

Mech 2511

Chapter 2511: The Greater Devil

Gloriana and the Skull Architect had a lot in common from a professional standpoint.

They were second-class mech designers. They both pursued material perfection in mech design.

Of course, there were slight differences. Gloriana pursued the perfect vessel. This caused her to develop a much stronger focus towards individually-customized mechs. She did not want to make any compromises at all into achieving the greatest fit between her mechs and her clients. This meant that she wasn't able to design mass market mechs by herself.

From what Ves knew of the Skull Architect's work, the former Fridayman nominally specialized in energy transmission. What this actually meant was that the Senior actually obsessed over achieving the maximum possible efficiency.

While the professor made steady gains in this field, eventually he approached the limits of what was possible with his abilities.

In order to squeeze even more performance out of his mechs, he had to go through great extremes. How the Skull Architect turned to the X-Factor of all variables as the way to go was quite mystifying.

What the professor just explained plainly explained why he attached himself to the Cross Clan. It was nothing more than an attempt to take advantage of the Crossers to stay close to Ves, who he regarded as one of his best hopes of breaking past his current research huddle!

Ves had to applaud the Skull Architect's decision. If Professor 'Cortez' applied to join the Larkinson Clan directly, then his application would have been rejected straight away!

While the Larkinson Clan eagerly recruited competent personnel, it mainly directed its focus towards younger talents rather than older professionals.

Compared to the former, the latter were much more set in their ways. It was significantly harder for the Larkinson Network to convert them into truly loyal clansmen. This was especially so for highly-accomplished individuals such as Senior Mech Designers and their equivalents in other professions!

With the mental and spiritual strength of the Skull Architect, there was no possible way for Goldie to convert him into an honest Larkinson. In fact, Ves feared that the Senior might corrupt the Golden Cat instead!

"What are your intentions towards the Cross Clan?" Ves carefully asked.

"Isn't it the same as you?" The older man replied with a smirk. "The Crossers may be louts, but they are strong. If there is one lesson that I have learned in the frontier, it is that mech designers need protection. As long as I take care of their mechs and finances, I'll have these Garlaners eating from the palm of my hand in no time."

"Are you trying to take control of the Cross Clan?!"

"Not exactly." The Senior shook his head. "What would I do with all of that power? I am different from you. It is enough to wield enough influence to satisfy my needs. Patriarch Reginald Cross can keep running this band of glory-obsessed idiots. To mech designers like myself, most forms of power are ephemeral. Only our knowledge is eternal. Advancing to Master is the only goal that matters to me. As long as I can realize my ambitions, I can gain power over an organization that is ten times as powerful as the Cross Clan!"

In other words, the Skull Architect only used the Cross Clan as a means to an end. This explained why the Cross Patriarch signed Professor Benedict Cortez as a guest designer rather than a new member of his clan.

Not every organization adopted the model of the Larkinson Clan. It was quite rare for a clan to adopt external members on a wide scale.

After all, it was too hard to ensure the loyalty and commitment of those who joined in this fashion.

The Larkinson Clan was able to break this custom because of the existence of the Larkinson Network.

In any case, the Skull Architect wasn't the only guest the Crossers signed on. The Black Cats already observed a string of other people becoming enticed by the benefits offered by the Crossers.

While the Larkinson Clan also offered attractive conditions, it imposed very strict recruitment standards. Not only that, but not everyone wanted to abandon their family and allegiance and turn into full-time Larkinsons.

The contracts offered by the Cross Clan imposed considerably less demands.

"I can break my relationship with the Cross Clan at any time as long as I give them prior notice." Professor 'Cortez' explained. "However, I do not intend to break away if I can help it. The Crossers may be rough, but they have potential. At the very least, Patriarch Reginald is truly a possible ace pilot candidate. If he ever succeeds in becoming a Saint, then I'd be a fool to abandon such a powerful mech pilot."

"The previous ace pilot of the Cross Clan went mad on power and provoked a lot of enemies." Ves poignantly pointed out.

Professor Cortez waved his hand. "The Vicious Mountainers have learned their lesson. If not, I will personally intervene to make sure the patriarch remains a positive influence."

And what if the new ace pilot remained obstinate? From his personal experiences with wrangling his own expert pilots, trying to persuade an ace pilot to change his mind should be a herculean feat!

He shuddered again. What if the professor decided the best way to solve an out-of-control ace pilot was to turn the latter into bones?

Perhaps the Skull Architect might believe that his first attempt failed because the mech pilot was too weak.

If the unhinged mech designer integrated the skull of an ace pilot into his mech instead, he might be able to succeed!

Ves became less and less enthused about partnering up with the Cross Clan. Compared to joining hands with such an unstable element, he could entertain offers instead.

The Skull Architect was quite perceptive. He was someone who had to ally and work together with all manner of people throughout his eventful life.

His plan could only work if the Cross Clan succeeded in partnering with the Larkinson Clan. If the negotiations collapsed for some reason, then his primary motivation to attach himself to the Cross Clan became moot!

Since securing this cooperation was vital to his interests, the Skull Architect immediately made assurances.

"Mr. Larkinson, the Cross Clan can offer even more benefits to your clan now that I am here. Without my presence, the Crossers would have likely stagnated. Now that I am willing to lend my services to them, they will soon be able to return to their former glory. The Crossers will continue to keep up with the development of your clan as the years go by. With our combined strength, we will have more security in the Red Ocean."

Ves frowned. "While you are right, a strong partner will want more power and a greater share of the benefits."

"That is the nature of sharing power. It is a worthwhile tradeoff. You may think that your Larkinson Clan only requires a few years of development to get ready for the Red Ocean, but that is not enough. Partnering up with the Cross Clan is a great way to tide

you over in the first few decades of your stay in the dwarf galaxy. With my presence, I can keep the Crossers honest and ensure they will not drag your feet."

"Other potential partners can offer me these assurances as well." Ves responded. "I am not hearing any reasons why I should choose the Cross Clan over the alternatives."

"Come now, Mr. Larkinson." The Skull Architect confidently smiled. "There is also me. You have long been flailing around without any form of guidance as a mech designer. With my guidance, I can assist your progression and prevent you from going astray. Don't underestimate my teaching qualifications. I mentored a number of frontier brats into decent mech designers. Mayra of the Swordmaidens should be familiar to you. She came out alright, didn't she? Even though you have achieved immense success by yourself, you can advance to Senior at least a decade sooner with appropriate guidance."

This was a very compelling argument to Ves. Though the Skull Architect might be exaggerating the benefits of his guidance, the fact that he was good at teaching was not false!

Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to raise a frontier native like Mayra into a Journeyman under barren circumstances!

Ves was still reluctant, however.

"I'm already a Journeyman. At my stage of development, I can already figure out the way forward. Besides, I'm not alone. I have Gloriana as well. We frequently exchange with each other. The added value of having you as a sounding board is not great."

"Are you looking down on me because I'm just a single rank higher than you?" The Skull Architect's smile grew a little strained.

"No! I just.."

"I told you, Mr. Larkinson. Don't underestimate my qualifications! There are differences between Seniors as well. I am over 140 years old and have progressed enormously in my current rank. I am only a short distance away from realizing my design philosophy. Do you realize what this means? Befriending me means befriending a Master-in-the-making! As long as you can assist me in overcoming my final bottleneck, you will earn the eternal gratitude and support of a Master! And unlike Moira Willix, I am not bound by any pesky rules of neutrality or other onerous bureaucratic rules."

"This..."

The Skull Architect raised a finger. "Our design philosophies work well together. The collaborations we had before were too limited and indirect for you to recognize the benefits. However, believe me, we can design revolutionary mechs together!"

"I already have Gloriana."

"Miss Wodin cannot assist you in designing expert mechs! Your clan has acquired quite the number of expert pilots and expert candidates. Perhaps you have already made the arrangements for the expert mechs of the former, but what of the latter? While you can make deals with unfamiliar Master Mech Designers, their time is costly. If any additional expert pilots emerge within your clan, are you willing to give up millions of MTA merits?"

That was indeed a very grave problem. There was no way the Hall of Heroes would have only five expert pilots.

"I am different." The professor generously said. "No matter if I'm a Senior or Master, I will not demand any merits to help you realize your expert mech designs. Unlike other mech designers, I recognize the value of your design philosophy. Not only that, our separate approaches synergize well with each other. This will ensure that any expert mech we design together will perform more optimally!"

Ves had collaborated with Seniors before. Ves enjoyed collaborating with Professor Ventag on designing the original Aurora Titan. If he was able to collaborate with an even better mech designer, then he might be able to realize some ambitious mech designs that he could only dream about otherwise.

Perhaps this might not matter very much when it came to his normal mech designs, but it was different for his expert mech designs.

Each expert mech designed for the Larkinson Clan had to be as good as possible!

Yet the cost in merits, resonating materials, design expertise and so on was quite burdensome. Compared to getting ripped off by others each time he approached a third party, it might be better to take advantage of the deal offered by the professor.

The Skull Architect might be an unhinged war criminal, but he was a potential Master who promised to offer his services for free.

Thinking about all of the MTA merits he might save over the course of the next couple of decades, Ves became very tempted!

It took too much time for him to advance to Senior himself. While the System offered him a means to acquire the skills needed to design expert mechs himself, he wouldn't be able to explain how he was able to come up with them without the intervention of a Senior or Master.

No matter how he looked at it, the generous concessions offered by Jimenez sounded incredibly attractive to him. This was especially the case if the professor succeeded in advancing to Master!

Enjoying the backing of a real Master was very valuable, especially in a place like the Red Ocean!

"Maybe.. we can talk about this further.."

"You have made the right decision, Mr. Larkinson." The Skull Architect grinned.

Chapter 2512: Altered Power Balance

The Cross Clan had changed!

Before, Ves and the Larkinsons looked down on the Crossers. The latter were a bunch of washed-up warriors who lost their foundation.

Ves even concocted some plans to assimilate the refugees into the Larkinsons. No matter their deficiencies, the refugee fleet largely consisted of bona-fide second-class soldiers. Their martial prowess exceeded that of the Hexers.

This was because unlike Hexadric Hegemony, the Garlen Empire constantly engaged in war!

Even though the scale of wars in the Vicious Mountain Star Sector was not very large, the fact that many Garlaners fought in their lifetimes was undeniable!

Only true war produced true warriors. Ves had already observed many deficiencies from both sides of the Komodo War. In particular, the insular Hexers made many assumptions that turned out to be different from reality.

The tribes of the Garlen Empire would never make so many fundamental mistakes! Their enthusiasm for battle meant they were very motivated in increasing their effective battle strength.

Each time the Larkinsons saw the Crosser mechs performing live exercises, the disparity in martial tradition became very clear.

The Cross Clan were consummate soldiers and warriors!

The precision of their formations, their controlled aggression, the versatility and utilization of their powerful second-class mechs and more completely transcended everything Ves had witnessed!

Even if the Larkinson Clan's mech forces possessed a strong core of battle-hardened veterans, their foundation was still too shallow. Surviving a few desperate battles in the Nyxian Gap did not make the Larkinsons qualified to take part in proper conflicts between second-class powers.

"We still have much to go to complete our transition from a third-class to a second-class power." Ves sighed as his shuttle departed the grand flagship of the Cross Clan.

In terms of military development, the Cross clan possessed an undeniable edge.

The reason why the Larkinson Clan still kept its head high was because of its superior industrial and financial strength.

This went beyond just having a pair of Journeyman. The LMC was a rising mech company that had long exceeded the scale of other typical mech companies. The great attraction of glows caused its products to have a very wide appeal in many different markets.

The revenue earned by the company was astronomical! Though the low value of third-class mechs and the large number of middlemen involved meant that the per-unit profit was fairly low, the quantity of sales was terrifying!

Across the surrounding star sectors, LMC mechs became increasingly more ubiquitous.

The current commercial mech models offered by the LMC all provided a lot of value, making them a good fit for many customers in almost every state.

The Komodo War also showed the great promise of employing LMC mechs on a much greater scale. This meant that customers were ordering the LMC's products in greater batches than before!

