

Mech Touch 6731

Chapter 6731: Substitute for Opticonium

The field test thoroughly allowed the Larkinsons as well as other parties such as the Red Association to gain a relatively extensive understanding of the Amaranto Mark III Rev 2's combat power.

It was extremely good, just as expected.

"The lethality of this ace mech surpasses that of other typical junior ace mechs." Vector Loban judged. "It is not just that the damage output per shot and per minute is considerably higher than other ranged mechs of the same level. It is this novel combination between an ace mech and a companion spirit who has recently been promoted to the second major cultivation rank that results in observably better performance. It is as if an ace pilot is perpetually teamed up with a qi cultivating domain shaper!"

This was the benefit of mech pilots that acquired their own companion spirits.

Mundane mech pilots with companion spirits already enjoyed numerous benefits that allowed them to become more sensitive to E energy and gain a second mind that improved their multitasking capabilities.

However, companion spirits at this level were not really capable of directly affecting the combat performance of mech. The best they could do was to possess a specific weapon or component to give the mech pilot better control.

Companion spirits of the first major cultivation rank started to acquire slightly stronger and more useful capabilities. This was where their affinity with certain E energy attributes allowed them to augment the power of a weapon or make the mech a little more resistant towards damage.

While all of that sounded nice, it was only when companion spirits reached the same level as that of an ace pilot where they truly came online!

A companion spirit as powerful as Vail could already fight by herself and amplify the performance of an ace mech by at least 10 percent or more without doing anything too special!

This was because they acquired their own domains that allowed them to harmonize with E energy radiation and use that to produce profound and powerful effects.

In short, ace pilots with companion spirits possessed a lot of advantages! They were effectively two cultivators rolled up in a single body, thereby allowing them to expand their capabilities that normally would have been difficult to attain.

Ves knew that it was no longer possible for ace pilots without companion spirits to acquire one.

Their willpower had become too strong for Ves or a companion spirit to separate a part of their spirit and breathe life into it. Saint Stark therefore lucked out big time that she already had a companion spirit before she broke through.

Vail had the potential to become as strong and useful as Emma one day. The former already possessed a shadow of the power of a True God-level companion spirit.

After the test came to a conclusion, Saint Stark did not wait for the Tarrasque to return to New Constantinople VIII to depart to the battlefield.

The native aliens had begun to consolidate their most recent gains and were already in the process of amassing their forces to assault the fifth defensive line.

The Amaranto had to be where she was needed the most. The powerful ace mech was of little use in the hinterland of human-occupied space.

Ves met with Saint Stark one last time before she transferred to a fast courier vessel that would bring her to the frontlines.

"Have you already decided whether you want to fight alongside Tusa?"

"I have decided not to follow him at first." The female ace pilot responded. "I would like to receive mentorship from an older and more experienced ace pilot. There are many that have shown interest in mentoring me. Executing a lesser phase lord during my second breakthrough event has made me considerably popular among those who are having difficulties with these powerful enemies."

"I bet that they want to try and see if they can poach you from my clan as well while they are at it." Ves said. "You are the only ace pilot in our retainer that has not formally joined my clan."

"There is no need for concern. I will continue to serve you for the remaining duration of our 100 year agreement. You have yet to show any dishonor that would compel me to prematurely break our relationship. The love and effort that you and your wife have put into the Amaranto over the years has thoroughly convinced me that I will only be able to enjoy the best mechs and gear for my rank as long as I remain in your service. Others can only produce mechs that are at best comparable to the Amaranto in strength, but lack the living quality that makes your products so loved among mech pilots such as myself."

A living mech had long exceeded the definition of a simple tool or product. It had become a living entity that possessed its own personality and emotions. Many people couldn't help but treat them as pets or even siblings.

Once their relationships with living mechs had reached this level, it became a lot more difficult for mech pilots to switch to piloting other machines, as they weren't swayed by objective measures of performance anymore!

This was the reason why Ves did not worry too much that others would succeed in poaching Saint Stark.

None of them could design living mechs comparable to his own works. Even if they were able to design mechs that could strike harder and more effectively, that was not enough to overcome Stark's strong emotional attachment towards her battle partner!

The two continued to chat. Ves eventually brought up another important subject.

"As you know, the Amaranto Mark III Rev 2 is considered finished by us for the time being. My wife and I have our hands full with many other projects, so we cannot provide your ace mech with regular iterative updates. I think it is best to just let you

master the current iteration of your machine. If your machine is still intact after several years of fighting, we can examine the data of its performance and see what kind of modifications and upgrades we should apply to your mech. Until then, please try to respect its strengths and limitations. Gloriana has invested more effort and resources into training highly intelligent and skilled engineers into mech technicians that are qualified to repair the most common applications of archetech. If your mech has sustained damage, it should be easy enough for them to follow Gloriana's instruction and guidance and perform simple repairs by themselves."

"What if my mech has sustained heavy damage?" She asked.

"Then you have no choice but to bring the damaged Amaranto back to us, or more precisely my wife. She is the only one in our clan who can fully repair or reconstruct the more complex and powerful pieces of archemetal. Right now, archetech is too new and exotic. Not enough people have studied it yet, and those that attempted to do so are unlikely to persist due to struggling with making sense of all of the alien interpretations of science."

This was the price that the Larkinsons needed to pay for using alien and obscure technology.

It was still worth it as far as Ves was concerned. The Dark Zephyr Mark III had repeatedly taken advantage of the strengths of architects to take more risks and achieve more results on the battlefield.

"I shall endeavor not to sustain damage, then." Saint Stark said. "It will be easier for me than a pilot that dances with danger as much as Tusa."

"That is good to hear. Please remember that while I have no objections with you going on tour, there will come a time where I will transmit a request for you to return. I will need your firepower and the power of all of our other ace pilots in order to fight on behalf of our whole clan. Only by concentrating our best assets and utilizing them exactly the way they are supposed to be employed in battle will we be able to attain the best results."

Saint Stark mildly frowned. "I have few objections to returning to fight under your direction, but only if we actually get to fight just as many aliens. I will not agree to stay around if all you want is bodyguards to cover your escape."

"Don't worry. I do not have any intentions of running away." At least for now. "If enough time has passed, having you return will make it easier for my wife and I to apply upgrades to your ace mech. By the way, do you have any requests that you would like to add to your Amaranto next time? We can't fulfill every request, but we can at least look into whether it is feasible."

"I do have a request." She said. "The initial version of the Amaranto made use of Opticonium as a resonating exotic. It granted me the very useful ability to bend my energy beams, allowing me to strike targets that were otherwise behind cover. The Mark III doesn't have that anymore, and I always find myself missing this useful capability. Is there any way you can return this capability to me in one form or another? It is very useful for my mech to be able to threaten enemies that are not in a straight line of sight from my position."

"I am sorry, Stark, but what you are asking for is... difficult to fulfill. Opticonium is indeed a very useful resonating exotic for expert pilots, but there is no ace mech-grade equivalent. There are material scientists that specialize in developing new resonating alloys that can attempt to develop such a material, but that will take years and hundreds of millions of MTA credits of funding. It is not really worth investing in. You don't need it, though."

"I do not?" Saint Stark looked surprised.

"Resonating exotics are a crutch. It's a shortcut." Ves stated to the guest pilot. "The most popular theory and the theory that I ascribe by is that exotics are the fossilized remains of powerful entities. That, or they are simple rocks and minerals that have been affected by the radiation of strong beings in the distant past. Resonating exotics are the same, but may have absorbed the essence of the domain of those beings. The implication of this theory is that you don't need to stick with using the powers of others as a crutch. Now that you have become an ace pilot, you should be able to develop many wonderful applications of your Saint Kingdom. My advice to you is that if you want to bend your energy beams, you can try to experiment with your domain field in order to figure out a solution yourself. Maybe you can enlist the aid of your companion spirit for additional help."

That was a good suggestion. Saint Stark hadn't been an ace pilot long enough for her to make much progress on this front.

"Do you think this will grant me the ability to bend my energy beams like before?"

"Yes, but you should plan out your training and development strategy before you try to improve. How you choose to develop your power will largely affect what kind of powerhouse you will be as you approach the threshold to god pilot. If you spend a disproportionate amount of time on bending your energy beams, then that will become your defining characteristic. Your frontal damage output won't be as strong as a similar ace pilot who has focused on increasing the upper limit of his attacks."

"Hmm. You have given me much to think about. Thank you for your advice. A part of me thinks that I already possess enough firepower. Regaining the capacity to attack enemies that are being protected behind obstacles is useful, but increasing my absolute damage output is also important as far too many enemies rely on energy defenses to keep themselves safe."

Saint Stark couldn't make up her mind at the moment. She needed to consider her possibilities further if she wanted to make a choice that she wouldn't regret.

Chapter 6732: The Victrix

The departure of Saint Davia Stark and the Amaranto Mark III Rev 2 returned Diandi Base to calm.

Ves returned to his old routine. He devoted much of his time to developing his slate of mech design projects. His main preoccupations at the moment were the Minerva Mark II Project and the Arboreal Project.

Aside from that, he also began to spend a bit of his spare time on helping Ketis set up the Elemental Universe. The comprehensive reform and expansion of the MSTS was an ambitious project, so much so that the two mech designers couldn't complete it by themselves and still had enough time left over to design their mechs.

This was why the two had already begun to set up a new organization that was specifically tasked with managing, maintaining and expanding the Elemental Universe.

Finding the right programmers, architects, virtual system designers and so on was not that difficult these days. The gradual compression of human space created a lot of refugees that urgently sought new homes and jobs to rebuild their lives.

It took a lot of administration to set it up and hire the right personnel. Ves and Ketis had to find the right directors and head researchers in order to make sure that the Elemental Universe Consortium enjoyed a good start.

Fortunately, once the key positions at the top got filled, the executives and leading researchers were able to do the remaining work without needing any hand holding. Once Ves handed over the initial set of work goals to the new consortium, he made Ketis responsible for supervising its operations from this point and returned his attention to his main line of work.

The Minerva Mark II Project progressed at a brisk pace, especially after Gloriana enlisted the aid of the Red Association to figure out how to properly make use of a Mentalist Crystal inside a mech.

Mentalist Crystals were very powerful and possessed many different use cases due to how flexible they turned out to be. They were crystallized hyper materials that were overwhelmingly aligned towards the mind E energy attribute.

Just carrying raw, unprocessed Mentalist Crystal in a suit pocket was enough to make the carrier a lot smarter and more assertive than before!

Of course, this was the simplest and least efficient way to make use of a Mentalist Crystal. It was much better to integrate them into a logic machine or cranial implant set that could vastly improve the quantity and quality of data processing activities.

"In ancient mythology, Minerva was the goddess of wisdom, war, strategy and many other domains." Gloriana told Ves as she presented her solution to Ves one day. "She is often depicted with a helmet, a spear and an owl. We have no obligation to mirror these historic symbols in our present work just because it is tradition, but it would be pleasant if we could make it work. To that end, I have designed a single unique 'fey' of sorts that should be of considerable assistance to the Saint Commander. Please gaze your eyes on Victrix."

The fey she designed came in the form of an owl that was larger than the size of the Minerva's head.

Naturally, the owl did not look anything like a real owl. Its exterior was matte white and its surface showed the distinct characteristics of archemetal.

The eyes and the wings of the owl grabbed his attention. The wings could flap like the wings of a real avian creature, but they were not the primary means of traversal for the

fey. The actual propulsion modules were cleverly hidden within the folds of the feathers.

