

Mech 3721

Chapter 3721 - Her First Time

The mech designers steadily fabricated all of the high-end components of the Minerva Project.

While their complexity and use of expensive materials increased the difficulty of producing the parts, none of them were unprepared for their respective tasks.

It also helped that the five mech designers had split up the work assignments so that they all worked on what they excelled at. Their chances of producing high-quality mech components were much higher if their work was directly tied to their primary specializations!

Everyone possessed a clear division of work.

Ves was responsible for building the luminar crystal rifle and miscellaneous components.

Juliet created the flight system and various other mobility-related parts.

Sara invested all of her attention on the armor plating of the Minerva Project.

Professor Benedict produced all of the power generation and energy transmission parts.

Gloriana was responsible for fabricating the remaining structural components such as the sensor system.

In this fabrication run, the work division of Gloriana was not as well-defined. In past projects, she was usually responsible for making both the armor system and much of the internal architecture of a mech.

However, now that Sara and Professor Benedict came into the picture, Gloriana was squeezed out of her prior roles.

Not only that, but her design philosophy partially overlapped with that of the Senior Mech Designer involved in this project!

That did not discourage her at all, though. She respected the contributions that the other two mech designers could make and plainly acknowledged that Sara and Benedict could do a substantially better job. Pa nda

Novel There were still plenty of ways for her to leave her mark on the Minerva Project. It was a high-end project that she had individually tailored for Commander Casella Ingvar,

after all. The expert pilot's presence in the design network made it a lot easier for Gloriana to tailor her work to the intended user of the expert command mech!

As everything went well enough, Ves judged that they had reached a stage where the Hammer of Brilliance could exert a useful effect.

Still, before using it, he had to decide whether it was desirable to make use of it. From what he could see, every mech designer working to make the Minerva Project were doing well so far. None of them exhibited any obvious inadequacies and they all produced satisfactory parts.

"It could be better, though."

Ves wasn't sure whether the circumstances at the moment was enough to meet the threshold of producing a masterwork mech, but it was nice to have additional assurances.

He gripped his hammer tighter. "I shouldn't discard an advantage so easily. The Minerva Project is crucial to our clan."

Now that he decided to use it, he had to figure out who to whack with his hammer.

He quickly ruled out himself and his wife. Both of them had been knocked on their heads so many times that the benefits had turned marginal.

Each of them had turned a lot of their latent ideas into realized design solutions that there were hardly any 'raw materials' left in their minds.

Inspiration only worked when there was enough accumulation, and Ves did not think that enough had passed for him and Gloriana to refill their minds with new materials.

The Hammer of Brilliance would produce a much more significant effect if applied to others.

Ves recalled that he had already whacked Juliet at least once. This meant that the second time wouldn't be as drastic, but could still bear a lot of fruit.

He decided against it, though.

First, Juliet was not one of the more prominent individuals who worked on the Minerva Project. The expert command mech itself did not revolve around mobility either.

Another candidate was Sara Voiken. The defensive specialist played a considerably more important role in the design of the Minerva Project and was the primary person responsible for keeping Commander Casella alive under difficult circumstances.

It also helped that she was new to the effect of the Hammer of Brilliance. Once she experienced Vulcan's splendor for the first time, she would gain a huge amount of benefits that could substantially push her design philosophy forward!

When Sara experienced all of this during this crucial timing, her elevated mood and pleasure of gaining enlightenment would definitely boost everyone's moods to a higher level!

"This is an interesting choice."

There was also another alternative, though. Ves directed his gaze towards Professor Benedict who sensed the attention.

The two of them stared at each other for a moment.

Eventually, Professor Benedict shook his head. Both of them had conducted a silent conversation through the design network.

The Senior did not think the hammer would have a strong effect on him. Applying it to Sara was more appropriate because her reaction would be the strongest and because she was most in need of a boost.

"You want to facilitate the design of our next expert mech." Ves surmised from the older man.

The logic was easy enough to understand. Professor Benedict liked the Minerva Project, but valued the Mars Project.

As his passion project, the Senior intended to put his full effort and resources into designing the best possible high-tier expert mech for Patriarch Reginald Cross.

If Ves utilized his hammer on the professor at that point, the difference it could make might play a crucial role!

In the meantime, Sara could obtain a major improvement in her design ability that would allow her to increase her contribution to the next expert mech design project.

As far as the Crossers were concerned, the development of the Minerva Project was a practice run for the development of the Mars Project!

"Hmmm..." Ves frowned.

He didn't quite agree with Professor Benedict.

From the perspective of maximizing the prospects of the Mars Project, it was indeed better to whack Sara's head.

However, even if she gained a massive amount of inspiration, it was still unlikely for her to improve so much that she could impart a qualitative boost to the Minerva Project.

"She's not like Gloriana and I. She still needs to work on her confidence."

Sara was too new to the Larkinson Clan and did not think she was able to match up against the Miracle Couple.

Otherwise, she and her brother wouldn't have applied to work under Ves and Gloriana in the first place!

It took a certain amount of humility for Journeymen to subordinate themselves to other Journeymen!

Given these circumstances, Ves did not think that the Hammer of Brilliance would produce the strongest effect with Sara.

Ves had higher hopes for Professor Benedict, especially when the old man had become fascinated by the way the Larkinson mech designers were working. His astonishment and appreciation couldn't be hidden.

Once he tasted the fruit of Vulcan, Professor Benedict was much likelier to produce a significant reaction!

Even if Vulcan wasn't strong enough to produce a strong reaction, even minor improvements would be enough for Professor Benedict to get excited!

Besides, with all of the insights he would gain from this experience, he would be in a much better position to design the crucial Magma Vein System and other critical elements of the Mars Project!

The downside to this course of action was that they would have one less tool available to potentially turn the Mars Project into a masterwork mech.

"You made a commitment to our clan. You should do your best to fulfill it, Ves." Professor Benedict softly conveyed.

Ves remembered that he did indeed promise to do his best to participate in the design of the Mars Project and turn it into a masterwork expert mech at all cost.

Given this condition, the last thing that Ves should do was shoot himself in the foot and miss a chance to fulfill one of his important promises!

"Alright. Have it your way, then." Ves sighed.

He quickly readjusted his mentality and did not think about applying his hammer to Professor Benedict anymore.

In any case, it was not a bad idea to enlighten Sara at this time. The benefits she could gain from this time would not only allow her to contribute more effectively to the Mars Project, but also improve her work on any other mech design project she participated in the future!

Considering that defensive systems were vital to practically every mech, Sara could have a major effect on the performance of the Larkinson Clan's subsequent mech designs!

When Ves stepped in front of Sara, the woman already had a decent idea of what was about to take place.

"It's finally my turn, is that correct?" The woman asked.

"Yep. Since you know this much, you should also be aware how precious this opportunity can be. The first time is always the most drastic. The benefit does not only lie in all of the dots that you can connect in your mind, but the immense satisfaction that you gain from solving so many latent problems. Don't underestimate these emotions. The euphoria that you will likely experience will not only elevate your work to a higher level, but also bleed through the design network and affect the rest of us. Don't hesitate in sharing your happiness. We all benefit, which means the Minerva Project will benefit as well."

"Do you have any other tips for me, sir?"

"Not particularly. Everyone experiences it differently. All I can say is that you should not get lost in your daydreams but remember your current responsibilities. Try your best to channel your creative energies into furthering your work."

Once they were ready, Sara turned around and presented the back of her head.

Ves carefully raised his hammer and lightly tapped Sara's skull.

For a moment, the defensive specialist stood still.

Half a minute passed by as Vulcan's gift caused Sara's head to glow in a bronze light.

Then, she opened her eyes!

"So it's like this! I should have figured this out before! How could I be so blind to miss the obvious!"

With the help of Vulcan's active influence, Sara truly felt enlightened for the first time!

Her mind elevated to a higher level than ever as she spotted dozens of mistakes that had gone unnoticed while figuring out the solutions to many more problems.

When she turned her attention back to the work she was doing, she suddenly discovered that if she changed the settings and utilized slightly different processes, she could increase the resilience of the Minerva Project's armor plating by a small but consequential margin!

Sara enthusiastically dove back into her fabrication work. She had become incredibly motivated to apply some of her new solutions on her existing work.

In addition, she had become so buoyed by the inspiration that she received that her good vibes quickly spread through the design network, thereby infecting the other mech designers with her drive and passion for her craft!

The difference it made was noticeable. Not just Sara, but all of the other mech designers worked as if they had wind in their sails!

Though no one exhibited any exceptional performance after Sara gained a lot of stimulation, the good vibes in the workshop had risen by a noticeable amount.

Even the Crosser Journeyman who were assisting the main mech designers noticed the changes. They all paid even closer attention to the performance of Ves and the others for fear of missing out the crucial factor that caused them to make so many remarkable mechs!

"Do you think they are actually succeeding?" Ritin Kaaise asked one of his older colleagues.

Archibald Uzu looked envious at the industrious designers. "I have worked in numerous different workshops over my career, but none of them comes close to this. The trust, cooperation and optimism shown by these mech designers are incomparable. There is something about these Larkinsons that makes me feel that anything is possible. I wish more than ever that I could be a part of this project!"

It was a pity that a mech design project could not accommodate too many contributors. Besides, the Minerva Project belonged to the Larkinson Clan, so it did not make sense to involve any more external mech designers than necessary.

Chapter 3722 - Workshop Fighting Spirit

When Patriarch Reginald Cross entered the workshop, he stopped and observed the mech designers at work.

Ves, Gloriana, Juliet, Sara and Professor Benedict had all become engrossed in their own tasks!

With the final parts of the Minerva Project being made, the fabrication run was soon ready to move on to the assembly phase.

After seeing how productive the mech designers had become, Patriarch Reginald gave them an approving nod before he strode forward.

He did not want to disrupt the ongoing work, so he kept a lower profile and made sure that his distinct aura did not affect any of the mech designers.

"Brutus." Patriarch Reginald greeted his fellow expert pilot. "Are you impressed?"

"How could I not? My sister is always at her best when she is fulfilling the purpose she has dedicated her entire life towards. I am happy and envious towards Commander Casella Ingvar. She will definitely be happy with the mech she is about to receive."

Patriarch Reginald nodded after he observed the mech designers a bit more. "I don't understand anything about building mechs, but I can sense the fighting spirit in these mech designers. That is always a good sign. These are not people who are going through the motions. They are putting their all in order to practice what they love the most. That is not a sight that I have seen every day."

Both expert pilots were impressed by what they were witnessing. As pilots who resided on carriers all the time, they had seen plenty of instances where mech technicians and mech designers worked on different mech-related tasks.

However, that was all routine work that hardly fired up the workers. To them, servicing or fabricating a mech was routine work. As long as they put in the hours and as long as they did not completely slack off, the mechs that passed through their hands would be fine.

There was no pressing need for them to exert more effort into their work. As long as they were familiar with the steps they needed to take, it was practically impossible for them to make a mech stronger than normal. Even if they had the talent to do a better job, it was too difficult for their efforts to yield drastic differences, especially in the case of mass-produced mechs.

Ordinary workers didn't even dream of creating a masterwork mech from their own hands! The prerequisites were so insanely high that not even Seniors could produce them just because they wanted to. Why should they even entertain the notion of creating a work that could define the rest of their careers?

This was why the current group of mech designers stood out so much. Their eyes were all lighting up and they did not show any signs of boredom.

Furthermore, they all directed their full attention to their work as if every little step mattered. They looked so diligent and serious about their craft that Patriarch Reginald thought that his confidence in them was vindicated.

To him, not even Master Mech Designers showed as much passion in their work!

He still recalled the time when the high and mighty Masters contracted by the old clan developed his Bolvos Rage.