These trends showed no signs of abating. In fact, the LMC's growth jumped yet again as the publicity of the Miracle Couple's wedding enabled the LMC to reach out to even further markets!

Money was the foundation of success in human space.

The Larkinson Clan only needed a little time to convert its earnings into additional battle power.

"It's too bad I can't take advantage of the Crossers anymore." Ves regretfully sighed.

Now that the Cross Clan gained the support of the Skull Architect, their industrial and financial prowess would likely surge again. It would take time, but the prospect of bankruptcy no longer loomed over their heads.

The only advantage the Larkinson Clan possessed was that its scale and foundation was hard to match by most competitors.

The Skull Architect did not possess as great of a business foundation as the Miracle Couple. He essentially had to start from scratch, whether it was designing a set of

suitable mechs for the Crossers to acquiring the industrial capacity needed to produce his mechs.

He did not possess the cluster-wide production, distribution and sales networks that the LMC painstakingly built.

His current cover identity wasn't famous enough. Almost no one had heard of 'Professor Benedict Cortez'. It would take years of hard work to build up a reputation that was somewhat comparable to recently-advanced Seniors. Without the brand recognition of an established mech company, the Skull Architect wouldn't be able to achieve a lot of sales at the start.

"It's doubtful whether he will even invest in a fixed industry."

There wasn't enough time. The Red Ocean beckoned. The Larkinson Clan was almost ready to embark on its grand expedition. Once it departed, the LMC operations it left behind wouldn't become abandoned goods.

The LMC already made adequate preparations to keep its local operations going. With the help of prior accumulation, business alliances, government support and the Larkinson Loyalty Medallions, it was no problem to maintain their current level of productivity and profitability.

For at least a decade, the LMC's operations in the Yeina Star Sector would continue to supply a steady stream of cash to the Larkinson Clan.

This was vitally important because it was not easy for the Larkinson Clan to earn a sufficient amount of money on the move. Its expanding fleet and mech roster meant that its expenses were ballooning rapidly.

There was no choice. The current Larkinson Clan had to invest enormous sums in almost every aspect. The current development for the clan called for the acquisition of lots of capital ships, sub-capital ships, mechs, supplies and augmentations.

Even with the astounding success of the LMC, Ves still needed to work hard to expand its income.

This was something the Cross Clan and its new guest would never be able to accomplish in a short time.

"It seems the problem is not as bad as I feared. The Larkinson Clan should still possess a strong financial edge.

It was just that the Cross Clan was no longer in such a desperate position as before. Senior Mech Designers had many ways to earn money aside from running their own mech companies.

Even without producing a single mech, Professor Cortez could leverage his formidable design skills to design excellent mechs and simply put them up for licensing or outright sell them like a design studio.

He could even accept commissions from wealthy clients. Just like how Ves initially accepted a commission from DIVA, it was no problem for a Senior to solve the problem of individual clients for a rich reward.

Aside from that, there were other ways that the Skull Architect could earn money. He could tutor mech designers over the galactic net. He could leverage his formidable science and engineering knowledge to assist in the research and development of mech components.

In short, Seniors were never destitute!

"There are limits, though."

Why did so many mech designers dream of running their own mech company?

It was because selling mechs was the most lucrative choice out of all of their options!

While the Skull Architect would doubtlessly work hard to earn money in his own way, Ves was pretty certain that he held an advantage in this area.

There was only so much a single person could achieve. The time of a Senior was very valuable, but without the backing of an entire mech company, Professor Cortez shouldn't be able to reverse the fortunes of the Cross Clan single-handedly.

"The situation will only change once we reach the Red Ocean." Ves guessed.

The Red Ocean would be their new base of operations. It was not unthinkable for the Cross Clan to establish a fixed presence on some planets in order to get the Skull Architect's mech company up and running.

In fact, with his strength as a Senior, Professor Cortez's business operations in the dwarf galaxy might surpass that of his own ventures!

"It depends on how I plan to conduct business in the new galaxy." Ves hummed.

He held many discussions on this topic with the likes of Gavin and Raymond. Ves was inclined to rely primarily on his upcoming factory ship to produce high-end mechs, but most of the executives of his mech company wanted to establish a stronger presence at fixed settlements.

Regardless of the choice, Ves believed that the Cross Clan might rise up rapidly once it established a firm foundation in the Red Ocean.

That did not spell good news to the Larkinsons. Once the Crossers grew stronger, they would definitely want more say in their partnership.

"How troublesome."

Their partnership might dissolve or at least diminish to a lower level of cooperation.

Ves shrugged. "That won't happen for at least a decade. At that time, our Larkinson Clan should have caught up to the military development of the Cross Clan. Perhaps we don't need to rely on any close alliances to survive in the Red Ocean."

Aside from sharing the cost of a beyonder ticket, the principal motivation to band together was because the Red Ocean was too dangerous.

In the first ten years of their stay in the dwarf galaxy, none of the pioneers could guarantee their safety. As long as any of them stepped outside of the protected star system, it was open season!

Partnering up with the Cross Clan still made sense.

Besides, the addition of the Skull Architect brought a lot of benefits in this critical early period. The offers he made showed that the former fugitive was not domineering and knew how to act according to his current position.

Ves was no longer the weak Apprentice Mech Designer of before, while the Skull Architect had long left behind his identity as one of the most formidable pirate mech designers of the Faris Star Region.

Despite the gap in age, experience and rank, the two of them were actually quite close in status. They also needed each other to complete their own goals, and this caused Ves to feel at ease.

There were no inherent conflicts between them. There was no logical reason for the Skull Architect to go against the mech designer who might possibly play a key role in helping him advance to Master!

"I should stop referring him to his old moniker."

Professor Cortez seemed determined enough to leave his old life and habits behind. As long as he did not engage in any crazy experiments, he shouldn't be a liability.

While his shuttle was still on its way to its next destination, Ves briefly conferred with Calabast, Major Verle and some other people about the changes to the Cross Clan.

"Our bargaining position has weakened." Calabast frowned.

"We haven't lost out that much. The Cross Clan is able to provide more benefits now. Besides, the amount of MTA merits is the most important factor. Our superiority in this aspect will ensure we retain enough dominance."

"That is true, thankfully."

Once Ves dealt with these matters, his shuttle finally arrived next to a civilian passenger ship.

This was not a regular ship. She hailed from the Harmony Association of Majestic Teal.

Ves passed through the hatch and stepped onto the deck of the foreign ship with Lucky and Nitaa. Two people along with some perfunctory guards awaited his arrival.

"Patriarch Larkinson! Welcome aboard our ship." Erander Tsai called.

Ves shook hands with the senior shipwright.

"Thank you. Is this..."

"This is my daughter, Vivian Tsai."

A woman in her thirties with straight black hair and a professional outfit stepped forward and bowed. "Hello."

Ves sensed that the younger ship designer was feeling rather mixed.

She never expected her father to recommend her to the Larkinson Clan all of a sudden. She was doing fairly well in the Harmony Association. Why should she leave behind her friends and family and travel hundreds of thousands of light-years away?

Vivian didn't know what to make of her current situation!

This was one of the reasons why Ves visited in person. He did not want to delay her recruitment and integration into the Larkinson Clan. With the impending arrival of his factory ship, it became more important than ever to gain an expert who understood ship construction at a deeper level.

If he waited, who knew whether she would leave. He needed to take matters into his own hands and convince this young but promising shipwright to work on his behalf!

Chapter 2513: Imaginative Shipwright

Projections of dozens of ship designs filled the work compartment. A dizzying variety of virtual starships flew around Ves as he tried to evaluate the vessels from a design and engineering standpoint.

The ship designs weren't too detailed, but the drafts and broad strokes revealed plenty for Ves to develop an overall impression on their designer.

As a fellow creator, he knew that every person possessed an individual touch. They developed their own habits, adopted their own preferences and favored certain solutions. As long as Ves was good enough, he could recognize these touches and understand a different creator's style.

While Ves was not too versed in ship design, starships were still machines. Even if their scale was on another level, much of the science and engineering was still the same whether he looked at mechs or space-faring vessels.

A few immediate properties stood out to Ves. Many of the ships projected in his view were distinct.

They seemed to deviate from the norm. Their exterior and interior were not very comparable to other ships, particularly the standard ones adopted by the mainstream.

"These ships look.. artisanal. They are unique, individual designs." Ves remarked.

Erander nodded with a smile. "Many capital ships are unique. Even vessels from the same series exhibit at least some variation due to updates in their design, the introduction of new technologies, changing specifications and so on. It is customary in our industry to treat each capital ship as precious, valuable and worthy of continued investment."

"That sounds similar to how my mech company aspires its customers to treat its mechs. We believe that mechs are alive, and should be treated with respect."

"I am aware. I admire your outlook. In the shipbuilding industry, your views are not exotic. Some of it is due to their size. We small humans simply can't imagine that ships that are taller than many skyscrapers are dull. Another factor is the great expense needed to build a single capital ship. They are the opposite of disposable products. It is not uncommon to see capital ships in the galaxy that are over several centuries old. As long as their owners maintain them well and keep their parts up to date, it is not impossible for these aged ladies to eke out another century."

Ves looked quite impressed. "It's hard for anyone in the mech industry to hang on to an existing mech that long. In fact, mechs that are in use for over twenty years are already ancient in many people's eyes!"

Talking to an engineer who specialized in another field was always interesting to Ves. Comparing his experiences to that of Mr. Tsai's allowed both of them to look at their work from a different perspective. Sometimes, contrasts produced the most surprising insights.

As Ves continued to exchange with the senior shipwright, he began to pick out and examine some of the more interesting-looking ship designs in greater detail.

"That's the Cunning Lizard, one of my draft designs." Vivian Tsai spoke out, breaking her long silence. "I designed her for clients who intend to travel to the Red Ocean like you. The Cunning Lizard can best be described as a carrier and mobile base."

"This ship looks.. Very complicated. I see she's made up of two distinct halves."

"The forward half of the Cunning Lizard is actually a sub-capital ship. This section contains plenty of living space and production capacity." Vivian became more engaged as she presented her work to someone who might be able to realize her work. "While that doesn't sound remarkable, the forward half exists to facilitate the operation of the rear half."

The rear of the Cunning Lizard was a lot bigger in terms of volume. Twenty identical sections lined the rear. They not only stretched far, but were also affixed to giant rails along the hull.

Ves grew puzzled.

"What is the purpose of these..."

"They are docking stations. Smaller sub-capital ships are able to shelter in them. The Cunning Lizard can even engage in FTL travel in this configuration, allowing the crews of the smaller vessels to transfer to other ships or mingle with each other in the common areas of the Cunning Lizard. This way, the normally-isolated crews and passengers of the sub-capital ships won't be cooked up by themselves!"

Ves looked quite shocked at this elaborate arrangement. He couldn't imagine how much effort Vivian Tsai had to put into her studies of FTL drive technology to accomplish such a great feat!

"The concept is still incomplete." Erander Tsai couldn't help but inform Ves. "Humanity has built ships like these before, but the technical challenges are immense."

"I can see the potential uses of this ship. It is a great solution to improve the livability of a fleet. However, is this the extent of the Cunning Lizard's role?"

"There is more." Vivian said. "The primary purpose of my ship design is to increase survivability, not comfort. Due to the extensive propulsion systems and FTL drives of the Cunning Lizard which allows for consecutive jumps, she can easily help a large number of sub-capital ships flee to safety! After performing two FTL transitions in quick succession, the rear section, which I call the Lizard's Tail, can be ejected from the Cunning Lizard. The latter possesses a smaller FTL drive that allows the most important

half of the ship to immediately transition into FTL. The sub-capital ships that were previously docked with my ship can engage in FTL as well."

"What about the Lizard's Tail?"

"It's deadweight at this point." Vivian shrugged. "While the Lizard Tail looks big, I deliberately designed this section to be expendable. As long as your crew take out her strained FTL drives, only pure structure is left. Any enemies who are chasing us won't earn much of a profit from capturing this unimportant tail. Once the chase is over, you can easily build another Lizard Tail."