What also stood out to Ves was how the virtual fey moved in the simulated environment. His wife had put in a significant amount of effort to increase the articulation of the owl. Every feather could move on an individual basis and the wings displayed a surprising degree of flexibility.

This was more than a purely functional product. This was a work of art, one that encapsulated Gloriana's pursuit of perfection.

"So this is the destination that you have chosen for the Mentalist Crystal?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think it is rather precarious to insert a hyper that is as rare and precious as a Mentalist Crystal in an external construct that can easily be targeted by any enemy?"

"Oh, please. The Victrix will remain under the control of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar at all times. It, or rather she, will hardly fall into danger."

"Victrix sounds familiar to me." Ves furrowed his brows for a moment. "Wait, isn't that the name of one of the Hexer Matriarchal Dynasties?"

"I did not name the Victrix after the Victrix Matriarchal Dynasty!" Gloriana defended her decision. "We both took inspiration from the same source!"

"Okay, then. What is this owl supposed to do? You must have compelling reason for you to integrate the Mentalist Crystal in a fey as opposed to the mech frame itself where it is much safer."

"Did you recall one of the requests that Casella Ingvar has made to us, Ves? She told us that one of her constraints is that her Command Field may have grown much larger after her most recent breakthrough, but its range is not good enough in every warzone. There may be times where she has to be at two places at once. Being restricted to deploying her Command Field in only one location can be a severe handicap for her. It also limits the extent to which she can convert melee mechs into Knights or Barons."

That was indeed a heavy limitation to the Saint Commander. She was only really good at commanding troops on one big battlefield as opposed to a lot of small and highly dispersed skirmishes.

There was nothing wrong with that, but Casella clearly wanted to gain more flexibility.

Ves suddenly understood the idea behind the Victrix.

"Wait, you want this fey to turn into a relay that can extend the Saint Commander's Command Field in locations that are further away from her ace mech's position?"

"Exactly!" Gloriana grinned! "I am hoping that it would be possible for the Victrix to be deployed far enough away that she can essentially project a smaller version of Casella's Command Field at distances that are tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of kilometers away. If that is not possible, then the Victrix should at least be capable of projecting a lesser Command Field in a sphere that partially overlaps with the existing Command Field centered around the Minerva Mark II."

It was like trying to expand a swimming pool. Gloriana ideally wanted to create a second swimming pool that was located on another side of a house.

If the second pool could not be dug because of water flow issues or whatever, then she at least wanted to create a secondary pool that directly drew its water from the original swimming pool.

Right now, Ves did not have enough information and expertise to judge whether the more ideal situation was feasible. Their only choice was to try and create the Victrix and hope for the best.

"This is a good and practical way to expand the Minerva's reach." Ves judged. "What else is special about the Victrix? It doesn't have any armaments and it doesn't carry anything else aside from carrying a lot of architech processors that are probably designed to take advantage of the effects of the Mentalist Crystal."

This was another reason why he had doubts about whether his wife made the best choice on how to utilize the Mentalist Crystal. Ves had a strong suspicion that integrating it directly into the mech frame of the Minerva would cause Casella to grow smarter and more capable of manipulating her Command Field!

However, if the Victrix was successfully able to project Casella's Command Field way beyond the Minerva's normal range, then the tradeoffs may be worth this result.

Gloriana directed a sharper look at her husband.

"You are right that there is more to the Victrix. I want to make her as strong as possible. I am already aware that the fey are essentially the companion spirits of living mechs. I also happen to know that Ultimate Modules are powerful and possess divergent growth capabilities because they are also imbued with the mech version of companion spirits. Since that is the case, why not combine the two in one and make the Victrix an Ultimate Module as well!"

"What?!" Ves almost wanted to stand up. "I am already in the process of designing an Ultimate Module for the Minerva Mark II! I envisioned a slim but elegant silver crown to reinforce the identity of a sovereign leader. Its purpose is to amplify the effectiveness of the Command Field, either by increasing the number of Barons that she can Enfeoff, or strengthen this ability so that she can promote Barons into more powerful Viscounts. Doing this will directly increase her ability to cope against powerful enemies such as lesser and maybe even greater phase lords!"

Gloriana listened to his explanation. "These are good improvements. It would be great if you can realize them in an Ultimate Module. I am not asking you to suspend your work on the Ultimate Module. I am asking you to integrate it into the Victrix. I believe this is a superior solution as your Ultimate Module can directly benefit from the most powerful mind-attributed hyper material, namely a Mentalist Crystal. If you are so attached to the crown symbolism, then just design it so that it can be planted on the head of this fey."

Her suggestion... actually did not sound that bad.

She made a good point about the proximity to the powerful Mentalist Crystal. Also, the Ultimate Module that Ves had in mind could still work while remaining detached from the mech frame. Perhaps the Victrix must remain in closer proximity to Casella's

main Command Field in order for the strengthening effect to work, but that was not a big problem!

In this way, Saint Commander Casella Ingvar could choose to use her Victrix in two different ways.

She could deploy her fey at a distant battlefield that she was ordinarily not able to exert her influence because her Minerva Mark II was needed elsewhere.

This was great for large campaigns and most interestingly clandestine operations.

It was much easier to smuggle an owl-shaped fey behind enemy lines than an ace mech!

If Casella needed hard power more than extended reach, she could recall the Victrix back to her Minerva Mark II. The fey could even physically integrate into the mech frame to make sure the Mentalist Crystal boosted the ace command and Saint Commander Casella as best as possible!

In this mode, the Ultimate Module could truly get to work by strengthening the Command Field so that Casella could more easily channel a greater proportion of her true resonance into her Commandeered and Enfeoffed subjects!

This would help with closing the absolute power gap between the Minerva and enemy champions!

While the ace command mech still wouldn't be as effective at taking down enemy champions as the Amaranto Mark III Rev 2, that was not the primary purpose of the Minerva Mark II.

The two ace mechs actually complemented each other pretty well.

The Amaranto Mark III could focus on eliminating or suppressing enemy champions while the Minerva Mark II could focus on mowing down the regular enemy military units!

Ves looked forward to seeing the two fight alongside each other one day, preferably as part of a greater first-class Larkinson mech force.

After considering the Victrix further, he started to appreciate its merits. It was a marvel of craftsmanship and high-tech engineering. The archemetal construction, the utilization of the Mentalist Crystal and the promising features all won him over.

"Okay, Gloriana. You've convinced me. I can try and turn this fey into an Ultimate Module that will still be able to augment the Minerva as I have originally planned. There is just one issue. I really think it is not appropriate to call it the Victrix. Let's consider another name."

"NO."

Chapter 6733: The Self-Defense Problem

The Victrix added a lot of useful functionality to the Minerva.

One of the persistent constraints of ace pilots or any high-ranking god pilot for that matter was their inability to project their power in multiple locations at once.

Their power was concentrated in themselves, and that was a deliberate choice. Only by condensing their power to the extreme would they be able to reach critical mass and expand their force of will into a powerful domain.

Developing a domain put ace pilots ahead when it came to direct combat. Their willpower had already reached a state that was so strong that they could directly change the laws of reality in an area around their bodies!

Yet even if they resonated with an ace mech that was meticulously tailored to complement their abilities, there was only so far their domain field could reach.

Not even god pilots were able to project their God Kingdoms across light-years, let alone light-hours!

As powerful as they became, the basis of their strength still relied on the concentration of willpower. If they were characters in a role-playing game, then they pretty much invested all of their level-up points into density instead of reach.

What was interesting about ace commanders like Casella Ingvar was that she was one of the few rare exceptions to this pattern.

Her Command Field was way bigger than that of a typical Saint Kingdom.

Unfortunately, the price she paid for this was that she was unable to form a typical Saint Kingdom. Her ability to fortify her own ace mech and amplify her direct combat capabilities had already fallen behind compared to her peers.

If the Minerva Mark II by herself sparred directly against the Dark Zephyr Mark III, the Amaranto Mark III or even the Lionheart that had yet to be upgraded into a proper ace mech, the former would lose 10 out of 10 times!

This was not only because the Minerva Mark II was only able to generate a form of true resonance whose quality was better than that of a high-tier expert mech, but fell short of that of a junior ace mech.

This was undoubtedly an awkward situation to be in!

Unlike Saint General Ark Larkinson who at least possessed a strong enough ego to condense all of his willpower into himself, Saint Commander Casella Ingvar had clearly made the deliberate decision to fully delegate her power to her subordinates!

This was an extremely difficult decision to make for any high-ranking mech pilot. It was the main reason why ace commanders were so rare.

For expert pilots to become so dedicated to projecting their power through their subordinate units rather than their own expert mechs demanded an unparalleled focus on command, leadership and trust.

One of the reasons why the Saint Commander was so willing to entrust her safety and her agency to her subordinates was because of the excellent qualities of the mech pilots of the Larkinson Clan.

The clan made sure to hire mech pilots with higher qualifications that were not too old. Each of them were competent, capable and most importantly still impressionable enough that they could be trained and retrained to fight and live like Larkinsons.

The strong common identity among the clansmen made it easier for them to unify their thoughts and intentions in battle.

The Larkinson Clan was also new enough that the degree of infighting among the various internal factions had not grown severe enough to generate a lot of internal discord.

All of these factors and more provided Casella Ingvar with ideal conditions to calmly develop her command capabilities and push more and more of her fighting capabilities to her Commandeered and Enfeoffed units.

However, all of this also left an obvious weakness in her capabilities.

With the current state of the Saint Commander's development, her personal combat power ranked at the bottom among pretty much every ace pilot!

While it was rational for Casella Ingvar to make such a heavy tradeoff, it also meant that Ves and Gloriana suffered quite a headache when they tried to think about how to mitigate this problem.

"There are at least three reasons why ace commanders are rare." Ves said as he sat down next to his wife.

Both of them were staring at the incomplete archemach design projected above the work terminal.

"Three?" Gloriana questioned. "I only thought that there were two."

"Well, it is a matter of perspective. Anyway, the first obvious reason is that mech commanders break through at a lower rate than usual. They always have a lot of stuff on their mind, so it is naturally more difficult for them to set aside their rationality and channel their emotions strong enough to push their willpower above the extraordinary threshold."

"Understandable. Mech commanders have to spend more time on book learning and strategizing. They can't be as mindless as ordinary mech pilots who only have to master the basics before pursuing a goal to the extreme." His wife said.

"The other is that it is difficult for expert commanders to refrain from taking charge themselves when a fight gets difficult. From this perspective, Saint General Ark Larkinson most emphatically failed this test. He can become extremely powerful to the point where he can even exceed the strength of his peers when he is revered and worshiped by many soldiers, but he has forever denied himself the ability to empower others with his true resonance."

Whether Ark Larkinson could still be defined as an ace commander was a matter of debate.

Since he was largely reliant on the help of many other soldiers in order to maximize his contributions, people could still argue that he was a 'commander'.

Ark just chose to use himself as the vessel of everyone's hope and desire to attain victory through crushing might!

However, there were a lot of other snobs within the mech community who no longer saw this as true commanding.

Only Saint Commander Casella Ingvar followed all of the rules and fully abided by the traditions of this subprofession.

"What is the third reason?"

"Death." Ves immediately replied. "Ace commanders are like heavy artillery specialists. They have a disproportionate impact on the battlefield, but their self-defense capabilities are low. While they can still thrash high-tier expert pilots, they stand no real chance against any other ace pilot."