Though they showed great care and enthusiasm when it came to designing his powerful father's ace mech, they treated every other project like a more ordinary commission. Panda

Novel While these mech designers did what they were asked to do, Reginald never saw them put all of their heart and soul in the design and fabrication of the Bolvos Rage. Those aloof Masters had already made too many mechs to get excited at the thought of making another one, even if it was an expert mech.

Compared to the treatment he received back then, the care and enthusiasm displayed by these bunch of brats truly surprised the Cross Patriarch.

Even if their design capabilities were not as refined as that of centuries-old Masters, their unrestrained ambitions and their fearlessness in the face of the odds reminded Patriarch Reginald of the toughest battles that he had fought in his life.

Years ago, he and his fellow Crossers fought like hell in order to break out of the Garlen Empire and escape their pursuers!

Through a combination of grit and an unwillingness to let his enemies have their way, Patriarch Reginald succeeded in overcoming the many opponents he fought and found a way for the remnants of the Cross Clan to flee into the Komodo Star sector.

Though those desperates were long in the past to him and his fellow veterans, the memories of that hell march still defined them in many ways.

Not only had they been tested in the toughest circumstances, they also learned that they could beat any powerful opponent as long as they fought hard enough!

It was this sort of attitude that Patriarch Reginald had always relied upon to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

He believed that such an attitude could also produce the same result in a mech workshop!

This was why he did not look down at all on these Larkinson mech designers. Their previous expert mechs fully showcased their passion and their willingness to put in every effort they could muster in their work!

If other mech designers routinely exerted 60 to 90 percent of their effort into a typical project, Patriarch Reginald could always count on people like Ves and Gloriana to put in at least 95 percent of their effort!

This percentage grew even higher when they were working on mechs that were designed for their clansmen. Their urge to protect their family was strong and a powerful expert command mech like the Minerva Project could have a massive influence on how many clansmen might fall in the next battle.

When Patriarch Reginald shared his thoughts, Venerable Brutus looked thoughtful.

The latter looked down at the crib where his cute little niece was sleeping. She looked especially cozy when Clixie was cuddling up alongside her tiny body.

"You're right, patriarch. Now that I have noticed it, my sister and the others are working on the Minerva Project as if they are fighting a battle that determines the survival of our fleet."

"That is a given. Each of them are residing in the same fleet as us. The mechs they make not only protect their family, but also themselves. There aren't many mech designers who are willing to venture into the more dangerous parts of the frontier. It is difficult to imagine that this group of mech designers would feel as urgent if they are all working in a safe and well-protected design lab on Davute or another settled planet. When they don't have to brave the same dangers as us, they don't have to work as hard anymore. This is yet another reason why I respect these mech designers. With their skills and accomplishments, it would be natural for them to retreat to the rear, but they have decided to stay aboard this fleet despite all of the risks."

Although the Larkinson mech designers were already accustomed to this, their behavior was way outside the norm.

High-ranking mech designers were extremely precious. It took a huge amount of learning and dedication for Journeymen and Seniors to emerge. Why should they put their lives at risk when their presence on the battlefield wasn't needed?

Mech designers made their contributions before a battle began! Once the fighting was about to commence, it was the job of the mech pilot to shoulder most of the burdens.

It said a lot to people like Patriarch Reginald that nerds like Patriarch Ves and Professor Benedict were willing to accompany their own troops despite the risks to their lives.

To the Cross Patriarch, these mech designers were soldiers even if they didn't see themselves in this way!

It was because of their high dedication towards their work and their own organizations that Patriarch Reginald readily agreed to put a huge amount of wealth and resources at their disposal in order to develop the Mars Project.

There was no better guarantee to the success of the Mars Project than putting their lives and future on the line!

The two expert pilots continued to chat with each other as they observed the mech designers pumping out components from their machines. The sight was rather magical to them as they had no clue how to operate all of the complicated industrial equipment.

If they attempted to do this work themselves, they were liable to make the machines explode!

The more Benedict and Brutus the ongoing work, the more they envied Commander Casella for the treatment that her expert mech received.

"This expert mech will change the way we fight our battles going forward." Brutus remarked. "I've never fought alongside a command mech, let alone one that is made for an expert pilot. I've learned what the Minerva Project can do from Gloriana. If she hasn't exaggerated her claims, then the combat effectiveness of the rank-and-file of the Larkinson Army will skyrocket."

Patriarch Reginald looked envious for a moment. "In my former state, we believed in the supremacy of our champions, so we never bothered to cultivate expert pilots with command specializations. Not that it would have mattered that much as the difficulty of producing them is extremely high. The Larkinson Clan is lucky that it can add one to our defense force."

Neither of them thought that their respective organizations would be able to catch up to the Larkinson Clan on this aspect. It was simply too difficult to purposefully nurture a mech officer into an expert pilot and also ensure that the pilot in question was willing to sacrifice individual combat power in order to act as a force multiplier!

As both of the expert pilots thought about what the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan could do in order to close the gap to the Larkinson Clan, the situation in the workshop changed.

Shortly after Ves tapped his hammer on Sara Voiken's head, the mech designers all became energized!

Alexandria became livelier as the rush of euphoria from Sara Voiken spread to the other mech designers through her active design network.

This not only pumped the rest up, but also fed their positive outbursts back into the design network where they subsequently rippled out to each other.

Through this powerful interaction, Ves, Gloriana, Juliet and even Benedict became a lot more fired up! With Sara Voiken leading the way this time, the work on the Minerva Project gained an extra push!

Though Reginald and Brutus still didn't understand what had happened, their strong intuitions and their keen observations told them that the chances that the Minerva Project would turn into a remarkable product had increased!

"We are blessed." Venerable Brutus wistfully remarked.

"Oh?"

"We are blessed by the opportunity to get close to a mech designer like Patriarch Ves. He not only made all of his wonderful mechs possible, but also serves as the glue that holds us all together. Without him and his passion for mech design, no one would have imagined that mechs such as my Star Dancer Mark II or this upcoming Minerva Project could even be turned into reality."

"I feel the same way. We are indeed lucky to befriend and enlist the services of Patriarch Ves. If he is already this capable in his thirties, imagine what he could do when he becomes a hundred years old. Maybe even ace pilots will seek to commission their mechs from the Larkinsons!"

This was an absurd notion and one that Reginald would never dream about under ordinary circumstances.

Professor Benedict who was much further along this journey than the Larkinson mech designers might be impressive in his own right, but he didn't instill the same sense of confidence that he could produce a dazzling work some day.

As for the Larkinson Patriarch? Brilliant machines such as the Amaranto, the Shield of Samar and the Everchanger already serve as examples of his ability to exceed his limits!

"I wonder if the Minerva Project will join their ranks soon."

After numerous days of long and tedious fabrication work, the five mech designers completed all of the parts they had been assigned to make.

The collection of parts looked quite impressive. Despite involving multiple different mech designers who each possessed their own outlooks on mechs, the components and subcomponents they made with great care and attention were remarkably consistent!

Even though a discerning mech designer could spot the differences in the output of every individual mech designer, the degree of cohesion and uniformity was much higher than usual!

This was one of the many benefits of design networks! The ability for mech designers to share their insights and solutions to other participating mech designers made it so that their respective strengths spread out to others.

It was almost as if all of the parts were made by a single amalgamation of the five mech designers!

Of course, individual differences remained and those who became preoccupied with producing parts related to their specializations were unlikely to accept the input of others. This was why the components that made up the flight system or the armor system were still distinct from each other.

In any case, the hardest and most influential phase had passed. The parts formed the building blocks of the mech that the mech designers were about to assemble, so their quality and other properties were extremely vital to the outcome of this fabrication run!

Excellent parts made it a lot easier to build an excellent mech. As long as the assemblers possessed enough skill, they could put the mech components together in a ways that maximized their performance while minimizing any negative impacts on the final product.

Of course, if the people assembling the mech were incompetent or out of their league, then they could easily fail to unlock the potential of the parts. At worst, they could even damage the mech!

This was why no one who cared about mechs took the assembly process for granted. Every participant was like a cook that had meticulously prepared the ingredients.

Now, they needed to employ all of their skill, knowledge and any other advantages they might possess to cook the best possible dishes over a span of two days!

"Let us begin."

Alexandria's design network continued to play a major role in this fabrication run.

Although the mech designers did not need to borrow each other's expertise as much during the assembly phase, they still maintained a high degree of unity and coordination.

None of them stepped on each other's toes and always maintained a tacit distance from each other. Only rarely did they work as two or three as it wasn't necessary for them to do so anymore.

Every mech designer knew that there was a greater chance for problems to occur anytime four hands were needed to complete a task when two hands should be enough. The existence of the design network brilliantly made this optional since the mech designers could directly convey their own advice and solutions from one mind to another without any friction.

As the oldest and most experienced mech designer in the current team, Professor Benedict Cortez expected to take the lead in the assembly phase.

This was the traditional method of assembling mechs. The more the mech frame became complete, the greater the chance of colliding into each other. Someone always needed to be in charge to set priorities and determine the order of putting the parts in place.

What the Senior discovered was that the Larkinson mech designers did not defer to him despite his qualifications.

First, they were confident or overconfident in their own skill and approach. Whether it was warranted or not, the Journeymen all thought they could do just as well or even better!

They were not entirely wrong. People like Ves and Gloriana made the most masterwork mechs out of all of them. If nothing else, their repeated successes not only inflated their confidence in themselves, but also increased their mech affinities to a considerable height!

Professor Benedict quickly discovered that his fears were unwarranted. He was completely wrong to doubt the competence of the Larkinson mech designers.

Though Juliet Stameross and Sara Voiken were not as perverse as the Miracle Couple, the two female Journeymen both carried their own weight. They were already accustomed to working together with Ves and Gloriana so they did not pose any hindrance at all during the assembly phase.

This completely relieved Benedict from any burdens. One of the reasons why he refused opportunities to collaborate in the past was because he always became frustrated at the less-than-perfect teamwork that ensued.

Many mech designers were too full of themselves and did not believe that they were wrong. They also held strong opinions on many design aspects and could become unreasonably stubborn when challenged.

While that hadn't become invalid for this fabrication run, the design network solved a lot of misunderstandings before they happened. Pa nda

Novel This caused Professor Benedict to be able to work a lot smoother than in the past. Due to his exacting standards and his intolerance towards failure, he had never been the easiest mech designer to work with. This was especially problematic when he teamed up with another picky mech designer such as Gloriana!

Yet even though conventional wisdom in the mech industry stated that the two should conflict with each other, nothing of the sort had occurred.

They either resolved their differences without saying a word or they simply avoided each other and worked on significantly different sections of a mech.

Without the interference and interruptions that usually occurred during collaborations, Professor Benedict seamlessly performed his work in a harmonious fashion.

The lack of irritations allowed him to become more engrossed in the craft of assembling a mech.

"I missed this." He whispered to himself.

He had made many mechs throughout his career. Each time he did so, he treated it as a chore at worst. There were only a limited number of cases where he had developed a valuable mech that was more powerful than normal or incorporated a new invention.

Those were the moments where he invested a lot more in the fabrication process than before.

Those instances were rare, though.

In fact, as he grew older, he enjoyed the process less and less.

Part of that was because his growth had slowed down. Back when he was younger, he continued to learn so much new knowledge. If that wasn't sufficient, he performed research and developed new techniques based on his results.

Whenever he came up with an excellent innovation, he became a lot more eager to fabricate a good mech. This was how he managed to create a few of his best works.

Yet... the further he progressed, the harder it became for him to make new achievements.

He found himself in a position where he needed to spend time on much more complicated studies, many of which were so tenuous that they rarely if ever yielded usable results.

How could he maintain the same fire as before? With reality beating him down every time he tried to push it, he began to hold less expectations about his work.

