

## Mech 3711

### Chapter 3711 - Ketis the Sage

In a single meeting, Ketis made a bunch of excellent suggestions to Ves.

First, he should try to involve others in his secret research projects. Even if they didn't have his specialty or weren't able to contribute as much, just the fact that they were different people with different perspectives could bring in a lot of refreshing new ideas!

Second, Ketis suggested that Lufa's different glow variations could provide crucial assistance to expert pilots who were stuck in a rut or failed to overcome their bottlenecks.

In the past, people like this either needed to seek out battle or had to rely on factors outside of their control to keep moving forward.

No expert pilot could possibly enjoy a smooth ride to ace pilot. The fact that the latter were much rarer spoke much about how difficult it must be for demigods to shed even greater parts of their mortality.

Since their strength was based on a mental concept like willpower, any solutions that could directly affect their mentalities might have a direct impact on their strength levels!

However, it was Ketis' third suggestion that truly floored Ves.

She actually suggested that Ves should expose more ordinary people to the Aspects of Lufa!

"You've been trying to find a method to increase the rate of breakthroughs for such a long time, right?" Ketis prodded him. "Why have you not enlisted the help of those who have already completed this journey? Whether it is myself or a genuine expert pilot such as my husband, we have first-hand experience of what people must go through to reach a new level of strength! We are much more capable of guiding weaker pilots into finding their strengths! Though I don't expect this proposal to produce hundreds of expert candidates and expert pilots in an instant, it can be part of a comprehensive set of solutions that can increase the rate of breakthroughs in our clan!"

Ves looked shocked at Ketis!

"Are you being serious? You are suggesting that we put our own clansmen at risk by exposing them to the Aspect of Transcendence, an object that has created plenty of fatalities over the course of my attempts to harness its power."

"That's because you are an idiot by trying to do everything yourself, Ves. I admit that you are brilliant in several areas. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't impressed by your ability

to design living mechs. That doesn't mean I respect your ability to design swordsman mechs or your attempts to create a method that increases breakthroughs. You need to work with people who know better or at least offer a second opinion that is different from your own. The reason why you failed to make good use of the Aspect of Transcendence so far is because you kept tunnel visioning by performing the same experiment over and over again while expecting a different result."

"That's not true! While I did create a lot of failures, I was slowly getting closer to my goal! I even managed to derive a few lessons from the few success cases that emerged!" Ves defended himself!

"Your progress is too slow and you spent way too much time on diversions." Ketis judged. "That is also what I am trying to accomplish with my suggestions. There are many mech pilots that have gotten stuck after running into bottlenecks. According to my own understanding, each of them spend way too much time on figuring out how to get past their blockage. They can spend years if not decades of their life pursuing many fruitless diversions. With the help of your Aspects, all of these desperate mech pilots do not have to waste so much time anymore. They can leverage the Aspects of Lufa to understand their true selves and find inner peace. Breaking past their bottlenecks will become a lot easier at that point."

She made so many valid suggestions that Ves was beginning to doubt himself as a researcher. The swordsman mech designer sounded as if she was the one who developed the Aspects of Lufa!

"Why do you care so much, Ketis?"

"Isn't it obvious? I want to strengthen our clan. We are still too weak compared to all of the alien forces and powerful human organizations. We need to pursue strength in as many directions as possible. Whether it is producing new expert pilots or helping our current ones avoid time-consuming diversions, I think we should not let off this opportunity to speed up our growth!"

Of course, Ketis had a personal interest in this particular development. Finding better uses for the Aspects of Lufa directly facilitated her progression as a swordmaster. She had already used them once in order to evolve Sharpie to a human form, so she could probably use this method to make further progress in the future!

Her ideas truly gave Ves a vastly different cognition about the organic statues he neglected. Even without performing any new experiments, he already thought of many new ways to make good use of their properties!

This was the benefit of having a second opinion at hand. Few people were more qualified to assist him than Ketis. She was not only a mech designer who was familiar with glows and living products, but also possessed first-hand experience on the breakthroughs that Ves tried to produce!

At this point, Ves no longer harbored any resentment towards Ketis for breaking into his secret box.

She had completely vindicated herself with her results and the many useful insights she provided!

He briefly recalled that the Polymath had personally instructed Ves to achieve greater progress in one of his older MTA missions. So far, none of the MTA mech pilots serving in the Larkinson Clan as guest pilots had broken through to expert candidate after several years. This was abysmal progress!

He closed his eyes and made a few important decisions.

"Alright." He said. "I will start getting serious on this topic. The only issue is that you and I are full-time mech designers. We cannot divert too much time on this. We should look into hiring trusted helpers that can help us implement the suggestions you have made. I think I will set up a new confidential research group that will systematically conduct research on facilitating breakthroughs. The problem is that we need to staff it with people that we can trust."

This was a huge move that was bound to attract attention!

However, as long as this new research group took shape, the research on facilitating breakthroughs would no longer halt whenever he performed other activities.

Even if he went back to designing mechs, other researchers would make sure to conduct the studies that he had started!

Neither Ves nor Ketis knew anyone on the top of their heads that could become a part of this important new research group. They needed to pick their staff carefully because mistakes could easily lead to fatal accidents.

Ves intended to assign multiple different breakthrough-related projects to this new group. The Quint and the Enlightened Warriors all aimed to achieve the same result through different methods.

It was too bad that there weren't many people aside from himself who could properly manage the projects!

This was a familiar problem and one that Ves had struggled with for years.

According to his estimation, the only person who could truly lead these breakthrough-oriented research projects were people who received the inheritance of the Five Scrolls Compact!

In other words, Ves needed to get his hands on a madman like Dr. Jutland and someone convince him to obediently supervise his spirituality-related research projects.

Suffice to say, this was an unrealistic fantasy!

The safest option was to nurture a dedicated spiritual engineer and researcher from one of his own offspring. The downside to that was that it would take decades before one of his children could reach a satisfactory level!

Given the haste and time pressure that he was facing, Ves thought about applying a more unorthodox solution to his problem.

That was something to consider for later.

By the time that Ves and Ketis reached the end of their discussion, both of them were satisfied with what they achieved.

There was only one more topic that Ves wanted to bring up with his fellow Journeyman.

"Ketis."

"Yes?"

"Despite all of the fantastic suggestions you have made, you can't deny that there will always be an element of danger with our experiments. I am not comfortable subjecting our clansmen to experimental procedures. Even if your assistance and the assistance of expert pilots can reduce any potential accidents, screw ups will occur sooner or later. I would rather avoid seeing that happen to someone who has invested their trust in us. We have an obligation to protect them and we should take that seriously."

"I... don't disagree. What do you suggest, Ves?"

"We use the pakklavons we have taken prisoner as our test subjects."

"VES! YOU PROMISED ME YOU WOULD KEEP THEM ALIVE!"

"I'm not talking about subjecting them to my old experiments!" Ves innocently raised his arms! "You taught me a few different approaches, and I already came up with one myself that I had always been waiting to try out. The pakklavons are not humans, but they are close enough to us that they can serve as useful guides on whether our new methods can truly make a difference."

Ketis calmed down a bit. Though she still expressed outrage, she was willing to hear him out at least.

"You know how important promises are to people like myself." She fiercely reminded him. "If you break your word, I will never find peace until I rectify the matter. Don't make this situation harder on me. Saving the pakklaton refugees may be a mistake in other people's eyes, but I did what I thought was right."

Though Ves thought that Ketis made an incredibly naive and troublesome decision, it wasn't enough for him to disregard her demands.

That didn't mean he wanted to cope with the headache of hosting tens of thousands of pakklatons for free!

Even if it didn't take a lot of effort to keep them fed and housed aboard the Dragon's Den, it was not good for a human fleet to keep collecting every sympathetic alien race it came across.

He already came up with several different solutions, but even the most gentle one presented hard decisions.

"Hear me out before you blast me any further. First, I don't know if you have noticed, but there's an MTA frigate constantly following behind our flagship. Everything we do is under their sights."

Ketis huffed. "I haven't forgotten about that, Ves. You've been trying to get on their good side. That's one of the reasons why you're so eager to confront the aliens."

"Maintaining our relations with the MTA is vital to our future. If the mechers don't approve of what we do, they will step in whether we like it or not. Right now, it is against their policies to extend any form of mercy towards the aliens. No matter whether they are reprehensible savages or harmless savages, as long as they do not identify with the human race, they are obstacles to the expansion of human civilization. Do you truly think you can keep the pakklaton refugees safe from the MTA's directive just because you asked nicely?"

The air around Ketis turned gloomy. Even Sharpie no longer appeared playful and upbeat.

"Sharp... sharp..."

Mrow.

Blinky tried his best to console Sharpie. Fortunately, the little humanoid companion spirit was made of condensed and empowered willpower, so she did not remain deflated for long.

A sense of power and pressure radiated from Sharpie. Her unyielding will made it so that she would never admit defeat so easily!

Perhaps the time for her to impose her will was not today, but Ketis was confident that a time would come where she could make the MTA take her seriously!

Anything could be cut as long as her blade was sharp enough.

## Chapter 3712 - T Institute

Though she aspired to become the best swordsman mech designer in existence, she was far from reaching that level at the moment!

As a Journeyman, her right to speak in front of the MTA was practically nil. Even her peculiarities that set her apart were merely curiosities that did not translate into any real power.

Just like Joshua, Ketis experienced the helplessness of trying to oppose one of the most powerful organizations of humanity. Not even a sword god could cut an enormous trans-galactic organization in half!

She eventually sighed in defeat. "Okay, then. Have it your way. What do you suggest?"

"As I've mentioned earlier, the pakklavons are obstacles that provide no meaningful benefit to humanity. The only way to change that is by making them valuable enough to humanity that keeping them alive is more beneficial than killing them off right away. Our options are limited, but I think we can make a good case to the MTA if we propose to use them as our test subjects for our breakthrough and advancement-related research projects. They are not human, but possess enough commonalities with our race to make this viable."

"This... how will you treat them, Ves?"

This was the difficult part of this proposal. Ves leaned forward on his chair and adopted a serious expression.

"If we leave the pakklavons be, then they will be regarded as burdens at best and latent threats at worst. If we want to change this evaluation, we need to convert them into assets, and the only way I can think of that qualifies is to turn them into test subjects. The good news is that we don't have to experiment on all of them. We can leave at least half of their population alone so that we can use them as a control group to make comparisons and as a reserve pool if we ever need to draw upon more test subjects."

Ves essentially guaranteed to Ketis that half of the pakklavons under their control wouldn't be subjected to depraved experiments. That was already a great development that made Ketis feel more relieved.

Saving half of a population of harmless alien refugees was not as good as saving all of them, but at this point she would take what she could get. Just like Joshua, she could not possibly push the boundaries set by the MTA in an open manner.

Ves hadn't even detailed his experiments as of yet. As a mech designer and researcher herself, Ketis was aware that there was a huge leeway in how dangerous experiments could be. If haste was no concern, then they could easily drag out the studies across many decades, thereby reducing the potential dangers to a minimum.

Ves activated a projection that displayed a document that outlined his preliminary plan.

"I have been working on this ever since you 'requested' that we preserve as many pakklatons as we can. I already figured out from the beginning that we need to make them more useful alive than dead to humanity. Although there is no time for us to form any complete research proposals, I often daydream about exploring new phenomena by conducting different experiments."

This was one of his past times whenever he had an idle moment. He never stopped thinking about ways to improve his design philosophy and the strength of his clan.

If he ceased to do all of this, he would inevitably stagnate as a mech designer!

Ves turned his head and glanced at his document.