His wife turned and gazed at his face. "Does it truly matter, Ves? We are currently fighting against an alien force that employs entirely different units and doctrines. Most phase lords are incapable of crushing expert mechs at a distance, let alone ace mechs.

Their lethality at close range is extremely high, but their physical might is useless at range unless they are extremely good at throwing giant projectiles. Phase lords can project their power across moderate distances quite well if they specialize in spatial manipulation, but ace mechs are usually resistant enough against this that they can usually weather the pressure, at least for a short amount of time."

In general, ace mechs struggled to defeat and kill phase lords because the latter always possessed extremely formidable energy and physical defenses.

Their absurdly strong spatial barriers and outrageously huge bodies always hindered mechs that did not stand out in terms of offensive power.

Phase lords also struggled to kill ace mechs because the latter's Saint Kingdom could shrug off pretty much every variety of attack.

In addition, aside from a few rare exceptions, ace mechs were always highly mobile and could easily come and go where they pleased.

All of this meant that unless one side possessed the ability to trap or quickly eliminate a formidable opponent, it was nearly impossible to claim a kill!

Of course, there were many other variables on the battlefield that could affect the outcome. Ace pilots and phase lords rarely fought by themselves. Other forces were still able to tilt the balance in their favor.

"It does matter." Ves responded to Gloriana. "Throughout my years, I have continued to put my trust in my assumptions. I assumed the Bright Republic wouldn't betray me. I assumed the Ylvaine Protectorate wouldn't betray me. I assumed the Friday Coalition would not be shameless to turn against me. I assumed that there is no need for me to learn how to defend myself as I will always have enough protectors by my side. Well, guess what? I have been proven wrong each time. As long as there is a non-zero probability that things can go wrong, you can never rule out an accident that will check your arrogance."

His wife frowned. "I understand your perspective. What you say is true. A strong mech can still be felled if the enemy is capable or lucky enough to exploit its weakness. However, this truth applies to every mech that we have designed. It is impossible for us to make the Amaranto Mark III a strong duelist at close range, much as it is impossible for us to turn the Dark Zephyr Mark III into a ranged powerhouse. We

have chosen to specialize almost every mech that we have designed up to this date. Only the Mars, the Everchanger and the Lionheart are strong enough to take care of themselves in many different scenarios, but what they gained in versatility, they lack in focus."

"None of those mechs are invincible." Ves conceded. "However, their fault tolerances are much higher because they are fast and strong enough to take care of themselves. The Minerva Mark II lacks a Saint Kingdom, so her ability to amplify her performance with true resonance is too weak at the same level. A single ranged champion can snipe the Minerva Mark II from a distance if there is not enough. A single melee champion can crush the Minerva Mark II with relative ease as long as he gets close enough. We can rely on good positioning, excellent scouting, strong interdiction tech and lots of mechs in defensive positions to keep the Minerva Mark II safe, but how long will that last? The Minerva Mark II only has to be ambushed once for her to fall."

Gloriana narrowed her eyes. She knew him well enough that if he put so much effort into explaining a problem, he most definitely thought of a potential solution.

"Since you are so afraid that this low-probability outcome may come true one day, then I am sure that you have thought of a response. How do you suggest we mitigate this problem?"

Ves began to grin. "It is hopeless to rely on Casella and the Minerva themselves to grow strong enough to fend off enemies. My proposal is to design the Minerva Mark II as the heart of a larger amalgamation of mechs, ones that she can easily Enfeoff into Barons or stronger."

"Why not design the Amaranto Mark II so that she can easily interface with the Bastion or another high-ranking mech?"

"It is too difficult to guarantee that they will be part of the same force." Ves responded while shaking his head. "Also, forcing mechs such as the Bastion or the Blood Star Mark II to carry a vulnerable ace command mech on their backs will heavily degrade their performance and add a lot of concerns. I am also afraid that Casella's Command Field will interfere with the other ace pilot's Saint Kingdom and vice versa. Ultimately, I want the Minerva Mark II to gain a degree of self-sufficiency. I don't want Casella to rely on the protection of other expert pilots or ace pilots to bail her out of a sticky situation. This is not favorable to the development of her willpower."

"Okay? I understand your argument, but I still do not have a good idea how you intend to solve it. How do you expect Commander Casella and the Minerva to defend themselves if they are being cornered by a phase lord one day?"

"Like this." He said.

He activated a projection that showed an important moment during the last battle that took place in the Viola Magnifica System.

It showed numerous puelmer elite phasefighters joining together to form a combination gunship!

Chapter 6734: The Most Valuable Ace Pilot

Gloriana looked at the draft design that Ves presented next.

There was no obvious presence of the Minerva Mark II anymore. The ace command mech had become completely subsumed by a juggernaut-like construct that was several hundred meters tall!

The premise behind this monstrosity was relatively simple. Ves designed a series of 'mechs' that actually comprised the different limbs and sections of the juggernaut.

Unlike the puelmer elite phasefighters that were able to fight independently when they did not join together, it was clear that Ves designed each individual mech in a way that made them practically useless if they fought by themselves.

Only if they linked up with each other and wrapped up the Minerva Mark II like a protective shell would they be able to exert their true value!

Ves clearly did this because he did not have time to add dual functionality to the mechs and because he rejected the compromises that this design choice would entail.

By solely dedicating the different sections to functioning as limbs of torso sections, they were able to fulfill their primary responsibilities to the fullest!

As Gloriana quietly studied the ambitious concept, she most definitely developed a lot of options about it. Her lips curled into a frown.

"My first impression is that this can be extremely powerful if you can pull it off. It is rather clever of you to take inspiration from the puelmers and think about overcoming the Minerva Mark II's weakness by devising a combination juggernaut. This not only allows Commander Casella to empower her gigantic limbs, but she can also rely on the advantages of scale to overcome her lack of concentrated willpower. This is similar to the mounted wargear that you used to clad the Everchanger with. It is also similar to how phase lords have developed the habit of wearing raiments in order to augment their existing combat power. The biggest difference is that you are taking this much further. There are only two immediate problems that I can foresee."

"What problems have you noticed?"

"Cost." She said. "If we want to create a raiment that is not a drag on the Minerva Mark II and can fully enable her to compete against a lesser phase lord, then it needs to be made with the highest quality materials. The tech used to construct all of the systems must also be sophisticated enough. All of this will demand a huge amount of high-grade resources, far more than we have spent on any individual ace mech up to this date."

"We can cover the demand for phasewater based on the spoils that our clan has earned in the final battle of Viola Magnifica." Ves said. "If there is still a shortage, then I can still rely on other channels to obtain more. Ordinary groups don't have a chance in hell to exchange phasewater from the bigshots, but I am different. I always have something good to offer in exchange for a simple resource. As for high-grade exotics and hypers, we have many different channels to purchase or exchange for them. We are not short on money these days. This is not that different from trying to amass the resources to construct a first-class warship."

Gloriana crossed her arms. "That may be so, but what about the problem of time? There is no chance that I will permit you to work on this ambitious expansion when we are still short on time. It will be especially bad if we design these secondary elements as archemechs. Doing so will elevate their damage tolerance and resilience to another level, but it will take far too much time for me to complete this work by myself. We have multiple expert pilots and ace pilots that are impatiently waiting for the next iterations of their machines."

"I know it takes time, honey. As much as I would like to work on it right away, I think we can leave this project for later when we are not as busy anymore." Ves conceded. "I have split this side project up in multiple phases. We can start with the inner shell first before slowly expanding it with the outer shell and limbs. It is not necessary for us to

develop the entire combination juggernaut in a single go. We should at least complete the first phase within a year so that the Minerva Mark II can form a combination corvette of sorts that provides enhanced defenses and a propulsion system that is powerful enough to boost the Saint Commander away from an acute threat."

The projection changed. Ves had stripped away most of the structure of the juggernaut until there were only a handful of constructs left that wrapped around the Minerva Mark II.

His wife relaxed a bit. "This is more reasonable. You should have started with this image instead. I am... not as opposed to working on this reduced version. It seems to me that you have designed it to function as a combination escape pod."

"That is exactly what I set out to design." Ves smiled and affirmed her guess. "At this scale, I don't see any point in letting the Minerva Mark II fight against a powerful enemy that has managed to get close enough. Casella Ingvar's highest priority should be to escape and keep herself alive. Phase 1 should therefore only consist of the inner shell that not only adds a lot of defenses, but is also equipped with fairly powerful propulsion systems as well as anti-interdiction systems. This super escape pod doesn't even come with any weapon systems because it would only detract from its main purpose."

Though the draft design was lacking in details and precision, Gloriana was already accustomed to that from her husband.

She paid much more attention to the intent and future direction of the draft design. She tried to construct the complete version in her mind and roughly estimated how extensively the work helped to keep the Minerva Mark II alive.

"This is indeed a good way to increase the fault tolerance of the Minerva Mark II, which is the only criteria that matters." Gloriana admitted. "Even so, reducing the side project to just the first phase still entails months of dedicated design work, especially if I turn it all into archetech. There is currently no way for me to automate or delegate the labor-intensive design processes. I have to do all of the work myself. Are you sure you are willing to delay or postpone the completion of other projects in favor of designing a super escape pod for the Minerva Mark II?"

The patriarch of the Larkinson Clan firmly nodded. "I am certain. I have already reduced the scope of phase 1 as much as possible. You have to realize that the

importance of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar is much greater than that of other high-ranking mech pilots. No matter whether it is Saint Tusa, Saint Stark or Saint Dise, they are all conventional ace pilots who excel in personal combat and nothing else. They are good at killing, but they are not the best at preventing allies from getting killed. Saint Commander Casella is different. She is the only one that can make our mechs and starships last longer and die less through her special abilities. Losing her would be devastating to our clan."

The Larkinsons only had two ace commanders, of which one of them was pretty much fake.

Ves valued Saint Commander Casella's ability to Commandeer thousands if not tens of thousands of mechs.

She already attained good value when fighting alongside second-class mechs, but her ability to sway the course of a battle would become drastically stronger once she fought alongside first-class mechs!

First-class mech forces were generally smaller, but the quality of mechs were way higher!

What was even better was that first-class mechs that were high-end enough even possessed the capital to threaten expert mechs and cause a lot of inconveniences to ace mechs!

Therefore, Ves and many others expected Saint Commander Casella Ingvar to explode in power and popularity once she began to fight in the Upper Zones.

She also served as a vital component to his plan to form an all-Larkinson first-class mech force.

If the Saint Commander was not available to give every first-class Larkinson mech a powerful boost, then that would severely diminish the combat power of his most powerful force and limit his options.

This was also why Ves especially demanded modifications to the Torturous Scream so that her bridge could interface with the Minerva Mark II. This was another way to keep the ace command mech safe and protected behind multiple defensive layers.

His wife understood Ves' rationale. He truly valued Saint Commander Casella Ingvar above all other champions of the Larkinson Clan.

"Who do you care about more, Ves? I thought you always valued Joshua the most."

"I did, but my ranking is not static. It changes depending on the changes in environment, threats, future trends and the development direction of our clan. In the past few years, Joshua's performance has been rather disappointing. Tusa has already overtaken him in terms of progression speed. Stark and Dise are far more skilled at handling their respective weapons. Even my Uncle Ark is more useful because he is able to independently lead and protect a different detachment of clansmen. As for Joshua, what else can he do besides fight?"

