

Mech 3641

Chapter 3641 Controversial Incident

On that day, a unique incident took place on Davute VII.

In a radius of several kilometers around an expert mech that the authorities only reluctantly permitted to operate on the surface, the Everchanger turned itself into a vessel for Vulcan's mighty prestige.

The green mech currently emanated a powerful bronze corona as its stupendously amplified glow stretched across dozens of city blocks!

Tens of thousands of residents, workers, visitors and professionals all paused what they were doing as the Everchanger's ridiculously wide glow encompassed them all without any restraint.

In truth, Venerable Joshua had the option of limiting the angle and range of his expert mech's glow so that it only affected the site of the meeting.

However, Ves ordered him to go full blast, so that was exactly what he did. The response from the local authorities was not in his consideration. That was the responsibility of the patriarch and the rest of the clan.

While Vulcan's glow had an effect on many different people, it exerted its greatest effect on those with artistic or engineering backgrounds.

The mech designers, visual artists, fashion designers, weaponsmiths and other people who created works for a living all entered into a creative overdrive.

They all came up with brand-new ideas or viewed their existing ones in a new light. Although Vulcan's amplified glow wasn't as effective as getting hit on the head with the Hammer of Brilliance, it was still a completely life-changing experience to the people who never encountered it before, let alone any other glow!

Ves grinned as he saw how deeply the chief ship designer and the chief shipbuilder had become affected by the Everchanger's actions.

Before this point, he actually doubted whether this harebrained scheme could actually work.

This was why Ves felt it was important to prep Karina Murphy and Melaia Murphy beforehand by addressing them in person. By bringing up certain keywords such as creation, innovation and design, he guided their thoughts in a space where they became primed to embrace Vulcan's glow.

Right now, it looked as if his efforts had paid out. Whereas Gelly Murphy looked irked as she exerted her firm will that she had honed for many decades as the head of Murphy & Sons, her daughters were not as resistant.

In fact, even if they possessed the mental fortitude to disregard Vulcan's influence, they didn't want to get rid of it at all. Even though the effect was already starting to temper now that they harvested the most immediate benefits the glow, they still felt creatively inspired the longer they remained in this condition.

"Sir!" Joshua transmitted to Ves' implant. "The local security forces have drummed up their mechs. They're on their way and they're already demanding me to cease my operation. I'll have to stop what I'm doing."

"It's okay." Ves transmitted back. "You've done your job. Don't resist but don't let the authorities take you away. Wait for my people to handle this matter. You've done no harm today. In fact, it's quite the opposite. You have helped many people in the Commercial District."

He quickly sent a few messages to his clan to urge them to handle the aftermath of his radical plan.

Meanwhile, the Everchanger finally retracted its powerful, wide-ranging glow. A void seemed to have appeared in the Commercial District as many different people returned to normality.

"What happened?"

"It's an alien attack! We almost got mind-wiped by the space lizards!"

"This isn't an attack. This is a gift!"

"Why did it stop?! I just had the greatest idea!"

The Everchanger's stunt only lasted for a relatively short amount of time, but the impact it had on all of those people was enormous!

Many people became lost. Others were afraid. A portion of them had benefited from Vulcan's influence and wanted more!

Regardless of their reactions, it was undeniable that this remarkable exposure had changed their lives. Whether it was for the better was still questionable.

The governing powers who reigned over Davute VII received conflicting reports and were reluctant to make any reckless decisions. It was no joke to engage in hostilities against an apparently-powerful expert mech in a populated area!

While confusion continued to spread outside, Ves continually disregarded Gelly Murphy's mounting apoplexy and only directed his attention to the two key figures that he had tried to woo with his risky stunt.

"...This is an outrage!" Madame Gelly Murphy shrieked as she did not take the earlier disruption well! "Miss Tyana Delcrost was completely correct about you and your clan! You are nothing but ruffians and vagabonds with delusions of greatness! I want each of you to disappear from my sight and never show up in my vicinity again! You can completely forget about ordering any ship from my company for the rest of your clan's existence! Even if my shipyard is starved of orders, I will not even sell you a single shuttle!"

"Mother! Stop for a moment." Karina Murphy finally said as she raised her hand against the CEO of Murphy & Sons.

This time, Gelly Murphy directed her outrage towards her oldest daughter.

"Karina! You cannot possibly believe in this man, do you?! He has tried to manipulate you into abandoning our best chance at restoring our shipyard. Do not fall for his tricks!"

"Mother, listen to Karina." Melaia Murphy backed up her sister rather than her mother in this instance. "We have always held doubts about ZZR Industries, but we didn't voice them because you were in charge."

"If you acknowledge that I am in charge, then why are you working against me? You are showing disunity in front of outsiders!"

"We don't care about that right now, mother! As much as you think that Patriarch Larkinson has spoken out of order, everything he said was right." Karina said.

Melaia nodded. "Back when we were younger, Murphy & Sons wasn't like this. We had more freedom to experiment and develop new ship classes. We received more leeway to explore different designs and we didn't have to abide by so many restrictions."

Their mother remained unmoved. "We could afford to give you this leeway because our company was doing well at the time. Sales were high and we weren't subjected to onerous demands. Times are different now, and we need to adapt to our current situation. We need to ensure our survival first. We can talk about innovation another day when our crisis has passed and everything returns to stability."

"That talk will never happen, mother. We've been under your direction for our entire lives. You'll take the safe option over the better option."

"I'm thinking about your futures!"

"What if we don't want to embrace your vision?!" Karina Murphy pushed back. "Have you ever thought about that, hm?! I was always chafing under your strict rules, and it is only now that I have mustered the courage to speak out. ZZR Industries may be helpful, but if it is run by a woman who looks down on rimlanders such as ourselves, how can we trust this pit of snakes?"

"That is irrelevant." Gelly hissed. "We are different from the likes of the Larkinsons. We are shipbuilders!"

"You're not a shipbuilder." Melaia retorted. "My sister and I are the ones in charge of development and construction. I don't want to do this, but I think it is best that you reverse your earlier decision."

"Why? Why would I possibly do that?"

Karina Murphy glanced at Ves. "The Larkinsons have shown us a different way forward. We didn't go through all of the effort of entering the Red Ocean just to return to our old routines. We want to work in a different company. A greater company. A company where we can stand out and become famous in the shipbuilding sector. A company that is known for constructing the best and most interesting starships."

Neither side took a step back in this. The Murphy Family clearly couldn't come to a consensus at this time.

Gelly Murphy was beyond angry at this. It was already bad enough that one of the guests she invited had completely acted out of script. Having her own daughters talk back to her in front of others was even worse!

She glared towards Ves and the rest of the outsiders in the meeting chamber. "All of you, out. This has gone on long enough."

The old woman waved her hand, causing a powerful privacy screen to appear that completely isolated the Murphy Family's conversation.

Meanwhile, uniformed guards stepped forward and 'gently' urged the Redfields, the ZZRs and the Larkinsons to make their way out and leave via their shuttles as soon as possible.

Ves shrugged and did not resist. He and the rest of his delegation calmly left the compound and steadily boarded the shuttle. Once they were inside and secure, the vehicle smoothly lifted off and flew back towards the Larkinson Clan's temporary base.

He half-expected the local authorities to halt his journey, but nothing of the sort had happened.

"What's the update on Joshua and the Everchanger?" Ves asked as he reached out to Lucky and pulled him onto his lap.

"Meow." The cat grumpily responded as he looked towards Calabast.

Minister Shederin had been in constant contact with the clan. It took a moment for him to answer.

"The situation is... delicate at the moment. Right now, the authorities do not dare to make a heavy-handed response. Not only are they afraid of escalation, they do not want to ruin the safe and stable image of Davute either. Only a handful of law enforcement mechs have come out in the open to surround the Everchanger."

Ves slowly nodded. He had already figured out that the locals wouldn't want to make any hasty responses.

That said, it was never a good idea to mess with the local powers!

"How do you think this will end?"

"Seeing as we did not hurt anyone and do not pose an immediate threat, the authorities should seek to deescalate the situation and seek to create as little negative publicity as possible. They might even attempt to put a positive spin on this incident."

"All so they can convince everyone that no attack of any sort has occurred, right?" Ves smirked.

"Correct." Minister Shederin smiled back. "From what my people and I have gleaned from their response, the people in charge will not seek to exert too much pressure on us. That would break the narrative that the Everchanger did nothing wrong. I cannot say whether they will seek to punish us in other, less visible ways. We may encounter considerably more obstruction when applying for permits and such. Depending on the severity of these actions, our future business dealings in this star system might become impaired."

"That's the risk we took when we enacted plan B."

"You didn't have to make such a big show of it, sir. I may not know too much about mechs, but I can guess that the Everchanger didn't have to affect so many people in the Commercial District at once. You deliberately commanded Venerable Joshua to expand his expert mech's glow to encompass the greatest possible area."

"I did." Ves admitted.

Shederin looked upset. "Your decision has strained our relations with the authorities. You have jeopardized our plans to form a trade association and build a headquarters in

the Financial District. The benefits may very well outweigh our gains this time, especially if your attempt to divide the Murphy Family has failed. Was it worth it to take so many risks just to promote your 'Creation Association', patriarch?"

The old man was right to sound upset, but Ves did not regret his decision all that much.

"Gaining the support of Murphy & Sons has always been my main purpose. Promoting my Creation Association was a convenient side goal. There are so many people here that Vulcan's glow must have generated an enormous amount of publicity while also attracting the interest of at least a thousand accomplished professionals. I think I'll head back to my personal workshop to fabricate a batch of totems. We'll certainly need it to meet the demand of customers who want to relive that earlier moment."

As far as Ves was concerned, he had managed to hit two birds with a single stone today. Sparking another controversy was a small price to pay for progress!

Chapter 3642 Ruffled Feathers

The subsequent day turned into a tense period of time for the Larkinson Clan.

While the authorities allowed the Everchanger to be shipped back to orbit so that it could safely return to the expeditionary fleet, they were not particularly amused with the Larkinsons.

A lot of uncomfortable discussions took place. Minister Shederin had to exert the limits of his diplomatic skills in order to soothe the ruffled feathers of the officials who were responsible for keeping Kotor City and Davute VII free from violence.

At the same time, the foreign minister and his staff also had to minimize the impact towards the clan.

Neither side wanted trouble. While there were elements that advocated for a bigger response, most wanted to avoid escalating the matter at all cost.

The fact that the Larkinson Clan was accompanied by the Simile Halifax served as an excellent deterrent against any greater punishment.

Even though the MTA had told Ves that it would not shield him from anything he and his clansmen started on their own, other people didn't necessarily know about this particular nuance.

As far as outsiders were concerned, any organization that was escorted by an actual MTA vessel should never be trifled with! At the very least, it should be the mechers dishing out the punishment, not locals like themselves.

It was all one big bluff that fortunately worked out. The downside was that while the Larkinson Clan largely escaped official retaliation, the subjective attitudes of certain officials towards the troublemakers had certainly dipped!

"The results are better than we expected." Minister Shederin reported to Ves via projection.

As the leader of the Larkinson Clan and one of the chief people responsible for disrupting the Commercial District, Ves had little choice but to hurry back to the expeditionary fleet along with Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger.

"So how have the local authorities decided to handle this matter?" Ves asked as he leaned back on his chair.

"They have largely acted according to my expectations. They sought to pursue the course of action that minimizes as much damage as possible while trying to salvage as much good out of the incident. The official narrative that they have publicized is that the Everchanger 'accidentally' activated a benign feature that only exerts a positive effect. They have referenced our mech company's established products as examples to reinforce this message."

Ves chuckled. "So these fellows are actually promoting my products on my behalf."

