

THE DAY THE ENGINEERS MOCKED THEIR KING

Two days after Magnus Xavier died, the world inside Xavier Tech Headquarters pretended to be calm. 2

The main tower rose over the Verdanis capital Avalora like a blade of glass and steel. Inside, elevators hummed nonstop, screens flickered with updates, and voices buzzed with nervous excitement. Every floor carried the same message on its displays: 3

"Notice: The new CEO of Xavier Global Holdings will visit the headquarters today." 2

Senior staff paced the corridors, straightening ties and fixing jackets.

"We need to be sharp," one department head whispered to another near the lobby. "First impressions are always important. If he doesn't like what he sees, projects will certainly be cut." 1

"I heard he was personally chosen by Master Magnus," another replied. "That means he won't tolerate nonsense. Focus, smile, and don't speak unless you're invited." 3

"Do you think he's foreign?" someone else asked. "Or from one of the branch boards?"

Rumors floated up and down the building like dust in sunlight, but no one really knew. They only knew one thing: a new king was about to walk through the building, and everyone wanted to survive the coronation. 1

Far below the executive floors, in the industrial wing of the complex, the atmosphere was different. 3

The TitanFlex Engineering Hall was nothing like a regular office. It was huge and loud, with robotic arms hanging from overhead tracks, cranes parked along the sides, and enormous screens showing 3D models of structural beams and load calculations. The air smelled of metal and machine oil. 4

And in the center of it all stood the heart of the project: the TitanFlex Construction Unit. 3

The machine towered nearly a hundred feet high even in its folded state, built from reinforced frames and articulated arms that would one day assemble pieces of Imperium Bank's new skyscraper like a giant mechanical craftsman. Hundreds of cables ran from its base into thick consoles and testing stations. 2

Workers in grey overalls and hardhats moved around it, tightening bolts, running diagnostics, marking down data.

"Four years," one engineer muttered to his colleague as they checked a panel reading. "Four years of models, failures, adjustments. And now we're finally at the finish line." 2

"Yeah," the other replied, grinning. "When the new CEO approves it's completion, our names will go down in company history. Maybe even textbooks." 2

Groups of technicians laughed, some clapped each other on the back. It wasn't joy exactly, but there was relief in their eyes. Four years of sacrifice was no joke. Four winters of overtime that kept them away from family. Four years of betting their careers on one monster of a machine. 1

At the far entrance of the hall, a man in a simple shirt, dark trousers, and a standard-issue hardhat stepped quietly through the doors.

Ethan Ward paused for a moment, letting the noise and scale sink in. He felt something loosen slightly in his chest as he looked around at the machines and wiring.

This world — of circuits, metal, and ideas turned into shapes — was more familiar to him than grand villas and kneeling servants. 2

"No matter what changes," he thought, "this... I still understand." 3

He walked slowly along the side of the hall, staying out of the main paths of forklifts and carts. No one paid him much attention. 2

To them, he was just another engineer, maybe transferred from another division or brought in for testing. 4

When he reached the TitanFlex unit, he stopped. 2

Up close, it was beautiful in its own brutal way. Joints stacked with reinforced pivots, hydraulic muscles waiting to come alive, precision drills and gripping claws folded like a sleeping beast. Ethan stepped closer and laid a hand on a support column, feeling the faint hum of the test systems running inside. 1

"Impressive," he murmured.

He walked around the base, eyes gliding over the alignment lines and control ports. His brain, trained long before this moment, automatically analyzed details. 1

There, the torque points. There, the hydraulic stabilizers. There, the

primary balance core. 1

Then something made him pause. 3

A subtle vibration shivered up through the metal into his palm. Too sharp, too uneven for a machine that large at idle testing speed. He crouched slightly, listening to the frequency. 3

"That's not right," he thought.

He straightened and moved closer to one of the auxiliary panels, watching the live readings flicker across the screen. A slight spike in one of the resonance values kept appearing, then vanishing, like a warning trying to push through the noise. 1

"If this runs at full output," he thought, "the structural alignment will fail at high load. The upper sections of that skyscraper they want to build will be at risk." 3

He was still studying the panel when a voice behind him spoke.

"I don't think I've ever seen this face before." 1

Ethan turned.

Two men approached him, their overalls were marked with red stripes that showed senior rank.

The first man was in his early forties, broad shouldered, with iron-grey hair and a hard jaw. His eyes had the tired confidence of someone used to being obeyed. This was Dr. Marcus Steele, Chief Structural Engineer of the TitanFlex project. 1

Beside him walked a slimmer man with sharp features and a permanent smirk. That was Ian Rutherford, deputy project lead and Marcus's shadow in most decisions. 2

Ethan offered them a polite nod. "Good morning."

Marcus didn't bother nodding back. "You new?" he asked. "I don't remember signing off on you." 1

"Something like that," Ethan said. "I was just admiring the machine. It's a remarkable piece of work." 1

Ian rolled his eyes. "We know it's remarkable. We built it." 1

Ethan decided not to react. "I did notice something in the readings," he began. "There's a small resonance glitch in the balance core. If it's not corrected, it could—" 1

"Save the lecture," Marcus cut in. "We're not interested."

Ian folded his arms, looking Ethan up and down. "Where's your badge, hero? Every engineer in this hall has a proper ID." 1

Ethan glanced down at his plain shirt and hardhat. He had deliberately kept branding off his clothes today. 2

"My ID does not matter here," he said calmly. "What matters is that there is an error in your system. If TitanFlex runs at full capacity like this, the skyscraper you people intend to build can't be safely completed." 3

Ian laughed, loud enough for nearby workers to turn their heads. "Did you hear that?" he said to the closest group. "This unknown guy

walks in out of nowhere and tells us our four-year project is wrong." 1

Several of the workers snickered. Others watched more quietly, unsure.

Marcus stepped closer, his eyes were hard. "Listen," he said. "We've been on this project from the first drawing on the first day. We've run thousands of tests. Passed independent inspections. You think you see something, fine. But don't come in here like some prophet and speak about catastrophe." 2

Ethan kept his eyes steady. "I'm not trying to insult you. I'm saying if you adjust the balance core calibration right now, you can avoid a disaster later. That vibration you feel—" 4

"I don't feel anything," Marcus snapped. "Except annoyance." 3

A few more engineers drifted closer, forming a loose circle around them. The low chatter in the hall softened as people listened. 2

Ian tilted his head. "Tell us, mystery man. Where did you work before? Which team are you from? Or did you just wander in from maintenance?" 1

These guys had no idea they were speaking to their boss.

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