"He did manage to kill a lesser phase lord during the last battle, you know."

Ves rolled his eyes. "That is mostly due to all of the help he received as well as the D-arm that we granted to him. While he is admittedly beginning to make substantial progress again, it will take time for him to realize his newfound potential. For now, he is just a high-tier expert pilot that is little different from the likes of Venerable Vincent Ricklin. In this sensitive period of time, I place a much higher value on those who have already gained greater power. Saint Commander Casella Ingvar is already powerful enough with the Minerva Mark I, but she will completely explode once we complete the Mark II."

The point was that the Larkinson Clan had a treasure in the form of Saint Commander Casella Ingvar and could not afford to lose her. Ves was willing to set aside a few other priorities just to make sure she was sufficiently protected and possessed enough means to preserve her life when she was being targeted by powerful enemies.

This was guaranteed to happen!

The native aliens possessed strange ideas and customs, but they had proven themselves to be quite rational when it mattered. They were not ignorant of the universal rules of warfare.

An ace commander that was persistently able to elevate thousands of mechs into quasi-expert mechs as well as empower several dozen mechs into temporary low-tier expert mechs already posed an immense threat against the native aliens!

Gloriana could not refute this argument. Even if she could, she did not want to. Casella was a role model among the female members of the Larkinson Clan. She did not want Saint General Ark Larkinson to overtake Casella in importance.

"Fine." The female Senior Mech Designer sighed. "I will try to rework my schedule so that I can work on this side project in what little spare time I have available over the course of this year. I will endeavor to complete phase 1 of your plan in the short term, but I cannot make any hard promises. As for phase 2 and phase 3, let us consider their feasibility after completing the initial phase and observing the results. By then, we will know much more about the viability of your plan. Besides, we are still lacking in experience when it comes to designing juggernauts. Don't you have an existing one in storage? You haven't done anything with it yet. Will you continue to allow it to collect dust or are you actually going to put it into actual use?"

She raised another good point. Ves had indeed forgotten about the Otolon Sprius that he obtained from a costly exchange with the Evolution Witch.

"I had plans for that machine, but so much has happened that they are outdated. I still need time to figure out what I will do with the juggernaut instead."

"Well, I suggest you do that sooner rather than later, Ves."

Chapter 6735: Enterprising Alexa

As much as Ves wanted to spend his time on examining, repairing, modernizing and upgrading the Otolon Sprius, he simply could not justify this decision at this time.

He was far too busy and it would take far too much time to get a juggernaut that was over 60 years old battle ready again.

Ves actually estimated that if he was able to do all of that work to the best of his abilities, a fully modernized transphasic hyper juggernaut with additional flight capabilities may actually be of greater value than was apparent on the surface.

First, no matter whether it was controlled by a single pilot or multiple ones, it was enough of a mech that Ves could theoretically make it alive.

Attempting to breathe life into a juggernaut could yield a lot of benefits, but also had the potential to produce a huge man-made disaster.

Ves had not forgotten about the damage wrought by Uranus all of those years ago. The Otalon Sprius may be smaller, but it would also be much stronger due to the use of far better tech and materials!

Even so, the reason why he couldn't bring himself to let go of the 350-meter tall juggernaut was because of the potential for Saint Commander Casella to empower it with her true resonance!

No matter whether she was able to Commandeer or Enfeoff it, so long as her true resonance was strong and flexible enough to empower the entire juggernaut frame, then the results would be astonishing!

"It would be similar to creating a small Carmine warship out of the blue." Ves guessed.

Since the Otalon Sprius was a juggernaut, it was much more flexible than a warship. It could take advantage of its much larger scale and much more extensive systems to resist phase lords directly.

This may be another way to further improve Saint Commander Casella Ingvar's self-defense capabilities!

The full plan therefore consisted of designing a combination juggernaut that was primarily defensive in nature and pairing it up with the Otalon Sprius that possessed a strong offensive focus!

Having either of them would be a massive boon to the Saint Commander and by extension the Larkinson Clan.

"It's too bad that my wife and I don't have time to flesh out these juggernauts." Ves sighed in regret.

Not every Larkinson mech designer was as busy as Ves and Gloriana, though.

One of them made an unannounced visit to Ves' personal lab a day later.

"I heard about your interest in bringing the Otalon Sprius back online." Alexa Streon said. "I would like to take charge of this effort."

Ves looked surprised as he turned around. "You? Why?"

"Because I want to make a more meaningful contribution to the clan." The woman said. "I have not done enough so far. While I have been supervising the design teams that are tasked with updating our existing mech lines to the Hyper Generation such as the Ferocious Piranha line and the Valkyrie line, this is not stimulating enough for me. I want to cut my teeth into a more technologically interesting pursuit. It has always been one of my dreams to design a juggernaut. Refurbishing the old Otalon Sprius that you have placed in storage is a good start."

He could clearly sense that she was being genuine in her desire to work on a juggernaut. There was just something about these enormous machines that attracted her fascination.

"If you heard about my intentions for the Otalon Sprius, then you should know that I want it to become a powerful weapon that will help the Saint Commander exert her power on the battlefield. It is not enough to restore the Otalon Sprius in a half-hearted way. I want it to be made entirely out of archemetal or another tech base that is equally as powerful."

"I have not mastered archetech."

"Then that is the end of the discussion."

"Yet."

"Wait, what?"

Alexa Streon smiled. "Do not underestimate my academic prowess. I am a former scion of the Streon Ancient Clan. I was born to become a mech designer. My genes

and my augmentations are all optimized towards studying and applying all manner of sciences. My cranial implant is not as good as one empowered by a Mentalist Crystal that your wife currently enjoys, but it should not be much worse. I have already begun to study archetech starting from a few weeks ago. While I am admittedly far from gaining enough proficiency to be able to design a full archemech, I can make greater focus as long as I have a reason and a motivation to invest in my studies."

Her revelations took Ves by surprise. He hadn't paid much attention to Alexa and what she was doing in her own time.

Now that he thought about it, he indeed neglected to assign any important responsibilities to her. He was too lazy to micromanage her schedule and he trusted her to decide for herself how she should spend her valuable time.

Alexa apparently thought it was a good idea for her to work on the massive Otalon Sprius!

"It would be... extremely helpful if you can study and master archetech to an extent." Ves said. "If you raise the priority on your studies, how soon can you reach a level where you can independently design an archemech?"

Alexa frowned. "Half a year perhaps. It is difficult to estimate as archetech is quite foreign and difficult to study. The good news is that enough scientists and mech designers have studied it that they have begun to publish textbooks and other teaching materials that are specifically written to make it easier for newcomers to master the basics. It would be better if I can receive personal tutoring from an authority in the field. I have already approached Gloriana to inquire whether she can spare her time to give me tutoring lessons, but..."

"Let me guess. She rejected you or only gave you the bare minimum." Ves based his guess on Alexa's not-too-happy expression.

The former Terran nodded. "That is more or less what has happened."

"Figures. She told me in person not too long ago that she would address the problem that our clan only has one individual who can competently work with archetech, yet she refuses to teach a willing and able student. Is she afraid that you will become a competitor who will overtake her one day?"

Alexa shook her head. "I do not think so, sir. I believe that she regards me as your protege. As far as she is concerned, I should only be focusing on learning how to design better living mechs. Your wife is already trying to raise her own proteges, but they are not ready to contribute to serious mech design projects as of yet. She would much rather make it so that every archetech-qualified mech designer comes from her lineage. For her, this is about competition and control."

What a petty woman. Ves rubbed his face in exasperation. The clan clearly needed more mech designers who could work with archetech.

Gloriana should have taken the greater needs of the clan into account.

Instead, she deliberately snubbed Alexa in favor of raising her own proteges.

He knew it was pointless to confront her about this. She would roll out a perfectly logical argument like how only the right kind of mech designers would be able to maintain continuity with her approach and philosophy towards archetech. Only this way would the archetech specialists trained by her be able to coordinate with their teacher with the least amount of friction.

There was enough legitimacy in this reasoning that Ves could not rebuke her for her selfish motivations.

"Okay, forget about Gloriana then." Ves dismissively said. "There should be enough alternatives for you to learn from. If these teachers don't already relax their terms because of an opportunity to cooperate with our Larkinson Clan, then we can offer valuable concessions to convince them to devote their personal time to enrich your understanding. In fact, it may be even better this way because you will develop your own style of working with archetech."

Alexa smiled. "That is what I have in mind as well. I do not know if you have paid much attention to this field, but ever since the Dark Zephyr Mark III and more recently the Amaranto Mark III have successively proven their superior strength and capabilities, archetech has become much more prominent among several academic and engineering circles. More mech designers are taking archetech seriously now that they have witnessed how it has significantly raised the performance and safety of our latest high-ranking mechs. More people are willing to learn archetech, and teachers are taking advantage of this by charging high fees for their expertise."

"We can afford their fees. As long as these guys don't demand anything excessive, you can reimburse any amount they charge."

They talked a bit more about what to expect from Alexa's studies of archetech.

"Currently, our understanding of archetech is relatively shallow." Alexa explained as she sat down. "We have only worked out the simplest facets of archetech and have yet to crack anything that possesses greater depth. We are not arche, so we have never been able to interface with archetech. We lack the archeshells that allow us to do so. While there are several who have developed technological means to overcome this problem, it doesn't solve the problem of interpretation. The data that we receive from archetech is all garbled and alien."

"That is why my wife relies on Hekkel as an intermediary." Ves mentioned.

"Yes, using an arche engineer as your interpreter is a clever workaround, but there is much that Hekkel cannot understand or convey."

"A bad solution is no solution."

"What if I tell you that we can do better than that?" Alexa leaned forward as she spoke with greater enthusiasm. "What if we apply a different approach towards archetech that may allow humans such as ourselves to interface with archetech as if we are native arche?"

"I would say that this is impossible, but I know better than to make such a claim. You... clearly have a plan."

Alexa's confidence rose. "I do, sir. My idea is to combine aspects of your design philosophy with archetech. I want to see if I can make an archetech product that is alive, ideally in the form of a single block of archemetal. If that is not possible, then I should at least be able to develop a living archemech. Regardless, as long as the mech is alive, it is inhabited by a spirit that can directly interface with humans. This spiritual interface can serve as a substitute to the more traditional archeshell interface!"

"I hate to burst your bubble, but we already tried that with the Dark Zephyr Mark III." Ves gently said. "Only Saint Tusa can interface with his ace light skirmisher, and he does not possess the technological acumen or expertise in archetech to understand the technical data supplied by his own machine."

"What I intend to accomplish should not be as rudimentary as that." Alexa shook her head. "I want to replicate the full experience of the native arche to humans. To that end, I want to develop a new variation of archetech that is inherently designed to align with our design philosophy. Originally, archetech was derived from the organic structure of archeshells. I am convinced that we can take advantage of this origin to make archetech more 'organic' and increase its compatibility with living mechs by several times. Once I apply this new variation of archetech to a juggernaut such as the Otalon Sprius, I believe it will be a groundbreaking machine that can bring living mechs to a higher state!"

What an ambitious mech designer!

Ves instinctively wanted to tell her that she was being way too ambitious, but he soon changed his mind.

He was not much different back when he was a Journeyman. He never let his relatively modest rank get in the way of developing groundbreaking innovations!

If Alexa was confident enough in this endeavor to invest her valuable time and energy on it, then he was more than willing to let her pursue her passion.