Ves had never come across a ship concept as unique and eccentric as the Cunning Lizard. Though the concept's logic was plausible, the practicality of this ship design left much to be desired!

"Although I'm not too familiar with second-class starships, the high requirements and sheer amount of variables involved is very considerable. Can this ship even work?" He asked.

Both father and daughter looked at each other.

"My daughter's work is more of a mental exercise than anything. While it is possible to construct a working version of the Cunning Lizard, we will have to invest an enormous amount of funding and years worth of research to solve all of the technical challenges."

Ves grimaced at this verdict. "The amount of effort required to realize this concept is not worth it. Although I applaud the creativity and imagination of this ship concept, our Larkinson Clan isn't in the market for impractical ships. We need ships that work."

Vivian looked disappointed. "I have better ship designs!"

"I know. I just focused my attention on this Cunning Lizard because it is different from anything I've seen before. Can you show me your proudest work? I want to see your best."

A competitive fire burned within Vivian. "Over here!"

Ves smiled. It didn't take much effort to rouse Vivian's pride. As a mech designer, Ves was keenly aware of the thoughts and desires driving other creators.

No matter if someone designed mechs or ships, they all wanted to gain other people's approval. Just like Ves, Vivian craved validation.

By picking apart one of her most eccentric and impractical designs, Ves caused the woman to feel professionally challenged. She no longer became caught up in her doubts and reluctance about joining the Larkinson.

Now, she just wanted to prove this outsider that she was a capable shipwright!

Vivian quickly showed him a projection of a defensive capital ship.

"This is my concept for the Graveyard, a scavenger vessel that can easily upgrade herself by incorporating the debris of fallen mechs and ships! She differs from other improvised ships by incorporating a deliberate layout and systems that allows for a strong cohesive inner structure to bear a large amount of mixed and uneven materials that may or may not have been added to the ship in haste. There is also room for plenty of bunkers to further increase her defensive power. In order to facilitate this transformation, the Graveyard possessed enough production and processing capacity to support a complete scavenging and recycling operation."

Ves had to admit that the Graveyard sounded like a much more practical design. Sure, this ship concept had its problem. The Graveyard's mixed outer hull led to very difficult handling and traversal. It was probably going to be a pain to keep the Graveyard on course when engaging in FTL travel.

The Graveyard was an inefficient ship design. Her biggest flaw was that she tried to incorporate both defensive and scavenging capabilities into a single hull. This unavoidably resulted in a lot of compromises that detracted from the ship's overall performance.

As someone who highly prized specialization, Ves would rather obtain a dedicated defensive ship and a dedicated scavenging ship than a Frankenstein creation that attempted to be both.

Yet... thinking about the ship quota made Ves pause his initial judgement.

While it was true that obtaining two specialized ships was the better choice, the different functions of the Graveyard ship concept just happened to complement each other.

Not only that, a ship like this that did not need to rely on large and dedicated shipyards to perform comprehensive upgrades and repairs on her hull was ideal for travelling through a dangerous frontier.

This was a highly self-sufficient ship!

"I like this design." Ves honestly admitted. "Your work offers good value. While it is expensive to construct the Graveyard, after she can easily become a lot tougher by relying on her own capabilities. Her purpose is clear. In battle, she functions as a shield. Out of battle, she can play a vital logistical role. While she can perform multiple functions, they are cohesive, not irrelevant or superfluous. Perhaps the most serious flaw of this ship design is that her structural integrity cannot match a standard defensive ship. However, considering how cost-efficient the Graveyard might be, this is a forgivable flaw."

His mostly positive evaluation provided a lot of validation to Vivian. She practically beamed with pride as Ves did not hold back in showering praise to her best work.

"Now that you have inspected my daughter's work closely, what do you think, Patriarch Larkinson? Are you willing to take her in and make use of her talents?"

That was not a simple matter. Ves looked thoughtfully at the two Majestic Tealers.

Though Ves had not heard much good about the star sector they came from, most of the awful rumors centered around the rulers and those in charge. People like Erander and Vivian Tsai came across as normal enough, so there shouldn't be too many problems concerning their personalities.

Ves looked around and briefly studied the projections of the other ship designs. Few of them looked normal. It seemed that Vivian was a very creative shipwright who wasn't satisfied with designing standard starships.

Was there anything wrong with that? Not necessary. One of the main reasons why Ves wanted to hire a shipwright was because he wanted to acquire unique capital ships that added strong and unique benefits to his fleet!

If he just wanted a plain old boring fleet carrier or mining ship, then he didn't have to go through so much trouble. He could just order a standardized or partially-modular capital ship from a commercial shipbuilder.

Ves wasn't happy with this solution! Ever since he specified his requirements for his factory ship to the Hexers, he already planned to modify and upgrade her once he got his hands on his future flagship.

Therefore, he would gladly accept people like Vivian.

He smiled at the junior shipwright. "If you are willing to help us expand our fleet, then we will be glad to take you in. I promise that your work will not be confined to tinkering with our existing vessels. You will have plenty of opportunities to design your own ships in our clan! So what do you say?"

Chapter 2514: Fellow Creators

In the end, was there any doubt?

Ves might be troubled if he tried to recruit someone who was absolutely unwilling to abandon everything and join a risky venture, but Vivian Tsai was not at that point. She merely didn't have enough time to weigh such a life-changing decision.

Since that was the case, Ves directly pre-empted her normal decision-making process by challenging her. Once he ignited her passion, he lured her in by offering her an implicit promise to turn her ship designs into reality.

This was enough to win her over!

"Will you really make use of my ship designs?"

"Yes." He said. "Of course, they will need to match my requirements and specifications. As long as your work conforms to what our Larkinson Clan needs, then I will do my best to find a shipyard to realize your work."

Of course, it was a lot more complicated than that. For one, Vivian simply couldn't design an entire capital ship from scratch by herself. She needed to hire an entire team of shipwrights, naval engineers and other technical experts in order to design an immense vessel filled with countless interconnected parts.

This was not something Ves had to worry about. He could leave these routine matters to Vivian. He just cared about acquiring the right principal shipwright to lead the Larkinson Clan's naval design operation.

As long as Vivian and her operation settled in, they could start designing unique starships that precisely fit the Larkinson Clan's needs. Ves might finally be able to add some distinct but very useful capital ships to his fleet that would surely be useful in the times to come!

Though he and the Tsais still needed to hash out a contract, as far as Ves was concerned, he could already consider Vivian a Larkinson. Once she entered the clan and formed a connection to the Larkinson Network, she would no longer have any thoughts about going back to her old life.

After explaining a bit more about what he expected from Vivian, Ves and her father stepped out of the workroom.

"Meow."

Lucky curiously floated around while Nitaa silently covered Ves' back.

Though there shouldn't be any threats on the passenger ship, who knew if someone wanted to act on Ves. In fact, Nitaa thought it was foolish for the Holy Son to step aboard a ship that wasn't under his control.

"I am glad that Vivian has decided to become a part of your clan." Erander spoke. He looked a lot more relieved than before. "She may not be very focused in her work sometimes, but she is earnest about designing starships that help people's lives."

"I can understand that. I hold the same mindset when designing my mechs. Machines make people's lives better. It is only through greater application of technology that we are able to further separate humanity from its primitive biological roots."

The Majestic Tealer threw an odd glance at Ves. "That is.. surprising to hear from you. I never imagined you would hold such a noble sentiment."

"Why is this surprising? We are both creators. We are both agents of order who work to provide solutions to people."

Erander awkwardly coughed. "Patriarch Larkinson, we create very different machines. The starships I design and build are purely civilian products. They pose no inherent threat to our fellow men once we deliver them to our customers. At best, you can argue that combat vessels such as fleet carriers can be used for destructive ends, but they are not engines of destruction. Mechs on the other hand..."

"I can understand why you would think that way, but I think you are discounting the role of mechs. Violence and war are an indispensable part of humanity. You cannot restrain our race's urge to fight. I think the Big Two has made the right decision to designate mechs as a reasonable alternative to warships as war-making tools. Ever since the Age of Mechs supplanted the Age of Conquest, our race has never engaged in mass slaughter on a galactic scale."

"Mechs are war machines. They are built for the express purpose to destroy. Even outside of battle, their mere existence inspires fear."

"I see that as good. It shows that mechs don't actually have to kill anyone or inflict any destruction to maintain order. Deterrence is essential to keep society running and to prevent our alien enemies from attacking our civilization."

"That does not make mechs righteous! While I respect your skill and efforts, I cannot disassociate mechs from death. The immensely prosperous mech industry is capable of supplying as many mechs that humanity wants. It is far too easy for people to get their hands on mechs. The ubiquity of mechs grants power to people who have no right to control dangerous weapons. Just look at Vicious Mountain! If their tribes and their glory-addled warlords aren't killing each other all the time, the Garlen Empire would have grown into a behemoth at this time!"

They couldn't come to a consensus. Their life experiences and backgrounds were far too different. The teachings they received also instilled different values and principles into their minds.

Shipwrights thought of themselves as the most important enablers of human advancement.

After all, the fate of modern humanity was undeniably tied to space! Without any means of crossing the stars, how could their race possibly bloom across the galaxy?

Of course, much of humanity's past and present success in its expansion rested on the destructive firepower of warships.

Erander Tsai conveniently left this special category of ships out of his consideration. He was just a civilian shipwright. Even if he designed a lot of ships, he had never touched warships before.

In fact, seeing the Gravada Knarlax was the closest that he could have ever gotten to a real warship!

Therefore, Ves did not take much stock in the Majestic Tealer's viewpoints. While it was correct to say that starships were indispensable to humanity, mechs served a purpose that was just as vital.

The Age of Mechs was a blessing to human civilization! There were very few alternatives to mechs that could capture people's imagination and wean them off their dependence on warships.

Despite their disagreements, Ves and Erander still respected each other. They were both very accomplished in their respective industries.

Just as Ves was about to enter his shuttle, the older man issued one last remark.

"As a parent, I am fearful of letting Vivian go. She will have to navigate life without my direct presence."

Ves turned to the older man. "You can still keep in touch with her through the galactic net. Though it's no substitute for hugs, she can still keep you in the loop."

"I know. It's just... family is difficult to part with. As a father, I know that every child must walk out of my shadow one day. It's just that I never anticipated doing so. Before I recognized the warning signs around the Harmony Association, I intended to keep her by my side until she learned everything she could from me. While I have changed my plans, I find it difficult to go through with them. The Red Ocean is too dangerous."

"Relax." Ves patted Erander's back. "Your daughter is in good hands. The Larkinson Clan welcomes every newcomer, especially one as capable as her. We aren't travelling to the Red Ocean on a whim. We plan to aggressively expand our strength in the coming years. Your daughter's role is indispensable as we are bound to acquire some core capital ships that will form the nucleus of our expeditionary fleet."

"I am glad that you intend to make good use of her capabilities. Shipwrights like her are often employed to tweak ship designs or realize upgrades to existing vessels. It is

actually quite rare for people of our profession to make full use of our skills and develop brand-new ships and ship classes from scratch."

"Mech designers have to cope with similar circumstances. As long as Vivian is capable enough, I won't let her abilities go to waste."

Erander Tsai looked very pleased at that. It was a pleasure for shipbuilders like his daughter to become part of an organization that intended to acquire a lot of starships. The Larkinson Clan made no secrets about aspiring to become a nomadic, space-faring power. The Larkinsons would provide plenty of stimulating and meaningful work to his daughter and protege!

Once Ves left the passenger ship, he rode his shuttle back to the Stellar Chaser. He finally reunited with Gloriana in her mech workshop.

"You're back." She spoke.

"I'm back, honey." Ves smiled as he approached and embraced her in a hug.

"It's about time you returned. I've been waiting to fabricate the first production models of our mech designs for weeks."

"Don't worry. I'm looking forward to what we can accomplish as well. I've taken care of the most important issues. We shouldn't have much interruptions in the coming three weeks."

He still needed to stay on top of a couple developments such as the ongoing talks between the Larkinson Clan and the Cross Clan. Still, as long as nothing abrupt took place, Ves was inclined to let his clansmen handle most of the wheeling and dealing.