"Essentially." Shederin sardonically answered. He was growing quite tired of his patriarch's antics. "That matters little as our products are currently impossible to obtain in the local market. The only manufacturer that is producing our mechs so far is the Pellysa branch of Zachren Bilitsa, which is located in a different zone. The cost and effort required to export mechs from Magair to Krakatoa is not viable at the moment. The risks of shipping products over longer distances are too high."

"That will hopefully change in a year. In any case, I've looked at the public reaction to the glow. Do you know how many mech designers, artists and other creators have contacted our clan?"

The projection nodded. "We had to activate waitlines to deal with the number of inquiries. Hopefully the rush will subside after a week. That goes for the negative impact as well. Those who reacted negatively to this incident will likely forget about it and move on once their memories have begun to fade. The long-term impact of our actions should not be too severe."

That was good to hear.

The two talked a bit further about the aftermath. Overall, the Larkinson Clan had managed to get away with a stunt that could have led to much more severe consequences.

"Right now, I am urging calm, sir. We should not antagonize the governing entities any further. If we continue to disturb the peace, we may lose possession of the plot of land that we have bought in the Financial District at a high price."

"Relax. I'm not in the habit of throwing away more than 4000 MTA credits. I still intend to base ourselves in Krakatoa for the next few years, so retaining access to Davute is still a vital priority. Do your best to ease people's concerns and repair any relationships with important officials."

"I will do my best. That is all I can promise at this time. My... attempts will likely deliver considerably better results if you can raise our department's discretionary spending."

"...You're asking for money so you can bribe people?"

Minister Shederin did not deign to form a proper reply. His projection merely smiled at Ves.

"Of course. Why do I even need to ask? How much?"

"1000 MTA credits."

"What?! That's as much as 8 Hoenbach hand-stitched two-toned lavender-and-white puelmer leather Giarna handbags!"

The old man wisely stepped aside the topic of handbags and focused on the money.

"It's better to solve all of the hard feelings right away rather than wait for them to dissipate over a longer period of time. I am aware that you take a dim view of bribery, but it is a fact of life as well as the cost of doing business. The particular venture that you engaged in was particularly costly, so you must pay the appropriate price to handle the aftermath properly."

Ves still winced. "Can't you do with a little less money? Not everyone has expensive tastes like my wife. Shouldn't it be enough to spend half of what you asked to get all of those officials off our back?"

"It's possible, but there is a chance that it isn't enough. Rather than take any risks, we should maximize our certainty and pay above what is expected to make these sorts of problems go away."

"Geez. You sound like Gelly Murphy."

"I am merely of the opinion that we have taken enough gambles for this visit."

Though Ves didn't like it, he approved of Shederin's proposal. The clan had to draw out another 1000 MTA merits from its cash reserves to allow the Foreign Ministry to act with speed, much to the chagrin of other parts of the clan.

With that issue taken care of, Ves busied himself by returning to his previous priorities.

"Has Murphy & Sons gotten back to us yet, Benny?"

"We haven't received a word so far." His assistant replied. "We don't know what's going on with the shipbuilding company. We've tried to contact them in order to obtain clarification, but their secretaries have hung up on us. They're not talking to others either."

Since Gavin Neumann didn't know anything else, Ves hung up and called Calabast instead.

"What is the current internal state of Murphy & Sons?"

Calabast's projection smirked. "You're certainly in a hurry."

"Just answer my question."

"Let me begin by telling you that we have not been able to penetrate the Murphy compound. Given your earlier... actions, I thought it was best not to cross any lines. Our means of deciphering what is taking place inside is therefore limited. We can only make spurious guesses by tracking the movement patterns of notable members of the Murphy Family."

"How have you managed to do that?"

"By looking at their movements through the windows. I am currently located in a floating hotel that possesses a decent view of the compound."

"I see. So what is your guess?"

"Gelly Murphy has always been in charge of the shipbuilding company and the family that is running it. Her status is roughly similar to yours in the Larkinson Clan. I think you can imagine how difficult it is for the Murphies to go against the leader that they had unquestionably obeyed all of these decades. It doesn't help that the culture among the Murphies is hierarchical and conservative. Rebelling against authority is usually not done."

"Usually?"

Calabast nodded. "You managed to break open a fault line in the Murphy Family. Just because Gelly Murphy has managed to suppress dissent for so long doesn't mean that

all of the accumulated grievances have disappeared. They had always been simmering in the background. Now that you have shocked the chief ship designer and chief shipbuilder into exposing their true feelings and desires, they have managed to amass a small but growing following within the family."

"They're winning the argument?" Ves looked hopeful.

"Let's not make any premature conclusions. The situation can still swing back into Gelly Murphy's favor. She is the unquestionably head of the family and the company, after all. Her authority and prestige are much greater."

The more Calabast provided her thoughts, the more Ves grew uncertain.

If his extraordinary plea failed to make the Murphies change their course, then much of what he had done was ultimately in vain.

Though he was still able to harvest other benefits, they simply weren't as critical as gaining the friendship and cooperation of the shipbuilding company.

"Please continue to keep an eye on the Murphies. If you think that there is any sign that they will reject us once again, please let me know."

"Will do. For what it's worth, ZZR Industries hasn't made any moves either. The Murphy Family has become so paralyzed that it is currently unable to go forward with its earlier agreement with Tyana Delcrost's company."

That was good news. Ves felt a lot better after hearing that. Achieving this outcome was another smack on Tyana's arrogant face!

"By the way, that Delcrost woman truly went too far during the meeting. I'm curious why she thinks it is okay for her to act in this fashion. Have you looked into her history?"

"You don't have to worry too much about her." Calabast replied. "Tyana Delcrost is an heir who took up the position of CEO far too soon. She will learn how to behave in time, but that is years away."

"So there's nothing more behind her or anything?"

"Our research into her background has revealed nothing of the sort."

"Okay."

They discussed a few other topics before they ended the call.

Ves furrowed his brows. The Murphies were deliberating, which meant that he had definitely won over at least some of them. Yet Gelly Murphy was still putting up a fight,

which meant that changing the direction of Murphy & Sons would likely be an uphill struggle!

"It would be great if Gelly Murphy slips on a staircase and falls head-first onto the floor." He idly said.

"Meow." Lucky rolled his eyes as he rested on a pillow.

"Yeah yeah, I know. Important people like her wear antigrav clothing that automatically prevents that from happening. Even if she didn't, her shield generator would go in effect. Still... there are other ways for people to meet with an accident."

"Meow..." His cat responded in a suspicious manner.

"You know, eating the wrong food or getting scratched by a four-legged creature."

"Meow meow meow!"

"Okay, okay! It's a bad idea!"

He was just dreaming. Assassinating Gelly Murphy would never work. Not only would it be more than obvious that Ves and his clan were behind it, the Larkinsons would also run afoul of the MTA! There was no way the mechers could miss something so obvious when they were already keeping the Larkinson Clan under observation!

Ves felt he needed a bit more certainty.

Just like how Shederin asked for higher-than-usual funding, perhaps Ves needed to make another move in order to drag the Murphies into a more favorable direction.

"What can I do that doesn't piss people off?"

Not much. Ves had exhausted the patience of many people. The last thing he should do was ruffle their feathers again!

"Maybe... instead of making another risky move on Davute, I should try and host an event in my fleet. I can get away with a lot more in my own territory!"

This was a great idea! Davute may be under the jurisdiction of others, but his own starships pretty much belonged to him. He could do whatever he wanted without needing to answer to a higher authority!

Chapter 3643 A New Event

After causing a commotion on the surface of Davute VII, there was no way that Ves dared to overstep his boundaries again. Just because his clan managed to avoid the

most severe repercussions through a combination of bluffing and bribery didn't mean that he could treat other people's territory as his playground.

This was why holding an event in his own fleet was such a great idea.

"I can do anything I want in my own sovereign territory!"

That wasn't quite true. Spacefaring laws were complex at best, but there were a few general rules that everyone understood.

The Larkinson fleet wasn't actually allowed to act unscrupulously while it was parked in space claimed by other powers.

After all, if the Larkinson Clan tried to conduct a live practice session where mechs employed true ranged weapons, their shots might actually hit a nearby trade ship or actually penetrate all the way through the atmosphere of Davute VII and strike a populated structure!

Nonetheless, it was no problem at all for the Larkinsons to hold a public event in one of its own starships.

Was it illegal to throw a party on one's own ship?

No! In fact, party boats were incredibly popular in every star system. Dozens of them attracted lots of visitors every day. Though they were mostly frequented by passersby who couldn't be bothered to make landfall, locals from the surface occasionally ventured upwards as well.

Given that hosting visitors on starships was not only legal, but also common, Ves immediately developed a brilliant new scheme.

He called his personal assistant to his office right away.

"What do you require, boss?" Gavin asked as he adopted a guarded look.

Having worked for Ves for numerous years, he could tell when his superior was up to something crazy or radical again.

This was not what he wanted to deal with. The Larkinson Clan had only recently dealt with the aftermath of the patriarch's latest stunt, and now this madman wanted to pull off another scheme!

At least Ves should have given his clan the courtesy of waiting a few weeks before he got up to mischief again.

"I know what you're thinking, Benny boy." Ves calmly said as he steepled his fingers like a stereotypical evil mastermind. "We've landed ourselves in hot water so you think we should lay low."

"That is... correct, boss. It would reflect poorly on us if we engage in another controversy so soon. We not only risk expulsion from the Davute System, but also make it seem as if we are too unstable to serve as good business partners. That will not only ruin our chances of attracting Murphy & Sons, but also scare away other potential parties that have already expressed an interest in joining our trade consortium!"

Gavin made an excellent point. Though the Larkinson Clan already developed an abnormal image, every organization exhibited a degree of weirdness. People in the Red Ocean were accustomed to encountering people who grew up in vastly different parts of the galaxy with their own unique cultures and subcultures.

However, while a bit of eccentricity was harmless, reckless and stupid behavior was not! No one wanted to be friends with someone who exhibited poor judgment.

This was especially the case in the Red Ocean where mistakes could not only lead to bankruptcy, but also death and annihilation!

Ves casually waved his hand. "Relax. I haven't lost my mind. I know what is at stake. While I can understand the desire to lay low, we can't afford to do nothing at this stage. Calabast has informed me that the Murphy Family is currently split on the issue of whether their shipbuilding company should become a part of our trade consortium. I'm afraid that Gelly Murphy and her collection of hardliners are too entrenched in their hierarchy to let the dissidents have their way. We need to give the faction led by Karina Murphy and Melaia Murphy a helping hand."

"And how do you plan to do that, boss?" Gavin skeptically asked. "Our clan's freedom of movement on Davute VII has drastically shrunk. We can't do anything over there anymore!"

Ves grinned and leaned back against his chair. "Ah, but that's the thing, Benny. We're not doing something on the surface this time. Instead, I plan to hold a public event aboard one of our ships! We'll open our doors and invite outsiders to attend a special occasion!"

His assistant looked shocked. He never expected that Ves would push for such a move!

However, the more Gavin thought about it, the more it made sense in his mind. It was indeed a good method to be proactive without testing the tolerance of the Davute authorities any further.

As long as the Larkinsons did not do anything outrageous such as hosting death matches or performing lethal experiments on test subjects, the controversy shouldn't be significant!

The question now was what the patriarch actually wanted to do. This was where Gavin began to feel dread again.

"Uhm, what sort of event do you have in mind?"

"It's nothing too fancy. The key is to organize this on short notice. While I have multiple goals in mind, the key purpose that we're trying to achieve is to give the dissidents in the Murphy Family a good push so that they can finally achieve a breakthrough. We need to make this happen before it is too late. At most, we have two days to start this entire event. Any longer and the Murphies may have settled their internal turmoil."