It was only when he started to work alongside the Larkinson mech designers that he regained a portion of his drive.

One example was gaining inspiration of Ves and Gloriana's design solutions to develop numerous innovations including the Magma Vein System.

There was just something about getting in touch with younger and eager mech designers that shocked Professor Benedict out of his inertia.

Now, that sense of change became a lot more evident as they were gradually piecing the Minerva Project together.

A sense of anticipation and fulfillment surged from the Larkinson Journeymen. Ves and Gloriana particularly held high hopes for the outcome of this fabrication run!

Though it was far too premature of them to assume that they had met their goal, the increased confidence and enthusiasm they exhibited towards their work was infectious.

Even without the design network, their optimism and eagerness inspired confidence in those who were working alongside them. Juliet and Sara couldn't help but have higher expectations as well and began to put even more effort into their work than before!

Though Professor Benedict was able to maintain a degree of soberness, his ambitious and hopeful side of himself wanted to embrace the positive vibes generated by the Larkinson Journeymen!

"This... is delusional."

Though he along with everyone else were satisfied with their work so far, there was no reason for them to feel convinced that the expert mech would become a masterwork mech.

Yet... there was always hope. Previous successes had buoyed their confidence and so far none of them had made any blunders.

From a rational perspective, the Larkinson mech designers were gamblers who purchased a lottery ticket with the firm expectation that they had won the lottery!

"The odds aren't that high!"

Yet... what if they became lucky?

What if they happened to do everything right?

"What if they only needed to put in a little extra effort to succeed?"

All of this logic gave Professor Benedict an excuse to indulge in his own hopes. As the hours passed by, he became increasingly more astonished when he noticed that his productivity had increased!

He was highly sensitive towards these changes due to his design philosophy. There was no way that he had made a mistake!

"I am actually working faster and smoother than before. I have also improved the quality of my work!"

These changes came for no good reason aside from getting infected by the emotions of the other mech designers.

"It's... nice, though."

He had worked by himself too many times. A hint of loneliness affected him for a moment before the companionship of his fellow collaborators drove it away.

While Professor Benedict regarded himself as a Senior Mech Designer with formidable design capabilities, he had forgotten that he was a human as well.

Eventually, he decided to throw logic out of the window and immerse himself in this moment.

The next few hours went by in a blur as the older man entered a state of mind that reminded himself of his younger self.

He used to be bolder and more unrestrained when he was a Journeyman. He had yet to learn about the immensely difficult challenges to come and readily believed he could become a Star Designer as long as he worked hard enough!

Though Benedict had gradually come to reject this naive mindset, the youthful passion shared by his other collaborators caused him to see this mentality in a new light.

He derived a lesson from this experience.

"You will do your best to attain your goal when you think that everything is possible. If you assume your goal is impossible to achieve, then you have been defeated before you have even tried."

He wasn't sure whether the former statement was valid, but he was wise enough to recognize that the latter was absolutely detrimental to his career!

This was why he readily embraced the youthful vigor of the younger mech designers. He threw aside every other doubt, concern or distraction and fully tried to relive his younger experiences in working on mechs.

Without his notice, the time had come to put the finishing touches on the Minerva Project. When he started to gain awareness of himself again, he discovered to his surprise that the expert command mech looked harmonious and complete in a way that he had rarely seen before!

Every other mech designer backed away as Ves and Commander Casella floated above mech.

"Ketis taught a little ritual." Ves said as he handed a small knife to the Sentinel Commander. "Blood can cement your connection to your mech. Go ahead and do the honors, Casella. Your battle partner awaits your mark."

Commander Casella looked solemn as she accepted the knife and slit her palm.

As the drops of blood splattered over the surface of the Minerva Project, the silvery mech came to life in a way that Professor Benedict never would have expected under ordinary circumstances.

Yet when he was working alongside these youthful and happy Larkinson mech designers, he felt as if this result was their expected reward!

"Masterwork!" Benedict gasped.

Chapter 3724 The Power Of Youth

After seven days of constant and diligent work, the Minerva Project reached completion!

What was more, it had become a masterwork mech!

As soon as Commander Casella Ingvar symbolically baptized the expert command mech with her blood, everyone already understood that something remarkable was about to happen.

Every mech pilot and mech designer in the workshop looked reverently at the completed Minerva Project as it began to undergo a mysterious transformation.

Ves, Gloriana, Juliet, Sara and their external consultant Professor Benedict had managed to accomplish the unlikely and succeeded in creating another masterwork out of an expert mech!

This outcome completely shocked the only Senior Mech Designer who took part in this project. Not only did this remarkable outcome defy all of the odds, he had actually played an integral part in making it possible!

"I did this... for a mech I did not play a leading role..."

The Minerva Project was first and foremost a Larkinson mech, so the older man had to hold himself back. He was unable to apply as many of his unique design solutions to the mech design as he wished, so he initially did not care as much about the project as he should.

Much of that had changed at the end of the project. The inspiration he gained from working alongside the likes of Ves and sharing the joys and expectations of the younger Larkinson mech designers over the course of the fabrication run had completely changed his mentality towards his work.

The Minerva Project became more than a commission to him. It became a point of pride and a work that he genuinely wanted to succeed.

"Since when did I care so much?"

Through the influences passed on by the design network, Professor Benedict had gradually opened himself up to the feelings of the other mech designers.

They wanted Commander Casella to do well. They wanted the Minerva Project to become another champion mech that could protect their fellow clansmen. They wanted their work to become a masterwork mech because they assumed it was possible for them to attain this goal.

Before he knew it, Benedict had turned into a reflection of his younger self. It was surprising how much a bunch of Journeymen had caused him to adjust to them. The opposite usually took place!Pa nda

Novel As each of the mech designers became fascinated by the subtle transformation of the Minerva Project, Professor Benedict temporarily threw aside his distractions and immersed himself in what he could gain from his observations.

"Amazing..."

The Senior felt as if he reacquainted himself with the magic of delivering an excellent mech. How long had it been since he felt so accomplished and fulfilled about his product?

Seeing Commander Casella Ingvar bloom with joy made him happier. He had completed his purpose and delivered the best possible mech to his client. Even though he had done this many times over the decades he was active as a mech designer, he rarely if ever interacted with his clients directly in recent times.

This experience was a reminder of how keeping in touch with his customers could give his work more meaning.

"I shouldn't have looked down on any of them. Their skills might not be as good as mine, but their confidence is crucial."

His diligence and his decision to be more accepting of the attitudes of the Larkinson mech designers paid off. Professor Benedict derived numerous little lessons from the masterwork transformation that provided him with a little more confidence in his ability to advance to Master.

At the very least, Professor Benedict could already think of a few ways to improve the performance of his upcoming Mars Project!

Even if he didn't derive any clear lessons from the Minerva Project's ascension to a masterwork mech, just the increase in his mech affinity was a valuable gift.

When Professor Benedict closed his eyes, he could feel the powerful mech a bit more clearly than before. He knew that he could gain an even better understanding of a mech even if he did not employ a scanner.

"How useful."

Mech affinity was a vague subject even for a Senior of his stature. It was an inherent quality that every qualified mech designer possessed, yet it was not a trait that could clearly be measured or defined.

There were certain people that used mech affinity as an indicator for talent in mech design, but this was far from the only variable that determined one's success in the mech industry.

There were brilliant mech designers who started off with low affinities but worked themselves up through hard work and thinking outside the box.

There were also mech designers who easily advanced to Senior by relying on their raw talent and excellent affinity, only to hit a wall that prevented them from getting an easy ride to Master.

At that point, it was no longer enough to rely so heavily on intuition and feelings to design better mechs! Mech designers needed to go outside their comfort zone where the most obvious answers weren't the best anymore.

As far as Professor Benedict knew, mech affinity was not an essential trait and could easily be substituted with knowledge and experience.

It was nice to have, though.

With all of the satisfaction he derived from making a brilliant masterwork mech after such a long time, the fact that his affinity and intuitive understanding of mechs became better was a sweet reward.

"We finally succeeded again! It's about time you stopped holding me back!" Gloriana exclaimed as the results validated her supreme confidence in her skills and fueled her conceit even further. "I'm about to receive my sixth masterwork certificate! Sixth!"

The others were happy about their work as well. Each of them had contributed a little bit towards turning the Minerva Project into a more powerful mech.

"It's not just a masterwork mech. It's also a third-order living mech." Ves uttered as he became engrossed with exploring the newborn mech's expanded personality.

Of all of the mech designers that took part in this run, Sara Voiken obtained the most benefits, especially given how little she brought to the table.

With no masterwork certificates under her belt, it was undeniable that she hadn't played a decisive role. Yet her excellent teamwork and the euphoria she brought after getting hit by a hammer played a helpful role in getting them closer.

To be honest, Professor Benedict hadn't imagined that the Minerva Project could go this far even at the very end. The parts the mech designers fabricated were good in quality but were not particularly exceptional aside from their greater uniformity and cohesion.

The assembly phase proceeded fairly well as well, but no one had shown a lot of brilliance during the last two days.

It was only when the Minerva Project was in its final hours that Benedict had an inkling that it might turn into a remarkable machine. Even then, the odds shouldn't have been that good!

When Professor Benedict looked back on how they all spent the last seven days, he formed a tentative conclusion.

"Emotions make all of the difference."

An older mech designer like himself had grown steadier over the years. While this was good in maintaining a consistent level of performance, it had also made it difficult for him to exceed his previous performance levels.

It was only when the Larkinson mech designers infected him with their youthful confidence that he had broken his own pattern.

He derived a great lesson from this experience!

"The power of youth is more useful than I expected!"

He should have collaborated more with younger mech designers if this was one of the benefits he could receive. It was harder for him to maintain his drive and passion towards improving his craft by himself. The erosion of years kept pushing him into taking it easy, but he resisted this urge as best he could.

This was why this experience affected him so much. He reinvigorated his passion in mech design by getting affected by the power of youth!

"I should collaborate more often with younger and less experienced mech designers!"

Professor Benedict recognized that it was likely difficult to replicate all of the boosts he received during this fabrication run. The absence of a design network was a major hindrance to replicating the incredible degree of coordination that he and the Larkinsons displayed.

However, plenty of mech designers were able to achieve success without resorting to such a trick. The Senior was highly confident in his ability to find his own way to derive strength from the power of youth in the future.

"Maybe it is time for me to go back to mentoring the younger generation of mech designers again."

He had mentored up-and-coming mech designers that displayed talent in the past. However, back then he never realized that he could lean on their youthful vigor and ignorance to rejuvenate his own attitude towards mech design.

The gains didn't outweigh the costs to him back then. He thought differently, now.

As Professor Benedict turned his attention back to deciphering how their design team had succeeded in turning the Minerva Project into a masterwork mech, he recalled the impressive degree of confidence that the Larkinson mech designers displayed.

"Confidence is the key here." He hypothesized.

Earlier, he thought that Gloriana was foolish for assuming that she could make a masterwork mech just because she assumed that she would succeed.

No other Journeyman could be so conceited, yet Gloriana thought in the depths of her heart that she could do better than many Seniors and Masters!

The fact that her absurd attitude did not drag the Minerva Project down was surprising to Benedict.

It caused him to question his own assumptions towards making mechs. Was it truly right to maintain a more sober and skeptical attitude towards his work?

"Overestimating one's capabilities is not desirable... unless it stimulates us into rising up to the occasion!"

There was a name for this type of phenomenon.

If Professor Benedict's analysis of the situation was correct, then the truth did not necessarily matter.

This was because Gloriana and her fellow mech designers engaged in their own self-fulfilling prophecy!

They strongly believed in their ideal outcome and used it as a target for them to work towards. Although their target was insanely difficult to reach, their assumption that they could reach it caused them to work hard to meet their inflated expectations!