With someone as ambitious as the Skull Architect in the Cross Clan, there was no way he would allow the talks to founder. It was only a matter of time before the two clans joined forces.

Ves felt free to concentrate on his current priority. After completing six mech designs, he and his wife received six prime opportunities to make another masterwork mech.

It was just that the recently-married couple immediately stumbled upon their first problem.

"Due to our separation, the Valkyrie Redeemer we build out of our own hands won't strictly be the first production model anymore." Ves carefully noted.

That predictably caused his new wife to scowl. "THAT'S YOUR FAULT! If you didn't wander off into the Nyxian Gap, we wouldn't have been separated from each other for

half a year. The Hex Army truly couldn't wait to deploy our Valkyrie Redeemers after receiving the complete design. Now our chance is practically gone!"

At their level, there was no hope of making any masterwork mechs unless they embarked on something of special significance.

So far, the two merely leaned on the fact that their fabrication attempts would produce the first true finished copy of a mech model. This sentiment was strong enough to bring them close to the required standard under optimal conditions.

Yet now that the two were about to fabricate their first Valkyrie Redeemer together, Gloriana's mood was already ruined due to the reason she had just stated.

Ves already knew this. He just didn't want to bring it up in order to remain positive.

Oh well.

"We should make the attempt anyway. Who knows. Maybe our copy is special."

Three days went by without success. Gloriana's foul mood ruled out any possibility of either of them entering into an inspired state. Their cooperation was stilted and the Valkyrie Redeemer mech they ended up with was one of the worst first attempts that Ves had ever made.

Certainly, it was a powerful mech that radiated a strong death-oriented glow.

Its quality wasn't quite up to par, though. There were too many disjointed areas which spoke of lack of concentration or lack of coordination.

Suffice to say, Gloriana wasn't very pleased by the outcome. Compared to her usual work, the Valkyrie Redeemer was an outright disaster!

"You need to get your act together, Ves! I won't allow you to make something this bad again!"

"It's been months since we last worked together!" He defended himself. "Both of us have progressed a lot during this time. It shouldn't be a surprise that we have to start over and learn how to work together again. Now that we know what to expect from each other, I think our next attempt will be better."

She scowled at him. "For your sake, I hope you will do better. Otherwise, our honeymoon ends early!"

"What? You can't do that!"

Chapter 2515: Philosophical Differences

Ves and Gloriana spent too much time apart.

After Ves led Task Force Predator into the Nyxian Gap, his collaboration with Gloriana mostly happened through remote.

While that did not significantly impact the quality of their mech designs, they still grew rusty when it came to knowing each other's habits and preferences.

It also didn't help that both of them progressed their design philosophy significantly. Ves not only made several breakthroughs in his specialty, but he had also evolved his design style further.

The increasingly desperate circumstances of his task force forced him to develop new tricks and solutions to cope with the restrictions he faced. He put his life on the line for every change or modification he made to his mechs.

He also became exposed to a lot of pirate mechs. Though their quality and maintenance left much to be desired, the pirates exhibited quite a lot of ingenuity when it came to keeping their mechs running even if they hadn't been properly serviced in years.

Pirates were consumers of mechs as well. Just like regular customers, they had their own wants and needs. They abided by several familiar conditions such as limits on complexity, piloting difficulty and budget.

Though most pirate mech designers were as sloppy and awful as Johnny Blast, the mechs utilized by the more organized pirate groups such as the Dry Snakes and the Allidus Alliance were not inferior compared to his own work!

Observing how his pirate counterparts solved or mitigated the challenges unique to the Nyxian Gap provided Ves with a lot of inspiration. His design style shifted even further towards emphasizing robustness and reliability.

This was an evolution of his design style. He became less hung up on maximizing performance because he had witnessed plenty of times in battle that making mechs last was a much greater priority.

It didn't matter if he could squeeze 5 to 10 percent more performance out of a mech. Ves had to make a lot of tradeoffs to achieve increasingly smaller gains. Just a tiny amount of extra performance could easily cause a mech to reach its limit 20 percent sooner!

Different mech designers had different ideas about the balance they should set. While Ves increasingly leaned towards the side of stability, the problem was that Gloriana went in the opposite direction.

Performance mattered. Many customers evaluated and bought mechs by comparing their prices and specs with each other. When mech designers developed their products, they had to make some very hard choices on how to configure their mechs.

Should they pursue the limits of performance? How much reliability was acceptable to them? To what extent should they account for improper handling?

Ves and his wife were on increasingly opposite ends with regards to these spectrums.

Gloriana followed the direction of typical mech designers. While she knew that offering rugged mechs was important, she believed it was worthwhile to sacrifice a bit of longevity and reliability to increase the peak performance of her designs.

To her, designing the strongest mechs gave her much more satisfaction!

"It's what customers want as well." She clarified her views to him. "I feel bad if a mech degrades by 10 to 20 percent after several years of intensive use, but mechs aren't sustainable products to begin with. It's better to achieve the highest possible performance parameters so that if the mech does degrade over time, it starts to drop from a higher height."

"That makes little sense. We can easily lessen the performance drop over time by making our mechs more robust! Besides, in actual battles, other factors play a much greater role in determining victory or defeat than a measly 5 percent difference in performance!"

"You idiot! This margin is enough to sway the outcome of duels!"

It shouldn't have been a surprise that they leaned towards opposite directions with regards to this profound issue.

Ves was much more attuned to large-scale battles where the complex environment, large quantities of mechs and the combination of different mech models often resulted in lots of chaos and confusion!

Under these anything-but-ideal conditions, plenty of factors that seemed important actually didn't matter as much. Instead, Ves learned to set aside every variable except how long a mech was able to last and how much punishment it could take.

Such an extremely basic and simplistic approach rubbed Gloriana the wrong way.

"If every mech designer adopted your perspective, the mech industry would have been a lot more boring!" She yelled! "Mechs are already designed to take hits and endure damage. You're getting overboard when it comes to maximizing reliability. How will our mechs ever stand out from the competition if they consistently underperform compared to their peers?"

"Our mechs have other advantages that make them strong."

"THAT'S NOT AN EXCUSE TO LET WEAKNESSES SLIDE!"

"A mech that lasts longer always retains a good reputation. A mech that performed great at the start but falls off sooner won't sell as much after a decade."

"That's just because too many mech owners are too unwilling to invest in proper maintenance! If our customers service their mechs exactly according to manufacturer instructions, they wouldn't lose so much value in so little time!"

"You can't expect perfection from your customers, Gloriana! Most people are inherently sloppy and don't understand the value of proper maintenance. Customers are also constrained by how much manpower, resources and capacity they can allocate towards servicing and repairing their mechs."

"THAT'S THEIR FAULT! We gave them the conditions to maximize the value of their mechs. If they don't take our recommendations seriously, then they are unworthy to pilot our mechs!"

Ves looked exasperated at his obstinate partner. Gloriana based her approach from an entirely different background.

While Ves frequently spent time among the lowest class of consumers such as mercenaries and pirates, Gloriana mainly preferred to interact with the upper end of the mech market.

In her formative years, Gloriana mainly designed custom mechs for rich and wealthy Hexers who could easily afford to provide the best maintenance to their products.

Hexers were very vain about their mechs. Their machines not only needed to perform well, but be in their best state as possible in order to show them off without feeling ashamed.

Since actual conflict wasn't very frequent in the highly-secure space of the Hexadric Hegemony, mech designers such as Gloriana had some very different ideas on what constituted the best mechs.

The Hexers placed much less emphasis on the problems that arose when their products were subject to wear and tear.

Ves and Gloriana couldn't ignore their widening philosophical differences any longer. Along with other factors, their opposing beliefs caused their first attempt at fabricating the Valkyrie Redeemer to fall far short of their expectations.

They clashed way too much against each other during the three days it took to produce a mediocre copy by their standards!

"We need a reset." Ves stated to his wife. "We can't possibly go on to fabricate the next mech on the list with such a dark cloud hanging over our heads."

Even Gloriana recognized the futility of proceeding further. The disgraceful result showed how urgently they needed to find a middle ground.

While their assistants carted the completed Valkyrie Redeemer from the mech workshop, the two newlyweds sat on a bench while holding their cats.

The impromptu pet therapy had a wonderful influence on the couple. Just a few minutes of taking comfort in the company of their pets already cleared up much of their tension.

"Meow?" Lucky looked up at Gloriana as he settled in on her lap.

"You've grown even closer to perfection than before, hihi!"

To her, Lucky was a remarkable work of engineering. In her eyes, almost every aspect about him was refined, elegant and sublime. Admiring his construction and trying to figure out how she could incorporate his exquisite form in her own work always aroused her interest.

"Miaow miaow miaow."

Clixie's furry tail gently swayed back and forth as Ves ran his hands over her soft fur. Her physical warmth along with her emotional warmth caused his heart to ease and melt.

There was just something about furry felines that brought him a lot of joy!

As a cat person, he adored cats. While he also liked Lucky's company, he was not a traditional pet.

As someone who was attuned to life, Ves found it much more relaxing to interact with Clixie. She wasn't as naughty as Lucky and was quite obedient. She also luxuriated in his love and attention. His ability to understand and communicate with animals easily allowed her to make her demands known!

"Miaow miaow."

"I understand your frustrations, but I can't do that yet." He smiled adoringly at the Rubarthan Sentinel Cat.

"Miaow?"

"You're asking for something that trillions of humans in the galaxy would kill to have. Let alone empowering a human, I don't even know how to grant this ability to a cat!"

"Miaow!" Clixie cutely showed off her claws!

Ves chuckled and rubbed her colorful head. "If you've been observing my work for a time, you know that it tends to get dangerous. I don't want to risk harming you, so you'll have to wait until I've solved all of the problems. I'll boost you right away once I've developed a viable solution!"

It seemed that Clixie had run out of patience with regards to her lack of capabilities. Compared to Lucky's frequent upgrades and Goldie's easy growth, the organic cat was getting very frustrated at being left behind!

While Ves had never seen her in action, he knew that Rubarthan Sentinel Cats were actually quite formidable in battle. It was just that she had already reached her maturity and couldn't grow any further.

It was not a good idea to perform further genetic modifications on her. She was a precisely-engineered designer cat developed by some of the best cat geneticists of the New Rubarth Empire.

Let alone Dr. Ranya, not even the best cat specialists of Felixia would be able to add any improvements to her highly-developed gene design!

Perhaps it was possible to augment her with implants, but that was very precarious due to her complex internal physique.

Ves saw no way to improve her aside from augmenting her spirit. Yet that was another challenge in itself because Clixie did not possess any spiritual potential!

As he racked his head for ideas, he suddenly developed a novel idea.

"Why should I do everything myself? Don't I have other helpers?"

He wasn't talking about James. The obnoxious bastard may possess deep insights into the extraordinary, but he was completely useless when it came to developing specific solutions.

Instead, he turned to the Larkinson Mandate. After taking the book from Nitaa, he called up the spirit resting inside.

"Goldie."

A glowing cat quickly materialized in the air and began to brush against his head.

"Nyaaa!"

"Hehehe. I have a little problem here that you might be able to help with. Can you figure out a way to solve Clixie's problem?"

As soon as he explained the issue to the Golden Cat, the two cats began to converse with each other.

"Nyaa?"

"Miaow miaow."

"Nyaaa... nyaa..."

"Miaow!"

Goldie looked back at Ves in puzzlement.

He sight. "I know it's not any easy problem to solve, but I think we can work together on this. Let's just take it slow while we come up with some good ideas. Moving too quickly will only lead to danger. Is that okay, Clixie?"

"Miaow..."

Clixie looked downcast, but Goldie soon swooped down to cheer her up. His lap became very busy as the two cats began to lick each other.

Ves smiled at the sight.

He hoped that pulling in Goldie might help with solving this critical issue. With how much Goldie cared about her 'mother', she had plenty of motivation to figure out a solution!

Perhaps Ves might even be able to freeload off her hard work!