"Two days?! That's too short! Depending on the scale of this public event, we may need weeks to market the occasion. We also need to handle the logistics of transporting visitors to and from our fleet. Then we need to prepare for the event itself. Since we are inviting outsiders to our fleet for the first time, we have to make sure we present ourselves in the best possible light."

Ves sighed. "I know that, but we don't have another choice. Ideally, we should be able to start today or tomorrow, but that gives the public too little time to book their tickets and shuttle over to our fleet. Two days is just enough for the most interested people to arrange passage. Besides, you don't have to worry too much about the marketing aspect. The people from the Commercial District of Kotor City are all abuzz about what they just experienced. The local news portals are still talking about the Everchanger's glow, so interest in our clan has reached a peak! As long as we publish a statement where our guests can receive the opportunity to experience it again, I'm sure we'll be able to attract enough visitors!"

This scheme might actually work. The foundation was there. The Larkinson Clan just needed to work overtime to set the stage!

Gavin grew serious. He pulled out a data pad and made a short list.

"I can get our people to organize one right away, but before they can do so, they need to have a better idea of what sort of an event you intend to hold."

"It should be an event that centers around craftsmanship in some way." Ves said. "After all, that is what I am relying on to win over the more proactive elements within the Murphy Family. I need to give them more ammunition, and the best way to do that is to teach or demonstrate the value of good craftsmanship. I'll probably need to hold a speech in order to get this across."

"So you want to hold a trade fair?"

"No." Ves shook his head. "Trade fair is the wrong descriptor. We'll have to invite a lot of other companies and craftsmen to exhibit their works, and that is impossible to accomplish on short notice. It will just be about our work and my creative approach."

"Then... an exhibition?"

"That's close, but not enough. I don't intend to sell a new product at this time. Even if we can show off our upcoming Monster Slayer or our newly-released Ferocious Piranha Mark I Version B Mod I, we don't have any copies on hand to sell them in Davute. I suppose we can show them off regardless in order to generate market interest in them, but they will not be the main focus. What is truly important is the message that I will be attempting to convey."

"A press conference?"

"No. I'll be holding a lecture of sorts. I want the people who visit our fleet in person and those who tune in to the remote broadcast to know that they will be receiving a profound philosophical discussion on craftsmanship."

"A symposium, then."

"Close enough." Ves said. "Let's go with that, then."

"We need to offer more to the public if we want to make it worthwhile for them to pay a visit to our fleet." Gavin warned. "I'm sure that there are a lot of people who want to come here just to experience the Everchanger's glow, but there will be many more who don't think it is worth the effort."

Ves paused and thought for a moment.

"That's a simple enough problem to solve. We'll just have to present more attractions. How about... exhibiting our masterwork expert mechs? The Quint, the Amaranto, the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger are all impressive machines. I seriously doubt there are more than a couple of other expert mechs that are also masterworks in Davute! Even then, none of them were made by Journeymen!"

Ves may have gotten accustomed to their presence, but he did not forget the enormous attraction they held towards other mech insiders!

A large number of mech pilots and mech designers would definitely want to book a ticket to the Larkinson fleet once they learned they could study the masterwork expert mechs up close!

"Is that wise, boss? We will be exposing our greatest assets to potential rivals and enemies."

"They're already exposed for the most part." Ves dismissively waved his hand. "They've already appeared in public numerous times for mech designers to figure out their general properties. Turning them into live exhibits is not a big deal. We just have to make sure to erect interference fields around them. Naturally, we also have to prohibit people from bringing in high-powered scanners or engage in any obvious spying behavior."

"That... can work, I guess. Interest in attending this event will be high once we publicize this matter. Perhaps we'll generate too much interest."

"We'll just charge money if that's the case." Ves smirked.

He briefly thought about how much money he paid to enter Chancy Bay's Masterwork Gallery. People were absolutely willing to pay a pretty price to view masterwork mechs!

"That's not all. We need to hold this event in a large enough venue. Might I suggest the Vivacious Wal? There are enough open spaces and exhibition halls in Dawn City."

Ves nodded. "That is what I have in mind as well. The Vivacious Wal was always designed to attract tourists. That will make our lives much easier as we don't need to make as many preparations."

They settled the basic details of the upcoming symposium. Ves didn't need to specify anything further. There were other people in the clan that could fill in the rest. There were plenty of clansmen who once attended these kinds of occasions themselves, so they should have a good idea of what needed to be done.

Of course, the event that Ves wanted to organize on short notice wasn't a traditional symposium. Only Larkinsons would be speaking this time.

Ves understood that he couldn't be the only speaker at this event. If he truly wanted to enlighten his audience about the marvels of craftsmanship, he should pull in a couple of other speakers.

Should he... ask his wife to hold a lecture?

His body shuddered. He dreaded the idea, but given the importance of this event, she had to take the stage as well. After all, she possessed just as many masterwork certificates as him! It would be unreasonable to keep her away!

"By the way, have you come up with a name for your new initiative?" Gavin asked.

"Hm." Ves rubbed his smooth-shaven chin as he fell into thought.

Calling it the 'Craftsmanship Symposium' was too simple. He thought about his other goals. Part of the reason why he wanted to organize it was because he wanted to generate interest in the Creation Association.

"Let's call it the Vulcan Symposium."

Chapter 3644 The Vulcan Symposium

The clan moved extremely quickly once Ves unveiled his new plan. Although most Larkinsons were floored by his requests, they had no choice but to play along and prepare the Vivacious Wal to receive a lot of visitors.

Fortunately, preparing the ship for a symposium was well within their means. There were plenty of clansmen who possessed plenty of experience in attending and organizing such events.

These people quickly gathered together and hammered out a more complete outline for the symposium.

Many other clansmen contributed to the event as well. They performed vital actions such as shipping necessary goods, setting up the exhibition areas and heightening the security measures aboard the ship.

Thousands of Larkinsons moved back and forth. Everyone who could help with the symposium had to drop their leave or regular duties in order to ensure that the Larkinson Clan's first public event on its starship concluded in a successful manner.

The prestige and reputation of the Larkinsons was at stake this time! If they somehow botched this up, then not only would Ves fail to reach his primary goals, his clan would also receive a lot of ridicule!

That was not conducive to forming a trade consortium!

Two days came and went in a blur. The Larkinsons truly went all-out in order to clean up a portion of the Vivacious Wal and make it ready to receive visitors of all kinds.

The lack of time severely hampered their ability to hold a grand event. Dawn City remained much the same. If not for the fact that the Larkinson Clan could utilize the Spirit of Bentheim to produce a lot of props and structural components, the symposium site wouldn't have looked remarkable enough!

As it was, the architects and planners of the Larkinson Clan did a decent job in transforming the public parts of Dawn City into a themed event site.

Since the symposium was named after Vulcan, Ves ordered his subordinates to apply a unified bronze-and-red theme on all of the props.

As the first batch of guests stepped aboard the Vivacious Wal, they underwent a different experience from usual as they were led into spaces where the Larkinson Clan had put its best side forward.

Banners displaying both the Golden Cat and a stylized blacksmith hammer hung from structures or floating poles.

Since the Larkinson Clan went through so much trouble to organize this event, it had to take advantage of this situation by impressing the public with its capabilities.

"Wow! Is this what the glows of the Larkinson Clan are like?"

"These mechs are truly more than what they appear!"

"It's not just their glows that are impressive. The quality of their construction is also remarkably high. Even their mass-produced mechs are consistently good!"

A lot of mech designers couldn't hold back their curiosity and paid a visit to the Vivacious Wal. They consisted of both independent and working for different influences, and mostly consisted of low-ranking mech designers.

While a number of Journeymen and Seniors had decided to attend the Vulcan Symposium as well, their numbers were much lower.

Mech designers at this stage were a lot prouder of their own work. The only reasons why they bothered to attend at all was to get a good look at the unique masterwork mechs of the Larkinson Clan and see if they could gain inspiration from what they observed.

Still, the Larkinsons were quite happy to attract these mech designers. The more mech designers acclaimed the mechs developed for the clan, the greater LMC's future sales potential!

As time went by, the amount of traffic continued to increase. Hundreds of shuttles and passenger transports steadily approached the expeditionary fleet.

Before any vehicle was allowed to approach, they first had to stop outside of the security perimeter and await their turn to be transferred aboard a passenger vessel operated by the Larkinsons themselves.

There was no way that the clan would allow any foreign vessel to land directly in the Vivacious Wal's hangar bay!

The security checks were quite stringent, much to people's surprise. The Larkinson guards were stern in their duties and preemptively filtered out any potential troublemakers before they were allowed to go any further.

The Larkinsons were especially afraid of bringing sleeper agents and Crown terrorists.

The Crown Uprising was still ongoing even though it wasn't a major concern in the Red Ocean.

It was hard for Crown terrorists to pass through the beyonder gate.

Even then, people and organizations were much more on guard in the new frontier. Few people who managed to enter the dwarf galaxy were incompetent. Pioneers and their followers were generally of a higher caliber than usual.

This was why the Larkinson Clan were more on guard against saboteurs and sleepers from other rivals. Organizations like ZZR Industries might try to disrupt the symposium.

For these reasons and more, the Black Cats undertook a lot of responsibilities. They not only vetted every single visitor beforehand, but also assisted with the security checks.

One of the more unusual methods they employed was using small totems of the Golden Cat to assess the intentions of the visitors.

A black-uniformed inspector approached an ordinary-looking mech designer and held out a small statuette of the Golden Cat.

"Please stand still while I press this object to your forehead."

The mech designer threw a dubious look at the statuette. "What is this?"

"You can think of it as a special scanner."

"A scanner? Are you kidding? I know how scanners work. This little toy is anything but!"

"Be that as it may, you may only pass through if you cooperate. If you object to our methods, then you are free to turn back where you came from. You'll receive a full refund of your ticket, minus an administrative charge." The Black Cat inspector explained in a bored tone. "Once I place this on your forehead, you might sense an unusual feeling in your brain. Don't be concerned. It will only last an instant."

"This.... You're not irradiating my head, are you?"

"Our procedure is completely safe. It is based on the same glows that are used by tens of millions of mechs that have been in use for years by our customers. Now will you consent to our inspection?"

"...Very well."

The actual inspection lasted a lot shorter than the questioning. The Black Cat officer lifted his arm, pressed the statuette on the visitor's forehead and quickly drew it back again.

The clansman frowned for a moment. "My apologies, sir. You have failed to pass our special inspection. While this is not conclusive proof that there is something amiss, we will not take any chances. According to the terms of your ticket, we have the right to cancel your ticket and refuse your entry onto our ship for any reason. There is no recourse for you to reverse this decision."

"What..? You're kicking me out?"

"We will not allow you to proceed any further."

"You can't do this! I paid substantial money for this ticket! I'm an amateur reviewer with 54,000 followers! You better let me go in or else I'll write a one-star review!"

The man's tirade did not change anything. As long as the Golden Cat didn't like someone, then it was better not to invite them onto the Vivacious Wal.

Fortunately, the majority of visitors did not harbor any ill will towards the Larkinson Clan. They were genuinely interested in what the symposium had to offer.

As the guests were being received, Ves looked down on Dawn City from above. He was in the process of preparing for the main event where he would hold an important lecture.

"How many tickets did we manage to sell?"

"Roughly 34,252 tickets." Gavin answered. "It's less than ideal. We could have easily attracted over 100,000 visitors if we delayed the start of this symposium by a week and held this event over multiple days. Our pricing has also scared away a lot of potential customers. It's too high. Why would you charge 0.1 MTA credits for an attendance ticket when we are only charging a fraction of that price for a virtual ticket?"

"We still managed to collect a handsome profit without overly compromising the security of our fleet, Benny. We are not ready to receive so many visitors. The current numbers are within a range that we can control. Besides, this price is incredibly cheap considering that people will be able to get close to our masterwork mechs. You can't experience them properly by remote!"