"Your proposal is intriguing." He said in an appreciative tone. "I am not sure how viable it is, but even a partial success can yield valuable gains to the development of subsequent high-ranking mechs. What do you need in order to get started on this interesting research?"

"You can begin by acquiring a hundred or so archeshells for me. I need to study a large enough sample of them in order to understand how modern archetech differs from the original organic structural patterns of their archeshells. It would be even better if you can ship over living arche prisoners as well, but it is not completely necessary to obtain them. I am only interested in their shells."

Chapter 6736: The First Breach

Ves tentatively gave Alexa permission to play with the Otalon Sprius. So long as she was able to learn archetech and find a meaningful way to combine it with living

mechs, then she had a good chance of turning the outdated juggernaut into a special war machine.

In an ideal reality, Ves preferred to tinker and experiment with the Otalon Sprius himself. Scale translated into power. He would have loved to work on a juggernaut and understand the rules and mechanisms that made them so dominant on the battlefield.

However, his schedule was so packed that he had little choice but to delegate this priority to Alexa Streon.

The only other alternatives available to Ves was to sell it to another party or keep it in storage for a longer period of time.

Neither of these options sounded acceptable to him. He could not afford to waste his resources and assets during this sensitive period of time.

Ves actually felt really grateful towards Alexa. She offered a more optimal solution to this problem. He would still be able to benefit from her work by studying her design for the reformed and upgraded version of the Otalon Sprius.

Studying Alexa's homework might not allow him to understand the juggernaut as deep and intimately as he would like, but he could at least obtain a lot of knowledge and insight for free.

He also felt it was worthwhile to assign this challenge to Alexa to develop her as a mech designer.

If she wanted to stand out in the mech market, then she needed to choose an interesting direction for her work.

It was not enough for mech designers to stick to routine work. A Journeyman Mech Designer should go beyond the well-trodden paths and begin to explore how to apply facets of their design philosophy in a superior and novel fashion.

The outcome was not too important so long as the mech designer learned and improved from the experience.

Of course, Ves did not think that Alexa would botch her assignment and fail to properly upgrade the Otolon Sprius. She was one of the most competent mech designers in the Design Department. Her excellent background and upbringing even caused her to perform better in certain jobs than Ves and Gloriana!

Though Ves only knew Alexa for a few years, the latter had consistently met or exceeded his high expectations. The Terrans truly knew how to raise their best scions.

With the Otolon Sprius issue out of the way, Ves began to spend his time on developing the Victrix into the living fey and Ultimate Module that his wife envisioned.

Designing the exquisite owl-shaped construct as a living fey was not that difficult. What stumped Ves was how he was supposed to make it expand Casella Ingvar's reach or amplify the strength of Casella's Command Field.

As Ves puzzled over this issue, he paused in his work when he received a silent alarm.

It was a very special alarm. He had set it shortly after he exited from the System Space after concluding his latest marathon.

His lips curled into a smile, but he kept himself under control. He resumed his work but secretly waited for a development.

It did not take long for his personal assistant to send a priority notification to Ves.

"You need to see this, Ves! Did you know what happened shortly after the expeditionary fleet arrived in the Davute System and settled down to recover from the latest battle?!"

"Let me guess, Gavin. Did Casella and Ark come to blows with each other?"

"No! This is much bigger! The news had already begun to spread, sir. Swordmaster Ketis flew out into space and used the Heavensword to cut a giant tear through space! Unlike similar tears that other powerful beings have made in the past, the one created

by the legendary weapon is remaining open much longer than it should! The swordmaster herself claims that it can last up to 24 hours, and the preliminary scans and analysis on the tear in space indicate that it may indeed last for at least 20 hours!"

Ves paused for a few seconds. He tried to act as if he had no idea what his former student had been up to. Ever since the Heavensword pressed itself into her hand, it hadn't really done anything remarkable, so many people had gradually ceased to pay attention to the weapon.

While Ketis had gained a lot of prominence as of late after her Heaven Earth Man Trifecta started to spread across the mech community as well as the swordsmanship community, the influence of the Heavensword over her theories was largely abstract and difficult to visualize.

This was different.

Nobody could miss the obvious tear in space!

Although a strange barrier formed over the dimensional tear that evidently prevented background radiation and small particles from passing through and contaminating places where they did not belong, it was still very obvious that Ketis had created a portal into the unknown!

At this time, Ketis floated in front of the breach she created. After multiple delays, she finally did it. She potentially altered the course of red humanity by 'exposing' one of the Heavensword's hidden powers.

She had very obviously wielded the Heavensword prior to creating the dimensional breach.

A large and oversized Dimension Blade had briefly overlapped the blade of the ancient relic as she chopped it down.

Hopefully, the sleight of hand should be enough for observers to conclude that her ability came from the Heavensword as opposed to another source.

"So this is what you have been planning to do all along." Venerable Joshua said as he and his Everchanger floated close at hand.

As her husband, Joshua had grown concerned when Ketis randomly expressed her desire to take a lengthy space walk.

A lot of accidents could happen when a vulnerable individual like Ketis chose to fly out into space while wearing nothing but their suit of combat armor!

The infantry-grade protection might fare well when peppered by small arms fire, but any decent mech would be able to squash her body flat!

Even if she was a swordmaster and even if she enjoyed the direct protection of the Heavensword, Venerable Joshua could not stop himself from worrying about her safety, so he hopped into the cockpit of his Everchanger and launched into space.

He did so despite the fact that the expert mech was due for a round of maintenance after exerting himself too much in the previous battle!

Joshua felt thankful that he did so, because his Everchanger could clearly sense a huge increase in the amount of active sensors being pointed at the dimension tear's direction!

"I need more help here, guys!"

Other Larkinson mechs were moving towards the dimension tear to protect it as well as Ketis against anyone mad enough to launch an attack.

A few more familiar expert mechs that were on patrol were also on the way. The Valkyrie Krista and the Valkyrie Ursa of the Glory Seekers had already begun to patrol the perimeter while powering their sensor systems to the fullest in order to sweep up any vessels under stealth that sought to sneak closer.

The Bastion took a lot longer to arrive. The expert heavy space knight's mobility was not the best, but fortunately Ketis did not fly too far from the Spirit of Bentheim.

She provided a lot more reassurance once she did arrive. The Bastion not only excelled at keeping herself alive, but also others who sheltered behind her considerable bulk and sizable tower shield.

Already, Venerable Jannzi began to resonate with her Bastion and covered Ketis with a resonance-empowered energy shield.

"Ketis, please tell us when you are about to make a high-profile move like this next time." Jannzi pleaded. "Did you know how much unwelcome attention that you have attracted? The Davute System is anything but safe. My intuition can vaguely sense a multitude of overtly hostile glances. These aren't the usual idiots. There must be cosmopolitan, alien or factional enemies within this port system. If any of them was piloting a mech in the vicinity, you could have been sniped by a mech-grade rifle."

Jannzi was upset that Ketis had needlessly put herself into danger. Did she not understand her current status? She was one of the most prominent mech designers in the Larkinson Clan after Ves and Gloriana.

While the Design Department was filled with promising talents such as Alexa Streon and Kelsey Ampatoch, the Terran and Rubarthan Journeymen arrived much later.

Ketis had been with Ves since the early days. She developed herself step by step and attracted plenty of admiration.

It was only recently that her reputation had begun to spread past the immediate Larkinson circles.

Whether it was her highly effective and surprisingly helpful swordsman mech models or her leadership position among the sword practitioners of the Red Ocean, Ketis had already turned into a pillar of the Larkinson Clan!

What was better was that she was still fairly young. If she was already able to accomplish this much when she was still a Journeyman, what was she capable of introducing when she became a Senior like her former teacher?

This made it even more important to shelter Ketis against external threats!

Once the swordmaster's security was somewhat taken care of, the Larkinsons became preoccupied with three acute priorities.

First, they needed to form a full security security cordon with multiple layers of defense and interception.

Second, they needed to block or handle the huge amount of inquiries from other powers as well as the general masses!

Third, they had to thoroughly scan the new tear in space and guard against anything that might emerge from the aperture that was roughly 20 meters tall.

Many scientists and experts began to study the data. The mysterious energy barrier keeping the environment of the two sides isolated also prevented everyone from conducting detailed scans of the other side of the breach.

It could be heaven or it could be hell. It could grant them passage to Messier 87 or just the star system next door.

Anything was possible!

It took a bit longer for the local MTA garrison force to dispatch a nearby patrol. The mechers were far more eager to obtain answers than the Larkinsons.

As Ketis continued to get bombarded by internal and external requests for clarification, she abruptly raised her Heavensword and induced it to release a bright flash!

"ENOUGH!" Her voice boomed in an authoritative manner, causing many others to shut up! "I do not have all of the answers, but I will hold a press conference on the spot in order to clarify what I have done. I do not want to repeat myself a dozen times over, so do not bother me with exclusive interviews or interrogations. By the time I have concluded my speech, you will understand the significance of what I have done. For now, I am requesting my clan to dispatch probes through this breach and confirm whether my blade has cut into the right destination."

The Larkinsons had already begun to send out probes. They were not too hardy, but they were cheap and disposable. No one would shed a tear if an astral beast swallowed them whole or if close proximity to a powerful star had vaporized their structures.

The first probe cautiously touched the mysterious energy barrier, but encountered no resistance.

It easily passed through the tear in space. Its disappearance was strong proof that the probe had reached an entirely different destination!

The first probe returned 5 seconds later, just as it had been programmed to do. The Larkinsons downloaded the logs and recorded and gained their first view of what may be lurking on the other side.

"It's so blue! Everything is blue!"

"Did Ketis use the Heavensword to open up a portal to an alternate universe where Blue Ocean has taken the place of the Red Ocean?"

"Visibility is moderate to poor. Small particles keep interfering with our sensors."

"Look over there! Some of the sensors of the probes managed to detect materials or natural phenomena with elevated energy levels. Whatever the case, these readings are so high that we can definitely earn massive gains if we are able to obtain the first sample of whatever is hiding behind this annoying blue fog."

Chapter 6737: Dimension #365

The 'press conference' organized by Ketis immediately attracted a lot of attention when information about what was on the other side of the dimension breach became clear.

It was another dimension, one that was much higher than the material dimensions!

All people knew about it was that it was filled with blue. There was no light source, so everything only began to shine in blue when a probe or other object lit up the surroundings.

Due to the blue particles that fogged up the entire dimension, it was difficult for the probes to discover anything substantial.

However, from the moment the first probe detected highly elevated energy readings, people's evaluation of the mysterious dimension had changed.

Everyone who possessed even a modicum understanding of science knew that higher energy levels usually corresponded to wealth and power!

If the source of the elevated energy readings was not yet in the possession of humans, then it most certainly represented an untapped source of exploitation!

The only question was whether the source of the energy readings already possessed an alien owner.

If that was the case, then it would be foolish to discard any advantage of surprise the humans might have and get close enough to be detected by any potential native entities.

The probes therefore never traveled too far away from the breach coordinates and only sought to secure the immediate surroundings as much as possible.

Less than 10 minutes after Ketis' initial announcement, she began her hastily organized press conference.

There was not enough time for the Larkinson Clan's Public Relations Department to organize everything properly. They had all been taken by surprise and scrambled to bring a semblance of order in this chaotic sequence of events.

Plenty of journalists had begun to cover this anomalous event, but not nearly enough to match the significance of what Ketis had just done.

