. Ves immediately recognized the benefits of this proposal.

"What are they suggesting?"

"For ordinary clan functions, they want to adopt a clean and simple look that is similar to the uniforms of the Mech Corps. Those uniforms are something that most trueblood Larkinsons are familiar with. They think it would be nice to pay homage to their heritage as loyal defenders of the Bright Republic."

Ves frowned. His opinion towards his former home state wasn't very good these days! It disappointed him that his fellow Larkinsons still clung to their sentiment to a state that was as good as doomed in the hands of the Friday Coalition!

"Have they come up with a design?"

"Here." Gavin projected a couple of outfits worn by generic human models. "The standard color scheme is red-and-white. The lines are inspired by the designs of some of the uniforms of the mech regiments the Larkinsons used to serve with. The uniform designers added a bit of their own touches as well. The extra stripes adds a bit of sophistication while the clan emblem placed in the back reinforces our common identity."

Ves inspected the design. His assistant wasn't kidding when he said the uniform looked clean! It lacked the flourishes he expected and its overall color distribution was very geometric.

However, it was exactly these kinds of uniforms that always withstood the test of time. Chasing after current trends or trying to implement anything too specific would only look gauche or outdated after a few generations.

Overall, Ves felt he could live with the uniform. "It looks fine. What about the other uniforms?"

"They are the modified uniforms for the Avatars, Sentinels and other organizations that fall under our umbrella. They retain the same layout, the clan emblem on the rear and the white accents. Instead, the principal color shifts according to the specific organization."

For example, the uniform of the Avatar of Myth adopted a bright yellow shade as its primary color while the Living Sentinels adopted a less ostentatious light grey shade.

Though the shift in principal colors resulted in different impressions, the common layouts made it clear that they all shared a common origin!

While the Avatars and Sentinels still wore the emblems of the Vitruvian Mech and Silver Caduceus on their chests, they all wore the emblem of the Golden Cat on their backs!

Ves liked this detail! His inner cat person rocked with glee when he imagined this emblem on every clan member's back!

Of course, the dog persons in his clan probably thought differently, but Ves didn't care.

Every organization generated their own variation of the standard Larkinson Clan uniform. So far, only the Black Cats veered from the standard by sticking to their muted black-and-grey color scheme. While Calabast's pet organization did adopt the new layout, even there they deviated a bit by darkening the emblem on the back!

Though Ves understood the intent behind this deviation, he felt a bit offended at the affront to the Golden Cat. It was as if Calabast was sending a message that her Black Cats operated according to her own whims!

Still, aside from this exception, the other uniforms looked fine to him. He knew that once everyone started wearing these uniforms, the Larkinsons would feel more united than ever!

To Ves, this was a good way to counteract some of the friction between the old guard and the new guard!

He waved aside the projections. "Please tell the Executive Council that I approve of their choices. Let's complete the transition to the new uniforms before we reach the Sentinel Kingdom. I want our Larkinson Clan presents the strongest unified front when we meet with the Larkinson Family."

"Got it. There is plenty of time to complete the transition. Is there anything else?"

"Yeah. Make sure to add the uniforms to my wardrobe as well."

"I'll prioritize it right away."

As the clan started synthesizing the new uniforms before issuing them to everyone, the expansion of the clan continued.

While the applicants on other ships made their oaths through the use of the Bright Warriors, the people on the Scarlet Rose were different.

Ves personally administered the oaths with the Larkinson Mandate. A lot of Kinners and Brighters joined the spiritual network, much to his delight. He was a lot more assured of their loyalties now that they came under the supervision of the Golden Cat!

Surprisingly, when it was time for Gavin to swear his loyalty, the Golden Cat instantly accepted his pledge and formed a connection!

Ves blinked as he withdrew the Larkinson Mandate. "I didn't expect that to work. Are you sure you're a qualified Benny?"

"Boss! I already told you! My name is Gavin, not Benny!" The latest Larkinson protested! "I know I made a mistake, but that was in the past! I'm better now! You can trust me now that I am family!"

"I'm not so sure about that."

Privately, Ves believed the Golden Cat was still fallible! Even she could overlook some issues! Trusting Gavin just because he successfully passed this test was not the end of the story!

As the Larkinson Clan soon reached 10,000 members, an increasing sense of optimism settled over the fleet!

Though plenty of integration issues popped up left and right, the overwhelming sense that the Larkinson Clan was on the rise made everything more manageable!

The ubiquity of the Larkinson Clan emblem on everyone's backs began to foster a new custom.

The Larkinson Clan gradually became known as the Clan of the Golden Cat.