Even though the Larkinsons had to refund a lot of tickets over the course of the day, this was actually an incredibly lucrative event. Together with the sale of millions of virtual tickets, the clan already covered the cost to buy land in the Financial District of Kotor City!

Ves became so pleased by this initial success that he even thought about holding exhibitions and symposia again. If he could turn this into a regular tour, then his clan could easily rake thousands of MTA credits per month! This was more money than selling millions of cheap third-class mechs in the old galaxy!

He shook his head. This was a stupid idea. The novelty of his symposia would quickly fade after a few times. It was also dangerous to exhibit the Larkinson Clan's most powerful expert mechs to so many people.

Even if the clan's additional security measures kept potential hostiles away, there were still plenty of other people who might one day act against the Larkinson Clan.

One time was enough.

"Has any member of the Murphy family decided to attend?" Ves asked.

"Let me check the database." Gavin quickly accessed his comm. "No Murphy has decided to attend in person, but we did sell dozens of virtual tickets to the Murphies."

"I expected as much."

Due to the Murphy family's internal turmoil, none of them were allowed to go out. Even if the chief ship designer and chief shipbuilder wanted to visit the Vivacious Wal in person, they could not afford to leave Gelly Murphy's side too long.

"Have we managed to attract any other notable guests? Master Mech Designers, perhaps?"

"I'm afraid I will have to disappoint you again. While we have managed to lure over mech designers who are known to work under different Masters, none of their superiors have deigned to attend your symposium."

Ves actually felt a bit of relief when he heard that. His symposium would gain a lot of legitimacy if it managed to draw in Master Mech Designers. On the other hand, these powerful mech designers were much sharper and more observant than usual. He was afraid they might figure out details that he preferred to keep hidden.

"It doesn't matter. These Masters need to keep up their reputation, I guess. It is beneath them to attend a symposium held by a Journeyman."

"I'm sure you will do the same if you become a Master yourself."

"Damn right."

The two talked a bit more. So far, everything was going well enough. Down below, the guests were introduced to various mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

All of these strangers who never came in touch with glows or living mechs in their lives began to learn about the wonders of Ves' distinctive products.

Numerous guests who initially weren't that impressed with the works of a Journeyman steadily revised their opinions after they experienced more.

Mech models such as the Bright Warrior, the Transcendent Punisher, the Ferocious Piranha and also the newly-developed Rigid Spine each possessed their own points of brilliance.

Of course, the Larkinson Clan didn't exhibit everything. The Stingripper light harasser mech of the Flagrant Vandals was nowhere to be seen. The mechs weren't even a part of the security patrols.

This was not just because the Larkinson Clan lacked the raw materials to mass produce the new light mech, but also because it was a new asset that worked best when no one learned about its properties!

Chapter 3645 Mechs on Exhibition

As the hours went by, the symposium started to get into full swing. Dawn city became more populated as more and more outsiders arrived to attend this curious event.

While a lot of people came to experience Vulcan's glow or hear what the Larkinson Patriarch had to say about craftsmanship, most of them became seduced by the many interesting mechs utilized by the Larkinsons.

Projections of sweeping battles played overhead. Identical mechs stood in perfect rows. Larkinson mech pilots and mech designers all stood close to the exhibits in order to explain their mechs and answer simple questions.

Almost any mech in use by the Larkinson Clan generated a lot of interest.

"This is the Bright Warrior in all of its four configurations." Rina Orion explained. "This exclusive mech design may not have been designed for the Red Ocean, but it is still a capable mech in our hands. Through the use of special methods, this mech is able to perform better when it is piloted by our clansmen."

"What makes this mech stronger than others?" A guest asked.

"Good question. I cannot reveal all of its secrets to you as the Bright Warrior model still plays a vital role in the defense of our fleet. However, I can tell you that it is a highly versatile mech that steadily adapts to its mech pilots and grows stronger over time. These are features that are highly common to all of our living mechs. You may be able to own them or pilot them yourselves one day. While our Living Mech Corporation

currently isn't ready to release any of its products to the Davute market, this will change in the future."

The group that had come to study the Bright Warrior mechs weren't particularly impressed by what they saw. Since they weren't capable of observing the invisible and out-of-sight properties of these living mechs, they couldn't distinguish how these years-old machines were better than freshly made ones.

On the surface, the design of the Bright Warrior model was rather basic by the standards of the Red Ocean. The materials that made up the machines were fairly weak while the tech level of the components were not that great either.

The only exception was the luminar crystal rifle wielded by the rifleman mech configuration of the Bright Warrior. The weapon not only looked splendid, but also exuded a greater sense of lethality than other armaments.

Even so, the more knowledgeable guests quickly figured out that the Bright Warrior was just an ordinary rim-level mech model that the Larkinsons had brought over from their previous hometown.

Rina Orion didn't have to rely on her heavy augmentations to figure out that the visitors looked down on the Bright Warrior. The technical design indeed fell behind, but that didn't mean the mech line was hopeless!

She smiled. "Our Bright Warrior mechs are still relatively young and have a lot of growth ahead of them before they become formidable. We do have a number of examples that have experienced much greater growth than other Bright Warriors. Many of them aren't on display here, but our clan patriarch has graciously allowed you to witness the greatest offshoot of this mech model. Please come this way."

The group followed the young assistant mech designer and entered another hall where there was a lot more traffic.

Before they even entered the specially-built hall, they all felt it. The glow of the mech inside was similar to that of the Bright Warrior, but it was much stronger and different than what they experienced before.

"This sensation... it's deeper."

"It's more powerful as well."

"There's more complexity and depth."

Many people used different descriptions. All of them failed to describe the wealth of sensations in their mind.

As they slowly strode forward, they entered a dark, shine-like interior where a single highly-modified Bright Warrior mech stood in place.

The mech, which was currently in its space knight configuration in order to look more imposing, was a golden marvel of metal and life.

If the visitors were previously skeptical that living mechs were even a thing, they held much less doubts this time.

"This mech is a masterwork!"

"Indeed." Rina Orion said as she respectfully bowed before one of the living relics of the Larkinson Clan. "Meet the Quint. It not only started off as a masterwork mech, but also received numerous special upgrades over the course of its usage. Two of our expert pilots managed to break through while piloting this mech. This has made it even stronger and more alive."

The mech designers among the group were incredibly impressed by the Quint. It was not only stronger and more exquisite than the ordinary Bright Warriors, but also possessed a presence that made it seem as if they were in the presence of a living legend rather than a lifeless machine!

While many different visitors gawked at the Quint, others were discovering unexpected facets about the other mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

The Chiron training mech was one of them. The Larkinsons had decided to exhibit the mech model to the public for the first time since its existence.

The mech didn't look that impressive at first. It was clearly a third-class mech that didn't perform nearly as well as an ordinary modern third-class combat mech.

However, these faults were much less severe once people realized that the Chiron was a training mech.

A young uniformed mech cadet proudly stood in front of the Sagittarius, the first production copy of the Chiron and also her personally-assigned machine. She enthusiastically sang the praises of the mech model that had accelerated her growth so much.

Even though she had outgrown the Chiron at this stage in her training, she still piloted her machine as frequently as possible.

"The Chiron here has many advantages compared to other training mechs." She claimed. "I am only allowed to tell you about two of them. First, it can change its physical form to adapt to its mech pilots. The changes it can make include changing the length of its limbs and altering the shape of its torso. By trying to match the physique of

its pilots as closely as possible, more junior cadets can more easily learn the ins and outs of basic mech piloting."

This was a useful feature that was not uncommon to see in training mechs.

Not all training mechs were designed to be adjustable. There were certain instructors and academies that believed that mech pilots needed to learn how to adapt to their mechs instead of the other way around.

Those who adhered to this doctrine looked down on mechs like the Chiron that bent over backwards in order to make the piloting experience as easy as possible!

If Lanie Larkinson noticed these glances, she did not acknowledge them. The Chiron was best mech model in the Larkinson Clan and no one could change her opinion!

"Another way the Chiron can do what other training mechs cannot match is its ability to accelerate the learning of its pilots."

"That is a vague statement, miss. How exactly does the Chiron accomplish this feat?"

"It's a living mech. I'm sure you've heard other Larkinsons throw this phrase around, but it truly matters, more so for a training mech. From the moment a cadet like myself begins to pilot the Chiron, the living machine becomes a part of the training journey. The mech cadet gains a personal companion and tutor who not only grows stronger and smarter the more you use it, but is also able to provide the best and most appropriate tips that are always relevant to your current progress. Not even the best instructors can do better since they don't exactly know how their pupils are doing inside the cockpit."

Although there were plenty of skeptics among the crowd, others already developed a desire to obtain these mechs for themselves!

"Can we try it out?" A mech pilot asked.

Lanie laughed. "I'm sorry, sir, but these mechs are only here for sight-seeing. I would love to show you in person how they are by far the best training mechs in this galaxy, but that is not what this symposium thing is about. I'm allowed to show you bits and pieces of my training footage, though. You can judge the effectiveness of the Chiron by yourselves."

She waved her hand, causing a large overhead projection to display edited clips of her best training performances.

The footage showed Lanie piloting mechs in reality and in simulation. The former were more tame, but the Sagittarius piloted by Lanie fought with surprising skill and aggression.

Lanie understood the limits of the Chiron model so well that she was able to pilot the third-class training mech close to its full potential.

Even when she sparred against a Bright Warrior piloted by an instructor, she did not allow herself to get crushed. She managed to stave off the Bright Warrior through a combination of great familiarity, polished skills and excellent combat judgment.

The mech pilots among the crowd became increasingly more impressed at Lanie.

Sure, as second-class pilots, they looked down on mech cadets that started their training with third-class mechs.

Yet there are elements about mech piloting that were universal among the different classes.

Focused aggression. Smart decision-making. Good intuition. The ability to exploit openings.

Lanie scored high on all of these aspects, so much so that she actually outperformed many second-class mech cadets!

The differences became more obvious when the footage also showed her piloting different mechs.

These sessions mostly took place in a virtual environment. Mech cadets were only allowed to pilot real combat mechs in their last academy years, so they mostly had to rely on simulation battles to pilot different machines than their training mechs.

In the instances where Lanie was no longer constrained by the weak performance parameters of her Sagittarius, she turned into a beast of a mech pilot.

She happened to perform extremely well when piloting swordsman mechs such as the Bright Warrior in the appropriate configuration.

When she piloted these mechs, she was able to fight her way out through many different scenarios, some of which would have even given seasoned second-class mech pilots a good challenge!

There was nothing about her performance that suggested that she was an immature pilot-in-the-making. Even if she was fairly close to graduation, she showed none the roughness and mistakes that other mech cadets of her age would make!

"If this is what a Chiron can do, then it is truly a revolutionary pedagogic tool." A mech pilot who also happened to be a mech instructor commented. "I can't see whether this kid gained all of her skills from her training mech, but there should definitely be truth to

this matter. I've tried my best to pass on the same qualities in my own classes, but few if any of my cadets came close to her level."

His words and the words of other mech pilots added a lot of credibility to the Chiron model. They had fallen in love with the training mech. If they had the opportunity to pilot it during their academy days, then they might have made a lot of achievements at this stage!

"Where can we buy a Chiron?"

"It's not for sale, haha." Lanie chuckled. "Before you ask, it's not because we're selfish. The truth is that the Chiron is specifically developed for our clansmen. It's not as nearly as effective when outsiders pilot it. Believe me, we've tried."

"How?" Someone frowned.

"Because we're special." Lanie straightforwardly answered.

"Seriously?"

"What do you expect me to say? I didn't design this mech. All I know is that the Chiron is able to work this way because of special technologies. You'd have to ask a mech designer if you want to find out what that means, but I'm pretty sure they are under orders not to clarify anything. If you truly want to get to the bottom of our exclusive mechs, then you are welcome to join our clan. That is the only way you get to pilot these babies."