"Ah, it's a little outdated. The stuff we talked about has given me a lot of new ideas. Let me revise this plan."

He utilized his implant to directly transcribe his thoughts into additional text which he added to the document. It only took a dozen seconds for his research outline to look a lot more ambitious and comprehensive!

"The... T Institute?" Ketis raised her eyebrow.

"Yes. That's the name that I have chosen for the special research group that I have just mentioned." Ves answered. "It's a bland name that doesn't convey much meaning, but that's deliberate. I originally wanted to call it the 'Transcendence Institute' but that is too revealing. Once I have set it up, it will become the umbrella organization that is responsible for conducting all of the ongoing research related to facilitating human breakthroughs and improvements. Right now, I have come up with four broad research divisions that each attempt to discover new and better ways of facilitating human development."

The revised document mentioned four research divisions in total.

The Mech Guidance Research Division encompassed any research project related to providing guidance through living mechs. Mechs such as the Chiron model, the Quint,

the Enlightened Warrior model and even the upcoming Monster Slayer model fell into this category.

This was currently the most advanced and practical research direction. The Chiron and the Quint had already yielded good results while the Enlightened Warrior mechs were already starting to work on their mech pilots.

With the addition of the Monster Slayer, the Mech Guidance Research Division would be able to make a lot more comparisons since the mech was designed by Ketis as opposed to Ves!

The Enlightenment Research Division encompassed any non-mech means of gradual improvement and achieving minor breakthroughs.

What Ketis had recently done and suggested to Ves fell into the scope of this research division.

Although Ves had not yet performed any studies in this area, he already possessed enough clues to believe that this was a promising research direction!

The process of human development always required a lot of accumulation. The road to advancing to the next rank was long and torturous. The aim of the Enlightenment Research Division was to make this journey as straight and smooth as possible so that people did not waste their time on detours and dead ends.

This was especially relevant to mech pilots because they were like athletes whose conditions only allowed them to compete in a limited age range.

Due to the inherent nature of their careers, mech pilots needed to advance to expert pilot before they reached 80 years old if they wanted to obtain hope of going any further.

The sooner they broke through, the better! This was why it was so crucial for mech pilots to overcome their hurdles quickly and gain strength as fast as possible. They were literally working against their biological clocks!

"Why set up this Enlightenment Research Division when you already have the Mech Guidance Research Division?" Ketis asked. "They both attempt to improve people through similar means."

"That's true, but one research direction is exclusive to mech pilots while the other is open to people of other professions. You and I can't benefit from any advancements related to mech piloting."

"Ah. That makes sense."

Aside from the two divisions, there was also the Breakthrough Research Division. It encompassed all of the research related to triggering apotheosis and achieving major breakthroughs.

This was where Ves put much of his effort into the past. Though it was by far the most dangerous and extreme research division that he came up with, he still had confidence that it could yield incredible results.

Ultimately, Ves hoped that the Breakthrough Research Division could help him figure out how to artificially induce breakthroughs of every rank!

Mech pilot to expert candidate. Expert candidate to expert pilot. Expert pilot to ace pilot.

If Ves was able to grasp the secrets of each of these transitions, he would never have to worry about running out of high-ranking pilots again!

The Companion Research Division was the fourth and final one under the T Institute. It centered around the propagation and improvement of companion spirits.

Having created a bunch of them and seeing them flourish under different circumstances had given Ves a lot of confidence in their value and potential.

He no longer wanted to work on them on his own but form an entire research division that could perform dedicated studies on every conceivable aspect of companion spirits!

Unfortunately, this was also by far the most demanding research division because the requirements to create, manipulate and study companion spirits were extremely strict!

Ves did not want to give up on it, though. The more he thought about it, the more he saw potential in how companion spirits granted new capabilities to people who did not possess them before!

Alexandria formally introduced Gloriana to spiritual engineering. Since her companion spirit was made out of spiritual energy, she was able to manipulate it to a limited degree as well by borrowing the help of the Queen Cat!

Sharpie allowed Ketis to adopt a second profession. Without her companion spirit, Ketis would have little choice but to become an average Journeyman with a relatively boring specialty.

These were just two of the examples that proved to Ves that his companion spirits could improve human development in another manner. Whether it was improving one's existing capabilities or giving them entirely new capabilities, humans could always accomplish a lot more as long as they enjoyed this benefit!

Still, there were way too many problems with companion spirits. Not only did Ves barely know what he was doing, he also found it tedious to invest a lot of time and effort to grant companion spirits to individual people.

It was the same as how Gloriana was only able to provide a handful of mech pilots with custom mechs. There was no way she could equip thousands of soldiers with mechs in a timely manner!

This was why setting up the Companion Research Division was so important to Ves. He needed help to understand companion spirits better and find a way to 'mass produce' them without requiring his personal input.

It did not matter if the quality, capabilities and potential of the mass-produced companion spirits fell behind. As long as he was able to bestow companion spirits to thousands of people at a time, the sheer quantity of them would overwhelm any other group of people!

His ultimate ambition was to find a way to bestow a companion spirit to every clansman!

With this additional source of strength, his Larkinsons would become a lot more productive, thereby enabling them to contribute a lot more to the clan!

There was also an even greater reason why Ves placed so much emphasis on companion spirits.

If his assumptions were correct, the concept of companion spirits might provide him with the key to bestowing spiritual potential to norms who did not possess this quality!

Ves theorized that this could potentially be accomplished through two possible methods.

The first one was to activate a person's spiritual potential. Someone who's potential was dim and dull like Melkor could be activated through special means.

The second one was to transplant someone else's spiritual potential in the target's mind. This was a much more precarious and dangerous procedure, but Ves recalled he had already produced a partial success when he helped Silent William advance.

If Ves was able to follow up on this accomplishment and perform follow-up experiments, perhaps he would have been able to crack the secret by now. It would have been easy for him to turn Melkor into someone who had hope of becoming an expert pilot in his lifetime!

He silently shook his head. He was ultimately a mech designer. His passion always centered around mechs. His research on mech pilots was merely incidental due to his increasing proficiency in spiritual engineering, but he could never allow it to consume all of his attention.

Hence the need to set up the T Institute and delegate much of the research to other people.

That ultimately brought Ves and Ketis back to the most important requirement to setting up this new research institution.

"All of this sounds nice, Ves, but it is useless if you can't find the personnel to staff this institute." Ketis seriously pointed out. "You and I are the most qualified to lead it, but we don't have the time to babysit research projects that don't improve our ability to design mechs in the slightest."

Ves grimaced. "I know, I know. I don't intend to give up on the T Institute, though. I am done with performing all of this research on my own. I have come far enough that I am ready to shift this responsibility to a dedicated organization. Give me a few minutes. Let me think about who I can appoint to lead my new institute."

### Chapter 3713 - Unconventional Source of Manpower

Ves already came up with a handle of suitable names that could lead his ambitious T Institute.

The most obvious choice was to put Ranya Wodin in charge.

She was a biotech expert by trade, so she already possessed a lot of relevant knowledge as well as the right mindset towards augmenting humans.

She had also proven her ability to lead a large and important group by successfully remaining in charge of the Larkinson Biotech Institute.

Under her leadership, the LBI steadily grew to become the primary biotech service provider of not only the Larkinson Clan, but also the rest of the Golden Skull Alliance!

Though the LBI made much less progress in developing unique biotech products that could be put on the market, Ves did not mind too much. He understood how difficult it was to break into the biotech market when an organization had to start from scratch.

Still, Director Ranya had already told Ves that the LBI was on track to release numerous viable commercial products in five to ten years. Once this happened, the clan would finally gain a second major revenue source!

Aside from her proven leadership ability, there was an even more important reason why Ves favored Ranya above many other choices.

She was trustworthy.

She had long cast aside her former status as a member of the Wodin Dynasty and fully embraced her new identity as a Larkinson.

Not only that, she had become the wedded wife of Venerable Tusa Larkinson.

This indirect blood relation made Ves more inclined to entrust his secrets to her, knowing that she would never betray his confidence due to her personal bonds.

"Isn't Ranya an exobiologist?" Ketis asked as Ves mentioned the woman's name. "I can see why you think she can do a decent job in leading the T Institute, but who will you put in charge of the Larkinson Biotech Institute instead?"

"That... is indeed a problem."

The LBI had grown into a large organization that employed thousands of researchers and other staffers. There had to be plenty of smart people who could fill in Dr. Ranya's shoes.

Ves was reluctant to see that happen, though. He was someone who prized familiarity and personal relations and did not feel at ease with putting a relative stranger in charge of such an important institution.

Although the Larkinson Biotech Institute did not play a crucial role to him for the moment, it would definitely have a bigger influence in the future. After all, it was already in the process of collecting and cultivating dozens of mutated beasts. Ves could turn each of them into spiritual ingredients or design spirits.

Ketis made another suggestion. "How about one of your students? If I recall, that kid Maikel Larkinson is the closest mech designer who is following in your footsteps. Even though you're grooming him to become a mech designer, with his understanding of living mechs you could also turn him into the first director of the T Institute."

That sounded interesting, but Ves quickly shook his head.

"Maikel has his own ambition, and it doesn't involve performing weird experiments. He has dedicated many years to achieve his goal of becoming a mech designer. Sure, with my power and prestige I can easily convince him to pursue a different vocation, but I will be doing him a grave disservice."

Ves also looked forward to seeing what Maikel Larkinson could do once he began to progress his chosen design philosophy.

Ketis was right in that the young mech design student also wanted to pursue living mechs. This turned Maikel into a highly important asset to Ves. It was unacceptable to turn the kid away from a career in mech design!

Now that he thought about it, the original four Larkinson seeds were almost ready to graduate and become fully-fledged mech designers.

Though they would have to start off as mere novices, they had all received at least a bit of instruction from several different Journeymen.

Even if Ves was too busy with his own projects to spend much time tutoring Maikel and Zanthar Larkinson, the two adolescents weren't clueless students anymore.

Both of them had not only studied a lot of fundamental subjects, but also gained plenty of hands-on experience and observed a lot of mech designers at work.

Though Ves regretted that he couldn't provide Maikel and Zanthar with orthodox education, the two had received so much personal attention that they definitely enjoyed a much higher starting point than other mech designers!

Only the direct disciples of Master Mech Designer like Tristan Wesseling received better guidance!

Ves and Ketis continued to swap ideas, but neither of them came up with anything better.

The difficulty of finding even a single person to lead the T Institute was a considerable problem that could significantly delay his research gains in the area of human development.

This was an unacceptable outcome!

As Ketis had already said, Ves had been wasting the potential of the Aspect of Lufa and many other fantastic solutions due to lack of time.

He might have been okay with this in the past because he never really thought about it, but now that she pointed it out, he couldn't ignore this issue any longer!

As Ves continued to think about this problem, he suddenly came up with a radical idea.

The MTA, or at least the Survivalist Faction, possessed a vested interest in the success of the T Institute.

After all, weren't they clamoring to uplift humanity and promote their development? What Ves sought to accomplish with the T Institute aligned quite well with the goals of the Survivalists!

The only concern was that the research projects of the T Institute might interest the Five Scrolls Compact as well, but that made it even more important to tie his cart to the MTA's horse!

Though Ves preferred not to entangle himself with any of these huge powers, if he had to shelter under any of them, he might as well stick with the MTA.

The mechcers weren't malicious towards him. In fact, as a mech designer, he possessed a natural affinity with the Association.

His previous concerns about attracting the wrong kind of attention from the MTA were also dispelled mostly. The Polymath herself traveled all the way to Davute in order to probe whether Ves possessed the System.