This eventually caused them to put in far more effort and emotion into their work, which ultimately caused their 'prophecy' to come true!

"The wonders of youth."

Gloriana actually taught Professor Benedict a valuable lesson with her display of fanaticism and conceit.

Though the Senior Mech Designer did not regard her personality traits highly, their ability to warp her expectations was immensely high!

This was a classical case of making the improbable happen by believing in it hard enough.

The difference here was that the difficulty in doing so was a lot higher!

Although the concept sounded easy enough, Professor Benedict knew that it was practically impossible for other Journeyman Mech Designers to succeed with this method.

They needed to believe with all of their hearts and minds that they could successfully create a masterwork mech, yet how could they truly accept this belief when they had never made this accomplishment beforehand?

Only abnormal personalities such as Ves and Gloriana succeeded in overcoming this immensely difficult hurdle.

As long as they succeeded once, they would definitely be able to succeed again! This was because their absurdly high confidence in their own abilities had a basis in truth, however small!

"I cannot even imagine how they managed to succeed in the beginning. How could they have possibly passed the initial hurdle?" He puzzlingly frowned.

Regardless, Professor Benedict had become inspired by the effectiveness of this approach.

Perhaps even a Senior like himself could adopt the same mindset over the impossible challenge that hindered his advancement to Master.

"If I think I deserve to be a Master hard enough, then I will likely get closer to realizing my ambitions!"

Chapter 3725 Raised Floor

"We did it, Ves! We created another masterwork mech!" Gloriana happily embraced and kissed Ves after they had all pulled out of their fascination.

Each of the Larkinson mech designers were ecstatic about the results of their stellar fabrication run.

They succeeded in adding another masterwork expert mech to the Larkinson Army!

Although Ves had played an important role in making this possible, he genuinely did not expect that he would be able to hit the jackpot again so soon.

He thought that he and his wife needed more accumulation since they already depleted much of it in their last expert mech design projects.

It was already exaggerated for them to succeed twice in a row. The Shield of Samar and the Everchanger were the culmination of their previous design round and they invested a lot more resources and ingenuity in their mech designs than normal.

The Minerva Project was a bit more average in comparison.

They didn't have access to Unending alloy this time, which was a fantastic material that made the prior expert mechs extra special.

They also did not receive help from an impressive MTA Master Mech Designer.

Furthermore, the Minerva Project was not a passion project to anyone. Neither Ves, Gloriana and the others considered it to be a mech that spoke to them personally.

That didn't stop Ves and her wife from putting in their full effort into the project, but that was mostly because of their professional obligations.

They were accustomed to channeling their passion into their work and the expert command mech also happened to be the flagship project of the current design round.

Therefore, Ves held fairly modest expectations towards this fabrication run. He had traveled to the Cyclical Engine's workshop with the mindset of giving it a try, not really expecting that he would win the biggest prize all of a sudden.

He still had to process this amazing turn of events. To him, it appeared that he and the others put in a lot of effort but not to the point of reaching critical mass.

His gut feeling caused him to think that they had all put in enough effort that the Minerva Project was only a short distance away from reaching the next rung of the craftsmanship ladder.

In this particular scenario, Ves could have given expert mech a final push by integrating one of Lucky's gems.

Yet somehow this additional step wasn't needed this time, and that made him confused!

How could they have made everything so well despite involving a relative newcomer with no experience with masterwork mechs?

"Practice makes perfect!" Gloriana exclaimed as she espoused her own theory of what went right. "Isn't it obvious, Ves? It's all because of our earlier successes. We learned so much about elevating the quality of our mechs due to the previous masterwork mechs we've made. Don't you see that this is a positive feedback loop that will ultimately enable us to make masterwork mechs on demand?"

"I doubt it is as simple as you say. Otherwise, human space would be filled with masterwork mechs." Ves mildly retorted.

His wife arrogantly lifted her chin. "Hmph! Says you. I am more special than you. Have you forgotten my specialization already? Being able to make Masterwork mechs on a frequent basis has always been one of my core goals! As a result, I learn a lot more how to repeat my successes than any other mech designer."

Her argument might sound more convincing if she had proof to back up her claims. It was unfortunate that she was full of herself that she did not think that providing solid proof was necessary to back up her boasts!

Though Ves could readily believe that Gloriana had done a lot to increase their odds of success, he didn't think she deserved the sole credit for what had happened today.

Ves still believed that no one dominated this fabrication session this time. He had kept track of every mech designer including Professor Benedict. Though each of them grew more confident and motivated over time, no one entered into an exceptional state of mind.

As he silently crossed out one theory after another, he ended up with an explanation that sounded a little more plausible than the other ones.

Had they unconsciously become good enough that it was no longer extremely difficult for them to reach the masterwork threshold?

Their mech affinities had risen so high and they had developed a substantial amount of experience in making prior masterwork mechs.

This continually raised the quality floor of their work!

Perhaps the difference of a single success was not that great. However, when Ves and his wife had succeeded multiple times, all of the gains they made from those fantastic attempts continued to stack up until they had attained a formidable height compared to where they started!Pa nda

Novel The simplest analogy that he could think of was stacking data pads on top of each other. A single one might not look impressive, but when dozens of them were precisely placed on top of each other, it became a lot easier for Ves to touch the ceiling of a room if he stood on the stack that he had built!

This theory implied that as long as the stack of data pads was high enough, there would come a point in the future where he could touch the ceiling without exerting any additional effort.

Their success today made Ves think that this was an accurate description of his current state. The only question was how many 'data pads' he needed to add to the pile before it became high enough. Six? Twenty? A hundred? He had no clue.

He still had a lot of time, though. In the meantime, his incremental improvements would slowly raise his base chances of success.

As Ves thought about the success rate of his subsequent mech design project, Commander Casella Ingvar had already begun to familiarize herself with the mech of her dreams.

She hovered closer to the just-completed expert mech and placed her palm on its silver-coated surface.

"Minerva... that's a good name. I'll call you Minerva, are you pleased with that?"

The simply-named Minerva apparently agreed because it responded to her in a deeper fashion.

To her, the Minerva was an expert mech that was just waiting to demonstrate its power! No expert mech was weak, but a mid-tier one like the Minerva was much more formidable in its own way.

"From now on, you and I will be partners for many years. If neither of us fall, we will do our best to keep up with each other. The enemies of the Larkinson Clan will regret fighting against our combined might."

YOUR VOICE SHALL COMMAND THE STARS.

"Don't get too carried away. It is enough to lead our fellow clansmen in battle."

Commander Casella was accustomed to dealing with higher order living mechs. Her considerable experience in dealing with the Quint played a useful role this time.

As the expert pilot and expert mech got along with each other, Patriarch Reginald Cross looked impressed at what the team of mech designers had delivered.

He expected that they had the potential to create a masterwork mech, but he felt both gratified in the expectations he placed on them but also distressed that it wasn't his Mars Project that received this treatment!

"My sister has done it again. Her excellence will not allow anything worse." Venerable Brutus smiled with pride.

"She and her fellow Larkinson Journeymen are truly far above the ones that our clan has recently employed." Patriarch Reginald Cross agreed.

The momentum of the five Crosser Journeymen were incomparable to that of the Larkinson Journeymen.

The latter were not only more competent, but also possessed real accomplishments that could earn the respect of any mech designer!

Now, the difference between the two groups had grown.

Moving resources around or clearing away the fabricated parts hardly required a lot of knowledge. Any mech technician could have taken over their roles.

As Ves kept going over the implications of what he learned today, Gloriana dragged him over to the place where his daughter and his cats were being cared for. Aurelia already lit up as she sensed the approach of her mother!

"Mama!"

Gloriana lovingly picked up the baby and entertained her for a moment. "Mama is here, now. I hope you have enjoyed your time in the company of others. I have a strict set of incentives in place."

Ves gently took their daughter from her hands. "Papa has made a mech that will make our clan grow stronger. I have a hunch I will be meeting them again in the future."

"Hihihi!"

The baby clearly didn't understand what he was saying. Aurelia just wanted to grab onto anything shiny and interesting enough in order to wait for the next move.

"Congratulations to your new masterwork expert mech, Larkinsons." Patriarch Reginald respectfully said. "Many forces in the Red Ocean cannot even dream about fielding a single masterwork mech. It is even more unlikely for them to be expert mechs. On the other hand, your clan is able to field five of them at a time! This is a disproportionately high number for a relatively small organization like yours. I am afraid that people cannot even believe that you have been able to build them up as Journeymen in the span of a couple years."

"We take more risks and put more at stake than many other mech designers." Ves modestly smiled. "We just happen to be lucky enough that our bets have paid off. It got easier at that point. Our successes will become more frequent in the future. That said, we haven't reached the point where we can guarantee the Mars Project will match the splendor of our new expert mech."

"From what I have observed, You are on the right track. I would never bother to ask if other mech designers can turn my expert mech into a masterwork. Unless they are highly-accomplished Masters, no one can give me enough assurances that they will be able to meet my exacting demands. You are different, Ves. You and your team are among the few mech designers that can actually deliver on your promises."

Ves grew awkward. Despite getting ready to collect another masterwork certificate, he was still leagues away from being able to make a masterwork mech whenever he wanted.

Properly speaking, he would have to become an extremely powerful Master Mech Designer before he could reach that point!

Even if he started off early, there was no realistic way that he could raise his chances of success at this stage in his career.

The Minerva Project was just a happy accident in his eyes. Maybe the fact that he had been making so many masterwork versions of expert mechs in particular gave him an

advantage when making exceptionally powerful mechs, but the Mars Project's specifications were much higher.

The difficulty of turning a quasi-first class expert mech into a masterwork mech was incomparable!

Although Ves wanted to temper the Cross Patriarch's expectations, the astonishing success today made that difficult.

"Professor Benedict deserves a lot of credit for today's accomplishment." Ves modestly said, choosing to shove most of the burden to the Senior. "He has played a critical role in the development of the Minerva Project, and that was when he acted as an external consultant. Next time, your esteemed Senior will be directly in charge of your clan's flagship project. His work and effort will set the tone for your future expert mech."

The leader of the Cross Clan placed his large hand on Ves' shoulder. "That is a given, but if he is the body, you are the heart. Your role in the design of my new machine is indispensable. I hope you can show the same level of passion and dedication that you have displayed towards your clan's new expert command mech."

"Have no fear of that. I always treat all of my mech designs as if they are my children. Each of them are alive, after all. I already have a few interesting ideas in mind for your Mars Project."

Chapter 3726 - Divine Label

The excitement surrounding the completion of the Larkinson Clan's fourth new masterwork expert mech had yet to die down!

The significance of this new machine couldn't be overstated. It was not just a singular powerful combat engine, but also promised to provide a huge amount of support to the rank-and-file mechs fielded by the Living Sentinels and possibly other mech legions.

If the Larkinson Battalion's final winning match in the G-Aena League was any indication of Commander Casella Ingvar's extraordinary combat application, then the addition of a suitable and compatible expert mech would allow her to replicate this feat to a degree!

Right now, many mech pilots were curious to what extent the new expert command mech was able to enhance the battle power of ordinary mechs.

It was difficult to perform a precise estimate because of many reasons. Commander Casella's previous performance was also a result of forced resonance, which often produced a more violent burst of power compared to true resonance.

Still, even if Commander Casella was unable to rouse as much power in her current state, she was still a young expert pilot!

As long as she continued to pilot her new machine, her resonance strength would definitely grow by leaps and bounds. This was one of the biggest advantages of piloting a masterwork expert mech!

"So you've decided on the name of your expert mech?" Ves asked Commander Casella.