The young woman smirked as she attempted to do her part in strengthening the clan.

Chapter 3646 'Special Technologies'

So far, the Vulcan Symposium did not match anyone's expectations.

The guests who attended the hastily-organized event were surprised by what they saw.

Fortunately for the Larkinsons, the visitors generally responded with delight rather than disappointment.

For an organization which originally came from the galactic rim, the clan exhibited plenty of curiosities that could interest people from every part of human space.

While it was hard for the clansmen to explain the greater benefits of living mechs, it was incredibly easy for anyone to experience their characteristic glows.

A lot of professionals saw great uses in the properties of certain mechs. The duty-oriented glow of the Solemn Guardian, the disorientation-oriented glow of the Ferocious

Piranha IB1 and the death-oriented glow of the Valkyrie Redeemer were especially intriguing to third parties.

"Is this marauder mech for sale?" A female mech commander asked.

"I'm afraid not." Juliet Stameross shook her head. "The Valkyrie Redeemer and its numerous variants are exclusively designed for certain elements of the Larkinson Clan and an old galaxy state called the Hexadric Hegemony. Since it was originally designed to fight in wars, the Valkyrie line is protected by special... technologies that hinders anyone else from piloting it. This prevents our enemies and the enemies of the Hegemony from using the Valkyrie mechs against its own forces."

Most of the guests were already familiar with the phrase 'special technologies'. The clansmen assigned to explain the exhibits had all been instructed to say these words whenever they needed to address the many mysterious methods of the Larkinson Clan.

Clearly, the Larkinsons weren't willing to elaborate. Even if they wanted to, their understanding of glows and living mechs were woefully shallow. Only Ves was able to provide the curious guests with a proper explanation, and he was nowhere to be seen at the moment.

A portion of the women among the crowd looked deflated when they heard the Valkyrie models weren't for sale.

"Will a version of the Valkyries ever be put on the mech market?"

"I cannot say for certain." Juliet shrugged. "The Valkyrie Redeemer was originally commissioned by the Hexadric Hegemony. It is up to the state to decide what to do with it. There may be a chance that this may change. The Hegemony is currently losing the war back in the old galaxy. If it is dissolved, the rights may return to our clan, as I can hardly imagine the Hexers ever contemplating defeat. If they did, they would have added a clause that allows them to transfer their rights to a successor state or organization. Do not take my word on that, though. I am not a lawyer and I have never read this contract."

It was all a bit complicated and it heavily depended on whether the Hexers exiled to the Red Ocean could remain united. If multiple dynasties fell out and tried to claim that their colonies were the true successors of the Hexadric Hegemony, then that would lead to a lot of complications!

Juliet inwardly shook her head. She no longer pledged her loyalty to the Hegemony. Now that she dedicated her life to the Larkinson Clan, she saw numerous advantages to selling a commercialized edition of the Valkyrie line.

Personally, she would love it if more people came in touch with the Superior Mother. She thought it was a waste if the Hexers largely claimed her for themselves. She had

lost faith in her former state when she heard that the powerful dynasties were evacuating from it while doing little to save the rest of the population.

Juliet never realized that the Hegemony was so rotten! It was only when she gained an outsider's perspective that she recognized how dysfunctional it was. The state could have been so much better if the Hexers didn't demonize boys so much.

Elsewhere on the Vivacious Wal, thousands of visitors flocked inside the large structure where one of the highlights of the Vulcan Symposium could be found.

The lighting in the specially-renovated hall was dim, which caused the projected footage to stand out from the darkness.

As the visitors proceeded through the hall, they experienced the life trajectory of the mech that they wanted to witness.

Few visitors who wanted to observe one of the Larkinson Clan's famed masterwork expert mechs knew that its beginning was much more humble.

"The Shield of Samar started out as an ordinary third-class mech?" Someone asked as they watched the projection of the mech during its initial debut.

Back then, the Larkinsons were still third-raters and the Aurora Titan was one of Ves' best works.

The Shield of Samar enjoyed an auspicious start as its test pilot broke through during the Aurora Titan's public announcement!

A lot of mech pilots grew envious when they saw how easily Jannzi Larkinson managed to become an expert candidate.

"She was under no threat at all!" A mech pilot complained. "The rest of us have to throw ourselves in constant battle while this woman lucked out during a choreographed show of all things!"

Other mech pilots were more nonchalant. "Everyone has their own opportunities. Maybe this pilot is talented enough that she would have broken through regardless of the occasion. She's an expert pilot now so she clearly has what it takes to become a demigod."

"Could it have been her mech?" Someone else wondered. "I mean, just look at how many expert pilots and expert candidates the Larkinson Clan produced in just a couple of years. If these living mechs can really help pilots progress, then maybe we should try and get them ourselves."

"Don't be silly. The Larkinsons employ tens of thousands of mech pilots according to the public figures. Having six or seven expert pilots is not out of proportion. Besides, there are tens of millions of LMC mechs in use in the old galaxy, and the statistics have never shown a distinct increase in breakthroughs."

There were a lot of mech fanatics that were obsessed about this topic. They pooled their efforts together to track and register breakthroughs. They subsequently added their data to large public databases where anyone could gain a fair estimate on which mechs produced the most expert candidates and expert pilots.

The tour continued. They learned about the battles the Shield of Samar participated in and also saw how the Shield of Samar was upgraded over time.

The latest revision was the most drastic of all. Only the mech designers among the crowd understood how difficult it was to overhaul an existing mech and turn it into a new masterwork.

"This is impossible. The mech designers involved are still Journeymen, and young to boot!"

"I bet it's mostly the credit of that MTA Master Mech Designer who got involved for some reason."

"Don't belittle the work of the Journeymen. The MTA has never awarded masterwork certificates that the recipients haven't earned, and as far I know that Master never participated in any fabrication runs. These young mech designers have earned their acclaim."

Not everyone believed in the official records, though a lot of people thought these skeptics were fools. It was never a good idea to criticize one of the current overlords of human space.

Besides, the MTA possessed a stellar reputation. The mechers were always honest and accurate in their inspections and never distorted their records.

After a fairly long tour through the hall, they finally approached the mech that they had all paid to observe.

They had gradually felt the powerful expert mech's awesome presence before they even came close enough to observe its resplendent details.

"It's... so big."

"It's so heavy as well."

"I feel safe in its presence."

While the Amaranto that was situated in another part of the Vivacious Wal also fascinated a lot of people, the Shield of Samar made a significantly greater impact on most people.

This was because its powerful resonance presence did not just announce itself to them, but faintly enveloped them in its protective embrace.

This was a rare experience that few individuals ever got to enjoy. The fact that the sensation came from a third-order living mech piloted by a woman with strong principles about the value of human life made it even better!

That said, the expert pilot responsible for this phenomenon was anything but happy at the moment.

Venerable Jannzi was in a grumpy mood as she sat in her cockpit. She had been here for hours without doing anything except keeping the Shield of Samar in place.

The reason why it was necessary for her to be involved was because the masterwork expert mech wouldn't be as impressive if it didn't generate any true resonance.

"I'm not a circus exhibit, Ves!" She cursed.

PATIENCE, PARTNER. THIS IS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL OF US. LET THESE PEOPLE GAWK AT US. THEY WILL ONLY COME AWAY WITH A MUCH BETTER IMPRESSION OF OUR CLAN.

"Yes, yes, I know. I'm sure Ves will be delighted with all of the revenue generated by the tickets he managed to sell. I think that is the real reason why he was so eager to hold this 'symposium', whatever that means."

Despite her words, there was still a part of her that liked all of the attention that she was getting. Obtaining respect and recognition from people was a far cry from the rejection that she usually received when she tried to convince her fellow Larkinsons that Ves was not a good leader.

The Shield of Samar also enjoyed the attention. Although it was almost human-like in its intelligence and awareness, it was still a relatively young entity. Being at the center of attention would flatter any person, let alone a mech that wasn't quite mature!

Another popular exhibit in the symposium had nothing to do with mechs at all. Though few people knew about it, the Larkinson Clan also engaged in numerous biotechnology activities.

Though the Larkinson Biotech Institute hadn't developed any products that were ready to be displayed this time, it did offer a number of curiosities that attracted plenty of attention.

The large piles of preserved flesh taken from the Titania impressed a lot of people. Astral beasts were exotic and rare in the old galaxy, so the thought of encountering an enormous specimen that was 5 kilometers long was quite impressive!

Of course, the visitors didn't come here just to gawk at the alien flesh.

"Get your astral beast barbecue right here! This is the opportunity of a lifetime, so get it now before it's gone. Come and take a bite out of this skewer made out of 6000-year old astral beast meat!"

"Is it safe to eat?"

The salesman grinned. "Our clan has been eating this meat every sunday. Our scientists did something to it to make it edible for humans. If you're feeling adventurous, then go ahead."

The taste of astral beast meat was odd to say the least. It was tough, stringy, chewy and did not possess the usual flavors associated with traditional meat.

Nonetheless, it was edible. As long as the cooks added enough spices, the meat became palatable.

Aside from that, the biotech section of the public area also displayed more profound assets.

None impacted the guests more than the Aspects of Lufa. Two of the four living statues were made available for the symposium.

For a small fee of 5 MTA millicredits, everyone was allowed to spend five minutes within the active range of the Aspect of Tranquility and the Aspect of Healing.

A lot of people came away impressed and wanted to go again. Unfortunately, the Larkinsons only gave them the opportunity to experience the two statues for a single time each.

"Why can't we go again?"

"For safety reasons."

"How do they work?"

"Special technologies. That's all I can say."

"How can we experience these glows again? I've lost so much stress today."

"You can purchase the Tranquility Treatment Editions which our mech company has released a while ago. They're not for sale in the Red Ocean but that might change in the future. Stay tuned and pay attention to our announcements."

Given the amount of stress that people in the Red Ocean had to endure every day, the value of mechs with these particular glows were much more valuable in this market!

Chapter 3647 Gloriana On Stage

Ves smiled as he observed the bustling crowd. He didn't need to read the status reports to know that the symposium was going well so far. The guests were largely happy and few expressed any obvious contempt.

The clan was also earning additional income by providing additional services such as selling astral beast meat and giving them a chance to experience the glows of a couple of Aspects of Lufa.

He even thought about making the Aspect of Rationality available as well for a much greater fee, but he deemed it too much of a risk. Who knew what people might get up to when they were stripped of all emotions and only retained their cold, hard logic.

Naturally, he did not spend a moment of thought on presenting the Aspect of Transcendence. Exploding heads was not a good way to earn a good review for his symposium.

He checked the time. Thousands of guests were making their way past the exhibits so that they could enter one of Dawn City's main attractions, the Theater of Joy.

While it was not as large as Twilight City's mech arena, the Theater of Joy could comfortably seat thousands of guests. It could fit hundreds of thousands more individuals through the use of floating seats.

Right now, those floating seats were necessary in order to accommodate the growing number of outsiders who came for the main event.

"It's almost time."

He originally wanted to invite more speakers to address the audience, but there were precious few people in the clan who were qualified to lecture about craftsmanship.

Aside from Ves and Gloriana, Ketis came close, but she was obviously not suited for these occasions.

He even thought about inviting Professor Benedict to hold a lecture. Having a Senior Mech Designer speak at his event would cause others to take it much more seriously.

The Cross Clan's head designer didn't stand out as an excellent craftsman, though. He didn't excel in creating masterwork mechs and he was much more interested in the research and design aspects of his profession.

In the end, Ves had little choice but to present two speakers today.

He would go last as his lecture was the most important. This was his best opportunity to appeal to the members of the Murphy Family that were tuning in to the broadcast today.