Ves and Gloriana continued to relax with their pets for a couple more hours before retiring for sleep.

They slept in the same bed.

Chapter 2516: Taking Turns

After a good rest and some mindless cuddling, Ves and Gloriana entered the new day with a fresher outlook.

Though the shadow of their previous failure still loomed large over them, they no longer felt as burdened as before.

A simple break and rest did wonders in cleansing their minds.

It also helped that Gloriana didn't go through with her threat to suspend their honeymoon period.

They both loved each other and had just come off a wedding that was close to perfect. Overall, there were far more reasons for Gloriana to be happy with Ves than otherwise.

Still, just because they had some fun didn't mean their problems magically went away. They merely faded in the background. Now that they were ready to fabricate their next mech, they had to confront the issue they were avoiding all this time.

As their cats playfully prowled across the mech workshop, the couple sat down at a work table in order to hash out their differences.

"We need to compromise." Ves said. "Neither of us can continue to work together if we aren't on the same page."

Gloriana crossed her arms. Unlike his sturdy and utilitarian work overall, she preferred to do her work while looking at her best. Her white shirt, black skirt and high heels along with her jewelry and scarf made it seem she was his secretary rather than a proper mech designer.

She was not subordinate to him, however.

"We can compromise by making one of us give in. In my opinion, you should be the one to give up. As far as I'm concerned, the first production copies of our mech designs are extra special. They are collectors items at worst and priceless heirlooms at best. Will anyone who obtains these valuable mechs ever mistreat them in any way? There is no way our customers will neglect or subject them to frequent abuse!"

"Uhm, the Quint has fought against battleships and dark gods just recently. Mechs are meant to be used for their intended purpose. While that has caused the Quint to have some close shaves, it's a much stronger mech. It played a key role in elevating Venerable Joshua. Before you call me stupid again or something, let me just say that as long as absolute perfection isn't attainable, there are different ways to get a good result. Whether we pick your approach or mine, they are both good in certain conditions. What we have to do is to adapt our mech to our current circumstances."

"This.. you may have a point." She reluctantly admitted. "Who do you design the mech for, Ves?"

Ves made a suggestion. "If we want to make both of us happy, then maybe we should alternate between our preferences. Right now, we have expensive mechs that will likely benefit more if I follow your lead. We also have more affordable mechs where performance is important, but reliability is an even greater issue."

She looked intrigued at his suggestion. While the solution he offered was not quite a definite compromise, it at least allowed them to reconcile their differences to an extent.

"We have five mechs to go. I get to dictate the direction of three of them while you can do what you want with the remaining two. I promise not to complain too much."

Ves scowled at her. "Why do you get three while I get only two?"

"Because I'm a woman and because I need compensation for the suffering you've inflicted on me these past few days!"

"That's nonsense!" Ves had no patience to deal with Gloriana's selfishness right now!

He forcibly calmed himself while trying to come up with a solution that did not amount to outright surrender.

"Look, let's just work on the next four mechs and leave the last one for later consideration." He suggested. "Perhaps we might be able to improve our teamwork to the point where we can find a third approach."

"Okay. We'll do it your way, Ves."

They still needed to fabricate a copy of the Cat's Paw, the Chiron, the Ferocious Piranha, the Sanctuary and the Crystal Lord Mark II.

Of the five, only one of them was a solid second-class model.

"We should leave the Cat's Paw as last." Gloriana decided. "I think it was a mistake for us to start with fabricating a second-class mech straight away. The Valkyrie Redeemer is much more intricate and features much greater considerations than lesser mechs. If we tackle the third-class mechs first, we can slowly ramp ourselves up and work out most of our kinks before we address our heavy artillery mech."

Ves nodded in agreement. He completely agreed with her logic this time.

"The Cat's Paw is arguably the most important mech of this batch. It will definitely be one of the key mechs of our clan."

It didn't take too long for them to determine which mech they wanted to take the lead on. Ves was very partial towards all five mechs, but if he had to pick favorites, it would have to be the Sanctuary and the Crystal Lord Mark II.

The Sanctuary was his first anti-glow mech and was presided over by his newest spiritual product. As the mech that best conformed to Lufa's properties, Ves wanted to make sure the first production copy of the Sanctuary was spiritually strong.

As for the Crystal Lord Mark II, it was a dramatic upgrade to one of his first original works. The story behind this product line and the effort that Ves had made into upgrading its original design spirit into the Illustrious One caused him to develop a lot of special feelings about this upcoming attempt.

Gloriana on the other hand had been highly involved in the design of the Chiron and the Ferocious Piranha. The Chiron incorporated a very sophisticated self-adjustment structure that she had largely devised from the ground up by herself. Though her attachment to the Larkinson Clan wasn't as strong as his, she actually cared a lot about nurturing the next generation of Larkinson mech pilots.

Each of them deserved a mech that closely fit their unique traits! As far as she was concerned, this was a rare way to apply her design philosophy to a standard mech model without offending her sensibilities too much!

As for the Ferocious Piranha, her preference for the mech model was actually quite simple. The light skirmisher was a feminine mech model to her. In truth, the mech only appeared this way because it was slender in comparison to the other mechs.

Now that they selected their mechs, they began to work while letting one of them take the lead.

In previous attempts, they rarely let one or the other take over entirely. The only exception so far was when they created the Little Angel. Gloriana completely took over the show when she fabricated the masterwork copy of the Blessed Squire.

Both of them agreed that whenever one of them entered into a similar state again, they should automatically take charge, ignoring any prior agreements they made.

The importance of taking the lead paled into comparison to fabricating another masterwork mech!

"Let's begin."

They decided to tackle the easiest model first. The Sanctuary undoubtedly won in this regard. Aside from its very special glow, it was a relatively plain space knight that stood out for its relatively high mobility.

If not for the presence of Lufa, the Sanctuary might be able to moonlight as the spaceborn version of the Blackbeak!

"The Sanctuary's value and purpose on the battlefield largely centers around its glow." Ves explained to Gloriana as they were beginning to inspect the raw materials that a transport had just delivered to the Stellar Chaser. "Just like the Blessed Squire, it's a force multiplier, and therefore a key strategic target. This is why I decided to package

this mech into an offensive space knight type. It has to be fast enough to get in the range of enemy LMC mechs and it has to be able to last against focused fire."

"I have no objections to your interpretation this time." Gloriana graciously said. "Maximizing the defense of our first production copy is paramount, although we probably have different ideas on how to fortify our mech."

Ves smirked. "That's why I'll be the one that will have the most say for this attempt."

They began to work on the mech. Despite its relative bulk, much of it was due to its thick and hefty armor plating. The Sanctuary's internals weren't very difficult to put together.

Overall, the two regained much of their harmony during this fabrication run. They just needed two days to complete the first copy of their Sanctuary design!

"Meow..."

Lucky looked uneasy as the unnaturally pure and suppressive glow of the finished Sanctuary flooded the mech workshop.

"Miaow~"

Unlike the gem cat, Clixie found the Sanctuary's glow to be rather pleasant.

"Nyaaaaa!"

As an inherently spiritual cat, Goldie didn't fare too well in Lufa's influence! The only reason why she managed to maintain her materialized form was because she was stronger than Lufa. Of course, it also helped that Ves hardcoded some instructions in the mech design and its design spirit.

There was no way Ves would allow Lufa to bully the ancestral spirit of the Larkinson Clan!

In the wrong circumstances, Lufa might even be able to suppress or destroy the Larkinson Network!

Making this realization midway into the fabrication run almost caused Ves to botch his current task.

It dawned upon him that he hadn't added any specific strengthening or defenses around the spiritual networks he created.

Wouldn't that make his clan critically vulnerable against spiritual attacks?

"I'll definitely add this to my to-do list!"

Fortunately, the brief distraction hadn't interrupted his rhythm. The white and sacred mech that emerged at the end had clearly reached a higher level of quality than their disastrous Valkyrie Redeemer.

Both of them not only became accustomed to each other's changes, but also minimized their conflicts by letting one of them take the lead.

"It's a fine product, but it still falls short." Ves pronounced with a touch of disappointment.

Gloriana also looked disappointed. "That's because you were too conservative when you took the lead. You didn't go far enough when you could have."

"Let's just take some time off and reflect on how we can do better next time."

Both of them rested and cuddled with their cats. Once they fully refreshed their mental states, they tackled the next mech.

"The Ferocious Piranha needs a proper name." Gloriana stated as they decided to tackle the light skirmisher mech next.

"I think its current name is fine."

"It needs a dignified name!"

Ves disagreed. "There's nothing wrong with continuing to call it the Ferocious Piranha! The name is a good fit for how this mech is supposed to fight. It's already strong by itself, but as the Valkyrie Redeemer already showed, a mech like this would work far better when deployed alongside many identical mechs. A piranha is never depicted alone. While pricy for third-class standards, I believe that plenty of customers will see the value in deploying this mech en masse with the help of its current name. I've even programmed some awesome visual projections to reinforce this theme!"

He eventually got his way, largely because Gloriana's choices didn't sound any better.

While this mild argument spoiled her mood a bit, she didn't let that affect her work.

With her competitive and perfectionist mindset, she could not tolerate an outcome where 'her' mech was inferior to 'his' mech!

She worked extra hard now that she held most of the responsibility. Ves did not work against her even if he didn't agree with her decisions.

In the end, they took two days to fabricate a Ferocious Piranha that was hardly different in quality than the Sanctuary mech they made before.

Gloriana looked upset. "I put in so much work in this mech! Why isn't it better?!"

"Maybe we are going at it the wrong way." Ves guessed. "Have you ever noticed that when one of us takes the lead, we can't produce the synergy we achieved before? We need to work as equals if we truly wish to draw out our potential."

Her anger faded as she processed this argument. "You may be right. It's just that going back to how we tackled the Valkyrie Redeemer mech won't work. How can we solve this problem?"

Neither of them could come up with an answer.

Chapter 2517: Resolving Differences

The two had grown too far apart in order to work as equals. They both possessed opposing ideas on what constituted a good mech. If neither of them took charge, they would just push against each other every step of the way, thereby cutting off the possibility of producing something remarkable at the end of their fabrication run!

However, after trying to make one or the other take the lead, they only ended up with adequate mechs.

Certainly, the quality of the Sanctuary and the Ferocious Piranha they fabricated surpassed that of regular gold label mechs.

Yet they were nowhere close to reaching masterwork quality. It was as if Ves and Gloriana lacked the magic they used to achieve when they worked together.

This was a very frustrating outcome for Gloriana. At the start, they had six chances to attempt a masterwork. Now that they completed their third attempt, the prospect of fulfilling her dream seemed even further away!

No amount of rest and cuddling with Lucky, Clixie and Goldie could pull her out of her malaise this time.

Even Ves felt troubled by this adverse development. He couldn't have imagined that splitting up for half a year would generate so much discord between the two of them. If they weren't able to solve this impasse, the future of their collaborative efforts might go under!

"How will we tackle the Chiron and the Crystal Lord Mark II?" Ves asked. "Do you want to continue with our current approach or find another way to achieve a better outcome?"

Gloriana pressed her fingers against her temple. "I don't want to go back to how we worked before. Every argument between us will only further detract us from our attempts to fabricate the best mech possible. I think we shouldn't be too quick to assume that our current approach is failing us. We just aren't too used to deferring all of the important decisions to one of us. Maybe we need to tweak our methods in order to do better."

They brainstormed some ways to make their next attempts more harmonious. In the absence of one of them entering into a special state, the best way to produce a mech of exceptional quality was for them to get in sync with each other. This wasn't easy to accomplish if one of them was explicitly restrained from showing any initiative.

"We should cooperate more extensively in the areas where we can find common ground." Gloriana proposed. "Despite our philosophical differences, there are still many aspects about our mechs where our opinions are close enough to get along with each other. We need to grasp these opportunities!"

That was actually a great idea. Their relationship was basically based around ignoring their differences while placing as much emphasis as possible on their similarities.

Since this worked so well in their relationship, it stood to reason that it should have an effect in their next attempts.

"Let's do this, then." Ves agreed.