After all, in a society where ace pilots and god pilots regularly defied the laws of reality, this was hardly the first time that people saw someone do weird stuff.

The onset of systematic cultivation only further desensitized the population to metaphysical phenomena.

Yet those with enough comprehension and scientific literacy knew how insane it was to not only create a large breach in another dimension, but keep it open for a duration of at least 20 hours!

The stability of the tear in space was so remarkable that many scientists and engineers already developed the urge to replicate the process.

Unfortunately for them, none of them had access to a grand work as outrageous as the Heavensword!

More and more people tuned into the live broadcast that the Larkinsons had hastily organized.

More mechs and starships of the Larkinson Clan had arrived as well. They formed an intricate protective cordon.

Every expert pilot and ace pilot of the Golden Skull Alliance that was available were either on standby or already deployed in space.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar had already spread out her Command Field. She had yet to Commandeer or Enfeoff any mechs, but she simply utilized the high degree of awareness of her vast domain to carefully monitor the surrounding space for hidden threats and intruders.

As a swordmaster who had yet to become a Carmine mech pilot, Ketis looked awfully small next to all of these large and hefty machines. Her combat armor added a lot of bulk to her body, but it was far from enough to match the scale of even the smallest of demimechs.

Yet everyone had the illusion that they were seeing a woman who had become larger than life.

Her body language conveyed confidence, discipline and drive.

The swordmaster acted in public because she did not fear exposure.

Instead of skulking in a lifeless star system, she boldly opened an entrance into another dimension in one of the busiest port systems of the Krakatoa Middle Zone!

That sent a strong message.

The Red Three also reacted at this time.

The Red Association dispatched several squads of first-class mechs.

The Red Fleet deployed a few frigates to patrol the surroundings and deter third parties from getting too close.

The Red Collective did not have much to offer, but they already volunteered their soldier cultivators for exploration missions.

Each of the Red Three also brought a lot of local and remote scientific support to the table.

Local scientists helped with gathering data and performing simple experiments in the vicinity of the dimension breach.

Remote scientists who usually possessed vastly superior knowledge and problem-solving skills subsequently took this data and began to analyze it based on their own biases and expertise.

Soon enough, the Red Three managed to derive a lot of information based on their observations and the data that the Larkinson Clan freely shared.

"It's time." Venerable Joshua quietly transmitted to his wife's combat armor. "Try to keep it short and sweet. The longer they remain exposed, the greater the chance of accidents."

"I know, Joshua. I can estimate and calculate the probabilities myself. I know how to be restrained. Just watch my performance.

A pair of bots had already arrived to provide the best quality recordings to red humanity. They worked hard to capture and convey the splendor of living mechs.

Once again, the Larkinson Clan showed up in the news again!

It hadn't been too long since the major players began to pay attention to the much smaller that Carmine mechs and kinship networks got introduced to the public.

For the Larkinsons to show up once again must be significant enough, or else they wouldn't have bothered with this circus.

When the broadcast began to spread across the galactic net of the Red Ocean, Ketis prepared to speak.

"I have an important announcement to make."

Her back became straighter and her willpower added an element of sharpness to her demeanor.

She was no stranger to public speaking. Even if she did not sign up for any courses, she just knew how to make herself appear more authoritative and special.

Ketis learned a few of her tricks from watching Ves address an audience. She learned the remainder from her prior experiences as well as all of the times she fought on the battlefield.

The way she presented herself had a very large influence on the morale and performance of her opponents!

If she was able to scare them into submission, then they were already defeated before her Bloodsinger sank into their flesh.

"Today, red humanity shall begin to rise."

She believed in these words with all of her heart. The initial results of opening a dimension breach were still relatively bare, but she already had a pretty good idea of what people might be able to find if they ventured further into the higher dimension.

After a few seconds of pause, Ketis very deliberately raised the Heavensword until it was pointed straight upward.

Its resplendent white surface and its glowing edge added a heavenly cast to her suit of combat armor.

"The power of the Heavensword is vast beyond imagination. As its current holder, I only have access to a fraction of its might. Today, I wielded a blade that cut through the walls that keep material dimensions separated from the higher dimensions. I did so with a single purpose in mind, and that is to give our race a means to strengthen ourselves against the alien menace. To that end, I have conducted a large amount of research into academic works that are related to what one might find in the higher dimensions."

She did not lie about this. Originally, the plan was for Ves and Ketis to earn so much AP over the course of their most recent marathon that they would be able to upgrade the Dimension Observatory's ability to seek valuable resources in the right higher dimensions.

This plan went bust as Ves became distracted by a variety of different interests.

In the end, the two failed to earn enough AP to purchase the most useful upgrade to the Dimension Telescope.

The pair of mech designers could only make do with lesser upgrades.

After a lot of consideration, the two decided to secure two upgrades that were barely within their budget.

[Observation Clarity - Level 2 (200 Ascension Points): Can increase the visual clarity and the data collection of dimension observations by a small extent.]

They had no reference on how Observation Clarity at Level 1 differed from Level 2, but it had to be useful for it to cost 200 AP.

The other upgrades to the Dimension Telescope were not particularly cost effective in comparison.

For example, the Dimension Telescope could only peek in a higher dimension for a maximum duration of 5 minutes.

They could pay 200 AP for an upgrade that extended this observation period to 6 minutes, but this was crazy!

If the Dimension Telescope failed to find anything interesting in 5 minutes, then the extra minute probably wouldn't make much of a difference.

[Breach Extension - Level 2 (250 Ascension Points): Can create a dimension breach that lasts for 1 day at the cost of 200 AP.]

This was by far the most useful upgrade to the Dimension Blade.

If not, Ketis could only create a breach that lasted for 10 minutes or 1 hour. That was hardly enough to recover enough valuable resources from an exotic higher dimension!

The Larkinsons and anyone else who passed through the breach could do a lot more in 24 hours.

Although Ketis had to pay a hefty price of 200 Ascension Points just to be able to create this dimension breach, as long as the resources that could be harvested on the other side were precious and powerful enough, she considered it to be a worthwhile tradeoff!

That said, she was yearning to unlock the ability to create a semi-permanent breach that had no time limit.

It would only break if enemies damaged it to the point where it could no longer maintain the breach.

She also wanted to invest in upgrades that reduced the AP cost of every Dimension Blade usage, but this option had yet to appear in the Dimension Observatory.

"In my research, I found multiple references whose titles I shall share later that mention the 'Blue Dimension'. According to the hierarchy of dimensions adopted by the scientific community, it is classified as the 365th dimension. The researchers of the past tried their best to cross the boundaries between dimensions and directly observe what made it easier for them to observe the Blue Dimension than the other adjacent dimensions. Their conclusion, which has not been sufficiently substantiated, is that there is a heavier dimensional weight to the 365th dimension."

That caught a lot of people's attention!

Most scientists and engineers never thought about traveling to other dimensions because it was far too difficult for them to do so on a stable basis.

Every starship equipped with an FTL drive regularly entered into the higher dimensions in order to take advantage of changes in physical laws and the altered fabric of space to traverse huge distances much faster.

However, it was impossible for a starship in FTL flight to simply stop moving forward and remain in a higher dimension. The vessel would always drop back into realspace from the moment the FTL drive was no longer active!

That was why Ketis' move was so significant. She borrowed the power of the Heavensword to create a static tear between dimensions that looked stable enough for humans to reliably enter the 365th dimension!

Ketis was not done yet. "Having found enough academic literature to strengthen my belief that the Blue Dimension holds great value, I created a dimension breach large enough for small mining shuttles and other vehicles to pass through and attempt to mine the rare resource that researchers have theorized that this special dimension may hold. There is no guarantee that their theories and conclusions are correct. However, the sensor readings from the probes sent in and out of this dimension breach indicate that there are islands of strange matter further inside. While sparse, these islands may

become highly desirable to everyone very soon, because the initial data readings are similar to a new type of material that the native aliens have recently debuted."

A few people were clever enough to connect the dots. They gasped and instantly wished they were there on the spot instead of watching this broadcast light-seconds or light-years away!

Ketis smirked behind her closed helmet. "I am speaking of superdimensional matter."

Chapter 6738: Everything Is Blue

Ketis might not have stumbled upon the Blue Dimension if she and Ves followed the original plan.

If they were able to exchange 1000 AP for Level 1 Observation Search, they would have used this new functionality to search for phasewater, hyper materials or other goodies.

The thought of searching for superdimensional matter likely wouldn't have crossed their mind!

Yet instead of relying on the System's expensive functions to find a good dimension to harvest resources from, Ketis had instead opted to save herself this enormous expense and rely on more traditional means of information gathering.

Red humanity did not really play around with dimensions all that much.

It was a different story for original humanity.

Over the course of thousands of years, a huge amount of scientists and mavericks experimented with FTL drives.

Most bold attempts to innovate on the tech or develop radical new applications from them ended up in disaster.

That did not mean that the experiments had been for nothing. Even failures produced valuable data, some more valuable than others.

The collective body of human science therefore gained a gradual understanding of what might be going on in different dimensions.

Above the 10 or 11 dimensions that encompassed the ones that most people who never traveled to other planets could come in touch with, the dimensions higher than that all possessed weird and even life-threatening phenomena!

For example, there was one dimension that appeared to be perpetually filled with thunderstorms.

It was never a good idea for a starship to engage in FTL travel that included this dimension, or else the vessel would begin to incur light but persistent electrical damage.

There was also another dimension that was filled with a jelly-like substance. Starships that happened to partially move into this band would encounter much greater resistance, causing their forward progress to slow or maybe suffer even worse consequences.

All of it was rather weird, but modern FTL drives possesses enough safety instructions to bypass these troubles.

The Blue Dimension was special in that it was one of the few dimensions where starships engaged in FTL travel tended to converge towards when their FTL drives were operating within a specific range.

The scientists who puzzled over this phenomenon came up with many possible answers, of which superdimensional materials happened to rank fairly high on the list!

This was enough for Ketis to bet on this choice. She could have invested just 10 AP at the start in order to quickly explore and confirm whether the sources were accurate.

However, she was already running short on AP and wanted to make the greatest possible impact.

Creating a dimension breach that lasted just 10 minutes was nowhere near as impressive as one that lasted for an entire day!

Now, Ketis became forever known as the Swordmaster who could open up entrances to rich and incredibly valuable higher dimensions.

The swordmaster continued to float in space just before the active breach.

"There are multiple points of data that indicate that the Blue Dimension contains significant quantities of superdimensional materials. However, that is not an immediate cause for celebration. The superdimensional matter may be in a volatile state and threaten anything that comes close. The Blue Dimension may also be difficult or dangerous to navigate. We do not understand the properties of the blue fog and whether they can corrode metals and other materials. Finally, there is one final threat that everyone who enters this breach must take into account."

Ketis took a deep breath. "The Blue Dimension may not be as lifeless as we assumed. My teacher has always told me that life finds a way. We have encountered the strangest life forms inhabiting the corona of a star. It is not far-fetched to assume that dimensional beasts could also exist in this strange and exotic dimension."

The enthusiasm of many would-be explorers dimmed a bit. The superdimensional materials may have their own protectors, ones that would be willing to fight to the death to preserve any quantity of their 'treasures!'.

Still, danger or not, there were still plenty of people who were willing to try their luck!

"I created this dimension breach for every group to enjoy." She continued to say. "We will not keep all of the spoils to ourselves. We are more than willing to let shuttles belonging to any of the Red Three to travel freely through the breach in exchange for cooperation and protection. As for other third parties, I will permit your shuttles to enter on a case by case basis."