The happy expert pilot nodded as she continued to rub the surface of her new battle partner's exterior. "The Minerva is a good name for my mech, patriarch. I have already associated it with this name in my mind and don't see the need to change to another one. Besides, the Minerva itself is completely okay with it. It is an honor to be called after an ancient human goddess of war."

Ves twitched his eyes. This was going too far. When he originally came up with the mech concept, he only loosely called it the Minerva Project in order to give himself and other participating mech designers a strong mental idea of a powerful command mech. Names possessed psychological weight and one of the best ways to hype up a new mech was to associate it with a powerful myth!

However, he never seriously thought about sticking with the name. It sounded a bit arrogant for a mech to be called after a god. That was usually a treatment reserved for much grander mechs such as the ace mechs of the first-rate superstates.

However... as Ves directed another admiring glance towards his latest product, he did not think that calling it the Minerva was a disservice to this powerful name.

There were few masterwork versions of expert mechs in existence to begin with. Each of them stood out from regular expert mechs and many had actually succeeded in nurturing ace pilots who went on to perform legendary deeds!

Therefore, Ves did not reject the name as much as before. The only part he found difficult was that he did not like to develop the mistaken impression that he and his clan were messing with actual gods.

It was one thing to call a mech after a mythical god. It was another thing for people to mistake the Minerva as the actual personification of the ancient Roman goddess of war!

Although Ves detested such a phenomenon, he knew quite well how easily people fell for superstition.

The former Vulcan Empire clearly proved that the fictional existence of Vulcan was enough to brainwash trillions of dwarves into tall folk-hating fanatics!

Ves may have chosen to give life to Vulcan, but that was only because he wanted to take advantage of the gullible dwarves.

With a convenient 'helper' like the Iron Emperor spreading the gospel of Vulcan out of strategic reasons, borrowing an established brand would definitely make it easier for the incarnation to harvest a lot of spiritual feedback!

This was okay in his opinion because Vulcan solely took advantage of the dwarven people.

Even if they were human in a sense, the dwarves who fell under the banner of the Iron Emperor were all planning to separate themselves from human civilization, so it was fine to treat them as non-humans.

What Ves could not stomach was setting up a situation where humans might do the same one day. A prominent mech like the Minerva would definitely attract a lot of admiration, especially among his own Larkinsons whose lives depended on the performance of this expert command mech!

He shrugged. This was not a phenomena that could be stopped once it got going. Mechs were venerated in the Age of Mechs, and powerful ones received even more attention from the public. No matter whether he called Casella's new machine the Minerva or a boring label like M-12346, the attraction of a powerful expert mech was irresistible!

In any case, after Ves reluctantly agreed to register the name that the Sentinel Commander had chosen, the woman addressed another topic.

"The Minerva and I are eager to see what we're capable of, sir. When will we be able to deploy for the first time?"

"Be patient, commander. We have just completed a seven-day fabrication run. We're not in the best state to supervise a field test at the moment. Besides, we also need to examine the Minerva carefully now that it has grown to its current form. Let's reconvene in twelve hours. We can use this time to prepare a more elaborate testing session. Since your expert mech excels at empowering other friendly mechs, it is necessary to see how many machines you can boost. This is crucial information that we can use to plan out our future battles."

Casella nodded in understanding. The Sentinel Commander needed to know the limits of her own capabilities. Though she possessed an intuitive understanding of her own prowess, she did not know how much her new expert mech could amplify it through resonance. Only an actual attempt would make everything clear.

Novel Ves and his fellow Larkinsons did not need to stay in the workshop any longer. The Minerva Project was originally the property of the Larkinson Clan so he arranged for it to be shipped to the Spirit of Bentheim.

Professor Benedict's subordinate mech designers were already cleaning up the workshop as well, so that was one less chore he needed to worry about.

Once the Larkinsons were about to depart, Ves briefly spoke with Professor Benedict one last time.

"You Larkinsons are truly amazing." The Senior said with a hint of bewilderment in his tone. "You are a young mech designer and your clan is not that old either, but the amount of surprises you can give me is still astounding. Your strong and abundant vitality is your greatest strength. Cherish it well and try not to lose it through the passage of years."

Though Ves looked a bit confused, he gratefully nodded. "Thank you for your compliment. You are an excellent mech designer as well. I look forward to collaborating with you on the Mars Project. With a straightforward combat expert mech, we don't have to compromise so much."

The Minerva was an expert mech that needed to split its resources between combat power and utility. It was inevitable for Commander Casella's new machine to fall behind in terms of absolute strength.

The Mars Project promised to be different! By allocating 100 percent of its design to direct combat applications, its mech designers would definitely be able to turn it into a strong battlefield champion without peer!

Like children in a candy store, both Ves and Professor Benedict exchanged eager grins.

"There are many reasons for us to be excited for our next big project, but let us not get ahead of ourselves. The Magma Vein System and many other innovations I have in store cannot be realized unless I make the necessary preparations. I have not yet managed to gather all of the rare high-grade exotics I need to construct these special systems."

The impressive-sounding Magma Vein System promised to turn the Mars Project into the singular most powerful combat asset of the expeditionary fleet, but how could it be made without paying a heavy price?

Every remarkable combat system required specific support! An ingenious design could only carry a mech so far. The use of powerful exotics with different unusual properties were indispensable!

Once the two finished chatting, Ves bid farewell to Professor Benedict and headed back to his flagship.

Both Ves and Gloriana cuddled up against each other. For now, no argument or differences of opinion could break them apart. They had just fulfilled their highest goal for this design project. How could they not be happy at this time?

"Mama!"

What was even better was that Aurelia playfully bounded around on their laps. The baby girl seemingly sensed the happiness of her parents and became happy as well.

"Meow meow."

"Miaow."

Lucky and Clixie flanked their sides and were content as well. They were smart enough to know that the Larkinson Clan had grown stronger again. With the Minerva watching over everyone, it would take a lot more effort for enemies to threaten everyone's lives!

Ves rubbed his daughter's head. "Don't look at your mother all the time. Have you forgotten about me already? I'm your papa! Say papa!"

Aurelia paused for a moment before she tried to reach out to Ves' face. "Papa!"

"Yes! You called me papa! What a good girl!"

Gloriana rolled her eyes at the spectacle. "Don't forget she said 'mama' first. You will always come second, Ves."

"You don't have to remind me about that every day."

As Ves continued to play with Aurelia, he began to think about how they should raise her in the coming months and years.

"Should we look for playmates for Aurelia?"

"I'll take care of it." Gloriana quickly said. "Don't worry about that. I have already been examining a list of children born from prominent couples. There are not many of them that have powerful lineages in our clan, but they are adequate enough."

Ves did not excel in this area so he was happy enough to shove this matter to his wife. She clearly cared about this more so she would definitely do a thorough job.

"What I am more concerned about is her schooling." His wife said. "It will take a few years before she is ready to receive her first lessons, but I am not satisfied with putting her in an ordinary school aboard the Spirit of Bentheim."

"There aren't many other options available." He told her. "Dawn City has larger schools since it is a large civilian population center, but it is inconvenient for us to put our own daughter on a different ship. I don't want to put her into a fancy virtual school for elites. I don't want her to grow out of touch with our clansmen."

He expected Gloriana to object to that and convince him to put Aurelia into an elite school. Instead, she made a different suggestion.

"If we lived in Davute, it would have been easy for us to enroll her into an expensive academy. Since we cannot do that, I think that we should hire a group of highly-qualified tutors to educate her and our future children in person."

"That... sounds like a decent suggestion."

As a low-born human, Ves was quite aware that he was severely lacking in etiquette and many other essentials that the members of upper society took for granted.

While that had never been a problem due to relying on his strength as a mech designer to earn people's respect, he did not want to pass on this shortcoming to his daughter.

Hiring renowned and capable tutors sounded like a good way to instill Aurelia with the knowledge to excel in whatever vocation she embraced.

The truly excellent ones were already attached to various elite educational institutions, but there should be plenty of decent ones that could be persuaded to tutor a child in exchange for generous salaries.

Of course, the amount of money needed to employ them was high in their perspective but trivial in the eyes of the Larkinson Clan!

Since those elite tutors could also be used to educate other prominent children in the clan, it was absolutely worth it to pay a couple of MTA credits a year to hire a bunch of them and raise the development of the clan!

Ves nodded in acceptance. "Alright, let's do what you say, but don't hire the tutors by yourself. We probably won't be able to bring them aboard unless we return to Davute, and that might take a while. You should take that into account."

"I know what I'm doing, Ves."

Chapter 3727 - New Mech, New Possibilities

When the Larkinson mech designers returned to the Spirit of Bentheim, they quickly returned to their grand staterooms and enjoyed a well-deserved rest.

The mood among the clansmen was high. The appearance of another masterwork expert mech and one that was capable of enhancing other friendly mechs was like music to their ears.

The regular mech units were the backbone of the Larkinson Army!

Although the six impressive expert mechs in the service of the Larkinson Clan had attracted much of the attention as of late, they could not shoulder the burden of defending the Larkinson fleet alone.

There were just too few of them. Their individual combat power needed to be directed wisely in order to achieve the best possible impact. They could also be blocked by enemy forces that fielded their own expert mechs.

The most reliable way to win a battle was by achieving superiority on a fundamental level. The expert mechs wouldn't even be needed to bail out the regular troops if that was the case!

The mood among the Living Sentinels was especially high at the moment! Though Commander Casella was unable to return to the Gorgoneion at the moment, the Sentinels stationed on the well-armored fleet carrier practically held a party when they learned that their legion commander would be able to enhance their battle strength in future conflicts!

"Ready our mechs and make sure our mech pilots go on a refresher course." Captain Sorral Larkinson instructed. "We're about to show our strength when the new Minerva gets tested soon. Let us make sure that we are not found wanting!"

Among the Living Sentinels, a pair of expert candidates grew envious towards Commander Casella. Each of them were far away from wielding so much strength and influence on the battlefield.

"How long will it take for us to receive our own expert mechs from our patriarch?" Trinity Larkinson asked.

Percival Larkinson looked troubled. "We need to work harder if we want to catch up to the likes of our legion commander. It would have been nice if we are able to pilot the Quint, but there is only one of it. Isobel is lucky she possesses the right specialization."

The latest two battles reinforced the importance of strengthening the Larkinson Army's ranged combat capabilities. It made complete sense to put their only expert candidate who excelled at piloting rifleman mechs in a masterwork mech that had a reputation for producing breakthroughs!

"I heard that our clan has made a bunch of new mechs called the Enlightened Warriors, which apparently work like a lesser and more universal version of the Quint. Our guest pilots have already begun to pilot them on a daily basis."

Percival Larkinson shook his head. "Those are commercial mech models, Trinity. If the patriarch intends to issue mechs to expert candidates such as ourselves, then he will probably wait until he has designed a more powerful version that is exclusive to our clan."

"That will take at least a year. What will we do until then?"

"We do what we always do. We follow our legion commander's orders and find our breakthrough opportunity the old-fashioned way. I think the Minerva can help us. The mech pilots who participated in the G-Aena League back then told me that Casella was able to give them the battle strength of an expert candidate. I wonder how this boost will apply to us. I don't expect us to turn into expert pilots, but I think the Minerva might be able to give us a surprise."

Neither Percival nor Trinity knew what to expect from the Minerva. They had high hopes for the mech though. As a machine that was dedicated to empowering other mechs and mech pilots, perhaps it might be able to make their dreams come true!

Half a day passed as the Larkinsons excitedly prepared for the upcoming field test. They decided to go big and deploy a lot mechs for the occasion.

Over a thousand mechs hailing from the Living Sentinels as well as numerous other mech legions deployed into space.

The expert mechs of the Larkinson Clan launched into space as well. Aside from the Amaranto, every other powerful Larkinson mech was scheduled to take active part in a couple of specific tests!