Now that they had regained some much-needed hope, they approached the Crystal Lord Mark II with higher expectations.

Though Ves unquestionably took charge in producing the mech he had a special bond with, his wife gained more room to provide her input.

With both of them actively trying to foster greater cooperation whenever possible, their moods remained positive throughout the fabrication run.

Neither of them started any new arguments. Eager to break the previous pattern, Gloriana kept herself in check to a greater extent than before. Ves admired her forbearance. It was quite rare for her to be so patient.

Yet after two days of hard work, the Crystal Lord Mark II they produced was only somewhat better than their previous mechs.

Gloriana lost her good mood. "We failed!"

"We made progress." Ves tried to reassure her. "Be glad we haven't regressed! Compared to where we stood after we made our first Valkyrie Redeemer mech, we

have caught up to our old level. I'm already proud of what we've accomplished this time."

Compared to the previous mechs, the Crystal Lord Mark II was much more dazzling. The Illustrious One finally unleashed its glow through a mech without restraint, thereby causing Ves and Gloriana to be affected by a field that caused their sights to be a little blinded.

It took a bit of time to get used to the complex glow of the Illustrious One. Unlike many of his other design spirits, the Illustrious One did not impose any judgemental values onto the people that fall under its influence.

The Illustrious One didn't care about duty or loyalty to the Larkinson Clan. He did not attempt to terrorize a mech pilot.

Instead, his glow mostly added a bright and sparkling quality to the Crystal Lord Mark III! The landbound rifleman mech looked like it was more at home in a mech exhibition hall than a muddy battlefield!

"This proto-god is wasted on a third-class mech." Gloriana remarked with a frown. "It would have been so much if we could make him empower a second-class mech. In fact, it would also be best if you turned him into a woman!"

Ves did not even bother to engage in her last point. He did somewhat agree with her initial judgement.

"I think we need to design a lot of second-class mechs in our second round of projects. Our Larkinson Clan is lacking too many adequate mech models. We also need to boost the LMC's profit by at least five times in order to fulfill our ambitious plan to outfit our fleet with enough capital ships and expert mechs."

She looked skeptical. "While I agree with you, right now we are the only ones who are qualified to design second-class mechs. Our assistants still need years to reach our standards."

"I've been thinking about this problem for a while now. I see two ways to achieve what I want. The first is to hire second-class mech designers as our assistants. Previously, no second-rater took us seriously. I think our recent accomplishments along with our grand wedding has permanently solved this issue."

Gloriana frowned. "I don't know. Second-class mech designers are a lot more difficult to handle than the obedient boys and girls we have right now. While their design abilities are lacking, I like how much they defer to us. We won't be able to command the same level of respect from the talents who graduated from similar universities as mine. People like us are inherently proud and confident."

She had a good point. Ves always had a headache whenever he had to manage strong personalities.

"The second method is to collaborate with the Cross Clan's new Senior Mech Designer. Professor Cortez is quite a good mech designer."

"I heard about him." Gloriana replied. "I studied his work, what little he has published. He's actually quite average for a third-class Senior. It's only recently that he changed his course and began to design some second-class mechs. I like his specialty. It's just that I'm not sure whether we can work well together."

"Is there a conflict between your design philosophies?"

"We'll have to meet and exchange with each other to be sure. Instinctively, I think that some of what he does encroached upon my specialization. The good news is that I think we can work out our conflicts."

This was something to consider later. Though Ves only threw this option out as a possible choice, he was still very reluctant to work together with Professor Cortez on anything aside from expert mech designs.

They reluctantly proceeded onwards with fabricating the Chiron. Now that Gloriana took back the lead, she tried her best to imitate Ves in opening herself to outside input.

It was a lot harder for her to do so. She had to grit her teeth and act against her nature in order to give Ves sufficient room to express himself.

The end result turned out to be no better than the Crystal Lord Mark II. The training mech they made was merely 'good', which meant it didn't possess any special qualities!

"This isn't working!" Gloriana complained. "Our approach is flawed from the start! No matter how much we try to accommodate each other, we haven't been able to achieve true synergy!"

They had only one attempt left. The last but most important mech was by far the most critical one. The formidable Cat's Paw was not only bigger and more complex than any mech they worked on, it was also a model that would play a key role in the defense of the Larkinson fleet.

In order to give their exclusive second-class artillery mech the best possible start, Ves wanted to start off strong. Even if he couldn't turn the first production copy into a masterwork, he at least wanted its quality to exceed the usual norm.

As Ves and Gloriana retired for a day in order to prepare for the big job, Ves began to think about a way to break their current deadlock.

He agreed with his wife that their synergy was lacking. How could they regain the magic that they achieved during the early days of their collaboration?

At some point, his eyes shifted to his wedding band.

"Wait a minute."

Achieving synergy required great understanding. By getting in sync with Gloriana, he achieved some form of resonance with her, allowing them to focus their entire abilities on the same goals.

Right now, their growing differences had made it harder for them to resonate with each other. The logical solution to resolve this issue was to find a way to narrow the gap between each other!

The moment when Ves and Gloriana returned to the mech workshop again, Ves presented a radical idea.

"You want to activate our wedding rings?"

"Yes." Ves nodded. "Do you recall the shared moment we had right after we kissed during our wedding? Back then, we felt more close to each other than ever before. Part of that was due to our love. Another part of it was due to the moment. However, our rings played a role as well. To be more exact, it's the fragments connected to them that has played a significant role."

Both of them possessed each other's spiritual fragments. Normally, this caused them to feel each other's presence even when they were alone. They also derived some other minor benefits.

What Ves wanted to do now was to activate one of the functions he programmed into the fragments. Once the spiritual constructs built into the fragments became online, both of them should be able to gain a portion of each other's domain!

Ves wasn't quite sure how this would affect their current work, but he theorized that it would definitely allow them to find more common ground.

Though Ves had not tested this at all, Gloriana easily accepted his proposal. "Okay. If you think it will work, let's try it. Our Cat's Paw has to be better than the trash we made before!"

After instructing her for a bit, both of them took the time to calm and center themselves before activating their borrowed spiritual fragments.

A hint of excellence and perfection unfolded into Ves' mind. The foreign presence was not inherently compatible with his domain. He had to put active effort into preventing his mind from pushing away the foreign influence.

Gloriana had it easier. She already hosted his spiritual fragment for a few years. Her strong obsession towards Ves and her acclimatized design seed allowed her to embrace the growing influence of Ves in her mind!

Their rings seemed to radiate energy. An invisible line seemed to form between them. Ves and Gloriana became too caught up in the changes to their moods, thoughts, preferences and perception.

"Wow." She looked impressed. "This is new. I think I comprehend a little more how you view mechs. It's so.. chaotic. Somehow, it doesn't look so bad this time. I can see the charm in letting mechs grow."

"I'm experiencing the same phenomena as you. I didn't expect this to work so well."

Theoretically, all kinds of compatibility problems should have taken place. Yet for some reason, the rejection he anticipated wasn't as strong as he thought.

After adjusting to their altered states, they began their final fabrication attempt with greater confidence!

Chapter 2518: Dual Perspectives

The act of activating a foreign spiritual fragment in the mind was a novel process.

Due to how close they were to each other, the fragments formed a stronger connection to their sources. This not only allowed them to gain a bit more strength, but also increased Ves and Gloriana's mutual understanding towards each other.

This was a magical state, one shared by the both of them. As Ves analyzed what was happening to him, he realized that his current condition was similar to that of entering into an inspired state.

"How intriguing."

He had experimented with activating Gloriana's fragment several times in the past, but that was when he was a fair distance away from her. Now that they were in the same room, the experience was substantially different.

In those cases, the fragment itself was too weak to exert any significant power. It only granted him a taste of Gloriana's domain and allowed him to understand her work to an extent.

This couldn't be helped. Ves was too afraid of harming her by harvesting too much of her essence at once. The fragment of him that Gloriana possessed was also rather small. In the past, she couldn't really do more than take comfort in her presence.

The experience was different now. After activating the fragments, both Ves and his wife became a lot more attuned to each other's domains.

However, this state did not come without a price.

Ves could feel that the fragment in the mind of his wife was actively drawing strength from his spirit. The same must be the case for Gloriana as well.

This small drain was not a great concern if it only lasted for an hour, but if it went on for days, Ves estimated that he and Gloriana would both be forced into a low state for weeks!

This was quite a serious price to pay!

However, when he considered the potential benefits of forming a greater degree of mutual understanding with his partner, it might be worth it if it yielded enough results.

If they failed to make a masterwork mech or something close to it this time, then the gains might not be worth the price.

After all, to passionate mech designers, entering into a low state significantly lowered their productivity.

They wouldn't be as creative, they weren't able to channel their design philosophy as effectively and their design results lacked passion. The couple would basically be unable to perform their jobs as effectively!

He turned to Gloriana, who automatically met his gaze. Due to the faint connections to their minds, they had synced up to an extent. She already understood some of his thoughts.

This must be an application of his life domain. Some of its properties complimented their current state well!

"Wow." Gloriana sounded impressed. "Is this how you experience reality all the time? It's no wonder you're so good at manipulating people!"

"Life is the real miracle to me. Everything extraordinary in reality is rooted in mysteries of life."

Just as she became more attuned with life, Ves gained a deeper perception of perfection.

Perhaps perfection was the wrong word to use here. Gloriana possessed an intuitive sense of quality. She was able to look at any object and judge how close to ideal they were. Now Ves gained the same ability in a weaker form.

He looked around. Their chairs, their rings, the work table, the production equipment and so on all provided him with a flood of additional data that he never paid attention to before. He was able to judge their overall quality as well as the factors that raised or lower it. What annoyed him a bit was that every little flaw and imperfection stood out like a sore thumb!

No wonder Gloriana was so irritable at times. She lived in a reality that was filled with flaws. Even when she worked hard to turn her own workshop into her own sanctum, she still couldn't eliminate every flaw!

"You must have built up quite a tolerance." He lightly quipped.

She looked appreciative at Ves. Finally, someone else finally understood what it was like for her to live like this. It was not easy to bear this burden!

"To create the perfect vessel, I have to understand what makes them flawed. It is a necessity for me to learn everything that affects the quality of an object. I also have to develop a deeper sense on how an object fits to a person."

Her domain went beyond observing flaws and judging quality. Gloriana's design philosophy also judged the fit or compatibility between objects and their users.

For example, when Ves studied his current comm, he realized that the high-quality model fit his wrist fairly well. Its automatic adjustment function caused it to wrap around his skin as comfortably as possible, but it wasn't perfect. His skin and flesh did not conform to the baseline human standard anymore. They were harder and stiffer than his comm was designed to accommodate.

"I should buy a custom-fitted comm." Ves concluded.

"Better yet, you should build your own one. It's only when you take matters into your own hands that you will be able to ensure that everything goes right."

No wonder Gloriana was such a control freak. She simply didn't trust other people to do their jobs properly. Just as his unique perception of life and spirituality shaped his behavior, his wife became enthralled by her exceptional vision and intuitive judgement.

To put it in an uglier way, they were slaves to their own perspectives!

Ves never thought about how the manner in which he sensed reality narrowed their minds and put them onto a narrow road.

If he didn't gain a portion of Gloriana's perspective, he wouldn't have been able to understand how much his normal self was missing in his life!

It was rather strange to view reality with two different lenses at once. Ves felt like he was wearing a mental monocle.

Being able to compare one perspective to another was incredibly valuable!

Both Ves and Gloriana gained so many new insights that they both fell silent as they became engrossed with what they learned.

Not only did they deepen their understanding of the other, they also learned more about themselves! Some details blended so well into the background that neither Ves nor GLoriana were able to observe them under normal conditions.

It was only when they were able to compare their perspective to another that a noticeable contrast emerged!

He suspected that rational mech designers who were able to simulate the design philosophies of other mech designers also experienced something similar. Being able to make comparisons allowed rational mech designers to constantly understand their own strengths and shortcomings. This would definitely help them to polish their own design philosophy and prevent their progression from going astray!

However, there was a downside as well.