That did not sound good for groups that did not maintain close relations with their partner.

Ketis' expression grew harsher. "The breach will only allow for the entry of shuttles that can safely pass through the breach. It is not large enough to comfortably transfer a large amount of mechs... for now."

The inability for most mechs to pass through the entrance was an incredible inconvenience.

Not every shuttle could fit through. Even if they rolled at a 45 degree angle, parts of their vehicle would still collide against the side of the breach!

The point was that the first breach would not allow mechs to play a role on the other side. It would be shuttles, people and mining equipment at most.

The mechers, fleeters and collies were already scrambling to start their mining operations as soon as possible.

In fact, because Ketis also blindsided her own Larkinson Clan, precious minutes passed by until the Larkinsons and their allies in the Golden Skull Alliance gathered so many small shuttles that were suitable for mining missions.

Soon enough, an expedition had formed.

No expert pilot or ace pilot would enter the other side as it was stupid to remove them from their cockpits at this time.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar was thoughtful enough to put Avatar Commander Melkor in charge of this first wave of exploration.

"Why?"

"Because you are stronger than other people who have engaged in qi cultivation." Caslla privately explained to Melkor over a private communication channel. "If the Blue Dimension is populated by dangerous beings, then you should be able to lead our men to safety."

"I shall do my best then, Saint Commander. Thank you for giving me this opportunity"

The shuttles had already sorted out their entry order and many other factors that Ketis did not even think of. She still floated out in space in just her combat armor at this time.

As much as her fellow Larkinsons urged her to retreat to the Spirit of Bentheim where she wouldn't be directly exposed to potential threats anymore, Ketis did not feel like retreating from this historic event.

"I will lead the way."

"But ma'am, your safety—"

Ketis swung the Heavensword in a sharp and cutting motion.

The relic responded by letting loose an arc of sharp and lethal blade light!

"I can defend myself. I need to see what I have wrought for myself."

She did not tolerate any objections. She used her combat armor's maneuvering system to fly towards the forward-most shuttle and planted her feet onto its roof. A simple application of electromagnetism caused her boots to remain secure onto the metal surface.

"Proceed." She commanded.

The shuttle was small and short enough that Ketis did not have to duck when the fairly slim scouting vehicle passed through the breach.

For a moment, Ketis felt as if she had been torn inside and out, but that illusion faded quickly once she successfully entered a new and completely different space.

An unknown source of pressure lightly brushed against her steely mind. She was able to ignore it easily enough, but the same could not be said for the crew manning the scouting shuttle.

"Swordmaster, we are being affected by an unknown energy field that is inducing noise, nausea and other debilitating effects on us all! Not a single of us is spared from this hazard!"

Ketis frowned. She actively resonated with the Heavensword. The weapon automatically began to unfold a protective energy field that possessed exceptional qualities.

The new energy field expanded until it encompassed the entire scout shuttle.

"Have I managed to relieve the symptoms."

"Yes... Ah... that is a relief. I can still feel the droning in the back of my head, but it is only a fraction as strong as before. We can work bear with this remaining pressure."

"How long do you think you will last if I was not around to provide relief?"

"40 minutes. Maybe shorter depending on how well we can endure the pressure and pain in our heads."

That was not much time!

"Please send back a probe detailing all of this information." Ketis briskly commanded. "Tell our fleet to set up a rotation of personnel. They must be cycled fairly regularly. No Larkinson should stay here for longer than 30 or 35 minutes at most. Also tell our fellow Larkinsons to prepare more automated systems. Our probes and other technological products do not appear to be suffering from any form of degradation."

Once the scout shuttle sent a probe back to the other side of the breach, the vessel slowly began to boost forward.

Meanwhile, more shuttles entered the Blue Dimension from behind.

As more and more humans entered and experienced the same painful droning in their heads, they weren't able to enjoy Ketis' protection, so staying here was pure torture!

If not for the fact that they were all professional soldiers who had experienced warfare and hardships over the course of at least several years, they wouldn't have been able to last so long!

Ketis was not here to babysit them. She had a more important goal in mind. As the scout shuttle approached the direction where the nearest source of strong energy readings could be found, her anticipation began to rise.

She gripped her Heavensword tighter in her greaves. She would have preferred to wield the Bloodsinger, but her true life sword was simply not strong or useful enough to perform at this level.

She also needed to maintain the charade that the Heavensword was responsible for creating an entrance to a dimension that was potentially filled with strategic materials.

Eventually, the headlights of the scout shuttle managed to pierce through the blue mist and shine a light on what appeared to be soil. Blue soil.

"What the...?"

As more and more of the source became visible, Ketis and the crew realized that they had just stumbled upon a fairly small floating 'island' of sort!

All of the dirt and ground on the surface layer was remarkably flat, but not in a disturbingly unnatural fashion.

The bottom of the floating island was roughly shaped like a cone. The geometric shape was quite obvious!

None of this seemed natural to Ketis. What was this place? Why did it look like this? Why was everything in blue?"

"Have you discovered any superdimensional materials yet?" Ketis asked.

"Our initial scans have returned with frankly baffling data, ma'am. We had to manually check whether the AIs made the right judgment and whether there is anything amiss with our sensors. So far, we have not found any signs of malfunctions or glitches. If the data is to be believed, this entire island... is superdimensional."

"WHAT?!"

Ketis lost her composure when she heard that. Was it truly possible for this strange blue island to consist entirely out of superdimensional matter?!

"Ah, before you get too excited ma'am, this is far from the best variation of superdimensional materials that can theoretically exist. The superdimensional version of dirt is only useful for building or expanding large fortifications. What we need is weapon-grade and armor-grade superdimensional materials, which should mostly come in the form of metallic ores. Due to the huge interference produced by the entire island, we are unable to scan for the more strategically valuable variations of superdimensional matter."

"Are you telling me... that we have to dig up this island to search for ore?"

"Yes, ma'am. We are not quite sure whether our digging equipment can even dig through superdimensional matter. Our tools may break."

"Great."

Chapter 6739: A Gift to Red Humanity

The spontaneous exploration of the 365th dimension completely disrupted the schedules of many people in the Davute System and beyond.

Ever since the bigshots found out that the tear in space led to a dimension that was potentially filled with the same matter that made Saint Piercer arms so incredibly deadly, a huge effort went underway to exploit this temporary miracle as much as possible!

The first shuttles that passed through were ordinary scout shuttles, troop shuttles and mining shuttles that the Larkinson Clan and other nearby forces had on hand.

That changed soon enough. The Colonial Federation of Davute and the Red Three had been caught off guard, but that did not stump them for long.

The best designers they had available quickly designed a very specific mining vessel and fabricated it with all of the materializers and superfabs they had available in the Davute System.

Soon enough, purpose-built vessels that looked like extremely long passenger vehicles started to approach the tear in space and pass right through.

Each of them possessed a cross-section that was almost 20 meters tall and 5 meters wide.

Their length varied, with the longest one measuring well up to 150 meters!

The RF probably would have preferred to make them even longer than that if there weren't any concerns about unknown threats and environmental hazards.

The newly fabricated 'shuttles' consisted almost entirely of harvesting and mining vehicles. Their considerable volumes granted them more than enough capacity to efficiently harvest a huge amount of matter that could only be found in the Blue Dimension.

Ketis was rather perplexed as she witnessed all of this activity taking place.

Hours had passed by since she initially entered the Blue Dimension. Her sword aura kept herself and whoever was close at hand protected from the pervasive pressure exerted by the environment.

In fact, it was not just Ketis that was able to resist the unknown effect. Particularly good swordsmen and sword initiates were able to more effectively resist the pressure of the mysterious energy field as well.

The Larkinson Clan happened to have a lot of them, so many of them had been drafted to act as temporary mining workers and security guards.

Ketis had not bothered to explore the mysterious dimension any further. She continued to stand on top of a shuttle as she witnessed the huge man-made effort to steal away as much of the floating blue island as possible within the 24-hour timeframe.

The dedicated mining shuttles possessed all manner of devices and mechanisms that allowed them to break off pieces of soil and shove them into their sizable cargo bays.

All of it happened to be transphasic.

The initial attempt to dig through the island ended in abject failure. All of the drills and blades wore down and broke far too easily when digging through the superdimensional rock and dirt.

People quickly discovered that only transphasic tools could resist the accelerated erosion effect, and even that was limited depending on how much phasewater saturated the mining equipment.

This effectively locked out the poorer and more grassroots entrepreneurs and organizations from taking advantage of this bounty.

Only the bigger players such as the state and the Red Three were able to harvest a huge amount of superdimensional matter from the Blue Dimension.

That did not mean that the smaller groups and outfits gave up, though. Some of them had taken to harvesting the blue gasses as they became convinced they could develop a useful purpose for it somehow.

Others chose to venture deeper into Dimension #365. They either sought new treasures, encountered native beasts or found other superdimensional islands before coming back to sell the coordinates to an interested party.

Out of respect for 'the Heavensword' for creating this unimaginably valuable portal through dimensions, everyone deferred to Ketis when deciding on who was permitted to enter the dimension and how their spoils should be divided.

"Anyone can try their luck if they have a shuttle and are willing to brave the hazards of this dimension." She declared at the time. "This dimension breach is our gift to red

humanity, not to the Larkinson Clan alone. I only hope that my clan and the Red Three can set up a form of traffic control so that everyone who is interested has a fair share of profiting from their own discoveries in this dimension. The Red Three should not monopolize everything. Everyone should have the chance to become stronger and fight for a better future."

Whether the bigshots respected Ketis or not, they took her words seriously and did not allow anyone to take ownership or abuse their control over the dimension breach.

Ketis felt satisfied with how everything unfolded so far. She knew extremely well that humans had always engaged in one form of infighting or another. They couldn't help but tear their rivals down in order to climb their way up. She half-expected for an idiot or three to come along and test her patience.

A pity.

She could have used an exercise.

She looked forward to being the first human to execute another in this new dimension.

As dozens of mining shuttles and other small vessels continued to break down the superdimensional island, a handful of smaller demimechs flew in to assist in the effort. Their transphasic shovels, pickaxes and drills were remarkably effective at breaking down the harder and more valuable superdimensional matter.

Few groups had any demimechs on hand that were small enough to fit through the dimension breach. Not even the Larkinson Clan had any on hand.

Most ordinary mechs were too big to safely squeeze their way through. Only the big players were able to materialize or cobble them together in a short amount of time.

The demimechs fulfilled several different functions. Dozens of them had been sent on scouting trips. Others assisted in the mining effort. The remainder were armed as heavily as their limited frames could fit and guarded the vulnerable shuttles.

Ketis reminded to herself that she should really purchase the System upgrade that would allow her to increase the size of the dimension breach.

One of the demimechs fabricated by the Larkinson Clan approached Ketis' position.

The machine lacked any form of coating and its design was very crude and basic. The mech technicians who put it together in a hurry had only bothered to apply the crest of the Larkinson Clan on its chest to denote its allegiance.

The demimech was a little more special than the others because it radiated an aura of courage.

This was because its pilot happened to be Venerable Vincent!

Despite the unknown dangers of the Blue Dimension, Vincent did not hesitate to be the first Larkinson expert pilot to pass through the breach.

Even though he had been reduced to using the weakest demimech that he ever had the pleasure to pilot, Vincent was not a stranger to controlling bad machines.