Since she failed to find what she was looking for, Ves was pretty much in the clear! None of his other secrets were a big deal in the eyes of the mechcers. It was actually beneficial for him to expose what he could do because it enabled him to cooperate with the MTA in an upright manner!

Ves quickly made a decision. "Since we can't find the right person to lead the T Institute in our ranks, we can ask for help from another organization. I have contacts within the MTA that will probably be happy to recommend me a suitable talent."

"What?!"

This time, it was Ketis' turn to be shocked!

According to her own understanding of Ves, he would have never asked for help from the MTA on his own initiative.

It was even more unlikely for Ves to allow the MTA to put one of their own goons and informers in charge of his most sensitive and vital research projects!

"You can't do this!" Ketis hissed. "Haven't you forgotten about your original aim of turning the pakklaton refugees into your 'test subjects'? We need to protect them from the MTA!"

"That's exactly why this is a great idea, Ketis. I know the mechcers well enough that they are fascinated by research. As long as our research projects are promising enough, anyone the MTA puts forward will not only provide unofficial sanction for our activities, but also make sure our 'experimental assets' will be fully retained! Even if we dump the aliens on a sleepy mudball, the MTA will probably assign warships to patrol the star system. This is the best way to guarantee the long-term survival of the alien refugees!"

The swordmaster was not a stupid woman. She quickly figured out his rationale. It was a brilliant if unconventional way to obtain cover for his experiments. The logic being that any experiments happening under the full supervision of an agent of the MTA ought to be without issue!

"You are playing with fire here..."

"Well, that's only because you pushed me into the fire in the first place, you know."

The two discussed a bit more until they finally ended the meeting.

In the end, both Ves and Ketis had a lot to look forward to. Not only would the T Institute provide a way for the pakklaton refugees to survive, it also promised to provide the Larkinsons with many new ways to improve their strength!

Once Ketis retracted Sharpie and left the office, Ves remained silent as Blinky returned to his own mind.

"Meow?"

"Yeah, I should make the arrangements."

Ves moved quickly. He expanded his initial plan for his T Institute and instructed his assistant Gavin to take care of the administration.

As for finding a suitable director and other useful personnel, he directly sent a message to Jovy's personal comm.

He recalled he still needed to provide a companion spirit to Jovy, but he needed to think about it carefully.

If he wanted to raise his value to the Survivalist Faction, then he needed to make sure that Jovy received a life-changing gift!

The companion spirit that Ves intended to design for the MTA Journeyman not only had to be strong, it also had to compliment his design philosophy!

Only by accomplishing this goal would the mechers be truly delighted!

Days passed by as Ves arranged various matters before turning his attention back to putting the finishing touches on his remaining mech design projects.

Almost two weeks after the Battle of Orange Tulip, the salvage fleet invited by the Golden Skull Alliance finally entered the star system!

Everyone in the expeditionary fleet was relieved to see the arrival of the new ships. Once the salvage fleet took over the captured pakklaton starships, the Golden Skull Alliance could move on without carrying any burdens.

Though it took a bit of time for the slow and heavy salvage fleet to reach the inner system, once they neared the site, Ves took a good look at the newcomers.

There were a lot of carriers as well as cargo ships in the salvage fleet. The Golden Skull Alliance had transmitted the exact volume, mass, dimensions and other data about the captured vessels and valuable debris, so the salvagers came prepared.

As the salvage fleet came into position, the expeditionary fleet moved back in order to give the professionals space to do their work.

Many of the salvage ships belonged to a company called the RTG Group. When Ves observed their salvage teams at work, he quickly nodded in satisfaction. They were all working efficiently and with great care towards preserving as much value as possible.

Murphy & Sons happened to bring the bulk of the cargo ships, though. These huge but largely hollow vessels used to carry all of the parts of their disassembled shipyard. Now that it was set up in the Davute system, it was no problem for the cargo ships to be used to transport salvaged goods and materials.

Melaia Murphy of Murphy & Sons happened to accompany the salvage fleet this time. Ves received her on the Spirit of Bentheim in person in order to discuss the salvage operations and other important topics.

"Is your shipyard operational yet?" Ves asked the older woman.

"Not yet. I wouldn't be here if that was the case." The chief shipbuilder shook her head. "The reassembly process is a huge endeavor due to the size of the shipyard. We also need to inspect and test every important system in order to ensure that their time in storage hasn't degraded their functioning. Aside from that, we have only received half of the replacement shipyard components that we have ordered so far. It will take at least two more months before we can tentatively begin with constructing starships. Don't worry. It will not take long before we can fulfill your first ship commission."

## Chapter 3714 - shipbuilding Trends

The arrival of the fleet organized by Murphy & Sons and the RTG Group fully freed up the Golden Skull Alliance. There was no more need for the Larkinsons and their allies to linger any longer in this empty star system.

While the salvage teams surveyed and broke down the captured pakklaton ships, Ves continued to converse with Melaia Murphy.

During his initial meetings with the Murphies, they always acted aloof and superior towards others. Shipbuilders were much more needed in the Red Ocean, hence it shouldn't have been a surprise that they acted as if they owned the place.

However, now that Murphy & Sons became one of the founding members of the Open Consortium, the Murphies treated the Larkinsons with a lot more warmth.

"Many of the issues that previously plagued us are no longer bothering us as much." Melaia Murphy explained as she and Ves toured the Spirit of Bentheim. "Our shipyard will be ready to begin operations and we have already collected an enormous amount of prepayments for future orders. As long as we deliver the first batch of orders to the members of the Open Consortium, we will not only be able to pay off all of our debts, but also accumulate a healthy surplus that we can invest back into our company."

Ves wanted to hear more. "Where will you invest your money? Will you upgrade your shipyard's existing capabilities or will you work towards building a second shipyard?"

He had his guesses, but he was curious to hear what Melaia Murphy had to say. Her response would reveal much about the strategic direction of Murphy & Sons.

"We have not made any definite plans, but we are seriously considering whether we should build a second shipyard. With an additional shipbuilding facility, we can double our production volume. This will double our income, which we can use to invest in another set of shipyards. If this goes on long enough, well, you can probably imagine how many ships we can produce per year."

The profits would definitely be astounding at that point! If there was one commodity that would always be in short supply in the Red Ocean, it was starships!

The ability to ship goods and mechs from point A to point B was so essential to the functioning of different colonies that the amount of starships a pioneer possessed directly determined their power!

Therefore, Murphy & Sons and all of the other shipbuilding companies in the Red Ocean did not have to worry about oversaturating the starship market for many years!

Still, with his background and experience in the mech industry, Ves recognized that the shipbuilding industry could not expand at a geometric rate without limit!

"I can see the benefit of building multiple shipyards, but how will your company be able to staff them all?" Ves asked. "From what I heard, naval engineers are extremely hard to come by. In addition, increasing the amount of shipyards will also increase the amount of input you require. The supply of materials will never grow at the same rate. Besides, all of your competitors will probably be pursuing the same strategy. Soon enough, there will be way too many shipyards in Davute but not enough materials to go around. Prices will skyrocket."

Melaia Murphy nodded. She did not look surprised. Any insider in the shipbuilding industry could foresee this much.

"The first phase of our establishment in the Red Ocean is centered around building up a basic foundation in the local industry. Relying on a single shipyard for all of our business

is too precarious. As long as we have a couple more of them in our possession, we will become less susceptible to falling in the same dire straits as before."

That was understandable. A proper company should never put all of its eggs in a single basket.

"If this is the first phase, what is your second phase?"

She smiled. "Once we have obtained a measure of economic security in the new frontier, we can begin to invest in our product development and quality of our production. Our aim is to develop more diverse and unique ship classes so that we can begin to stand out from the pack. This way, we can build up a more loyal and dedicated clientele that will allow our business to be more resilient in the face of sudden changes in the shipbuilding market."

That was basically the strategy that Ves had suggested to the Murphies.

Of course, Murphy & Sons planned to invest its money on a lot more areas. Since the company's spending power was so high, it would be a waste to pursue only a single strategy!

Ves envied Murphy & Sons. Ships were in much shorter supply and even the crappier ones could be sold for a fortune in the Red Ocean.

In contrast, the mech industry was already running at full tilt. The barrier to entry in this sector was much lower so the competition was already extremely high.

If the LMC wanted to stand out in the regional mech market, Ves had to come up with products that could seriously impress potential buyers!

Ves asked a few more questions, but the chief shipbuilder did not give out many hints.

Even though they were part of the same consortium, they were not that close. It was not wise for Murphy & Sons to reveal all of their long-term plans to the Larkinson Clan.

Who knew whether their direct competitors would get their hands on this sensitive information one day!

Since Murphy & Sons was not in business yet, Ves and Melaia soon ran out of topics to discuss.

The Open Consortium was almost a month old. Hardly anything happened as of late and this particular cooperation was the first of this kind to happen.

The only part of the conversation that interested Ves was when they both looked out in the distance where the salvaging fleet was slowly breaking down the crippled or ruined starships of the pakklaton race.

Melaia displayed a lot of interest in the alien vessels.

"You've given us an interesting puzzle, Patriarch Ves. While the MTA has published a large amount of data on the pakklaton starships, it is much easier to study their nuances with actual examples before me. Ships equipped with warp drives are always designed in a different manner than ships equipped with FTL drives. Though we already studied the basic theories, the pakklatons have a wealth of practical experience in optimizing their starships for warp travel."

This might not be important for building ships with regular FTL drives, but once phasewater became more ubiquitous, this was bound to change.

The direct combat applications of warp drives was too great! The Murphies could already foresee that military vessels equipped with either warp drives or superdrives would become insanely popular in a few decades!

Even though that sounded like a huge amount of time, the Murphies did not wish to slack off. They had to start as early as possible in order to make sure that their company would be able to keep up with changing market trends!

Through this conversation, Ves not only learned the importance of studying intact alien starships, but also gained more insight into the future pattern of the starship market.

Once the time had come for both of them to part ways, Melaia Murphy shook hands with Ves once again.

"Thank you again for what you have done for our Murphy Family. My mother has been less strict as of late. My sister and I have obtained considerably more leeway in what we can do in our respective positions. The Open Consortium is also working out a lot better than we hoped, though it is too early to make a definite conclusion."

"The Open Consortium will stand the test of time." Ves confidently stated. "It is one of the few organizations that is truly bound by trust. Every consortium partner can do business with each other with the assurance that none of them will backstab each other. There aren't many organizations at this level that can make the same promise."

"That is so, but there are more factors at play than trust, Patriarch Ves. Power, connections and wealth are also indispensable, and we are currently short in all of these areas."

Ves thought about her words when Melaia and her people boarded a shuttle and flew back to the salvage fleet.

The Open Consortium was still on shaky grounds due to the lack of those fundamentals. Ves wasn't sure whether Chairwoman Calsie could hold down the fort without the proximity of the rest of the Larkinson Clan.

"I hope she can surprise me." Ves muttered under her breath.

To most of the people in the expeditionary fleet, the saga surrounding the pakklaton refugee fleet had finally come to a close. The expeditionary fleet had already prepared a long time ago and finally transitioned back into FTL travel.

The expedition to the deeper parts of the Krakatoa Middle Zone was back on track!

At this time, Ves juggled several responsibilities. He not only helped with setting up the T Institute, but also had to make sure the pakklaton prisoners were taken care of while they remained captive inside the Dragon's Den.

That latter group was providing Ves with a lot of headaches.

Director Ranya expressed more and more frustration with what the Larkinsons were even supposed to do with the aliens.