Aside from the spiritual drain, the mental strain was also considerable. His design seed possessed a very strong identity and did not take kindly to Gloriana's spiritual fragment taking over its territory!

Ves had to restrain his design seed from lashing out at the foreign fragment. He also had to keep his passion pure and prevent it from being contaminated by his partner's influence.

If he let himself become contaminated, then his domain wouldn't be as pure anymore! In the worst cases, his design seed would become heterogenic, causing him to lose much of his specialty.

The gains weren't worth the losses!

The entire point of Ves and Gloriana collaborating with each other was to take advantage of each other's strengths. The better they were at their respective specialties, the more they gained from working together.

If they let themselves be contaminated, then they wouldn't have any strong points anymore. They may have become more self-sufficient, but their work would suffer as their mixed passion would never be able to burn as hot as before.

"This is dangerous."

Ves eventually snapped out of his fascination. He hadn't forgotten about his original goal. He lightly shook Gloriana's arm in order to return her to the present.

"Hey. We still have a mech to fabricate. We are straining and exhausting ourselves the longer we maintain this state. We can't waste our time on introspection. Also, don't get too caught up to what I can do. I'm very different from you. It's okay to take a peek, but I don't advise you to go too far. You'll just lose yourself in the process and push you further away from your ambition."

Due to their enhanced communication, Ves didn't need to elaborate any further. He conveyed his theories, his concerns and his urgency to her by communicating on a spiritual level.

This was quite convenient.

"Alright." She nodded after adopting a serious expression. She became more focused on the task at hand. "Before we begin, we should bestow a proper name to the result of the Cat's Paw Project. Don't tell me to settle for this code name. It isn't serious enough and doesn't properly fit with the design."

He agreed with her this time. The Cat's Paw was a second-class landbound artillery mech that was mainly purposed for static deployment on land and bunker deployment aboard ships.

Nothing about this was related to cats aside from the cat-themed bunkers of his upcoming flagship.

Goldie didn't even preside over the design!

Since Ves wanted to design a heavy artillery mech version of his old Deliverer model, he chose Ylvaine as its design spirit.

He already came up with a suitable name.

"It's official name will be the Transcendent Punisher. Its supreme firepower and enhanced targeting allows it to exact punishment on any enemy that dares to enter its range!"

Gloriana looked oddly at Ves. Even though she understood him, that didn't necessarily mean she agreed with him. She still retained her own perspective.

"It's a bit too direct for my tastes."

"That's on purpose. This is an expensive and powerful machine. One of its purposes is to deter anyone from attacking our expeditionary fleet. Once we are able to fill up every ship-based bunker with Transcendent Punishers, we'll be able to frighten off many people, particularly once our new artillery mechs have demonstrated their prowess!"

The Transcendent Punisher was their latest Ylvainan mech. While it derived its spiritual abilities from the Deliverer, it was much more powerful than the third-class marksman mech that once played a key role in the Sand War!

Ves and Gloriana began to fabricate the mech. In order to help them become more attuned to Prophet Ylvaine, Ves took the liberty of channeling Transcendent Punisher's design spirit.

While this added even further strain to his mind and spirit, it fit their current circumstances well!

Neither of them possessed much love for the Ylvainan Faith. Yet now that Ves channeled Ylvaine and extended the design spirit to Gloriana, both of them knew exactly how to make an authentic Ylvainan mech.

"The prophet will bless this machine!"

The two proceeded to work together in a much more harmonious fashion than before. While they were still trying to experiment and get used to their special states, they already tasted the benefits.

They spoke less and less to each other as they switched over to a more intuitive way of communicating with each other. At many times, they were of one mind. In the few cases where they conflicted, they easily hashed out their differences because their mutual understanding reduced their opposition to each other.

Gloriana finally understood the twisted logic that drove Ves to make decisions that didn't make sense to her before.

Ves realized how much certain elements were so glaringly wrong that she couldn't tolerate their existence. He became a lot more sympathetic towards her decisions even if it affected his own choices.

Both of them worked harmoniously for five straight days. It took a lot more time to fabricate a heavy mech. The sheer amount of parts along with their greater mass slowed down everything.

With each passing day, Ves and Gloriana experienced more and more strain. Their minds became weary and their spiritual energy reserves slowly diminished. They had to take regular breaks in order to recover from the strain and to stave off contamination.

All of these difficulties hampered their cooperation a bit, preventing them from achieving the best possible result.

In the end, their most difficult fabrication run to date produced a Transcendent Punisher that both of its creators took pride in! Unlike the previous five mechs, the machine they made was of significant higher quality than before!

"It's a pity..." Gloriana wearily sighed as she squeezed her ring, deactivating the fragment in her mind.

Ves was quite happy with the result. "I don't think there is anything to complain about. We achieved a higher standard of quality through replicable means. As long as we get more used to our activatable states, we can keep working on it until we are fluent enough to reach the next level!"

To him, this experiment was a success!

The potential of this new method lay in its consistency. Rather than praying for something as random as serendipity to bestow him or Gloriana with a special state, Ves would rather develop one himself that he could apply whenever he wanted!

Chapter 2519: Completed Round

The Transcendent Punisher was arguably the biggest and most powerful mech that Ves had ever designed.

It was one thing to flesh out designs by completing its schematics. It was another thing to piece it together in person up close!

The immense size and mass of the mech was already intimidating in itself, but its pure and sacred glow seemed to give people the impression that the machine was an embodiment of Ylvaine's wrath!

Just looking at the mech caused Ves to gain the impression that it was ready to exact divine punishment on anything that affronted the prophet!

"Transcendent Punisher indeed." Gloriana remarked as she looked ready to go to bed. The marathon session had drained her a lot! "Our artillery mech fits the prophet well. Only a boy could output so much threat and violence."

Ves was too tired to palm his face. Now that he deactivated the remote domain fragment in his mind, he no longer gained any sympathy for her Hexer views.

That was another side effect of his previous state. Understanding Gloriana meant gaining a very unwelcome glimpse on what she thought about boys! That was something that made Ves even more determined to guard against contamination!

"Even if it's not a masterwork, it's quality is remarkable enough to merit its own name. Do you have any suggestions?"

She shrugged. "I'm not in a naming mood right now. I don't have any inspiration."

Neither did Ves for that matter. As he examined both of their conditions, he noticed that they had expended quite a lot of spiritual energy.

The new technique which he called remote domain sharing was very useful but also very costly. If not for learning so much after activating it for the first time, Ves would have considered this attempt to be a loss.

As it was, Ves and his partner gained so many new insights that they had a lot to think about for the next couple weeks. This was good because it would take up to a month for them to restore from their loss.

Ves hadn't lost as much spiritual energy as he was a bit more efficient in its use. He also built up a modest reserve of excess spiritual energy which he could absorb right away.

However, Gloriana was able to recover faster because she could rely on prayer to accelerate her spiritual energy production.

His face scrunched a bit. Developing a replacement for his Grand Dynamo became a much higher priority than before!

He squeezed his brain for a suitable name. "What about the Prophet's Fist?"

"It's not a melee mech."

"The name is figurative. Anyone who suffers from this mech's attack will feel as if the Great Prophet punched them in the gut. It's not a pleasant experience, that's for sure!"

"Whatever."

Gloriana accepted his stupid name without any further complaint. While she was somewhat proud of crafting a good mech, she did not care as much about the Transcendent Punisher design as her husband.

Unlike her, Ves had long looked forward to fielding the Larkinson Clan's first true second-class mech!

The Transcendent Messenger was but the first of many powerful Larkinson-exclusive mechs!

Hopefully, Ves would be able to replace 80 to 90 percent of the stopgap mechs with Larkinson mechs of the same caliber!

"They Ylvainan faction in our clan will welcome our Transcendent Punisher model. They won't feel neglected anymore. They can also look forward to playing a key role in defending our expeditionary fleet for a long time to come. With the sheer power of this model, it will take at least a few decades before it begins to show its age."

Gloriana nodded. "Even if its power falls off, we can easily upgrade its armament in the event we gain access to better weapon components in the Red Ocean."

This was one of the key design features of the Transcendent Punisher. Mindful of how circumstances might change in different environments, the pair added a bit of modularity to its huge design.

While it wasn't an actual modular or semi-modular design, a crew of mech technicians should be able to swap out its weapon components without needing to disassemble the entire machine.

Of course, it would still take at least a day to perform such a comprehensive procedure. The weapon mounts were tightly affixed to the rest of the frame in order to prevent the Transcendent Punisher from wrecking itself with each weapon discharge!

This was something to consider for the future. The Transcendent Punisher's current weapon loadout was more than sufficient to handle most threats in the surrounding star clusters.

Hardly any second-class mech could withstand getting focused upon by gauss cannons, positron beam cannons and pulse cannons.

Perhaps only expert mechs were able to withstand the barrage, but as long as hundreds of Transcendent Punishers accurately fired upon their positions, their resonance shields and energy shields wouldn't last very long!

Ves grinned. He actually looked forward to testing out his latest mech model against some uppity enemies. The only downside was that it was very difficult to mass produce his heavy artillery mech.

In fact, Gloriana had to upgrade her mech workshop in order to fabricate such a huge machine!

"Once we gain our factory ship, we should focus on pumping out as many Transcendent Punishers as possible. I'll tell my staff to stockpile enough raw materials to produce hundreds of copies."

"That's a lot, you know."

"Our upgraded fleet can handle it. The factory ship and every combat carrier we're about to receive all possess bunkers that need to be filled. It's a waste to leave them empty in the event of battle."

The couple wrapped up the session. Ves ordered the Prophet's Fist to be shipped off to somewhere else where Major Verle could decide on how to utilize this mech.

Once Ves and Gloriana cleaned up the mech workshop, they left the compartment and dragged their weary bodies back to the latter's stateroom.

Both of them crashed into beds right after they changed their clothes. Their cats looked bewildered at how much the mech designers exhausted themselves!

"Meow." Lucky pressed his paw against Ves' cheek.

"Miaow miaow." Clixie curled her body next to Gloriana's head.

After a long night of rest, the newlyweds woke up again. After undergoing their morning routine, the pair discussed their next actions.

"I have a lot of matters to catch up to." Ves spoke. "We've been preoccupied with fabricating our mechs for two straight weeks. A lot has changed. Many guests have left. Master Willix and the Ubiquitous Force are already back in Centerpoint. Our talks with the Cross Clan have almost reached their end. Some of the hardware that we've ordered are already being delivered as we speak."

He did not look forward to handling all of these affairs, but he had no choice if he wanted to stay on top of the situation. He couldn't delegate everything.

Gloriana looked a bit tired as well. "I really hate it when you put me in this awful state. I don't feel as enthused about mechs as before. How can I perform any design work under these conditions? It seems I will be devoting my time on studying and handling the affairs of the Glory Seekers."

Both of them wanted to remain productive. Neither of them were in a mood to resume their honeymoon, not that they did anything too special.

Still, both of them were somewhat satisfied with their gains. The Prophet's Fist achieved a level of quality that gave both of them hope of reaching the peak again.

Ves figured he just had to spend more effort into increasing his emotional attachment to a mech design. Previously, cared about the Transcender Punisher design, but obviously he could have been more passionate.

The pair discussed when and how to publish their completed mech designs.

The Chiron and the Transcendent Punisher were meant for internal use. Ves did not need to announce them to the public. Neither did he need to present their designs to the MTA to undergo validation.

"The Transcendent Punisher can wait until we receive our factory ship, but the Chiron should start production straight away." Ves declared. "Our clan has rebuilt its mech academy, so there are plenty of mech cadets who can make immediate use of our exclusive training mech."

Ves looked forward to seeing how much of a difference the Chiron could make at the start. While the true potential of this self-adjusting training mech wouldn't become prominent until years later, it should already be considerably better than the bog-standard mechs the academy were currently utilizing.

"What about the Crystal Lord Mark II and the Sanctuary?" Gloriana questioned.

"There is no need to unveil the Sanctuary yet. Perhaps the only mech that has a lot of sales potential is the Crystal Lord Mark II." Ves replied.

"Will you hold one of your amazing press conferences again?"