Even a few custom mechs showed up. The Quint piloted by Expert Candidate Isobel Larkinson, the B-Man piloted by Expert Candidate Vincent Ricklin, the Gold Beacon piloted by Avatar Commander Melkor Larkinson and the Blade Chaser piloted by Expert Candidate Imon Ingvar had all been chosen to play a special role in the Minerva's debut performance.

Of all of the mech pilots taking part in this greater-than-usual testing session, Imon Ingvar felt the most mixed about it. His sister who he considered to be an equal for many years had completely bloomed once she settled in the Larkinson Clan.

Imon struggled for months to make peace with the fact that Casella became a demigod while he remained a mortal.

Now, he needed to press down his envy of his sister now that she had received an expert mech that was also a masterwork mech.

Piloting such an exceptional machine was the dream of many mech pilots!

Not even first-class mech pilots could obtain them on demand. The supply of mechs of this caliber was far too limited to meet everyone's demands.

This made the continuous successes of the Larkinson mech designers so remarkable. Even though much of the rank-and-file would never have a chance to pilot a masterwork mech themselves in their lives, just the hope of obtaining one if they advanced to expert pilot did wonders for their morale!

Imon Ingvar didn't know what he would experience in the coming testing session. As someone who aspired to become an expert pilot himself, he knew he mainly needed to rely on himself to find his chance.

However, if his sister could help him out by giving him a preview of what he could become in the future, he might have a clearer idea on what he needed to do to reach that level of strength!

"Relax, Imon." Vincent said over their private communication channel. "This is going to be fun. I always thought that expert candidates like ourselves can't play a big role in a battle, but if we get amped up by your sister, that might change! As long as we can borrow just 1 percent of the power of an expert candidate, I bet that we can beat up an enemy expert mech!"

That was a daring guess! Custom mechs or not, not even Imon could bring himself to believe that they could gain the power to challenge an expert mech.

However... a part of him wanted this to become true. How great would it be to relieve the burden of the Larkinson Clan and fight against powerful opponents on a more level playing field?

The Minerva could potentially make it all possible!

Imon frowned and quickly tempered his expectations. "I don't know, Vincent. Casella is still a new expert pilot and she doesn't have the strength to do much I think. Even if what you say is possible, we probably need to wait many years before Casella grows strong enough to make that happen."

"Oh, come on! Give your sis some credit. She is way more amazing than you think!"

While the custom mechs of the Larkinson Clan approached the testing site, Commander Casella was still hovering inside the hangar bay of the Spirit of Bentheim.

Ves and Gloriana were performing their last-minute checks on the Minerva. They had studied the mech carefully and made sure to scan the masterwork mech from top to bottom.

"Alright, the Minerva is ready, commander. You can hop inside the cockpit and wait for further orders."

Before Casella entered her expert mech, she briefly turned towards Ves.

"Did you add a killswitch in my machine?"

"That is standard for all of the mechs I make." Ves plainly admitted it. "I am sure you understand that mechs can be dangerous when we try them out for the first time. This is even more important for expert mechs like yours. The power of your machine is so great that subduing it will take a lot more effort. It is much easier if I can just press a single button to forcibly pull the plug of your Minerva in case you ever lose control."

"That will not happen. The Minerva and I will never give you cause to use your killswitch." Commander Casella confidently stated. "You will remove it once you deem my mech safe, correct?"

"Yes. As long as your new mech proves it is worthy of trust, I have no reason to leave the killswitch intact. It's a security risk and any hacker can potentially take advantage of it to disable one of our crucial expert mechs during a battle."

In truth, it was not that easy to accomplish that, but Ves didn't need to explain that to a mech pilot.

Commander Casella soon flew inside the cockpit and seated herself on the padded chair that accommodated her suited body to an excellent degree.

Once she secured herself, she silently waited as Ves and his fellow Journeymen all entered an observation room.

A pair of large bots arrived in the hangar bay. They grabbed a hold of the Minerva and moved the inactive expert mech into space and off to a more distant testing site.

The journey was long and tedious. Due to the scale and intensity of some of the upcoming tests, the Larkinsons extended the normal distance and wanted to make sure that all of the mock battles took place a lot further away!

When everything was set up, Ves finally issued a command.

"Go ahead, Casella. Start up your mech!"

Casella pressed the activation button and sat back as an entirely new presence unfolded in her mind.

As the man-machine connection took hold, the Minerva truly came alive in a way that she had yet to experience before.

Although the third-order living mech had already made contact with her beforehand, that was when the expert mech was in its dormant state.

Now that the Minerva was not only booting up but also interfacing with its destined expert pilot, Commander Casella slowly came in direct contact with a new but already formidable artificial life!

CASELLA.

"Minerva."

The two of them were separate beings, but came closer to becoming one. As Casella continued to interface with her expert mech, she quickly felt at home in a way she never did with the Quint.

Although the Quint was a powerful living mech in its own right, its snarky personality along with its imperfect compatibility towards herself made it feel as if she was renting someone else's apartment.

Not so for the Minerva. The expert mech designed specifically for herself truly felt like home to her senses! As she closed her eyes and explored what the man-machine connection exposed her to, she felt safe, comfortable and much less restrained.

She already began to resonate with the Minerva to a degree!

A dark gold corona surrounded her silver expert mech, causing it to exude an aura that made the Larkinson mech pilots in the vicinity feel as if Casella was staring directly at their souls!

Just as Casella continued to familiarize herself with her new living mech, a third presence made contact with her mind!

"Titania...?"

The supposed 'design spirit' was a core part of the Minerva. Casella did not know what to expect from something that Ves had apparently made out of the remains of the giant astral beast the expeditionary fleet had fought.

It did not help that the Titania did not know what to expect either. This was the first time she played her role as a design spirit!

Though Casella initially sensed a lot of wariness from the Titania, that slowly changed when the design spirit learned that she was receiving spiritual sustenance from the expert pilot.

This was the first time that the Titania tasted such delicious 'food'!

The two got along better after that.

Chapter 3728 - Defensive Properties

Commander Casella Ingvar might not know it, but Ves had kept his finger close to the killswitch during the initial activation sequence.

The Minerva was a great mech and Ves had little doubt that Casella could get along with the living mech.

The real danger lay in its design spirit. The Titania was an unusual spiritual entity that was derived from an ancient space creature. Even if she had lost much of herself, what remained of her mature personality and her huge collection of memories turned her into a formidable spirit that might respond completely differently from others of its kind!

However, after spending months in the company of Goldie, Qilanxo and the Superior Mother, the Titania had integrated into the Larkinson Clan to a degree. She might not be the feral alien monstrosity that Ves had feared.

"How are you doing, Casella?" Ves asked from the observation room.

He paid careful attention to the piloting telemetry. He did not want to take chances this time. Any sign of excessive stress or strain and he would flip the killswitch without any hesitation.

They could repeat a field test anytime, but it was hard to reverse any damage done to people's lives.

There was a reason for his heightened caution. The Titania was a brand-new design spirit that had not been utilized before. This test run was not just about the Minerva but also about the former controlling consciousness of an astral beast!

"I... am in an excellent state." The Sentinel Commander answered. "The Minerva is better than I have ever hoped. The expert mech fits me so well that it makes me feel complete. I have already begun to resonate with it without even trying, and if I push for more, my expert mech easily keeps up with effort. We are nowhere close to reaching our limits."

"That sounds good, commander. What about... the Titania?"

"We made contact." Casella stated. "The Titania is being cooperative. We have already agreed to back each other up. I have not sensed any ill intent from her. Even if she changes her mind, I am certain I can block her influence."

Ves grew reassured. The initial feedback sounded positive and he did not get the sense that Casella was concerned about herself.

"What of your cooperation? Can you sense whether the Titania can help you out in any way?"

"I don't know. We're too unfamiliar with each other. The Titania's presence is already helping me hone my mind to a degree."

After answering a few more questions, Commander Casella finally received permission to proceed with the initial round of tests.

She was already familiar with all of the movements her expert mech needed to make. The Minerva moved its limbs and cautiously tested out its flight system and boosters.

Once it became clear the expert mech wouldn't fall apart or explode if it made the wrong moves, Casella gradually increased the intensity of the Minerva's maneuvers.

The expert mech accelerated faster and faster until it exceeded the parameters of a standard mech and continued to speed up to a prodigious degree!

"What a fast mech!"

"It has to be in order to outrun pursuing expert melee mechs."

"The Minerva doesn't look agile. Its turning radius is high!"

Despite this shortcoming, the Minerva's straight-line acceleration was considerably higher than almost every expert mech in the Larkinson Army!

"The Minerva's flight system remains stable while operating at maximum thrust." Juliet Stameris reported. "All systems related to flight and maneuvering are still working without issue. The Minerva can keep this up for a decent interval of time, though I recommend that it should not maintain maximum thrust unless it is necessary."

"Alright, let's end the mobility test and start with a more exciting examination."

Ves wanted to see how the Minerva's defenses would fare against typical attacks.

Although the mech needed to endure different kinds of attacks, he was not too worried about its state. Even if the Minerva did not incorporate any Unending alloy, the defenses that Sara Voiken had designed for the expert mech were not light!

"Let us start with testing your energy shield generator. Please activate your Minerva's energy shield without arousing your resonance shield. We need to gain a preliminary assessment of how much damage that both of them can take in isolation."

The next few tests were much more interesting. A numerous Living Sentinel mechs flew forward and shot at the stationary Minerva with a combination of luminal crystal rifles and gauss rifles.

Naturally, the energy shield held strong and only started to reach its limits after a long time.

"The shield generator is operating according to expectations." Sara Voiken reported. "As expected, the Minerva's energy shield is considerably more efficient at resisting energy damage than physical damage. However, its total damage capacity is not impressive due to the smaller size of the shield generator. The Minerva should only activate its energy shield under serious circumstances."

"Understood."

Commander Casella switched off the shield generator and aroused another form of defense that came standard with expert mechs.

Resonating with the Minerva was incredibly easy for her, especially since the living mech actively cooperated with her. The golden corona around the expert mech soon grew stronger and more solid.

"Alright, fire away!"

Attacks poured onto the Minerva when it was in its most defensible state. Compared to technological energy shields, the more mysterious resonance shields did not entirely work according to common sense!

The resonance shield resisted a lot more damage as a consequence. Although its defensive capacity was ultimately limited by Commander Casella's limited resonance strength, the Minerva remained absolutely impervious even when an entire mech company kept bombarding it with attacks!

As long as Casella and Minerva were able to keep up their resonance shield, they did not have to worry about getting blasted to pieces by a multitude of regular mechs anytime soon!

Only two major threats could effectively overcome the resonance shield.

Resonance-empowered attacks launched by other expert mechs posed a significant threat to any powerful machine. The Minerva was in an even dangerous position due to its strategic importance to the Larkinson Army.

In order to keep it active, the expert mech needed to hide behind solid cover or travel around with a formidable escort of defensive mechs.

Fortunately, Sara Voiken recently completed her Rigid Wall model that offered superior defensive properties compared to the Bright Warrior model.

Though the mobility of the Rigid Walls were not up to standard, as long as the Living Sentinels weren't deployed away from the fleet, it was no problem for them to shield the Minerva.

The strength of a resonance shield was determined by both the expert mech and the expert pilot.

The Minerva was a mid-grade expert mech that incorporated resonating materials that were fairly average in terms of generating resonance shields. The defensive enhancement these materials offered might not be the best, but they were easy to work with since they did not produce much interference.

"The resonance shield's performance is fairly standard." Sara Voiken stated.
"Commander Casella does not excel in defense so it is normal for it to be able to withstand this amount of damage."

Not every resonance shield was the same. The mech and the resonating materials played a large role, but the qualities of the expert pilot also played a major role!