"We never anticipated that we would host so many alien 'guests' on our ship. Do you know what it means to host tens of thousands of pakklatons? Once the initial panic has died down, they have begun to stir up trouble. Even though we continually emphasize that they should obey our arrangements, these avian aliens are highly emotional and react differently to what has happened to them. I hope you know where we should put them, because we do not have the manpower or facilities to house the pakklaton prisoners in the long-term!"

Ves let out a deep breath. "I can understand your difficulties, but try your best to cope with the situation. If the Larkinson Biotech Institute is short on manpower, then ask for help from the Larkinson Army. Try your best to keep the pakklatons in line. I have a few plans in store for them but many of them will require us to host the aliens in our fleet for at least a year and likely more."

"Why so, sir?"

"Because they will soon be used as test subjects."

"...Clever." Dr. Ranya said. "Human rights don't apply to aliens because they are literally not human. Hence, we can perform any experiments on them as we like. With aliens, we do not have to be concerned about violating any ethical or legal boundaries. As long as we refrain from researching weapons of mass destruction, we can get away with anything. The only concern here is whether your experiments on the pakklatons will have any relevance on other species."

"You don't need to be worried about that." Ves told her. "The pakklavons are similar enough to humans in terms of their mentalities that they can definitely provide a lot of research data. I just need to set up the right research institution to conduct the necessary studies."

The news that Ves planned to create the T Institute came as a surprise to Dr. Ranya.

She initially argued that the preparations she had made should already be sufficient to allow the Larkinson Biotech Institute to conduct this research, but Ves was adamant in his choice.

"The emphasis on the two institutes are substantially different. I don't want you guys to split your focus. The T Institute also requires researchers who possess different specialties."

Though Dr. Ranya was concerned that the status of the Larkinson Biotech Institute would fall because of this, Ves quickly reassured her. The LBI would remain important for times to come.

"There may even be research projects where both research institutes will have to work together. You won't be left out, Ranya."

"I hope that is the case."

## Chapter 3715 - Giant Bird Cage

Ves did not waste his time on the Dragon's Den.

Aside from sharing some of his latest plans to Director Ranya, he also took the initiative to come down to one of the major biomes of the bioresearch vessel in order to see how the pakklavon refugees were doing.

Accompanied by Ranya and his bodyguards, Ves approached a transparent barrier that provided him with a view of a forested biome.

"This environment looks close to the original habitat of the pakklavon race." He remarked.

"That is the point, sir. We have no intention of making the lives of our alien captives needlessly uncomfortable. We have invested a great amount of effort and resources into transforming the environment of this biome. However, we cannot give the pakklavons what they truly want. Their home planets, their star nation and many of their fellow aliens are all gone now. They can never go back to their old and idyllic lives, and it is all because of the fault of humans such as ourselves. How can they possibly be happy with their new conditions? They don't even control their own lives anymore. We can euthanize them tomorrow and they cannot do a thing to resist our actions."

If Ves was in the shoes of the pakklavons, then he would definitely feel angry, helpless and resentful at all of the unfairness directed towards the race.

Fortunately, he was a human, so there was no need for him to extend any sympathy for an alien race that had become uprooted and would eventually cease to exist in the future.

Ves had no confidence that he could fulfill Ketis' wish in the long term. No matter how Ves tried to turn the pakklavons into useful assets, the galaxy was not short on suitable test subjects. There were plenty of pirates and other alien races that could fulfill this role a lot better than a bird-like race!

He could only hope that by the time the pakklavon race had become extinct, Ketis would have long set her sights on more important matters.

As he continued to peer through the transparent screen, he frowned as he had yet to see any of the pakklavons in person.

"The aliens do not like to linger at the edge of the biome." Ranya explained to him. "The cage reminds them of their lack of freedom. The inability to fly far and wide has made the pakklavons considerably upset. They are not comfortable with being confined to such a relatively small space."

"Oh? Don't they live on starships where space is at a premium? How can they possibly cope with the conditions of this biome?"

Ranya hesitated. "We... are not entirely certain of that, sir. The MTA has not conducted any thorough studies on the pakklavons. In any case, do you wish to drag over a few alien specimens?"

"Please do. I'd like to inspect their mentalities, and for that I need to get close to them. Studying them by remote is not good enough."

Ves waited for a minute before six different bots came over while clutching onto different pakklavons.

"Cawww! Cawww! Cawww!"

Naturally, the bound and immobilized pakklavons were all panicking. They continued to struggle against the solid grips of the bots, not knowing what the humans had in store for them. Were they about to be treated as sacrifices?

Ves didn't care what the pakklavons were thinking. He extended his spiritual senses without any warning and studied the individuals one by one.

Ranya had been thoughtful enough to instruct the bots to retrieve different pakklavons at different stages of growth and power.

Ves had already noticed this in his earlier examinations, but now that he was able to examine the large avian species without any immediate on his shoulders, he recognized that they were more emotional than humans on average.

Though this caused them to think differently from humans, extreme emotions could also trigger breakthroughs. If the pakklavons piloted mechs, how much stronger would they become?

The youngest pakklavon in this group looked like a typical angry bird that swore vengeance on humanity. The creature's beak was so poisonous that the translation programs couldn't fully convey what the youngster was speaking!

Ves had the greatest hopes on the alien equivalent of a teenager. The young pakklavon's mental development was the most malleable due to his young age. There were many ways to exploit this trait in order to transform the young bird into an entirely different creature!

The other two pakklavons were much less flexible. The adult and older pakklavons shared the same hatred and rignation as their younger comrade, but the difference was that their advanced growth and life experiences had already locked their mentalities in place.

Ves did not need to tinker with their minds and spirits to know that performing any adjustments on them was going to be an uphill battle.

He recalled the case of Venerable Stark. Unlike other expert pilots, she broke through at a later stage of her life and career. After that, she suffered so much trauma that her willpower broke because it wasn't malleable enough to cope with drastic changes.

"Hmm... I should test this hypothesis in a study in order to confirm whether it is true."

As he examined the three prisoners, he continued to develop all kinds of interesting guesses that needed to be confirmed.

The best part about all of this was that he could perform a wide latitude of experiments on the intelligent birds without worrying about violating any human rights.

Aliens weren't humans, so they didn't possess any human rights!

In the scientific community, any non-human organics were the equivalent of lab mice. They just possessed different properties. Just like how no one cared if someone grafted an ear onto the back of a mouse or pumped painful toxins inside their veins to see how

much they twitched before their hearts burst apart, the authorities would never arrest him if he tried to do the same to a bunch of aliens like these angry-looking pakklavons.

Ves grinned at the resentful specimens. "Go ahead. Be angry at me. The more your emotions are riled up, the more you will stimulate your mentality. You need to have lots of spirit in order to do well in the experiments to come."

"Caww! Cawww! Cawww!"

The aliens didn't understand his words at all. Not that it mattered. They hated the humans to the bone and would not hesitate to rip Ves apart with their beaks.

Though Ves could have used various means to make them understand his words, he did not bother to do so. Likewise, it was pointless for the aliens to comprehend his words.

"You probably aren't aware of this, but I am doing all of you a favor. Each of you should have been eliminated if we captured your fleet normally. It is only due to your research value that we are allowed to keep you alive and in captivity. If you want to do your best to cling on to your lives, then you should do your best to ensure you retain your value of test subjects."

"Caww! Caww! Cawww!"

The more defiance displayed by the pakklavons, the more Ves became satisfied with the quality of test subjects. The samples brought forward by the bots were particularly more energetic than he thought.

"You pakklavons should feel lucky that you have become the property of the Larkinson Clan. If other organizations have managed to capture you alive, then your fates would doubtlessly be worse. Here, you can not only relax and try to build new nests in the comfortable and spacious biomes we have made available to you, but you also don't have to worry about participating in any excessively dangerous experiments."

"Caww! Cawww!"

Ves waved his hand. "Send them back. Although I would love to experiment on them, now is not the time."

The bots forcefully brought the captive pakklavons back to the interior of the forest environment.

After lingering for a while longer, Ves ended his inspection of the biomes and the pakklavons kept inside.

He only made one last stop before he ended his visit to the Dragon's Den.

Both Ves and Dr. Ranya entered a cold compartment where stacks of alien eggs were put into storage arrays. The climate controlled environment ensured that the incubation of the unhatched pakklaton embryos stretched on for many years, effectively freezing them in time.

"How are the eggs?" Ves asked.

"They are in good condition more or less." The director answered. "Aside from a handful that have cracked during the transportation, the majority of them can still hatch healthy chicks if we wish."

"What do you think we should do? Should we hatch a few and give the captive pakklavons something more fruitful to do by raising new chicks?"

Ranya took a deep breath. "That depends on your long-term plans with the prisoners. So far, we have not heard anything from you about how to treat and settle these pakklavons on a more permanent basis. While we can continue to take care of them aboard this ship, their presence here is a burden on our life support system and our supplies. It's like our clan has expanded by 40 percent all of a sudden. Not only are there a lot of them, but they are also larger than average humans. This means we need to invest more into feeding them and fulfilling their basic needs. Though we have plundered a lot of pakklaton-specific food and other supplies, storing all of them takes up a considerable amount of cargo space."

"I understand your concerns. To be honest, I haven't decided on what to do with them yet." Ves replied. "I don't like to keep them all in our expeditionary fleet either. Hosting over 40,000 pakklavons on a single ship sounds way too precarious. Once our T Institute is up and running, I will task the people there with forming a more sustainable plan. I think the most likely option that we can take is to build an internment camp or something on a planet and dump the majority of the prisoners in them so that they won't burden our fleet anymore."

"That's a good idea, sir. A camp on a planet, preferably a settled one, is much cheaper and easier to run. Even if the prisoners manage to break out, they will not pose any danger towards a vital ship of our fleet."

"We shouldn't transfer all of the pakklaton prisoners away, though." Ves said after a bit of thought. "We need to keep a few hundred promising test subjects within my reach so that I can conduct my most promising studies on them. Once the T Institute is operational, I will find a way to divide the pakklaton prisoners into different categories that will help us distinguish their value."

The most valuable pakklaton prisoners were those that possessed spiritual potential. While Ves had not yet encountered an alien bird that displayed this quality, there were bound to be a few among such a large population of captives.

He did not worry about finding one at all. Every intelligent species was able to produce those that had the potential to activate their spiritualities.

Even the test subjects that didn't possess spiritual potential were useful to Ves. One of his major goals was to find a way to activate this property.

In the past, he had been too afraid of harming Larkinsons who entrusted their lives to him, but he didn't need to be so reserved towards his new test subjects!

Though there were certainly risks involved with trying to impart spiritual potential in those that lacked it, how could he make an omelet if he didn't break a few alien eggs?

Accidents happened over the course of many experiments and it was unreasonable to hold himself back too much. If the T Institute failed to be productive enough, then why bother retaining so many test subjects?

If the pakklats wanted to stay alive, then they should do their best to cooperate with whatever experiment he had in store for their group!

#### Chapter 3716 - Irvan Rifle

After a fruitful visit to the Dragon's Den, Ves returned to the Spirit of Bentheim and put the matters concerning the pakklats and the T Institute aside.

It took a lot of work to get everything up and running and he could not possibly perform all of the work alone. This was why he was patiently awaiting a response from the MTA.

"For now, it's time to finish the remaining mech design projects."

With all of the matters relating to the Battle of Orange Tulip behind them, the Larkinson mech designers could fully devote themselves to completing the final sprint of the current design round.

While Journeymen such as Ketis and Tifi Coslone had already begun to fabricate the first production copies of their completed mech designs, Ves and a handful of other mech designers directed their attention to a more important mech design.