In comparison, Gloriana's speech was much less important. Ves just wanted her to speak in order to add a bit more meat to his symposium.

He also gave her the chance to appear on stage because he knew she would nag and complain at him if he denied her this opportunity.

After all, if her husband was qualified to lecture about craftsmanship, then why would she be any different? They possessed the exact same number of masterwork certificates!

Soon enough, Gloriana arrived in the backstage area of the Theater of Joy.

She carried Aurelia in one arm and hung her overpriced puelmer leather Hoenbach handbag on her other arm.

"Where have you been?"

"I've been entertaining a couple of ladies and taking care of our daughter. What have you been doing, hm? You must have spent all this time overlooking your domain while feeling satisfied that you managed to convince so many people to pay money to attend this hasty event."

"At least I managed to earn back the money you spent on that stupid handbag and more!"

"It's not a stupid purchase, Ves. You should have seen how those important women reacted to my strategic asset. They became a lot warmer towards me once I showed that I exist at the same level as them. That is worth more than the 120 MTA credits that I paid for this bag."

Ves rolled his eyes. "Whatever you say. It's almost time for you to hold your lecture. Please make sure you stay within your time limit. The people over there have short attention spans and aren't interested in revisiting their school days. Fifteen minutes and no more, okay?"

That elicited an ugly reaction from his wife.

"I can hardly say anything of substance in so little time! How dare you call this event a symposium when you want to keep our lectures short?! Do you think so little of your audience?"

"We are trying to fulfill multiple goals, today. In another circumstance, I might agree with you, but this time is special. We need to rally and motivate the more receptive members of the Murphy Family, and we won't be able to do that by boring them all to sleep by speaking for three hours straight!"

"Can't you at least extend my speaking time by another 15 minutes? I can fit a lot more substance in my lecture that way."

"Absolutely not!"

Ves had to threaten to cut off Gloriana's speech transmission in order to get her to accept the time limit.

"Fine then! Here, take care of Aurelia and my handbag for me. I will go out and speak whatever common sense about product development I can fit in 15 minutes. They'll need it in order to digest whatever nonsense you plan to say after my turn."

Ves eagerly received their daughter but was much less enthused about holding his wife's favorite article.

"Muuuu.... guuuwaguaawwwuuuu..."

Aurelia happily gurgled as she tried to reach out towards the handbag.

"Really, dear?" Ves questioned.

"Baawuubuaa baaaa..."

"Ugh, what has your mother been teaching you? You have poor taste, do you know that?"

"Hihihih!"

While Ves tried to persuade Aurelia that Gloriana's handbag was not a toy, his wife underwent a few final preparations to ready herself for her first public performance since entering the Red Ocean.

Despite her contempt about how much the Larkinsons rushed this symposium, she still valued the opportunity to make a name for herself. She had witnessed her husband earning a lot of fame over the years and deriving plenty of benefits from it. Why couldn't she become famous as well? Her contributions mattered just as much!

After a makeup bot touched up her appearance, she went over her truncated speech one last time before she was ready to make her appearance.

"Good luck, madame."

Gloriana nodded to the people around her before she lifted off her feet and floated through the entrance that brought her to the main stage of the Theater of Joy.

The majority of guests had already taken their seats by this time. While more were still pouring in, she was pretty happy with the attendance level.

She was aware that a lot more people were tuning in to the remote broadcast. This boosted her confidence as she reached the center of the stage.

She raised her finger, causing a projection of a familiar mech to appear above her head.

"The Quint."

She twirled her finger.

"The Little Angel."

"The Amaranto."

"The Shield of Samar."

"The Everchanger."

She paused, allowing everyone in the audience to process her opening.

"Before I begin, let me say that I understand your skepticism. I am a young mother and a Journeyman. I am at least fifty years younger than other mech designers that have managed to produce masterwork mechs in their lifetime. I believe that many fellow colleagues in the mech industry are wondering how I have been able to succeed not just once, but five times in only the span of a few years. There may even be people among you who think they know this field so well that they question the legitimacy of my achievements."

Her lips curled into a smirk. "You are free to doubt my accomplishments, but if you insist on questioning the insights on craftsmanship that I am willing to share to you today, then you better be qualified to speak about this topic. I will only take you seriously if you are a Master Mech Designer or have made more masterworks than myself. Have I made myself clear? Very well, then. Let's begin."

She waved her hand, causing the impressive array of projections to fade away. She did not need them any longer to command the attention of the audience.

"Those who are familiar with my work and specialty should know that my Class I design philosophy is registered as Perfect Vessel. What this exactly means is outside of the scope of my lecture, but I am willing to share a few lessons that I have learned over the course of making five masterwork mechs."

She raised her arms, ruffling the wavy sleeves of her blue-and-black dress that was decorated with hexagonal patterns. "Take my dress, for example. It has been designed and tailored to fit my body to a fantastic degree. The tailors who made it not only accounted for my physical dimensions, but also studied other relevant aspects. My motion. My gait. My sitting posture. My habit of holding my daughter in my arms. All of this and more dictate the most ideal properties of my dress. This is the bespoke experience that is quite common in higher-end product design."

Gloriana slowly lowered her arms. "The benefits of using a product that is tailored to you and you alone are well-known and acknowledged. With the technology and expertise that humanity wields to this day, it is possible for anyone who hasn't fallen in abject poverty to acquire a decent collection of bespoke products. Yet... why do people in the mech community not try as hard to provide custom-fitted mechs to their individual mech pilots?"

This was indeed a good question, and plenty of people already had answers ready.

"Is it economics?" She asked. "I can accept that answer, but it is not entirely valid. While it is currently not realistic to design complete custom mechs for every single mech pilot in human society, we can still incorporate a lot more customization without imposing too many burdens. Mechs can be designed to be easy to adapt during the production. They can also be altered after they have been made. Yet why does this not happen at a wide enough scale?"

Gloriana paused for a few seconds before supplying another possible answer. "Is it lack of manpower? All of this customization work is fairly intricate, I admit. Only mech designers can fully account for all of the variables and generate the most appropriate solutions. Still, if there is one thing our industry doesn't lack, it is an abundance of mech designers! Instead of forcing the majority of unsuccessful mech designers into other engineering trajectories, why do we not make better use of their skills, hm?"

"This is a sad state of affairs." She dramatically sighed and shook her head. "It is absolutely worth it to design a mech that is customized for single mech pilots. Whatever downsides or compromises you must accept to obtain them is nothing compared to the victories you'll be able to achieve in battle. If you do not believe me, then let me show you my most recently completed work. It may not be a masterwork, but it is highly reflective of my current level of work."

A mech descended from a hidden entrance on the ceiling of the Theater of Joy.

As the machine slowly descended, many of the people in the audience became impressed by its sculpted form and its masculine glow.

The men among them felt particularly attracted by the custom mech and what it represented!

Even the less technically-versed individuals were able to recognize that this was not a normal mech!

"Meet the B-Man." Gloriana announced. "It's not the name I would have chosen for this custom mech, but it is a mech that completely compliments my client. This mech encapsulated my vision for mechs the best. A splendid hybrid mech like this wouldn't exist if custom mechs provided no added value. Wouldn't the mech community be a lot more dull if that was the case?"

A lot of heads started nodding.

"I am glad to see supporters among you. Custom mechs may not be appropriate in every case, but they should be much more widespread than they are today. Currently, the vast majority of mechs are mass-produced in manufacturing complexes where efficiency is the name of the game. Too many of these places are antithetical to what I stand for. The workers making the mechs are not allowed to deviate from their work. Craftsmanship is entirely absent. How can humans take pride in our mechs if we treat them as commodities instead of individual works? If we want to take mechs to the next level, we cannot reduce the intrinsic value of mechs any further. They deserve better treatment if we wish to continue to rely on them to fight our battles."

Chapter 3648 More than a Cog

Ves listened from the side as Gloriana briefly tried to convert as many people to her design philosophy as possible.

Oh sure, she started to address craftsmanship more in the latter half of her lecture, but he still found her story to be a bit too self-centered.

It was as if his wife was more interested in building up her image than actually expounding about craftsmanship.

"Oh well."

She at least kept her story interesting. The time pressure helped a lot. With only fifteen minutes of speaking time, she had to toss away a lot of elements that weren't as interesting.

Ves even agreed on a lot of her points. This was not a coincidence as he and his wife frequently held discussions about their work.

On top of that, they also shared their thoughts more directly with each other whenever they utilized a design network.

Because of this, they contaminated each other's design philosophies and partially converged towards each other.

Both of them still stood their ground when it came to their core ideas. The core of their design philosophies remained unchanged and it would take a much greater external shock for them to change.

Soon enough, Gloriana reached the end of her speech. She graciously wrapped up her moment and briefly reiterated her key points before floating away.

The B-Man stayed so that the audience could continue to admire the custom mech.

"I want a mech like this as well. Why don't mech designers make them this way?"

"What is that thing? Is that a belt? Why is it so big?"

Ves shook his head as he observed the reactions from the crowd. The B-Man may be a fine example of what custom mech design was capable of, but it was also the most farcical mech in the Larkinson Clan!

"Can someone remind Vincent Ricklin that he's supposed to make his way out by now?!"

After a few reminders, the B-Man finally left the stage.

"It's your turn now, Ves." Gloriana said as she approached and took back her two treasures.

Both Aurelia and her Hoenbach handbag were back where they belonged. She grinned and smooched her daughter's tiny head before gazing lovingly at her puelmer leather article.

Ves ignored this little spectacle and moved to the main stage.

Though he could have acted more pretentiously and floated his way forward, that was not his style. He preferred to walk most of the time since that was how he had always moved. The solidity of the surfaces underneath grounded him and made him more connected to his immediate environment.

He needed that reassurance as he was about to hold a brief but extremely important speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Vulcan Symposium." He began. "Most of you have initially heard of my clan and I when we sparked an incident in the Commercial District of Kotor City a few days ago. Who among you have personally experienced the special field that stimulated your creative desires?"

Over half of the people who attended the symposium raised their arms. This result completely fell within his expectations. It was hard to blame these individuals from seeking out this magical moment again.

Ves smiled. "What did you think about it now that you can look back on it? You over there. Tell us your thoughts."

A spotlight shone that centered around a random person who raised her hand. The woman genuinely looked befuddled.

"Uhm, I got a lot of new ideas about my work."

"What is your profession?" Ves asked.

"I am an architect." The woman replied as she gained a bit of courage. "I lead my own small bureau. It's called Hartzlan Architecture. I've been involved in designing the architecture of numerous structures in the Commercial District and the Art District."

"Now that you went through this experience, how do you view your previous work from a creative perspective?"

"They are fine buildings that are fit for purpose. My works are solid, defensible and affordable, which is exactly what many of my customers in the Red Ocean need." The architect emphasized.

"A product must do the job it is supposed to fulfill." Ves agreed. "It is never acceptable to deliver a product that can't perform its basic functions. However, is it enough to settle for the minimum? Is it right for us to stop expending any further effort in improving our work once we have satisfied the requirements for a job?"

"I... have developed a lot of new ideas after the incident. It is difficult to apply most of them to my past projects without going over budget, but there are still enough inventive solutions that I could have used to make my buildings sturdier and more pleasing on the eye."

Ves smiled as the spotlight faded from the woman. "That, my dear listeners, is the essence of craftsmanship. To me, this word goes beyond products made by hand. While I am certain that an architect like her has never installed a single bolt in the buildings she designed, the iterative process of coming up with new ideas and finding ways to apply them under the constraints she was working with is part of the craftsman's mindset."

He tapped the side of head with his finger. "Before we can even begin to make a mech or other work that is good enough to become a masterwork, we must approach our work with the right attitude. I dare say that not a single person who has ever created any masterwork did so with the thought of doing the bare minimum to earn a passing grade."