Someone as hard headed as Venerable Jannzi could easily withstand several times as much damage in the same conditions as Commander Casella by virtue of willpower orientation!

Therefore, the Minerva might look tough when fighting against regular mechs, but its defenses were incomparably weak when measuring up against a genuine defensive expert mech!

"Let's move on to testing its armor system."

This was a more dangerous test as the mechs were about to attack the actual structure of the expert mech.

However, the Sentinel mech pilots that instructed their mechs to attack the Minerva head-on soon discovered that the expert command mech was not as fragile as they thought.

Even if it lacked Unending alloy, Sara Voiken's defensive design was no joke, especially when she made use of resilient alloys.

Ves felt quite grateful for being able to pick up Sara Voiken. Having someone in the Design Department that specialized in the defensive side of mechs finally relieved a burden.

Though Gloriana had tried her best to cover for this aspect, it wasn't her true passion. Having Sara on hand not only solved this shortcoming, but also turned it into one of the Larkinson Clan's new strengths!

Sara smiled as a group of Swordmaiden mechs approached before whacking the surface of the Minerva with their swords.

The melee mechs weren't making much progress!

"I don't recommend using the Minerva as a space knight, but it should be no problem for it to resist a large amount of physical damage. This mech is much tougher than the Amaranto."

This was excellent news. The Amaranto was a fantastic ranged mech, but its defensive properties had always been its Achilles heel. The mech had been designed in a time before the Larkinson Clan had access to better materials and component licenses.

Ves intended to resolve that when it was time to update the Amaranto, but that wouldn't happen until a few years had passed.

The Minerva Project wonderfully showcased how much better a ranged expert mech could withstand damage. The combination of a defensive specialist along with excellent materials easily multiplied Commander Casella's chances of surviving a battle!

Though the Larkinson mechs did not dare to hit the Minerva too hard, Sara collected enough data to build a detailed model of the expert command mech's actual defensive properties.

"I have seen enough. I suggest we move on to the next test."

Ves grinned. "My Irvan rifle will finally see action."

He had painstakingly designed a transformable luminar crystal rifle that was worthy of an expert mech. Even if he had seen it perform many times in simulated environments, he wanted to see how it performed in real circumstances.

"Let's start with the rifle mode. Set targets at various distances."

The Larkinsons released numerous bots and pieces of scrap in space. The Minerva brought up its Irvan rifle and aimed its long and deadly-looking muzzle at the closest target.

A powerful laser beam erupted from its muzzle!

Even when it wasn't enhanced by resonance, the potent power of the Irvan rifle was enough to punch through the armor of a Bright Warrior mech!

The Minerva quickly cycled its attack phase to the other weapon types. The positron beams, light beams and other types of beams unleashed by its rifle were all performing within expectations.

The new masterwork expert mech only truly showed its fangs when Commander Casella resonated with the Irvan rifle!

When it repeated its earlier shots while employing true resonance, the firepower was on another level!

Thick bright beams lit up the surrounding space as the Minerva easily dealt enough damage to demolish a standard mech with a single shot!

"Impressive!" Ves' eyes lit up. "The Minerva is almost exactly as powerful as I expected! Once Casella's resonance strength has doubled, this expert mech will truly become an oppressive presence on the battlefield!"

Casella hardly enjoyed any opportunity to exercise her resonance strength, so she wasn't able to make full use of her Minerva.

"How powerful is the Minerva's damage output compared to the Amaranto?" Sara curiously asked.

"I need to gather more data and perform more calculations to be sure, but I can safely state that the Minerva exceeds the Everchanger in terms of offensive prowess." Ves answered. "It's no Amaranto, but it can definitely function as our second long-ranged expert mech. Stationing the two expert mechs apart from each other will allow us to suppress an enemy from two different angles!"

This was quite a powerful advantage! Enemy units that could only defend from one direction would not feel easy when they were struck from the side!

With two fairly powerful expert ranged mechs, the Larkinson Army's ability to deal serious damage against enemy warships and expert mechs had risen by a noticeable margin.

This was especially the case if Venerable Stark learned how to coordinate Commander Casella!

Chapter 3729 - Adequate Combat Power

Commander Casella was having the time of her life!

After she tested how much firepower she had at disposal at long range, she was finally allowed to test the Minerva's ability to fend off opponents at closer ranges.

A long-barreled rifle that did not possess a high firing rate was too unwieldy to be used in close-ranged fights!

This was why Ves was so keen in making it transformable.

Once Commander Casella received the command to transform the Irvan into its short-ranged mode, she grinned.

"Let's do it, Minerva."

The expert mech's rifle seemingly split in half. Its lengthy muzzle along with a portion of its forward structure detached from the rear half of the weapon.

The Minerva grabbed the detached rifle component and easily stowed it away by placing it onto a slot situated at its rear.

Shrinking the weapon unavoidable made it weaker, but that was not necessarily a demerit.

Through the man-machine connection, Commander Casella was able to feel that her expert mech had become a lot nimbler when handling its down-sized weapon.

"Let us repeat the earlier tests. However, instead of firing your gun at those stationary targets, I have prepared a better target dummy for you, commander."

The Everchanger soon flew forward until it faced the Minerva directly. The older masterwork expert mech knocked against its chest plate with its sword.

"You can fire your gun at me directly without worry, commander. My expert mech isn't as tough as the Shield of Samar, but I can repair it as long as I have enough strength and energy."

"Alright, Venerable Joshua. Get ready."

When the Minerva fired its newly-emerged submachine gun, the weapon barked out a staccato of relatively weak energy beams.

Of course, weak in this case was only relative as the Irvan weapon was still powerful even in its submachine gun mode! A casual strike could easily exceed the firepower of a serious shot from a normal mech.

The biggest difference here was that the Irvan submachine gun's firing rate was a lot higher!

Combined with the fact that the Minerva was piloted by a demigod who possessed inhumanly high skill and precision, such an expert mech could easily disable a horde of enemy mechs by precisely targeting their weak points or concentrating attacks on a single point.

The Irvan submachine gun in the hands of Commander Casella and the Minerva was an entirely different beast.

All of the different shots landed at around the same spots while the Minerva nimbly moved around in order to keep it safe in the open.

The Everchanger did not launch an attack but tried its best to spoil the Minerva's aim by performing evasive maneuvers.

It wasn't working!

The Everchanger was not as fast and maneuverable as the Dark Zephyr. The Minerva's weapon was easily able to track the movements of its target due to its fast firing rate and other advantages.

The firepower wasn't impressive, though. The continuous shots never got past the Everchanger's formidable Unending alloy armor plating. For all intents and purposes, Joshua's expert mech was immune against this kind of damage!

"Alright. I've seen enough. Begin resonating with the Irvan gun." Ves instructed. "It's time to see what your submachine gun can do when its shots can shred through defenses!"

The Minerva's damage output underwent a qualitative change now that Commander Casella expended a portion of her resonance strength into imparting additional power into her attacks.

"Damn, my Everchanger is really beginning to hurt!"

Even though the Minerva only fired continuous bursts of laser beams, the golden corona around them showed that they had been infused with Casella's force of will, thereby making the attacks drastically more effective against any kind of target!

A section of the Everchanger's chest plate began to glow and deform to a tiny extent. This was a remarkable amount of progress for such a light and weak energy weapon!

If the Minerva fought against an expert mech that wasn't covered with extremely resilient alloys, the expert command mech might have been able to bore a hole into the enemy's armor at this time!

"Impressive!" Ves remarked as he saw how well the Irvan performed at shorter ranges.

The weapon was not supposed to turn the Minerva into a close-ranged duelist mech. His goal was to give Commander Casella the option of fighting her way out of a predicament if the Minerva ever got assaulted by melee mechs.

With this degree of firepower, Casella definitely possessed the power to outfight a powerful enemy at close range!

They did not spend a lot of time testing Minerva's offensive power. Firing all of the resonance-empowered shots steadily drained Casella's willpower.

Her resonance strength was too inadequate right now due to lacking an expert mech for numerous months. She needed to manage her reserves carefully to avoid expending all of her willpower too soon during a battle.

Unlike conventional resources such as energy cells and ammunition, it was impossible to replenish an expert pilot's willpower once it started to become ragged.

Only rest and time could restore an expert pilot's readiness for battle.

Since this was just an initial test, there was no need to go overboard with weapon tests. That could be done in subsequent sessions.

They moved on to a more boring phase of the field test, which was testing out its command and control capabilities.

The Minerva performed admirably in this aspect. Even when various bots and mechs generated a lot of interference, the expert command mech's powerful communication arrays could forcefully penetrate through all of the jamming!

If that wasn't enough, the Minerva was also able to connect through spiritual networks and use them to transmit data to compatible mechs.

For now, the only compatible mechs that qualified were the Cherub, which was exclusively used by the Hex Army, and the nearly complete Nanny Project designed for the Penitent Sisters.

A lot of waiting clansmen grew sleepy during this time as a lot of the tests were technical and not visible to the naked eye.

Ves and the other Larkinson mech designers were satisfied with its performance, though. The Minerva deserved to be called a command mech as it heavily outperformed the other Larkinson expert mechs in this aspect!

"It's time we test out the centerpiece abilities of the Minerva. The entire design revolves around these functions. This is why it exists. If our expert command mech cannot properly channel Commander Casella's special capabilities, then it is a definite failure!"

Nobody thought the Minerva would underperform in this aspect. It had turned into a masterwork mech, and that usually didn't happen with flawed designs!

Everyone grew more excited once it was time to test the special capabilities of the Minerva.

The performance displayed by the Minerva before this point could be described as good but not up to the standards of the better works of Ves and his fellow mech designers.

Since the famed and increasingly more renowned Design Department had begun to design expert mechs, none of them turned out to be basic or average!

Each Larkinson expert mech not only started off as mid-tier models that normally weren't provided to low-tier expert pilots, they also possessed a few incredibly dazzling strengths that defined their existence!

The Dark Zephyr was fast and elusive.

The Amaranto excelled at long-ranged takedowns.

The Riot was a resilient combat engine.

The First Sword possessed the strongest cutting power.

The Shield of Samar functioned as the toughest bulwark.

The Everchanger was always strong in every battle scenario.

Now, the Minerva was about to reveal its signature abilities, thereby joining the list of special Larkinson expert mechs with pride!

The hype among the Larkinsons as well as its allies gradually built up. Nobody thought the Minerva would show an average level performance this time.

Even non-mech designers knew that mechs were designed with limited resources in mind. Since the Minerva had not shown exceptional firepower, defenses and mobility so far, it was clear that much of its capacity had been used to strengthen its utility!

The fairly powerful sensor, command and control systems already confirmed the Minerva's orientation as an expert command mech.

In addition, the spectators were already aware that the Larkinson mech designers preferred to save the best for last. This was because all of the weaker functions of the mech in question did not exert much strain on its frame.

However, the last demonstrations usually took a lot out of the mech and pilot in question. It was naturally best to perform such a big display when there weren't any other tests scheduled afterwards.

"Finally! The Minerva is not a conventional ranged mech. Its real strength lies in working together with other mechs!"

"C'mon! Power up my blade! My body is ready!"

"These Larkinsons are moving further and further apart from us. We need to do something about our lack of expert pilots!"

Two mech legions moved out in force this time.

The Bright Warriors coated in silver and green slowly approached and halted just behind the Minerva Project.

Grouped up into numerous different mech companies, the Sentinel mechs looked incomparably united!

However, the gold-coated Bright Warriors fielded by the Avatars of Myth did not wish to fall behind.

Even if the Gold Beacon piloted by Commander was incomparably weak in front of the Minerva, the Avatar mechs lined up behind the new custom mech exuded a considerably greater sense of threat!