After a huge amount of work and effort, the Minerva Project was finally complete!

Ves, Gloriana, Juliet Stameris, Sara Voiken and Professor Benedict were all satisfied with the latest iteration of the expert command mech that they had especially designed for Commander Casella Ingvar.

As far as expert mech design projects went, the Minerva Project turned out to be a fairly easy one to design. This was primarily because it was not that difficult to incorporate the various command and communication modules into the mech design.

Each of them were based on high-quality component designs that were already compatible with the mech design to begin with. Gloriana and Professor Benedict both possessed a lot of finesse and excelled at puzzling all of these powerful and demanding parts into a cohesive internal design.

Of course, the two also clashed quite a lot. Both of their specialties overlapped to a degree. Even though Gloriana was only a Journeyman, she was not afraid of voicing her opinions at all, especially towards a man.

For his part, Professor Benedict tried to keep an open mind, but when the discussion turned to subjects related to his design philosophy, he was unwilling to compromise!

Fortunately, the Senior did not apply too many solutions to the Minerva Project. If he became more involved, then his design philosophy would have crowded out the other ones. This was not desirable as the Minerva Project was supposed to be a Larkinson mech rather than a Crosser mech.

When the four Larkinson Journeymen who participated in the project gathered together, they briefly studied their completed mech design one last time before they were ready to fabricate the crucial expert mech.

"It looks better than I imagined. I never imagined that designing a powerful expert mech would go so smoothly." Sara Voiken said.

Ves smiled towards the defensive specialist of his team. "We owe a lot to Professor Benedict for designing all of the complicated elements that are related to the most powerful traits of expert mechs. With his help, we were free to apply our own solutions without too many burdens."

"It's a pity that an expert command mech is not the best platform to showcase my talent."

Sara Voiken was exceptionally lucky to be able to contribute to an expert mech design project at her current stage. The circumstances in the Larkinson Clan wouldn't last forever. Once Ves and a few others advanced to Senior and beyond, the role that Journeymen could play in future expert mech design projects would definitely diminish.

Right now, the clan was too new and its team of core mech designers were still in the early stages of their careers. This created an opening where Journeymen who had just entered the clan could also take part in the design of important mechs!

Although Sara was correct that a mech that did not possess a lot of armor was not a good place for her to maximize her unique abilities, she definitely played a useful role.

As Ves studied the armor system and inner structure of the Minerva Project, he could clearly recognize that the expert mech definitely gained a boost in its defensive capabilities.

Perhaps the difference was not as much as he hoped, but even a modest increase in damage resistance could allow Commander Casella to survive an engagement against a dedicated kill team of enemy expert mechs!

In addition, due to Sara Voiken's specialty in physical negation, the armor system designed for the Minerva Project excelled at repelling physical projects and melee weapons!

Due to the Minerva Project's high strategic value, Sara paid extra attention in raising its resistance against powerful piercing blows.

Anyone who thought that a command mech would crumble instantly when attacked by an expert light skirmisher would receive an unexpected surprise!

Though the defenses of the Minerva Project couldn't keep up with most expert mechs, the true value in having a defensive specialist around was her ability to raise a mech design's defensive coefficient while maintaining the same mass and volume.

Therefore, even if Sara Voiken felt as if one of her hands were tied behind her back, she definitely made a positive contribution to the mech design. Ves was fully satisfied with her performance in her first collaboration on such a complicated project.

"I am looking forward to how fast the Minerva Project can fly." Juliet commented. "This mech carries a considerable amount of mass, but her mobility is not weak."

The Minerva Project's acceleration and maneuverability characteristics were nowhere comparable to that of the Dark Zephyr or the Star Dancer Mark II. It carried too much baggage around to dance ballet.

However, Juliet managed to squeeze in a fairly powerful flight system with the help of their external consultant. Professor Benedict specialized in energy transmission systems, which essentially meant that the Minerva Project could provide considerably more juice to its systems.

One of the consequences of that was that the Minerva Project's flight system was able to provide more thrust power than usual for an expert mech of its size and budget.

Did this turn the Minerva Project into a capable duelist? Not really. What Juliet was able to accomplish was boosting the expert command mech's straight-line acceleration.

They all decided that this was the best course of action for the Minerva Project because it allowed Commander Casella to reach the places of the battlefield where she was most needed in a timely manner.

Being able to move faster also allowed it to outrun many more expert melee mechs that might attempt to kill one of the leaders of the Larkinson Army.

No matter what, a melee mech that couldn't keep up with the pace of its target was hardly a threat!

Even if certain expert mechs possessed the ability to damage enemies from a distance, as long as they didn't carry any powerful ranged weapons, the Minerva Project was more than capable of firing back!

"I'm pretty happy with how my new Irvan transformable luminar crystal rifle turned out." Ves smiled with pride.

It had been challenging for him to design a luminar crystal weapon that possessed substantially different weapon modes.

He not only needed to design both a long-ranged rifle and a short-ranged submachine gun, but also come up with additional components to combine the two together in a single weapon frame!

Suffice to say, Ves had to put in a lot of hours to make this weapon concept viable. He studied a lot of models of existing transformable guns, but blindly copying their solutions didn't work due to the peculiarities of luminar crystals.

Ves had to put on his innovator hat and invent a lot of specific solutions to come up with this formidable and flexible energy gun.

Considering all of the time and effort he put into it, he decided to give it a name of its own. There was no particular reason why he called it the Irvan. Maybe he thought it sounded similar enough to Casella's family name while still being unique enough to prevent confusion.

Whatever the case, the Irvan was a distinctly powerful luminar crystal weapon that strongly distinguished itself from the other comparable weapons that Ves had designed for his other expert mechs.

Of all of the expert mech-grade weapons that he had designed, the Amaranto was unquestionably the most high-profile one. It was hard not to become impressed by its supreme firepower and long-ranged suppression.

Since Ves had not bothered to bestow it with a name, Venerable Stark had taken to calling it the Instrument of Vengeance. It did not take a lot of thought to figure out why she settled for this name.

The Everchanger's luminar crystal rifle was a bit more standard and balanced in attributes. It was not as special as the other weapons of its level, but if Venerable Joshua resonated with it, the gun would definitely acquire special traits over time!

Joshua hadn't named the weapon yet so Ves had taken the liberty of calling it the Vitalus.

The only other existing expert mech-grade luminar crystal weapon in the expeditionary fleet was the one wielded by the Star Dancer Mark II.

Venerable Brutus had a slightly more powerful weapon at his disposal. Due to its size and mass limitations, the rifle was remarkably compact and suited a mobile expert mech extremely well.

Funnily enough, when Ves inquired whether Brutus had named the weapon, the expert pilot responded that he had taken to calling it the Hexacris.

Ves scratched his head when he heard this name.

In any case, each of these high-end weapons possessed their own advantages and disadvantages.

In terms of power level, the Minerva Project's Irvan probably ranked second when it was in its rifle mode.

The weapon looked fairly impressive in this state. Not only was it almost as big as the Amaranto's Instrument of Vengeance, it also shared many of the same features.

This enabled Commander Casella to contribute in a similar fashion, though not as drastic as Venerable Stark.

No matter what, the Amaranto was completely optimized for long-range marksmanship. Its accuracy and ranged power output in combination with its expert pilot was unparalleled in the Larkinson Army!

Against closer-ranged opponents, it was no longer suitable for the Minerva Project to wield such a large and unwieldy rifle. Its muzzle was excessively long and could lead to plenty of problems in close-ranged combat!

This was why the Commander Casella could choose to detach the forward muzzle as well as a part of the chassis.

Once the Minerva Project stowed away these parts, what was left transformed into a submachine gun that was considerably lighter and possessed a completely different firing mode.

Its high firing-rate but low power per shot did not look impressive, but it was enough to threaten light mechs while posing enough threat to other melee mechs.

Was the Irvan in its submachine gun mode an impressive weapon? Definitely not. Was it better than many other options? Likely yes.

Ves felt it was worth it to put in the extra effort to bestow the mech design with a submachine gun mode. Although the complicated weapon performed well in many of the simulation tests, he needed to see the finished product in action to be certain of the results.

He had a good feeling, though. The Irvan might not be the most powerful or even the most flexible ranged weapon, but it was just right for the Minerva Project and its expert pilot.

All in all, the Minerva Project was not a simple expert mech.

Compared to the more common mech archetypes such as light skirmishers and medium knight mechs, a command mech was a weird beast that came in many different forms.

To some states, a command mech should look like a bloated beast that contained as many command and control modules as possible!

Other people believed that command mechs should essentially be the mech version of a mobile command center. The machines that conformed to this vision were essentially the mech version of buses that housed battlefield commanders and their staff!

The Larkinson Clan did not support any radical ideas about command mechs. The Minerva Project possessed fairly normal traits for a mech of its role. The only truly peculiar element aside from its Irvan rifle was its special properties that came from being both an expert mech and living mech.

The Minerva Project had a lot of extra tricks up its sleeve!

## Chapter 3717 - Better Tools

After the Larkinson mech designers who took part in the Minerva Project repeatedly confirmed that the final design was acceptable to them, they all boarded a shuttle that brought them out of the Spirit of Bentheim.

Each of them were on their way to the Cyclical Engine. The reason for traveling to the Cross Clan's factory ship was that Professor Benedict had graciously offered his high-end workshop to fabricate the Minerva Project.

This was not an easy offer to accept. There were pros and cons to accepting the decision.

The biggest upside was that Benedict's workshop was much more powerful and capable than the ones aboard the Spirit of Bentheim.

It couldn't be helped. The production machines used by Ves and Gloriana were still Hexer goods that used to be adequate back in the galactic rim but not any longer in the Red Ocean.

Ves had personally visited the Cyclical Engine not too long ago and confirmed that Professor Benedict's workshop was filled with much better equipment.

They could not only handle and process all kinds of additional materials, they also perform their work at a higher pace and degree of consistency than inferior machines.

The downside was that the learning curve was higher. The machines that Professor Benedict had picked out for his own work were not aimed for beginners.

If the Larkinsons hadn't already practiced with the specialized production equipment in virtual simulations, Professor Benedict wouldn't have agreed to let them use his workshop!

Still, Ves hesitated whether it was a good idea to fabricate the Minerva Project in a new and foreign workshop.

He was not concerned about leaking secrets. Professor Benedict participated in the design of the expert command mech from the beginning and was familiar with almost all of its weaknesses.

Ves didn't think that the man would ever abuse the sensitive knowledge he possessed on the Minerva Project.

The Larkinsons and the Crossers had grown close and Ves had also progressed his friendship with the Senior Mech Designer.

So what if the Cross Clan was familiar with the ins and outs of the Minerva Project? Soon, Ves would be in the same position as he would soon take part in the design of the Mars Project, which was a much more important mech to his counterpart!

The actual concern he was grappling with was whether he and his fellow Larkinson mech designers were able to work fluently enough with Professor Benedict's high-end production machines.

Even if he read the manuals and operated their virtual equivalents to gain proficiency, he still lacked real experience.

Ves knew quite well that these little details could disturb him and the others during important moments when they were fabricating the Minerva Project.

He did not forget that he had managed to fabricate three masterwork expert mechs with the help of his trusted old workshop equipment. He knew the settings and properties of the ELKINE production line inside-out and had tweaked their settings exactly to his liking.

More importantly, he had used them enough times while channeling his passion that a part of him had rubbed off on the equipment he used.

This had unintentionally imparted them with a bit of life of their own. While Ves wasn't sure whether this could make a difference at all, he at least managed to develop a greater sense of intimacy towards the machines that had helped him secure numerous fantastic achievements.