"Yet that is exactly how so many workers and designers approach their own jobs." He said with evident disappointment in his tone. "My wife has already addressed this deficiency from the perspective of customization. However, even if you are stuck with making standardized products, there is still a lot of room to add your personal touches to your work."

Many people wondered how this was possible.

"Factory owners all aim to achieve maximum consistency in the output of their facilities. Variations are seen as flaws and experimentation is taboo on the workfloor. While there are a lot of cases when customers only want an affordable product that works, I believe that is not all what people want. Which mech pilot truly wants to settle for an average mech over one that workers have tried their best to improve?"

Ves began to pace from side to side.

"Not every attempt to improve a work will succeed. More often than not, these little experiments will lead to worse outcomes. This is why craftsmen must use their resources wisely. Good thinking and good design can go a long way into improving a real product. It is these elements that are key to elevating the quality of a mech. Anyone can do it as long as they have mastered the basics of their crafts."

He pointed his thumb towards himself. "Look at me for example. Just like the previous speaker, I hold five genuine masterwork certificates. Succeeding even once was considered to be impossible for Journeyman. Yet my fellow colleagues and I have repeated this feat multiple times. I think it is safe to say that we have definitely proved that you don't need to become a Senior or a Master to make a masterwork mech."

Ves then thrust his finger towards his audience!

"That does not necessarily mean that you can be successful! There is still a good reason why Journeymen cannot make products at this quality level. However, you can get a lot closer if you adopt the right attitude to your profession and your work. No matter whether you make mechs or ships for a living, as long as you have room to explore your craft, you can always do better no matter what other people think is right or possible."

He smiled again. "There are two good reasons why many more craftsmen and other workers should adopt this approach. First, you'll be able to generate more profits. With enough innovation and effort, you can find a better formula and stand out from your rivals. High-quality products are always more desirable, so you can sell them at higher

prices or at greater sales volumes. Any business that takes craftsmanship seriously will also be able to stand the test of time. Its products will remain popular for a longer amount of time and its excellence in pursuing improvements also allows the company to adjust to market changes. A company that never takes any effort to stand out will usually be the last ones to adapt. Those of you who have studied biology should know what happens to species that are bad at adaptation."

Though it wasn't obvious to most people, Ves implicitly addressed his words to the Murphy family members who were probably paying close attention at the moment.

"Yet profits are secondary to a true craftsman. While all of us would like to be compensated fairly for our work, money is only a means to an end for individuals like us. I believe that every human desires to attain this goal even if reality tries its best to keep it out of reach. Do you know what it is?" He coyly asked.

He didn't keep them in the dark for long.

"It is the desire to become unique. I don't think there are many children who dream of becoming another faceless cog in a machine. There are an uncountable amount of people out there that largely live forgettable lives. Their coming and passing goes unnoticed by the vast majority of people. Does this sound desirable to you all? I think not. I believe that each of you has a fire in your hearts that seeks to stand out, achieve something memorable and leave a lasting legacy behind. This fire is called passion."

Ves briefly thought back on his greatest works. His masterworks were largely products of passion that never failed to stoke his excitement.

"Passion fuels the engine of creativity." He claimed. "Passion is the driving force behind our ability to express our creativity. If you are not passionate about your work, it will be a thousand times harder for you to make a masterwork."

He swept his gaze across the crowd. "How many of you have looked into your hearts and seen whether there is still a flame inside? Has the years of harsh living and constant challenges in your work managed to douse your flames of passion? I hope that hasn't happened yet. As for those that still retain their fire, cherish it. Do not think that it is easy to keep it alive. You must make a constant effort to express your creativity in your hobby or your work in order to retain an active imagination and a willingness to seek improvement."

Ves thought of all of the times where he encountered problems in his work and spent many hours and days on solving them. He recalled the times when he finally came up with good solutions and the immense amount of satisfaction he derived from those successes.

"As one creator to another, I know how hard it is to do all of this. Keeping your passion alive while also making active improvements in your creative work is far from easy. That

is why there are many more cogs in existence. However, the reward for standing out and transcending the machine is worth it! To become unique and to be known as a creator of a fantastic and celebrated work provides so much satisfaction that you will feel as if you have finally completed the main objective of your life!"

He suddenly smirked. "All of this sounds nice, but how will you actually be able to reach this point? Let me tell you that it is not as unattainable as you think. Even if hard work and constant effort can go a long way, there are certain... forms of help that can help you along your way. Receiving the instruction of a teacher or seeking inspiration through travel can help. Yet what if there is another, more convenient way for you to improve your work?"

Several seconds passed by as the crowd quickly sensed that Ves was about to unveil his main point.

"Over the course of my career, I have developed a... method or a system if you will that significantly improves my ability to iterate on my designs and my ability to elevate the mechs I make. It's quite complicated and I would never be able to explain to you how it works, but fortunately for all of you, I have developed it to the point where you can easily make use of it without any fuss."

Ves slowly unholstered the Hammer hanging from the side of his toolbelt and dramatically raised it above his head. The relic already began to exude an enchanting bronze corona!

"Let me introduce you to the Vulcan System!"

Chapter 3649 Unclear System

The soft glow of the Hammer of Brilliance did not reach that far. Yet it gave the audience sitting in the Theater of Joy enough of a taste to stimulate their creativity.

The words that Ves had spoken beforehand had already primed his listeners by adopting the right mindset. After speaking so much about the need to create something different and the desire to stand out from other makers, a lot of people easily allowed themselves to be affected by Vulcan's glow!

The influence was slight. There was no substitute to actually getting hit by the hammer, but those who experienced the Everchanger's glow once before immediately recognized that familiar energy field.

As for those who experienced this glow for the first time, they marveled at how certain thoughts and impulses became more active. It was easier for them to think about creating new works.

Those who watched the symposium by remote hardly felt anything. The glow didn't translate so well through transmissions, but there was just enough of a blip for the millions of viewers to become a bit more curious.

"Look at those people in the crowd. They're all excited."

"Are the Larkinsons brainwashing these people?!"

"I should have bought a live ticket."

After half a minute, Ves lowered his hammer while Vulcan stopped channeling power through it. The effort required to exude such a glow at a wider range was quite strenuous, especially when the design spirit had to do so through a smaller medium.

"That." He said. "Is one of several applications of the Vulcan System."

Many people looked impressed. They completely fell into his narrative. As Ves gazed at the thousands of faces, he only spotted a few thousands who were not that taken in. They were either mentally resilient individuals such as Senior Mech Designers or did not possess a creative bone in their bodies.

It didn't matter. He never expected to catch everyone. He just needed to affect the right people. He hoped that the Murphy family members also resonated with his words.

"Now what is the Vulcan System, you might ask?" He smiled towards his enchanted audience. "Well, I cannot easily explain it to you, but I shall try my best to give you an idea. Those of you who have been touring the exhibits aboard our capital ship must have grown familiar with my creations. Each of my mechs are characterized by two essential qualities. First, they are alive. Second, they possess glows. The Vulcan System is an offshoot that I have developed in order to augment my own work and that of others. It is a crystallization of the excellence in craftsmanship and my ceaseless attempts to realize higher-quality mechs."

He could tell that his words weren't entirely clear. He was speaking a lot of words, but they didn't necessarily convey a lot of pertinent information.

That was deliberate on his part. He did not want to remove the mystique surrounding the Vulcan System. The only way to make it seem legitimate while at the same time denying as much information as possible was to speak a lot of nonsense.

"The Vulcan System may be derived from the special technologies that we have developed, but we have developed it into an entirely new framework." He continued. "By adopting a mindset that matches the principles and ideals that I have mentioned, you are already applying it in your own way. There is no need for you to borrow the tools that I have developed to make success more attainable, but it can certainly help in certain cases."

Ves turned around and waves his arm in a dramatic motion. Above his head, hundreds of projections came to life. Each of them displayed stock footage of workers, artisans, craftsmen and mech designers and other creators at work.

"The Vulcan System is a philosophy that advocates for the need for humans to go beyond the minimum and dedicate their lives towards developing better and more valued products. Many of you who still possess a passion for creation can utilize the system to give you an extra push. It might mean the difference between living a forgettable life to becoming a celebrated creator."

The projections faded as Ves turned to face the crowd again. "So there you have it. Whether you are open to my arguments or not, I hope that each of you gain a better impression of craftsmanship. The reason why my system is named after a mythological figure is because Vulcan is a model of what each of us try to become. Each of you has a fire in your heart. This burning passion is like the fire of Vulcan's forge. If you feed it well, then you can make marvels of technology and craftsmanship the likes of which humanity has never seen!"

The time had come to wrap this presentation up. He clapped his hands and smiled.

"Don't believe in Vulcan. Believe in yourself. If you need a little assistance, then you can approach us after this symposium. In order to spread this new movement, I have recently founded a new organization called the Creation Association. There, you may find more resources and guidance that can help you on your way to become a more successful artisan. You may also find opportunities to buy totems from us that can help you apply the Vulcan System in a more direct way. Supply is limited, so act with haste if you want to secure a tool that can stoke your inner fire."

The main event of the Vulcan Symposium came to an end at this time. Ves slowly turned around and exited the stage.

Meanwhile, the crowd began to clap. The people's reactions were tentative at first, but soon they all gave Ves a standing ovation!

Even though many of them still didn't have a good idea what the so-called Vulcan System was supposed to be, they couldn't very well expose their ignorance at this time. Nobody wanted to look stupid!

The audience already began to discuss the state of craftsmanship in human society and the Vulcan System. Ves had successfully reinvigorated their interest and desire into moving beyond standardized production.

A number of people even began to look up the Creation Association. They learned that they could visit a repurposed structure in Dawn City to inquire more about it. Hundreds of people eagerly left the Theater of Joy in order to explore what this new organization had to offer!

When Ves returned to the backstage, Gloriana awaited his return with a skeptical look.

"The Vulcan System? Really?" She asked as she rocked Aurelia in her arms. "Why can't you talk about your god more straightforwardly?"

"Gods don't exist!" Ves insisted. "I'm not starting a religion here. I just want to direct more business to the Creation Association, but I can't do that unless I market my products properly. Besides, the main point of my message is that people like them and us don't need to pray to any higher powers in order to achieve success. We managed to create numerous masterwork mechs by relying on our own capabilities, after all. While the addition of Vulcan can make our lives easier, he can only amplify what we already possess."

"I know that. I don't need to rely on anyone's help to become a brilliant mech designer." Gloriana claimed before she turned to her daughter. "Isn't that right, Aurelia? What do you think about mama's craftsmanship?"

"Maaa... guuubooobooo..."

"Did you hear that, Ves? Our daughter agrees with me!" She beamed.

"Uhhh... I'm pretty sure that Aurelia wants you to put her down so she can crawl around and chase after Clixie's tail."

"VES! Ugh, never mind. Whatever you do, don't spend too much time on that Creation Association of yours. We are mech designers first. We still need to complete the Minerva Project and several other design projects in the coming weeks."

"I know, I know, honey. I don't intend to expand the Creation Association too much at this point. I don't have the time to fabricate totems all day. It is also better if my new organization acquires a more exclusive and mysterious reputation. For this reason, I plan to make a modest batch and spread out the totems and see how they fare."

After talking to Gloriana, Ves said goodbye to his wife and daughter and departed from the Theater of Joy.

The symposium programme had ended, so most of the visitors headed towards the exits.

A small proportion of visitors who expressed interest in the Creation Association were led down a different route. Once they entered an assembly hall, they came into touch with numerous representatives of the new organization.

Each of the new representatives wore robes colored with bronze, black and red. Each of their uniforms were marked with the new symbol of the Creation Association, which

depicted an upright bronze hammer situated underneath the stylized depiction of a life-bearing planet.