This was the difference in quality between the Avatars and Sentinels. As the first two mech legions to have come into existence, both of them represented the two most fundamental values of the Larkinson Clan.

The Avatars of Myth exemplified the pursuit of ambition and the willingness to uphold honor.

The Living Sentinels stood for the love of family and the desire to protect the weak.

Although it was common sense that the latter was weaker in many ways, the differences in leadership were incredibly clear at the moment!

Whereas the Avatars were led by a relatively young and unremarkable legion commander, the Sentinels gained a lot of confidence by taking their orders from a talented and visionary expert pilot!

No one understood this disparity better than Commander Melkor Larkinson. As a trueblood Larkinson, he always felt inadequate that an adopted Larkinson managed to surpass him to such a drastic extent.

"That's life." He sighed.

Melkor was not the sort of person to get hung up about this. Everyone possessed their own opportunities and he acknowledged that Casella fully deserved to get where she was. Having an additional powerful expert pilot on the side of the Larkinson Clan only helped everyone out, so there was no logical reason for him to harbor resentment at her excellent accomplishments.

He soon adjusted his mentality and regained his confidence.

"Men." He said as he transmitted his words to his Avatar pilots. "We're about to fight in a tough mock battle. Even if our rifles have been adjusted to deal minimal damage, do not hold back even if we are confronting our fellow Larkinsons. I refuse to turn this into a showcase of how overwhelmingly the Sentinels can crush us with the help of their new expert mech. We are stronger than that! If we want to fight against expert mechs in the future, then we must gather our courage and acquit ourselves well! Let us show our clansmen that the Avatars of Myth are qualified to challenge any expert mech!"

"We are larger than life!"

With that little pep talk, the Avatars were fully prepared to face the coming onslaught. The psychological pressure exerted by Commander Casella and the Minerva no longer depressed their confidence!

In contrast to the Avatar Commander, the Sentinel Commander did not hold a speech. The Sentinels already received their instructions before they sortied and they did not need any further encouragement.

Her presence and the presence of the Minerva were already enough. Casella could feel the incomparable confidence and belief that her subordinates placed on her shoulders.

With the help of a purpose-built command mech and a design spirit with ancient roots, she was able to sense that she had already developed a bond with her Sentinels!

Chapter 3730 - Command Field

Commander Casella Ingvar and her new battle partner started slow at first.

There was no time pressure in the initial test. The Avatars, which had been assigned to play as the adversaries for this mock battle, did not launch attacks or move from their positions.

This allowed the sixth expert pilot of the Larkinson Clan to take her time with exploring how to resonate with the key resonating exotics of her expert mech.

Having been exposed to the thoughts of the designers of the Minerva through the design network, Casella possessed a decent understanding of the two most important resonating exotics in her new machine.

She could already feel a material called Talasmir reach out to her so that she could expand her willpower and presence across a wider area.

Even when she wasn't actively resonating with this material, her influence had already expanded to a modest extent.

From the theories she had inadvertently learned, this was a sign of excellent compatibility between herself and Talasmir. It was incredibly lucky on the part of the Larkinsons for being able to find an excellent match and be able to acquire a sufficient quantity of this rare material back in Chance Bay!

As her willpower ranged even further throughout the frame of her expert mech, she was able to sense a different resonating material with a strong response.

This one stimulated her willpower in a different way. Instead of expanding it, the material known as Pecker Carbon concentrated it to the point where she felt that she had gained increased dominion over a smaller area!

Both resonating exotics strongly affected her willpower but in different ways. It was easy for Casella to distinguish between them and resonate with them without making the wrong choice.

She briefly tried to see whether she could resonate with both Talasmir and Pecker Carbon at the same time, but the burst of pain and the feeling of tearing from her mech quickly disabused her of this notion!

Talasmir essentially expanded her reach over a larger area while Pecker Carbon concentrated it in a single location! Anyone could figure out that their effects were mutually exclusive!

"Since that is the case, let's start with Talasmir."

This was the most compatible and gentle resonating exotic to her senses. As Casella closed her eyes and steadily figured out the knack to resonating with it, the Minerva golden glow became more diffused.

The resonance glow initially surrounded the expert mech like a bubble. After Casella resonated with Talasmir, the glow expanded like an inflating balloon and became more diffused over a wider area.

Seconds passed by as the bubble grew at a brisk but steady pace. Its radius reached hundreds of meters but did not slow down in the slightest.

When the radius of the diffused golden sphere around the stationary Minerva surpassed a kilometer, many observers became a lot more impressed at the sight!

The expansion continued until the sphere had reached an impressive radius of 8 kilometers, only slowing down near the end as Casella had clearly reached her limits at this time.

This meant that a large chunk of space that could easily fit hundreds if not thousands of mechs turned into a special field where Casella held sway!

It just so happened that the mech companies of the Living Sentinels that had sortied into space were all within this 8-kilometer sphere.

Although the Sentinel mechs did not glow or exhibit any special signs of empowerment at this time, Commander Casella was not finished with her attempt!

"What is your current state, commander?" Ves asked.

"I am under moderate strain at the moment, patriarch." Casella answered. "I can keep this up for a time, but it is much less exhausting for me if I rein in the expansion of my Command Field."

That did not fall outside of Ves' expectations.

"Try and retract your 'Command Field'. At what point can you comfortably keep it up for several hours?"

This required a bit of experimentation on Casella's part. She reduced her effort and had to feel how much easier it became to maintain this state.

The Command Field steadily shrunk until it had reached a rather disappointing radius of 300 meters.

"I can maintain my Command Field without getting exhausted if I keep it at its current state." Commander Casella reported. "If I get more practice and increase my resonance strength, I think I can increase the range of my Command Field when in equilibrium and when exerted to the maximum."

That was to be expected. Every expert mech grew stronger as their expert pilot rose in strength.

Masterwork expert mechs just happened to help their pilots grow stronger at an accelerated pace, so Ves did not have to wait too long for Casella to become a monstrous existence in the Larkinson Army!

"Alright. We can explore the nuances of your range later, but right now I want to know what your Command Field can do. Can you apply your power to one of the Sentinel mechs within your range?"

Commander Casella had already been exploring this idea herself. She had already made a bit of progress in mastering her Command Field and focused on a random Sentinel mech.

It was strange to describe her power. She felt she could latch a portion of her willpower onto the mech pilots in her range.

When she explored this facet, she found out that her willpower easily latched onto the minds of her Sentinel mech pilots. Not only that, but she was also able to extend her influence to the mech itself!

It helped a lot that the mech was alive. The living consciousness of the mech served as a hook that Casella could grapple without too much effort.

She figured that it would be a lot harder for her to do the same to a lifeless mech, if it was possible in the first place.

As Casella slowly tried to infuse the power of her Command Field in a specific mech and mech pilot, she gained a lot more awareness of them both.

She understood their conditions, their moods, their inclinations, their conditions and more. Although she did not understand them on a detailed level, what she managed to learn from them could definitely be useful in the right circumstances!

Casella knew she could do more than that, though. When she began to push more of her power into the new bonds she established, the mech and mech pilot she had chosen began to acquire a faint glow!

"Commander! I... I can feel you! I can feel your strength!"

When the lucky mech pilot received an order to launch an attack, his mech pointed its rifle at a piece of scrap and fired a laser beam that was clearly more powerful than usual!

"True resonance!"

The mech designers in the observation room were all ecstatic when they saw what Casella was capable of! Her special resonance ability was similar to that of Ghanso when he piloted the Charlemagne.

However, unlike Ghanso who was a pure rifleman mech, Casella was a command-oriented expert pilot who could extend her power to others in a much more natural fashion.

The use of spiritual networks and resonance abilities also enabled Casella to 'bless' another mech with her strength without involving any complicated neural interfaces and other dangerous technology.

This was the goal that Ves had been chasing with the Minerva. Seeing that all of his hard work had paid off made him a lot more jubilant!

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Several minutes passed as they tested the capabilities of the Command Field. Every Sentinel mech was able to receive an enhancement. Though the magnitude of strengthening was not that strong, Casella was able to extend her power to hundreds of mechs before the strain grew too great!

With so many mechs carrying a portion of her will, the attacks they could unleash were much more powerful than the attacks launched by the Minerva's Irvan rifle!

"Casella and the Minerva are in their element this time!"

Ves and many others were shocked at how much stronger the Living Sentinels became!

Even though the mechs only launched attacks on cheap target bots and worthless pieces of scrap the Larkinsons had tossed into space, all of the sensors and analytics showed that the Sentinels became at least 50 percent deadlier!

That was a huge leap in combat power!

Even though Commander Casella indicated that she could not sustain the expenditure of infusing so many mechs with her strength for long, the use of her Command Field at this scale could definitely overturn a crisis!

This wasn't all, though. Ves thought up an interesting idea that he wanted to test out. He just needed the cooperation of an expert mech.

"Venerable Joshua, please move your expert mech closer and resist the incoming attacks with your resonance shield as best as possible."

"Can I skip this mission this time? My Everchanger already got beat up earlier. My mech isn't happy about being treated as a target dummy. Isn't it a better idea to use the Shield of Samar?"

Ves grew annoyed. "Get moving, Joshua! Consider it practice!"

After the Everchanger begrudgingly moved into position, Casella had retracted her power from most of the Sentinel mechs.

Her willpower wore out at a faster rate when she bonded herself with so many mechs and mech pilots.

By limiting her command field's effects to just a single rifleman mech company, the strain became a lot more tolerable.

"Fire!"

The ranged mechs that were surrounded by Casella's characteristic dark gold glow began to fire plain and boring laser beams at the Everchanger!

Although ordinary laser beams could not pose a threat to the expert hero mech under ordinary circumstances, the ones fired by the empowered Sentinel mechs were different!

Even if their rifles hadn't switched to light beam mode, the resonance-empowered laser beams dealt considerable damage to the Everchanger's resonance shield!

The attacks from the ordinary mechs already contained a touch of Casella's extraordinary will. Although the magnitude was weak, this extra property was enough to pose a real threat to the Everchanger's considerable defenses!

"My resonance shield is draining fast!"

The Minerva's Command Field was an amazing ability. As long as the friendly mechs were close enough, Casella could turn them into her 'surrogates' who were able to channel a small amount of true resonance!

This ability possessed a lot of potential!

"Please shift your Command Field's active effect to a different unit and see whether it is just as effective." Ves instructed.

When the Minerva began to empower a squad of Avatar mechs, the strengthening was almost just as strong.

The same applied to the mechs and mech pilots of other mech legions such as the Avatars, Battle Criers and so on. The only disappointment was that the strengthening effect was not as powerful with certain targets such as the Swordmaidens.

Commander Casella was able to figure out the reason after personally experiencing the differences.

"My Command Field ability works best with mechs and mech pilots that are close to me. My Sentinel mech pilots already respect and revere me to a greater degree, so I don't feel any hindrance when I work with them. The Swordmaidens on the other hand largely believe in their own strength. Our attitudes are different and we don't align with each other that much."

"I see." Ves replied. "That makes sense."

"There is another matter that I should say. I think it makes a huge difference whether the mechs are alive. I can only channel a limited amount of power to any single individual with my Command Field. If I can bond with both the mech and mech pilot at the same time, I can channel at least twice as much power!"

"Well, that should be easy enough to verify."

Ves requested the Cross Clan to dispatch one of their ordinary mechs to the testing site.

When the Command Field tried to latch on to the lifeless mech, the strengthening effect was much weaker!

"It's a lot more difficult to channel my strength in a non-living mech." Casella explained with a touch of frustration in her voice. "I can sense that the Crosser mech pilot respects me, but we are too different from each other. We also aren't a part of the same 'network', so I have to put in extra effort to establish a bond with his mind."