A part of Ves held the mindset of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. His familiar workshop had yielded him plenty of success and there was no reason to think that it would disappoint him this time.

However, another part of Ves wanted to move onto better equipment. The original Hexer production equipment might have been amazing to a mech designer who had recently escaped from a bunch of third-rate states, but as a leader of the Larkinson Clan, he deserved better!

Ves only needed to spend the equivalent of Gloriana's single handbag in order to get his hands on better gear. 120 MTA credits roughly translated to 22.8 billion hex credits, which sounded like a huge sum a few years ago but was not an excessive price for him to pay these days!

He was reluctant to upgrade his current workshop, though. Anything he could get for 120 or 1200 MTA credits would be substantially better than the ELKINE production line, but would still fall far short from a superfab.

Obtaining a superfab was one of his medium-term goals. To do that, Ves needed to raise tens of thousands of MTA credits, which was not easy considering the Larkinson Clan's debt burden and large expenditures.

Still, Ves was confident that once he completed a bunch of commercial mech design projects for the next design round, the Larkinson Clan's finances would look a lot better!

At that point, investing 30,000 or 40,000 MTA credits in a decent superfab was not impossible!

He planned to stick with the superfab that he would buy at that point for the long haul. He even wanted to look for a model that was more modular so that he could upgrade it more easily over time.

Wouldn't it be great if he used the 'same' superfab over many decades of his career?

Perhaps he might even learn enough about fabrication technology that he could design upgrades for the machine himself!

Combined with investing it with life and imparting it with a touch of Vulcan, the superfab was bound to turn into a remarkable life artifact!

Ves just needed to be patient and earn enough money to reach a starting point. The superfab he intended to buy shouldn't be too shabby, so he disdained purchasing the cheaper second-hand goods that were usually sold for at least 10,000 MTA credits.

All of that was still too far away. For now, it was already good that he and his fellow Larkinsons obtained an opportunity to make use of Professor Benedict's high-quality workshop.

Although his relative lack of familiarity with the Cross Clan's production equipment was definitely a constraint, the potential rewards were much higher.

There were always limitations to tools.

It was a lot harder to cut down a tree with a butter knife as opposed to a woodcutter's axe!

In turn, a woodcutter's axe was much less efficient than a modern saw!

Better gear translated to a higher base and ceiling in output. As long as Ves was able to use his new tools well enough, he could potentially surpass his previous best work!

"We're here."

After a short trip, the armored shuttle smoothly landed in the hangar bay of the Cyclical Engine.

A couple of guards and attendants met the Larkinson Mech Designers and guided them to Professor Benedict's workshop.

Upon entering the slightly familiar hall, Ves immediately spotted the Senior, but also encountered a handful of new faces.

"Patriarch Ves. Madame Wodin. Miss Stameross. Miss Voiken. Welcome to my workshop. Please come and meet your peers in person. This should be the first time that you have all met in person."

The Larkinsons approached the group of Crosser mech designers and awkwardly shook hands. They had briefly met during various virtual meeting sessions but never interacted on a serious level.

The two groups weren't actually comparable. Even if they were all Journeymen, their potential and accomplishments were entirely different!

The Cross Clan wasn't a particularly attractive destination for mech designers and Benedict probably recruited this batch by looking for specific qualities.

Gerin Itoran, Demilo Tarvus, Ritin Kaaise, Ascasca Terrine and Archibald Uzu emerged from different parts of the old galaxy. After they somehow managed to enter the Red Ocean, Professor Benedict somehow managed to get them under his banner.

Their ages ranged from 44 years to 76 years, which meant that they belonged to the older generations compared to the Larkinson Mech Designers.

"The professor has assigned us to assist your group for the upcoming session." Archibald Uzu, the oldest among them, politely explained to the Larkinsons. "We will not be fabricating any parts ourselves as we have not made any significant contributions to the Minerva Project. We will primarily help with the logistics and the various preparations, so please feel at ease and devote your time to the work that matters."

"That sounds good. I trust you know what you are doing." Ves nodded in understanding.

Having genuine Journeymen ready to assist in a fabrication run was luxurious treatment. Professor Benedict must have been highly effective at establishing his expertise among these Crosser Journeymen. Otherwise, these dignified mech designers wouldn't have embraced a role that was ordinarily relegated to low-ranking mech designers.

Of course, Ves was not blind to the other possible motivation that the fivesome harbored. Each of them wanted to see the 'legendary' Miracle Couple in action!

Both Ves and Gloriana possessed a lot more prestige than their peers! Almost no other Journeymen succeeded in earning genuine masterwork certificates at this stage in their careers!

Therefore, the dynamic in the workshop was definitely a lot more hierarchical than normal. The Larkinson mech designers held themselves with a lot more confidence than the Crosser mech designers.

Their ages didn't matter in the mech industry. Only their rank and accomplishments mattered. Those with inferior skills and abilities could never earn true respect from their peers if they tried to throw their weight around.

This was why Mr. Itoran and company did not dare to hold their heads high at this time.

Ves wasn't particularly interested in getting to know them better either. If one of them managed to excel and develop a brilliant new design application, then he might change his mind, but for now he had more important matters on his mind.

After they got past the perfunctory chit-chat, Professor Benedict clapped his hands.

"I will give you all an hour to examine my workshop and make your various preparations. If there is anything you need, please say so. While the Minerva Project belongs to your clan, I look forward to adding another strong addition to our collective fleet."

Each of the mech designers that were about to work on the Minerva Project did not set out to produce an average quality expert mech.

They were aiming to match or exceed their best! They would never be fully satisfied with their attempt if they failed to make a masterwork mech this time!

"We will need the presence of the designed mech pilot in order to improve our final product." Ves spoke up. "I have taken the liberty of inviting Commander Casella Ingvar over. We have a special technique that can substantially improve the alignment of the mech to its intended user."

"We will bring her to this workshop when she arrives."

During the next hour, the mech designers all made their preparations. All of them seriously inspected the production machines and made sure that none of them were different from their expectations.

Gloriana and Juliet also performed their usual ritual by asking for a blessing from the Superior Mother.

Since they hadn't brought the original statue of the Superior Mother to the Cyclical Engine, they had to make do with prostrating before a small altar.

The entire sight looked odd to the Crosser mech designers.

Ves helplessly shrugged. "I find it best to just let them do what they want. When it comes to matters like these, any source of confidence can make a difference. Even if it is silly, it doesn't matter as long as the final outcome is good!"

He would butcher innocent pakklavons if that helped with producing a masterwork mech!

What did it matter as long as he was able to add another extremely strong mech to his lineup?

The value of a masterwork expert mech far surpassed that of a regular expert mech!

The latter was not a worthless machine, but the former simply brought too many benefits. Machines like the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger not only accelerated the growth of their mech pilots, but also had a much higher chance of helping Jannzi and Josh undergo their second apotheosis!

For this fabrication run, Ves and the others wanted to try their best to provide Commander Casella Ingvar with the same opportunity!

## Chapter 3718 - Expert Babysitter

"Meow meow."

"Miaow~"

"Wooooo... mama..."

While the mech designers were making their preparations, Gloriana made sure to feed and pamper Aurelia.

The baby giggled as Gloriana kissed and tickled her little girl.

"Mama will be busy for the following week. I won't be able to spend as much time with you as I'd like. Your uncle will do his best to keep you company, okay?"

"..Mama..?"

One of the requests that Gloriana had made was to invite Venerable Brutus over to the Cyclical Engine! Panda

No vel The sole purpose for bringing him over was to turn him into a babysitter for Aurelia!

Right now, she hadn't hired any nannies that she was willing to trust with her precious daughter. While there were other workers who could babysit her daughter such as Melody Raft, her personal assistant, none of them excelled at this job.

With her standards, Gloriana could never accept the thought of handing over her precious daughter to someone who wasn't family or a professional caretaker!

Fortunately, Venerable Brutus was more than happy to pause his regular duties to watch over his niece.

He already responded to Aurelia as soon as he caught sight of her. His force of will swelled as it enveloped Aurelia with a thick protective bubble!

Though Venerable Brutus was hardly able to express his strength outside of his expert mech, Aurelia responded well to the goodwill he directed towards her. She immediately reached out to her uncle!

"I'm your uncle, Aurelia. Can you say that word?"

"Uuucuuu..."

"Well, you will get there eventually. With a smart mother like Gloriana, I am sure you will dazzle us all with your intelligence!"

"Hihihi!"

Brutus absolutely adored Aurelia and the baby immediately got along well with him. Gloriana was relieved at the sight. She also reminded herself that she should look into hiring a nanny to take care of Aurelia as well as her future children.

It was never easy to raise six offspring!

While Gloriana and Brutus discussed how Aurelia should be cared for in the following week, Ves and Professor Benedict Cortez gathered together in order to hold their own little talk.

"You've done it before, so you can do it again. How confident are you in fabricating a masterwork mech?" The Senior straightforwardly asked.

"You should know as well as I do that you can't make a masterwork mech by snapping your fingers." Ves replied. "It's difficult. Many different variables have to fall in line to make it possible. While I have done my best to manipulate the variables that I can control, there are many other factors that are out of our hands. We can only roll the dice and hope that we have started on a good day."

Not even a Senior Mech Designer was able to do much better in this regard. In fact, Professor Benedict was arguably worse at this than the Journeymen he was working with. He actually created less masterwork mechs over his career than Ves!

Part of the reason why that was the case was that Professor Benedict did not insist on fabricating any mech he designed. They usually took up a decent amount of time and he never found it important to put in so much effort for relatively unimportant mech designs.

The success of the Larkinson mech designers may have prompted him to develop a new appreciation for hands-on work, but he was primarily obsessed with research!

Professor Benedict was mature enough to accept this reality. "If we do not succeed this time, then so be it. There are more than enough opportunities in the future for us to achieve our goal."

"I know, but it still feels bad if we know that we can do better. I put in a lot of effort into designing the Minerva Project and my other design partners feel the same way. This is the only expert mech that we have worked on for this year and it is by far the most interesting one that I have worked on. I have a considerable emotional investment in this expert mech."

Despite designing so many masterwork mechs and despite being able to count on Vulcan for assistance, Ves still had no idea what might come out of this fabrication run.

The only regret he had was that the System was still on a holiday. Ves was already certain that its Superpublish function had become available again, but without the ability to access it, there was no way for him to take advantage of this function!

This was not a major setback, but one that made Ves feel as if he was missing an opportunity.

Not only would he be able to improve the Minerva Project further, but also gain another opportunity for everyone to learn how to refine their respective design solutions.

An even greater benefit was that he could reinforce Mr. S.'s existence and further prove that Ves was connected to this 'great figure'!

After all, there was no way a Journeyman like Ves could make so many wonderful improvements to a mech design. Ves didn't have many high-level contacts and it was easy to check whether the Superpublished design was actually made by a known high-profile mech designer.

Ves inwardly sighed. The System wasn't going to make an appearance anytime soon, so he should make do without this extra bit of help.

It was fortunate that Ves never developed a reliance on the Superpublish function. He had never been anxious about using it as soon as it became available.

To him, there may be times where he felt it was worth it to use on certain projects, but he would never obsess over it to the point of aligning the completion of his important mech designs to the availability of the Superpublish function.

It did not take much effort to correct his mentality. Anyway, he relied on himself to develop his own repertoire of solutions to increase his chances of fabricating a masterwork mech. His hand briefly brushed the handle of the Hammer of Brilliance that was hanging from his toolbelt.