Ves haplessly gestured to his tired face. "Do I look like I am in a condition to hold a compelling presentation? I'll be stuck like this for several weeks. We can either wait to publish the Mark II or leave it up to someone else to announce it to the public."

"You can also settle for publishing a simple press statement."

"I'll just shove this question to Raymond. The LMC shouldn't have to rely on me all the time."

His response made Gloriana pleased. "Good. You don't have to step forward each time you accomplish something. While I know you like the Crystal Lord product line, it isn't impressive compared to our second-class mech designs."

"The Crystal Lord Mark II may possess a fraction of the power of the Transcendent Punisher, but it has the potential to become the LMC's latest cash cow."

"Do you really think that? No offense, Ves, but the demand for premium rifleman mechs isn't great."

"That just means that even if the Mark II's sales fall short of reaching the level of the Desolate Soldier and the Doom Guard, the new model will still improve our financial position."

He had a lot more faith in the success of the latest edition of the Crystal Lord now that it had been brought up to par with his other glow-oriented mechs.

Once they decided on how to handle all of their finished mechs, they began to look to the future.

"We have a few weeks to think about our next round of design projects." He said. "Even if we aren't in the most creative mood right now, we can figure out the roles we need to fulfill."

"You wanted to design a lot of second-class mechs this time, right?"

"Yeah. We need to complete our commission with the Hexers as soon as possible. We also have to outfit most of our Larkinson mech pilots with living mechs. Ideally, I want to complete both of these objectives in two years."

Gloriana looked a bit shocked. "Two years? That's too fast!"

"We can do it as long as we work hard enough."

"Our assistants won't be able to keep up. Didn't we talk about this?"

"We did. I also mentioned that we can find ways to circumvent this problem. In fact, don't underestimate how much our assistants can currently do. Each of them are working hard to get up to our level. We can always try. We'll just have to lengthen the time it takes to complete our second-class design projects by a couple of months."

The first round of projects showed that four months was sufficient to complete a third-class mech design. However, second-class mech designs benefited a lot from extra development time.

While both Ves and Gloriana had already thought about some of the mechs they wanted to design next, they decided to wait until after they recovered from their exertion.

As Ves was ready to depart the Stellar Chaser, Gloriana brought up something important.

"My parents and my brothers and sisters are ready to bid farewell to us. Please come with me to Parma Imago. I know you don't like to be around my mother, but we both need to meet them at least one more time."

"Err.. I need to meet with the Cross Patriarch.."

Gloriana glared at him. "You are meeting with your new mother-in-law."

"Okay.."

Chapter 2520: Ves the Good Boy

Ves hadn't met with Gloriana's immediate family very often. This was quite regretful as the imminent departure of the Wodin Warriors meant that this might very well be the last opportunity they would be able to speak with each other in person.

When the newlyweds boarded a shuttle that brought to one of the fleet carriers of the Wodin Warriors, Ves did his best not to get annoyed by how weird the Hexers decorated their ships.

From their hexagon-shaped corridors to their hexagon-sided tables, the female supremacists found plenty of ways to express their love for the number six.

The Parma Imago was still an impressive ship regardless. Her modern technology along with her advanced materials meant she could play a very useful role once the Wodin Warriors took part in the Komodo War.

As Ves and his new wife boarded a floater platform that brought them to the upper deck of the fleet carrier, they passed by plenty of male and female crew.

Ves frowned even further as every Hexer male assigned to the Parma Imago was no taller than 1.66 meters.

He was already familiar with this sight about the Stellar Chaser. The difference was that the Parma Imago boasted a much larger crew. While all of the women occupied important positions, the boys were responsible for all of the grunt work.

"Why do you Hexers even cap the growth of your male Hexers?" Ves couldn't help but ask.

"That's because they're boys, silly."

"This is unnatural!"

"That's the point, Ves. Nature is wrong. Nature is outdated. Ever since our civilization has developed to the point where boys aren't needed to defend their tribes anymore, their barbarism and propensity for violence aren't necessary anymore. Unfortunately, our civilization has developed too fast for our evolution to catch up. To prevent boys from deriving too much confidence in themselves, the matriarchs ordered their growth to be capped at a below-average height."

"And this actually worked?"

"The Hegemony considers this policy to be a massive success! There have been less rebellions ever since boys all have to look up to women all the time."

"Not every boy is cut short. Your siblings are just as tall as any other man in the galaxy."

"That's because they're good boys! Mother has raised them well. The Hegemony offers to unlock the growth of any boy who is exemplary enough. This reward gives hope to every boy in the Hegemony. Many of them work harder than ever in order to be recognized as a good boy!"

Ves could easily imagine why. He couldn't imagine the pain of being vertically challenged while living in a state where every woman was taller!

"Who exactly decides whether someone is a good boy?"

"There are different panels or other institutions that are dedicated to monitoring, rewarding and punishing boys. My mother happens to be in charge of one of them in the Scimitar System. She has punished many boys and rewarded a few of them over her career. Don't worry, Ves. You're a good boy to her, so she won't punish you anytime soon!"

Ves twitched. Was that supposed to be a compliment or an insult?

"I'm a man, Gloriana. Not a boy."

She turned lovingly at him. "Of course you are! You're not just a man, but you're my man!"

Well, at least she had her priorities straight.

The floater platform finally delivered the pair to the entrance of an observation chamber.

Once they passed through the hatch, they looked up to see an impressive view of the stars. The dome was oriented towards Cinach VI, so the pair also enjoyed an impressive view of the planet from above.

After admiring the open view, they walked across the wide deck until they reached an open terrace.

Constance and her brood were already present. Even Venerable Brutus sat next to his older brothers.

"Ves. We have been awaiting your arrival." The mother greeted him before turning to admonish her daughter. "Youngest, you've been out of contact for two straight weeks. Melody keeps telling me you have locked yourself up in your mech workshop."

"We were busy, mother!"

"That's no excuse to cut yourself off from the rest of your family!"

The exchange lasted for a minute. After she finished rebuking her daughter, Constance turned her disapproval to her new son-in-law.

"I see the both of you have been very busy in the last two weeks. Both of you look very tired. Have you been exerting yourself too much these days?"

"Uhm, fabricating mechs is intensive work." Ves modestly replied. "This is especially the case when attempting to create new masterworks. It's through putting a lot of effort that we have already succeeded a couple of times despite our young ages."

"Very well. Did you succeed?"

"We came close in our last attempt. We're quite happy with the result. Maybe next time we'll achieve our goal."

His mother-in-law inquired a bit more about their work. She exhibited some interest in the mech designs he recently completed.

"These third-class mechs are a waste of your time. According to my daughter Kellandra, your clan is more than capable enough of fielding second-class mechs. Your most important clients such as our state also urgently need more mechs from you. So far, a year has gone by, but you have only delivered two designs out of the eight that you have promised."

Ves nervously smiled. "We.. were busy in our own affairs these past few months. It will be different now. I don't foresee any major distractions in the coming months and years so I should have plenty of time to complete the commission."

His commitment seemed to satisfy Gloriana's mother. "Good. Work hard and deliver the remaining mechs in a timely manner. We will reward you for every success. In fact, the Hegemony has recently approved a bonus for you considering how much your Blessed Squire and Valkyrie Redeemer designs have helped us defeat more Fridaymen."

The older woman elegantly waved her hand, causing a projection of a very familiar-looking capital ship to appear into view.

"This is my factory ship!"

Ves had already memorized the specific configuration of the Estralla Klavier-class vessel. As he studied the projected schematics, he immediately noticed some discrepancies.

There were a few more additions to the ship design.

"Wait a minute. That wasn't there before..."

Constance tapped the schematic, causing the alterations and new additions to light up in red.

"In light of your great service to our great and righteous state, the Hexadric Hegemony has decided to reward you with an allotment of free upgrades. The schematic already contains some improvements recommended by the shipyard that is currently constructing your ship. You have the right to suggest other additions and alterations if you so wish."

"How much, ma'am?"

"800 billion hex credits."

That was quite a lot! This amount completely soothed his regret for not being able to earn any money from the sales of his Blessed Squire and his Valkyrie Redeemer.

Sure, he might have been able to earn even more money over the long run, but that would take way too much time. Considering the current needs of his clan, he would rather get a lump sum straight away when his factory ship was still under construction.

While much of the structure was already built and fixed, there was still a lot of leeway to make some structural improvements that couldn't be done once the ship went active.

This was a precious opportunity!

Some of the suggested improvements already looked quite impressive. The factory ship already came with two heavy-duty FTL drives, but the Hexers added a third one for additional redundancy!

The outer hull plating that had yet to be installed consisted of a better and tougher alloy without increasing the factory ship's mass. This was incredibly helpful as even a modest boost to defense could save a lot of lives in the future.

Due to the formidable size and surface area of the factory ship, neither Ves nor the Hexers could afford to incorporate materials comparable that to mech armor. It was simply too expensive. This was why Ves was still diligently saving up on Breyer alloy in order to mount a fantastic prow on his new factory ship!

The recommended upgrades all looked sensible to him. They improved the core parameters of his factory ship, particularly improving mobility and defense.

Of course, the inherent DNA of the factory ship was still the same. Compared to other capital ships, she was relatively slow and couldn't be used to tank a lot of hits like some moving fortresses.

The only downside was that these recommendations already ate into much of the budget of his factory ship. He only had a third of the bonus left to implement some additional improvements.

"Can we replace the supplied production equipment with better models?" Ves asked. "I'm particularly interested in obtaining a machine that can process ultra-hard first-class metallic materials."

Though his factory ship already came with a second-class manufacturing complex's worth of production facilities, none of them were rated to handle materials as hard as Unending alloy!

"I don't think we can afford such a machine yet." Gloriana answered. "Even in the Hegemony, such a powerful machine is unaffordable to all but the state and the most successful mech companies."

"A shame."

He should have expected this answer. It seemed that Ves would either have to rely on Lucky or find some other means to process Unending alloy. He couldn't borrow the Ubiquitous Force's mech workshop now that Master Willix already returned to Centerpoint.

Ves examined the ship design for any areas he wanted to add some extra modules or any aspects he wanted to improve.

However, his low state did not help him with this regard. He simply couldn't come up with any good ideas.

He suddenly remembered one of his latest hires. Didn't he recruit her to take on these matters?

"Can you give us some time to submit our proposed modifications?" Ves asked. "Altering a ship design is way too complex for any single person to tackle. I'm not specialized in ship design, but I have staff that do. I'd like to bring these design schematics back to my team so that my people can puzzle out a solution that satisfies my goals. Also, can we expand the available budget by putting in our own money?"

Constance nodded as if she already expected the answer. "I will get back to you on the budget matter. You have a week to submit your suggested changes. After that, the construction of your factory ship will reach a stage where major alterations cannot be implemented without tearing open the hull again."

"I understand. How long will it take for the ship to arrive in our hands?"

"I am told it will take less than two months to deliver your factory ship, even accounting for your suggested upgrades."

"That's quite fast."

"Several institutions of our state are assisting in the construction. The fabrication of ship parts, the supply of materials and the amount of personnel have all received substantial boosts. You can thank us for this change. Our dynasty has lobbied the state to accelerate the construction effort."

Constance and every other Wodin in the terrace looked expectantly at Ves.

"Uhm.. thank you.. mother."

Constance smiled warmly in response. "Anything for my son."

Inwardly, Ves felt like puking. His mother-in-law didn't have to call him that! Why did he keep getting more mothers? Sometimes, he just wanted to go back to the days where he didn't have any. At least he didn't have to worry about meddling women trying to keep him on his best behavior!

With that done, they all proceeded to settle down and talk about other matters. Constance and many of her children were very curious about what Ves and Gloriana planned to do in the Red Ocean.

In a matter of months, the Larkinson Clan would finally depart from the Komodo Star Sector. Both Gloriana and Brutus would be accompanying Ves and his clan to an entire new region of space.

It was a given that Constance was quite concerned about the Larkinson Clan's plans. She wanted to make sure that Ves didn't lead her youngest son and daughter into another abyss!