Ves had woven multiple different meanings in this logo. While he didn't have any expectations of growing big right away, he hoped the Creation Association would become a widespread influence in the far future.

After all, his spiritual incarnation needed a lot of spiritual feedback in order to progress and to improve his craftsmanship-related abilities.

A graceful-looking woman dressed in a more elaborate set of robes approached his side. "Bright Martyr. You've come. I am pleased to meet you again. I thank you for the opportunity to spread your gospel."

Ves awkwardly coughed. "It's not a gospel. It's a system. Please keep your terminology straight."

"As you say, patriarch."

"How are you adjusting to your new job?"

"I have finally found my calling." Samandra Avikon said. "After leaving the Life Research Association, I must admit that I have found myself adrift in your clan. My original message has not found much purchase with our clansmen due to their lack of familiarity with biotechnology. The Ylvainans have given me a new home, but they can proselytize beliefs with my aid. I am infinitely grateful that you have given me a responsibility where my talents are much more suited."

Though the former priestess sounded pleased, Ves still wasn't sure whether he made the right choice.

There weren't many people in the clan who could lead the Creation Association. Its director not only needed to manage its internal affairs, but also had to be good at maintaining external relations.

Since the Creation Association was basically a scam modeled after a cult, why not put a former cult leader in charge?

This was the logic which he relied upon to appoint Samandra Avikon as its director. She had the experience, the mindset and the skills to lead the Creation Association in a certain way.

As the woman's glowing reptilian eyes stared devotedly at him, Ves was reminded of another reason why he put her in charge.

He trusted her. Just like Gloriana, the Ylvainans and the Penitent Sisters, Samandra Avikon was a religious nutcase. Though there were many downsides to people who could be described with this label, they also had their good points.

They were extremely loyal towards their objects of worship. Though Ves initially thought about putting a Purnesser with leadership experience in charge of the Creation Association, he could not guarantee whether this person would discharge his duties faithfully.

With someone who embraced the Ylvainan belief that Ves was the Bright Martyr who was no less important than the Great Prophet, he did not have as much worries.

All of her other excesses were relatively manageable in comparison. So long as she genuinely put his interests first, Ves would have no worries that the Creation Association would go down the wrong path.

"You know your current responsibilities, right?"

Director Samandra Avikon nodded. "We must carefully investigate and select a limited number of associates to test our new totems. We should continue to cultivate our relations with them and make sure our totems are being used as intended."

"Correct. It is important for our Creation Association to grow steadily and build up a good reputation. If we move too quickly or make any outrageous moves, we'll undoubtedly invite a lot of backlash. According to my own research, that has been the downfall of many cults?, err I mean scams. If we want our new Association to survive in the long term, then we need to make sure we don't pose a threat to other people's interests."

"I understand."

Chapter 3650 The Initial Goal

"Make sure to spread the totems across a variety of different professions." Ves instructed. "I don't want them all to end up in the hands of Vulcan. The greater the variety, the better. The recipients don't need to be the best in their fields, but they should not to be shabby or incompetent. Don't pick anyone who is too accomplished and successful, though."

"Why not, Bright Martyr?" The new director questioned. "Would it not be better for us if we establish connections with accomplished creators?"

"Ordinarily, you're right, but the problem is that the 'Vulcan System' is not a bottomless well. It is akin to a finite resource that is not too strong and cannot be replenished quickly." Ves replied. "I've tracked the usage of the totems that I gave to Zachren Bilitsa

and the House of Barach respectively. According to the data, the effectiveness of our totems vary depending on the strength and competence of the recipients."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Take someone who is relatively weak such as Chief Fabricator Denner of Zachren Bilitsa. When he made use of the medium totem we gave him, it was relatively easy to put him into an inspired state. The disparity between him and Vulcan is quite great, so the latter doesn't have to spend a lot of resources and effort to do his job."

"What if the supplicant is stronger?"

"In that case, Vulcan has to fight an uphill battle." Ves replied. "More than a week after we left the Pellysa System, Master Artisan Sivare Coriten Barach attempted to use the mini totem we bestowed to his house. As far as I know, the effect was rather marginal. Though Master Sivare definitely received a creative boost, it wasn't as drastic as I expected."

"I see. Why is this the case?"

"It's quite simple. It relates to the nature of a glow. It's an aura that is passively exuded by a powerful entity. The reason why they are so effective and so difficult to block is because we are compelled to react to powerful presences. The greater the power disparity, the more effective they become. That is why people like expert pilots and Master Mech Designers aren't affected by them. They don't necessarily need to look up to entities like Vulcan. Master Sivare is already highly successful in his field, so his confidence in himself is massive."

"People who are close to becoming gods revere them the least." Director Avikon stated.

"Right. Anyway, another reason why Vulcan has trouble inspiring Master Sivare is because the artisan's thoughts and methods are too damn profound. Vulcan is still young and he doesn't possess a lot of professional knowledge. While the difference isn't as wide as a Journeyman trying to advise a Star Designer, it is a lot to ask for Vulcan to help Master Sivare synthesize new ideas."

Samandra looked enlightened. "You wish to educate Vulcan, then?"

"That is one of my goals." Ves nodded. "The reason why it is important for him to get in touch with professionals who work in different fields is because he needs to build up his repository of knowledge. We need to build up his strength and wisdom so that he can become effective at inspiring more capable figures such as Master Sivare. This will be a long process. In order to ensure that Vulcan receives the best lessons, you must select our new associates carefully. Do you understand what is at stake?"

"I do, sir."

"Remember. This is your real job. The Creation Association is just a vehicle to us. If it becomes a liability one day, then we should not hesitate to discard it. That said, I don't want our efforts to go to waste, so make sure to act prudently."

Once Ves became assured that Director Avikon knew what to do, he spent a bit more time observing the people that had come to inquire about the Creation Association.

Each of them were receptive towards his earlier lecture, but that did not mean they were willing to do what was necessary to acquire their own totems.

Even if they wanted to, the Creation Association had to conduct a lot of research in order to find out whether they were suitable associates.

Not everyone would be able to get their wish because there were only a limited number of slots at this point. If too many totems were being used, then Vulcan would have to exert himself so many times that he would quickly become weary and drained of energy!

"Vulcan needs to grow stronger."

He could already feel his incarnation become excited by the prospect of getting in touch with a lot more people. The spiritual feedback provided by the people of Zachren Bilitsa and the House of Barach had already given him a taste of what other design spirits took for granted.

A day passed by as the Larkinson fleet returned to normal. A lot of clansmen worked to clean up the Vivacious Wal and restore her interior to its original state.

The clan also tracked the discussion that ensued after the Vulcan Symposium had passed.

Even though not a lot of people paid attention to this event, those that did still had plenty to discuss about. Ves had boldly presented an alternative model to how humanity produced most of its products. He also reinvigorated the creative desires of enough people that some of them already started to shift their careers!

As for the Creation Association, Director Avikon did not have to worry about lacking choice. There were enough test subjects that the totems would definitely find new homes.

Seeing that everything was going well, Ves no longer paid attention to these matters. He turned his attention back to the initial reason why he held the Vulcan Symposium.

If his indirect appeal didn't succeed in changing the Murphy Family's mind, then his effort would be a failure in his eyes.

"Have we received any word from the Murphies, Benny?"

"None. You already asked this question fifteen times. I will inform you as soon as we obtain new information, but for now the Murphies are still behind closed doors."

The Black Cats were tracking the movements of the Murphies day and night. According to their judgment, the family was still split, but the opposition had gained more momentum after the Vulcan Symposium had concluded.

This indicated that the event successfully boosted the younger faction of the Murphy Family.

The problem was that Ves didn't know whether it was enough to make a difference. Even if he managed to make an uphill battle more even, the chance of failure was still significant!

Ves was tempted to increase his odds further by performing additional actions, but he thought that would be excessive.

He had to wait a couple more hours before he received a notice from one of the Murphy family members.

"Who is it?!" Ves eagerly asked. After so many hours of waiting, the other party had finally made a move! "Is it Karina or Melaia Murphy?!"

Gavin reluctantly shook his head. "I'm afraid not. The woman who reached out to us is neither of the two. It's the mother that is on the line."

"...What?"

"CEO Gelly Murphy wishes to have a private talk with you, boss. She hasn't told us the reason for her outreach, but I highly suggest you answer her call. Just be careful what you say. These old leaders are not only sharp, but also possess strong sensibilities."

"I know, I know. This isn't my first rodeo."

Since this was an important call, Ves made sure to make himself as presentable as possible. He cleaned up his desk and made sure that nothing looked messy.

The only discordant element left was Lucky. Ves picked him up and straightened his posture so that he sat straight on his desk.

"Meow."

"Try not to cause any distractions, okay?"

Once everything was in order, he stood up and accepted the call.

The projection of the leader of Murphy & Sons and the Murphy Family directly appeared in front.

"Patriarch Larkinson." The old woman greeted.

"Madame Murphy." Ves briefly bowed. "To what do I owe you the pleasure?"

"Hmph. You know quite well what you have done. It was not enough to encourage my daughters to defy my orders. Your 'symposium' poured fuel to the fire, causing multiple valued family members and employees to advocate for changes in our strategy. As the culprit responsible for stirring up this decision, what do you have to say for yourself, Patriarch Larkinson?"

Uh oh. Gelly Murphy did not sound happy. Not only did she harbor the same resentment as before, she showed considerable animosity towards him for meddling in her family's affairs!

Ves had multiple ways to approach this situation. He could try to compromise and soften his tone. He could stick to his guns and present an unyielding posture. He could dump even more fuel to the fire by openly plotting for her downfall.

As he stared in Gelly Murphy's projected eyes, Ves made a judgment call.

"I am not your enemy. I do not want to see Murphy & Sons falter. It's the opposite in fact. I want to see it rise to greater heights. While I am sure you have your own ideas on how to grow your company, the Red Ocean is a galaxy of opportunity. Getting cowed by danger and adopting a conservative approach will not get you far in the long run. I think there are plenty of people in your company that don't want to return to building generic starships when there are much more interesting possibilities within reach."

"Be that as it may, it is not your place to lead them into opposing my policies. I have sympathy for their desires, but the survival of our family and company is more important than any ambitions they might hold. There will always be time for exploration and experimentation after we have established a solid foothold in Davute."

"That will take a long time, I think. Are your relatives just as patient?"

"...No." Gelly admitted as her expression grew tired. "I hoped that my daughters and her fellow supporters would see sense. After watching your symposium, they became even more taken by your message. My recalcitrant family members do not wish to wait. They want to take action as soon as possible."

"Will you continue to stand in their way?"

This was the key question. Ves already developed an idea of what happened in the Murphy Family, but he still awaited Gelly Murphy's answer.

"I can, but... I would prefer not to choose between our survival or the happiness of my daughters. Make no mistake, though. I will always prioritize the former over the latter. I am confident I can still make the dissenters happy even if I defy their wishes. It will only take more time and effort to restore my relations with them. If there is a better alternative, then I am open to other possibilities."

Ves inwardly smiled. Gelly Murphy still acted tough, but she was already close to surrendering.

Right now, she was looking for a bribe or a concession that would paint her defeat in a more favorable light.

He was happy to oblige, but within limits. It would do little good to pamper Murphy & Sons.

"I am willing to improve our original offer to you by increasing the voting rings of Murphy & Sons." He offered.

"How much?"

"15 percent." Ves succinctly answered. "We're both busy people, so I am not prepared to give you more. In order to keep everything in proportion, our clan will reduce our original voting rights to 20 percent. This means we will almost carry the same weight in the trade consortium."

This was a fair offer considering that the addition of a shipbuilding company would massively increase the popularity of the trade consortium!

"This is not enough." Gelly Murphy disappointedly shook her head. "You must provide us with additional benefits."

"I think that can be arranged." Ves grinned.