Professor Benedict did not miss this little gesture. "I have heard about that hammer of yours. I have also heard much about your so-called Creation Association. My initial impression is that all of this is a scam, but I know that you are not without substance. Seeing this hammer in person confirms my guess. Can I hold that hammer of yours?"

Ves saw no reason to refuse. He detached the hammer from his toolbelt and handed it over to the Senior.

Professor Benedict may have anticipated the hefty weight of the object, but he was not as strong as Ves.

"It is heavy. Your hammer certainly possesses a distinct identity. I can feel the presence of a glow of sorts. Is this your Vulcan?"

Ves nodded. "Yes. Vulcan is one of the personalities I have made that is specifically designed to help me create higher-quality products. We don't have to rely on him to fabricate a masterwork mech, but he can help in the right circumstances."

"Interesting. I am skeptical about this hammer's utility towards me, but I can see how it can make a significant difference to Journeymen such as yourself."

Vulcan was a strong design spirit but he lacked a lot of knowledge accumulation. It would be great if Professor Benedict got hit in the head with the hammer during this fabrication session, but the results wouldn't be as drastic if that was the case.

Senior Mech Designers were considerably more powerful than many of the mech designers that Ves had met. Their mental resilience and other relevant properties might not be as potent as that of a Master Mech Designer, but many of them were already close to leaping to the next rank.

They just needed to obtain the right opportunity to trigger a breakthrough!

In any case, Ves doubted whether he should hit Professor Benedict's head with his hammer. The immediate benefits should not be drastic, but the brief period of contact should give Vulcan a lot of opportunities to peep into the Senior's mind!

Mech designers of this caliber usually possessed strong mental defenses. Professor Benedict would not give a lot away even if he formed a bond with Vulcan.

As the two went into further detail on how to approach their fabrication run, the final guest had finally arrived.

"Commander Casella! Are you excited?" Ves asked as she marched closer.

"I am." Casella plainly admitted. "I have waited a long time for this mech. I have heard so much about it. I am gratified to see that the final mech design incorporates many of the suggestions that I have made. The Minerva Project is exactly what I need to go any further."

Ves did not entirely agree. "This will be the first expert command mech that we have designed, so we do not understand the full implications of our own work. We cannot promise that it will meet your expectations. It can turn out better or much worse than we thought. Don't worry about all of that. Your role is to impart your knowledge, insights and experiences to your expert mech."

"I am aware. The other expert pilots of the clan have already filled me in. I will not hold you back." She promised.

They continued to talk about the impending realization of the Minerva Project. Ves found that the Sentinel Commander was not overly nervous or unstable despite the huge importance of this event.

The Minerva Project was her first expert mech!

Not only would her expert command mech define her first years as an expert pilot, it also determined how well she could help the Larkinson Clan.

A lot was riding on this mech. An expert command mech's individual ability to defeat powerful opponents might not be the best, but its ability to amplify the combat effectiveness of subordinate forces was top notch!

With so much responsibility resting on her shoulders, Commander Casella was able to retain her mental balance, which impressed Ves a lot. This was one of the essential traits of a steady and clever leader.

After making sure that Commander Casella was ready to do her part, Ves made one more check.

He took out a P-stone and reached out to one of his new design spirits.

The Titania existed in her current incarnation for a few months now. Though it had been hard for her to accept that her 6000-year old life as a massive apex astral beast had come to an end, she managed to transition to her new form of life easily enough.

It helped a lot that other friendly design spirits such as Goldie, Qilanxo and the Superior Mother accompanied the Titania.

Just like how a clueless kid could turn into a troublemaker if he befriended the wrong crowd, the Larkinson design spirits succeeded in converting the Titania to the Larkinson cause!

In any case, her old life was already over and it made little sense to take revenge against her killers.

Unlike the original Zeigra, the Titania was much older and much wiser. Despite her supreme arrogance as an astral beast that had overcome a huge amount of opponents in her former life, the bestial design spirit was still prudent enough to bow her head to more ferocious predators.

Otherwise, she wouldn't have been able to survive in a dwarf galaxy that was dominated by phase whales and other major races!

Ves wasn't naive enough to think that he had managed to subdue the Titania. A portion of her original memories and consciousness had survived. Having lived for so long, it was extremely difficult to indoctrinate such an old and experienced entity.

His only hope was that the other Larkinson design spirits continued to befriend her. As an entity that originated from a bestial creature, the Titania got along remarkably well with Qilanxo.

"Hopefully you are willing to cooperate with Commander Casella and the Minerva Project."

In order to maximize the power of his upcoming expert command mech, it was vitally important that every party involved got along with each other!

## Chapter 3719 - Fabricating in a new Workshop

The fabrication of the Minerva Project started slower than usual.

The four Larkinson mech designers were unfamiliar with Professor Benedict's workshop and still had to get used to all of the differences. It took hours for them to truly get accustomed to the layout, the positioning of the production equipment and the type of bots available in the workshop.

In fact, the adaptation process should have taken longer if not for a novel factor.

When Gloriana summoned Alexandria from her mind and ordered her companion spirit to form a design network, everything changed.

Of the Larkinson Journeymen, Ves, Gloriana and Juliet were already accustomed to the effect of a design network. They hardly exhibited any surprise and immediately took advantage of the additional data they received.

Sara Voiken had come in touch with design networks numerous times when she collaborated on the design of the Minerva Project.

However, this was the first time she came under its effect during a fabrication run. The work they performed was substantially different so she still needed time to figure out how to make the most of her new condition.

Professor Benedict Cortez was the true newcomer to design networks.

Initially, he instinctively repulsed Alexandria's attempt to form a spiritual bond with his powerful mind.

It took a lot of effort on his part to lower his defenses and allow the spiritual cat to successfully establish a working bond.

Even then, Professor Benedict's inherent guardness and caution made it so that only a limited amount of his thoughts and emotions flowed through the bond. He might be new to this, but his mental control was surprisingly formidable.

This was not a man who trusted others easily. This was not a surprise considering all of the skeletons he hid in his closet.

Ves initially paid close attention to Professor Benedict as the latter got accustomed to the novelty of a design network.

The Larkinsons had briefed the man in advance so he already knew what to expect. That said, experiencing it himself was far different from hearing about it. He immediately understood how helpful it was to receive the thoughts and emotions exchanged by every member of the design team.

This was one of the best tools for cooperation that he had ever encountered!

While the Senior had occasionally heard of other powerful remarkable methods to increase the coordination of a design team, none of them were this easy and harmless.

The prerequisites and downsides of a design network were much less. Compared to linking everyone's cranial implants or resorting to strange alien technology, a design network was the least invasive but also the most intimate means of boosting

cooperation that he knew of! Perhaps even those pampered MTA mech designers would drool if they encountered this kind of boon!

As Professor Benedict familiarized himself with this strange new state, he slowly put down his guard and opened himself up to an extent.

He still exerted a lot of control over the thoughts he was willing to share with his fellow mech designers.

Aside from keeping secrets, Benedict did not want to flood the design network with an immense amount of high-level theories related to mech design.

As a Senior and a fairly advanced one, his knowledge on mech design was much more overwhelming than that of the Journeymen he worked with. Ves and the others were too young to handle so much input. He had to pay attention to what he passed on through the design network in order to avoid polluting the minds of the Larkinson mech designers with knowledge that they were not ready to comprehend.

No one objected to this. Ves was not greedy to access the knowledge of a Senior. Besides, much of what went on in Professor Benedict's mind mostly pertained to his design philosophy.

What Ves and his fellow peers received from the design network was just the basics. The bits and pieces that Professor Benedict cautiously passed on was enough to increase their understanding of the Senior's work, but not enough to distract them from their primary work assignments.

"Amazing." Commander Casella Ingvar said as she quietly stood next to Alexandria. "You are truly a remarkable cat. I heard from Venerable Joshua how taking part in this fabrication run can give me a much better understanding of mechs and mech design, but this is something else! I already feel as if I know every strength and weakness of my new expert mech!"

Although several different mech pilots had already cooperated with the Larkinson mech designers in this fashion, the gains they made from this remarkable experience varied by a considerable extent. Every mech pilot was different so the way they interpreted the input from a design network was different as well.

For example, an expert pilot such as Venerable Joshua who did not receive too many augmentations and only attended a couple of third-class mech academies in his life did not exactly stand out in terms of intellect.

He was an expert pilot who heavily relied on feeling, intuition, passion and diligence to excel. He was much worse in book learning and never stood out during his theoretical classes.

Therefore, when Joshua became a part of the design network during the fabrication of the Everchanger, he mostly paid attention to how Ves regarded his living mechs and whatever he could learn about the patriarch's design philosophy.

Casella was different. Even though she started off as a third-rater as well, she was a former noble who had grown up under a considerable amount of pressure and expectation. She had always been serious about her studies and she had kept that up when she joined the Larkinson Clan.

Leading the Living Sentinels was tough and she had always tried her best to increase her qualifications through additional studies.

What truly caused her to stand out from most mech designers was that she was not bad in studying the sciences. This had come in handy as she possessed a much better understanding on what mechs were capable of and how far she could push her mech units. Panda

Not Due to this foundation, Casella was able to understand the science and engineering-related knowledge passing through the design network to a much greater extent!

Although this did not magically turn her into an engineer who could repair her own mech, it was enough for her to gain a much deeper understanding of the technical side of mechs!

She sat down and completely immersed herself in the moment. She not only enjoyed learning about the unique perspectives that every participating mech designer held towards her upcoming expert mech, but also found satisfaction in contributing her own knowledge and experiences.

Every mech designer including Professor Benedict gained a lot from the expert pilot, especially since she was also a legion commander.

Learning how much Commander Casella worked to strengthen the Living Sentinels gave him a much better appreciation of the most humble mech legion of the Larkinson Clan.

To Casella, duty was paramount. The role of the Living Sentinels was to embody the most fundamental desire of the Larkinson Clan, which was protecting their family.

Casella constantly tried to come up with new ways to improve the performance of her mech units so that more of them came back alive after a battle.

This was a heavy burden. Each of her decisions directly or indirectly determined the lives and deaths of not just the Living Sentinels but any other clansmen affected by the performance of her mech legion.

"She's a hard worker, alright." Ves surmised as he busied himself with synthesizing the many crystals of the Irvan rifle. "She reminds me of Jannzi, but she is much more preoccupied with empowering her fellow Larkinsons rather than protecting them. This is an interesting distinction."

From what Ves knew about Jannzi's mindset, the defensive expert pilot was inclined to defend her fellow clansmen no matter whether they could take care of themselves or not.

Commander Casella possessed similar tendencies, but her different life experiences caused her to be much more accepting of the risks that soldiers endured.

She could not save every mech pilot who deployed on the battlefield, but she would do her damned hardest to improve their chances of winning!

This drive to win was a much more proactive mindset and often encouraged Casella to figure out better ways to defeat their opponents.

Under all of these influences, Ves cared even more about his work and looked at his contribution in a more serious light. He couldn't help but put in an even greater amount of effort in his work than before.

Hours went by as everyone worked in a harmonious fashion. The design network constantly helped to align their thoughts and make their work more rounded.

With a Senior Mech Designer participating in the fabrication attempt, Ves and the others received a lot of simple but profound tips that slightly improved their work in various ways.

They completed their work assignments a bit faster than anticipated and the quality of their output rose as well.

Fewer mistakes and friction occurred as everyone increasingly worked as one instead of five separate mech designers.

The only interruptions occurred when Gloriana needed to take a rest. When Alexandria retracted her design network, Blinky took over for a few hours.

This allowed the mother to go back to Brutus and take back her adorable baby.

"Meeehh..." The baby smiled.

"Yes, Aurelia. Your mama and her friends are making a new mech right now. Isn't that impressive? Once you grow older, I might allow you to lend a hand. That way, you can become a part of the production process of an impressive machine!"

As Gloriana regained a bit of her energy by playing with her child, her brother approached her side.

"How is the work on the Minerva Project proceeding so far?"

"It's going well enough, brother."

"Enough to add a new masterwork mech to our fleet?"

Gloriana looked uncertain. "It's too early to tell. What I can say is that we are all confident and optimistic about our work. The mood among us is good and our willingness to cooperate with each other is higher than ever. Each of us are invested in this project, but Ves and Sara Voiken stand out by how much they care about the outcome."

"Could you explain that further?"

"Well, Ves is Ves. He is always passionate about his work, but he gets particularly excited whenever he works on anything that is new, innovative and different from what he has handled before. The Minerva Project carries so many new features that he is incredibly eager to see his inventions in action."

"What of Miss Voiken? She is one of your newer mech designers, correct?"

"She is an adequate mech designer." Gloriana nodded. "Her defensive specialty adds a lot to our Design Department, and she is useful in so many different design projects. The Minerva Project holds special meaning to her as it is the first time she had made significant contributions to an expert mech design. Our cooperation would have gone smoother if she was more experienced in fabricating mechs and if she already possessed a few masterwork mechs. We are doing our best to bring her up to speed through our design network, but she needs to make sure she carries her own weight for this fabrication run."

Venerable Brutus glanced at Sara Voiken in the distance. The Journeyman was currently in the process of producing armor plating for the Minerva Project. He was impressed by how much she tried to do her best.

Sara did not want to disappoint her peers!

She knew quite well that this was an extremely rare opportunity for her. All of the other mech designers she was working with had already fabricated masterwork mechs. She might be lucky to join their ranks as well even if she did not perform remarkably brilliantly during this week.

The premise of achieving this was that she did not negatively impact the others! This was why she was being extra serious about putting in her all. She did not even dare to take a break at this time!

"She is a hard worker, alright." Gloriana nodded in approval even as she was about to take a brief nap after tucking in her sleepy daughter.

## Chapter 3720 - Taught By Juniors

The fabrication of the Minerva Project was projected to take seven days.

Although it was theoretically possible for them to finish the expert mech in five or six days due to working with better production machines, the mech designers participating in the project gave themselves more leeway so that they could pay more attention to quality.

Ordinary Journeymen never thought about fabricating a masterwork mech, but Ves and the others were clearly different.

Since four out of five of them already succeeded at least once, they all had realistic hopes of succeeding again!

Even if the chance of success was just 5 percent or 10 percent, as long as there was a window of opportunity, they would pursue it with all of their heart!

Professor Benedict was actually surprised by how much fervor the Larkinson Journeymen exhibited towards this goal. Ordinary mech designers did not think too much about this at all, but it absolutely dominated the minds of those who were far too young to be obsessed about this accomplishment.

"They're too ignorant, yet maybe that is their strength."

Those who knew better understood exactly how difficult it was to fabricate a masterwork. Seniors such as himself had probably made over a hundred mechs in their careers, but it was already fortunate if they succeeded once!

This was why he ordinarily did not set his sights on this goal at all. If he fabricated a mech at all, he merely wanted to deliver a good product to his clients.

To the Larkinson Journeymen, this was not their end goal, but their absolute minimum!

He discovered that all four of them possessed slightly different mindsets that were ultimately conducive to making masterworks.

Ves possessed a remarkably distorted mindset towards making masterwork mechs. He was fearless in the face of difficulties and eager to overcome challenges. His confidence

in himself was absurdly high for a young Journeyman due to the many successes he had achieved.

What was even more remarkable about Ves was that the fire in his heart burned incredibly hot once he became engrossed with creating another powerful mech.

His passion in mech design exceeded that of everyone else's! Ves was so consumed by his work that even Professor Benedict thought he was falling behind at times.

This was an astounding accomplishment as the older man always thought that his passion and drive in mech design was the highest among his peers!

His passion and extreme dedication were so high that these personality traits had even pushed him into risking everything!

He had gone as far as breaking the MTA's taboos and committing unspeakable acts in order to exceed the limits of his design philosophy!

Though Benedict had tried his best to restrain his wild side as of late, right now he felt the urge to release the beast.

The Senior Mech Designer shared many traits with Ves. When he looked at the leader of the Larkinson Clan at work, he saw an echo of his younger self.

For a moment, Professor Benedict reflected on his own life. Though he was still incredibly passionate about his work, all of the trials and tribulations he had endured over the last few decades had worn down his optimism and caused his mentality to become a lot more jaded.

The stagnation of his design philosophy had also impacted his confidence to a degree. The fire in his heart had grown cooler over the years as the constant setbacks in his research slowly caused him to doubt whether he could advance to Master at all in his lifetime.

"How I wish I was young again."

The Larkinson Clan's design network allowed Benedict to reconnect with the fire of youth. The Larkinson mech designers were all young, confident and utterly unaware of the near-impossible challenges they would face in the future.

Once they became Seniors and learned what it took to break past the barrier that prevented them from realizing their design philosophies, it would be impossible for them to maintain the same optimistic mindset! Panda

No vel For now, he was willing to let these Journeymen indulge in their own fantasies. It did not do them anything wrong at this stage.

As Benedict continued to study the source of Ves' strength, he noticed that the passionate mech designer relied on another source to boost his confidence.

Vulcan!

Though others weren't able to sense this clearly, Ves maintained a constant connection to Vulcan. This allowed the design spirit to constantly provide hints and other forms of assistance to Ves.

After all, they were bound by life!

Ves' craftsmanship not only became more exquisite because of this connection, the unorthodox mech designer also showed points of brilliance every now and then. His open mindset and his willingness to think outside the box made it easier for him to develop strange ideas, of which a few of them could actually produce performance gains!

"This guy..." Professor Benedict twitched his eyes.

Through their earlier collaborations, he already had a decent understanding of Ves as a mech designer. It was only now that the Senior discovered that he had severely underestimated the fellow's creativity.

"He's crazier than me!" Professor Benedict admitted.

Despite this evaluation, the Senior genuinely admired the gutsy Journeyman. He gained a better understanding of how Ves was able to find success with his abnormal design philosophy. The Journeyman broke the conventional rules of mech design as easily as eating breakfast!

"He will either become a legend or face absolute ruination in the future!"

Though the odds that the latter would happen was much higher, Professor Benedict couldn't help but bet on the former possibility.

That was because the Senior recognized that rare spark of brilliance and irreverence in Ves. In the professor's extensive experience, this rare breed of mech designers had the highest chance of creating miracles!

"With his extreme mentality, I can fully see why he has succeeded in making so many masterwork mechs."

If Ves was already an oddball, then Gloriana was even crazier!

Her belief in her superiority was so high that Professor Benedict had never met another Journeyman who was more arrogant than the wife of the Larkinson Patriarch!

For some reason or another, Gloriana genuinely assumed that she was the chief person responsible for creating all of the masterwork mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

It helped a lot that her design philosophy heavily emphasized quality and perfection. After making numerous masterwork mechs, she had derived so many profound insights and lessons from her best works that her absolute belief in her own superiority had become even more inflated!

"I've met plenty of spoiled Journeymen back in my former home state, but this is ridiculous!"

It didn't matter if the other people in the design network did not think that Gloriana deserved so much credit. She was so immune to doubt and criticism that not even a Star Designer could convince her that she was overestimating her capabilities!

Professor Benedict had to resist the urge to rub his eyes whenever he looked at Gloriana performing her work assignments.

"This is the first situation that I have encountered where narcissism is a positive trait!"

If that wasn't enough, Gloriana derived even more confidence from the assumption that she carried the Superior Mother's blessing!

To her, this supposed Hexer god or whatever was not only real, but also happened to be her mother-in-law!

With the belief that the Superior Mother was the grandmother of her child, Gloriana assumed that she enjoyed divine support. The Senior bet that hardly any other zealots were as conceited as her among the Larkinsons!

Professor Benedict felt ambivalent about the fact that he was working alongside a Hexer with such an extreme personality. She was crazy in a way that made someone like Ves look normal!

Yet for some reason, Benedict couldn't bring himself to reject Gloriana's role in this fabrication run.

The more he studied the dynamic among the Larkinson mech designers, the closer he came to the truth of how they were able to succeed multiple times.

It turned out that her insanely high confidence in herself synergized well with Ves' fiery passion in his own work!

Sure, both of them were confident and passionate in their own work, but it was this combination of one brand of crazy with another brand of crazy that was capable of producing amazing results!

"It is not a disservice to call them a Miracle Couple."

Logically speaking, such a crazy combination shouldn't have worked in the first place. Though Ves and Gloriana shared a lot in common, they also harbored deep philosophical differences about mechs.

Some of them outright clashed against each other!

Professor Benedict had witnessed many collaborations crash and burn over increasingly more irreconcilable creative differences. When there weren't any clear leaders in a design team, any argument about what was right and what was wrong could ruin long-standing friendships.

Yet somehow the two managed to cooperate without getting bothered by their differences.

"Is this the power of love?"

The design network clearly conveyed the affection the two held towards each other. They were husband and wife and trusted each other on a level that Professor Benedict had never experienced.

Previously, he always thought that mech designers would only get bogged down if they wasted their time on marriage. Not only did it take up a lot of time that they could have spent on designing more mechs, it also caused them to become less dedicated to their craft!

"My assumptions were wrong. A relationship between mech designers doesn't have to be a detrimental influence."

Though Professor Benedict recognized that the love between Ves and Gloriana was not entirely normal, their sincerity towards each other was strong!

The birth of Aurelia only further tied them together as a family and made them even more motivated to succeed.

The Cross Clan's Senior Mech Designer envied their synergistic relationship so much that he also wanted to seek out a partner to build the same kind of mutually beneficial bond!

Unfortunately, his love life was pathetic and he was anything but an expert in romance. How could he possibly find a suitable partner to date, let alone form a permanent relationship?

"Maybe I should enlist the aid of a matchmaking service." Benedict frowned. "I might not be good at this, but there are professionals who excel in solving problems like these."

He did not dare to think about this matter too long. What Ves and Gloriana built with each other was probably unique. Replicating it was anything but simple.

Compared to the extreme mindsets of Ves and Gloriana, the other two Larkinson Journeymen were much more reasonable.

To Professor Benedict, Juliet Stameross was a more muted version of Gloriana. She was a fairly normal Journeyman aside from her strong loyalty towards Ves and her extreme devotion towards the Superior Mother.

The strangest part about Juliet was that her unflinching beliefs aligned with that of Gloriana, causing them to reinforce each other's faith while they were connected to each other!

Not only that, but Juliet easily became affected by the enthusiasm transmitted by Ves and Gloriana.

As long as the Miracle Couple believed they could do the impossible, then so did Juliet!

The only normal mech designer in the design team was Sara Voiken. She was too new to the Larkinson Clan and adopted a follower mentality due to her lack of seniority and accomplishments.

However, Sara became so caught up in all of the hype that her common sense was beginning to erode!

She no longer believed in the ordinary assumption that Journeymen weren't capable of making masterwork mechs. Under the heavy influence of the other Larkinson mech designers, even she began to believe she could do it despite not excelling in craftsmanship!

In fact, even if this was the case, Ves just happened to possess a means to reverse this shortcoming.

During the third day of the fabrication run, Ves slowly raised his Hammer of Brilliance and contemplated who he should use it on. He and Gloriana had already used it enough times a false inspired state wouldn't produce anything special.

The effect was always strongest in the first few attempts!