He offered to stick in her vicinity and guard her from threats, but she didn't need the protection.

She instead sent him on a scouting trip and saw what everyone was doing.

"How was your journey?"

"Boring." Vincent replied over the communication channel. "Nobody has encountered any blue beasts or intelligent aliens so far. They haven't found any signs that these creatures existed in the area. So far, it looks like there is nothing alive in this part of the Blue Dimension. All people have found are half-a-dozen more islands, though a few of them are much smaller than the one before us. It remains to be seen whether there is anything truly worthwhile to mine."

"I see. I hope the prospectors are not letting down their guard too much in their greed."

"That's a tall order, Ketis. Everyone has developed a fever for these fancy new superdimensional matter. The Red Three has been scooping up dirt after dirt as if it has become the new phasewater."

"Does this dirt truly match the value of phasewater?" Ketis asked.

Vincent scoffed. "Well, the eggheads tried to explain it to me, but I didn't understand much of the science talk. All I managed to figure out is that just because something is superdimensional doesn't mean it is worth lots of MTA credits. There is nothing special about this dirt. It is made up of roughly the same kind of stone and other matter that make up asteroids and such. The stuff is only a bit more special because it is somehow superdimensional. Have you heard of the new way that the Red Three has classified superdimensional stuff?"

"No." Ketis said. "Communication is difficult in this dimension. All of this blue gas is inhibiting the transmissions of signals."

"Well, according to the people I have talked to, there are 5 grades in total, based on how valuable they are to first-raters. The dirt and most of the rock is labeled as structure-grade superdimensional matter. No superdimensional material is useless. Their density and toughness is higher because they exist in a lot of dimensions at the same time. That makes them useful to build strong buildings or other stuff that needs a lot of relatively affordable materials that can do the job."

"I see." Ketis looked thoughtful. "So that is why the Red Three is so eager to devour this entire island."

"That's not the only reason why they are trying to dismantle this cone-shaped island. They want to get the bad stuff out of the way so that they can get at the good stuff... if it exists."

"What are the next grades, then?"

"Next up is hull-grade superdimensional matter." Venerable Vincent answered. "These are ores and metals that are not particularly strong, but still better than dirt. They are hard and tough enough that they can withstand a lot of punishment, but only if they are stacked up in thick plating. This makes them a good choice to turn into hull plating and internal structural support for big warships. People have already found them in moderate quantities inside several islands."

"I hope our clan is not neglecting this grade of superdimensional matter, then."

"Oh, definitely not. There is already talk about upgrading the cat head prow of the Spirit of Bentheim with this kind of matter."

"That is a good choice. Ves would love that." Ketis smiled. "What is next?"

"The next two grades are armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter. The expectations for armor-grade matter is high, as it is tough enough that even lighter armor plating can be used to make tough defenses that is better than transphasic armor plating of the same thickness. Everyone with a first-class mech dreams of using armor-grade matter to cover their machines."

"And weapons-grade?"

"It is one of the highest and rarest grades that we will probably be able to find in this dimension." Vincent answered. "This stuff is the best we found so far. The eggheads of the Red Association has already confirmed that the hardness, density and so on of weapons-grade superdimensional matter is the same kind of material used to create Saint Piercer arms. In other words, as long as we have enough weapons-grade superdimensional matter, we can build our own Saint Piercers!"

That was a huge development!

Many red humans had sought to imitate or develop a substitute for Saint Piercer arms, but no one knew how to obtain the materials used to make these confoundingly deadly weapons.

Now they found a source for the building blocks that could be used to make Saint Piercer arms!

"Do you think the reason why the Red Cabal can make Saint Piercer arms is because they have a way of entering the Blue Dimension themselves?" Ketis speculatively asked. "Or do you think the ancient phase whales can outright produce weapons-grade superdimensional matter with their own spatial abilities?"

"Why are you asking me, Ketis? I'm just an expert pilot. I have no idea how the aliens are able to make their fancy Saint Piercers. All I know is that we don't have to fear their Saint Piercers as much anymore. Once our mechs are upgraded with this stuff, we can fight the phase lords without having to worry about getting killed with a single hit like what happened with Imon Ingvar."

Chapter 6740: The Sudden New Trend

Ketis had somewhat unwittingly unleashed a new frenzy among red humanity.

Everyone who was far-sighted or quick-witted enough knew what this meant.

Superdimensional materials had become the new rage.

Beyond phasewater, beyond hyper materials, superdimensional materials had become the new wonder material that red humanity sought to rely upon to defeat their alien foes and gain supremacy in the Red Ocean.

The new fever had spread far and wide in this formerly undisturbed dimension.

By using the Dimension Blade to open a tear to the Blue Dimension, she had forever broken the peace and stability that had reigned in this seemingly lifeless domain.

She was almost afraid of what would happen once the tear in space finally sputtered out. People would be demanding her to open up another dimension breach. They would claim that it was 'for the greater good', and their words would ring true more or less, except it would also serve their selfish purpose.

Ketis was ready to bear this burden.

She did not ask for this responsibility, but she did not eschew it either. She felt a sense of purpose and duty that went beyond her own wellbeing and the wellbeing of her clan.

Red humanity needed to survive in order to provide a better future for herself, her husband, her children and everyone she cared about and did not care about.

This was what she fought for. This was the reason why she was willing to misdirect everyone about the true reason why she was able to create the dimension breach in the first place.

By giving the public the impression that she was only able to create a dimensional tear by borrowing the power of the Heavensword, the authorities would more easily accept that she was not able to do so again so easily.

Because she had no agency in the act. It was all up to the Heavensword, and no one had the right or the courage to command an ancient grand work.

In fact, the real reason why she was not able to create an identical dimension breach was because she had just squandered her last Ascension Points.

She could not afford the whopping 200 AP price to create a new tear in space!

To that end, she hoped that everyone but particularly the Larkinson Clan harvested as many superdimensional materials that they sought in the 24-hour timeframe.

As Ketis continued to stand on top of the original shuttle that brought her here, she glanced at the mechs that had continued to act as an honor guard of sorts.

The machines no longer comprised the cheap and shabby second-class demimechs that had been fabricated in a hurry.

The Red Association's much better and stronger first-class demimechs had insisted on guarding her as well.

What also stood out were the larger and more formidable full-sized first-class multipurpose mechs.

The mechers had found a way to build a temporary fortification inside the Blue Dimension and set up enough materializers to fabricate full-sized mechs with the help of imported materials.

The machines were not on par with proper first-class multipurpose mechs, but the ones the RA managed to materialize in a hurry were nonetheless a lot stronger than the smaller demimechs!

Though Ketis thought that their protection was unnecessary, she did not voice her opinion.

She knew she was banking too much on the Heavensword's protection. She recalled Ves' warnings about relying too much on the strength of an external object and knew she was growing too dependent on the powerful relic.

The only sword that she could truly trust above all else was her life blade.

It was too bad that her Bloodsinger was too weak and inadequate to help her in times like these.

Yet word about superdimensional materials gave her hope that she might be able to change the truth about her weapon.

The Bloodsinger was inadequate compared to the Heavensword for all sorts of reasons, but the most basic one was that the material composition of the former was equivalent to garbage compared to the latter.

If the Larkinson Clan was able to gain enough weapon-grade superdimensional materials, then Ketis may be able to reforge the Bloodsinger and turn it into a weapon that was truly worthy for her grip!

Even if the new version of the Bloodsinger still fell short of the Heavensword in terms of artifact spirit and other qualities, at least her life sword had made a significant amount of progress.

To that end, Ketis inquired about the spoils that the Larkinson Clan had obtained up to this point.

Venerable Vincent did not mind acting as a messenger and courier. He regularly flew around to keep an eye on what others were doing and to pass information around.

When he next stopped by Ketis' position, the blue island that she was staring at had almost disappeared.

Shuttles and makeshift mining demimechs had devoured all of the rock and dirt. Soon enough, there would be nothing left as greedy humans did not let off a single grain of blue sand!

"Hello again, Vincent."

"Heya. I see you haven't moved. Don't you get tired?"

"I need to stay here."

"Sheesh. You are taking this way too far. There is nothing to see here. Why don't you take a break and eat a meal? Don't you need to visit the bathroom?"

"No need. My suit of combat armor takes care of everything."

"..."

"Tell me about what the Larkinson Clan has gained."

"The spoils are great, but not as huge as everyone was hoping for. Don't get me wrong. The patriarch and many people are still happy, but they couldn't help but wish for more."

"Please elaborate."

"Well, this Blue Dimension is largely empty if you discount this blue mist." The demimech waved his hand and disturbed the mist that looked blue when illuminated by external light sources. "This place is only sparsely populated with these strange cone-shaped islands. Many scout shuttles and scout demimechs have traveled further away in an attempt to explore and map this location, but all they have found is more blue mist as well as a blue island here or there. As far as these islands are concerned,

there is plenty of structure-grade superdimensional material to go around, but very little of the higher grades."

"Ah. I understand. The harvest of higher grades of superdimensional materials is not as much as we have hoped." Ketis surmised.

"Yup. We have plenty of structure-grade superdimensional materials to reinforce our bases and headquarters and such, but that is not what people truly want. From what I have heard, our clan managed to harvest a decent amount of hull-grade superdimensional ore, enough to construct a destroyer-sized vessel or strengthen the prow of the Spirit of Bentheim. People are still arguing about whether we should construct the former or do the latter."

"Has Ves issued a verdict?"

"Not yet. He is rather divided over the decision. He has a RF Frigate Token that would be perfect for constructing a superdimensional frigate, but he is also very partial to the Spirit of Bentheim. What would you choose, Ketis?"

"The latter." Ketis did not hesitate in giving her answer. "Ves is beginning to waver about his commitment to retain the Spirit of Bentheim as his flagship. It would be good for the factory ship to receive a powerful upgrade that would allow her to serve our clan as our flagship."

"Ah. I think a superdimensional frigate would be more useful to us. You know, we don't necessarily have to choose. If you can open another tear to the Blue Dimension that lasts a little longer, I am sure we can do both and still have enough hull-grade superdimensional materials left over to build a statue or whatever."

Ketis grimaced. "Creating a breach between dimensions that lasts longer than a few minutes demands a heavy price. It is not one that I can cover so easily. My answer to you is the same as the answer that I have issued to everyone else that has made similar requests. Do not expect me to repeat my earlier feat so soon."

It only cost 10 Ascension Points to create a breach lasting for 10 minutes, but 200 AP if he wanted it to last an entire day!

Ketis would have to complete a lot of Missions and maybe even undertake a marathon by herself just to scrounge enough Ascension Points to give everyone access to the Blue Dimension once again.

Next time, she would definitely plan it out. The Larkinson Clan, the Red Three and other participants should already have all of the vehicles and mechs ready to invade the Blue Dimension once again and plunder all of the spoils they could make off with in a 24-hour timespan.

That was the only way to make the most out of the 200 AP he sacrificed to briefly wield the Dimension Blade!

"Well, moving on, the amount of armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimension materials we made off with is not that much. So far, we have managed to harvest barely acceptable amounts of armor-grade superdimensional ore. There is not enough to make an entire superdimensional mech, but it is enough to cover its exterior with superdimensional plating. The patriarch has already laid claim on it for use in a future project. I am betting that he is thinking about using it to armor the next version of the Bastion, but I might be wrong."

Ketis personally agreed with Vincent's judgement. There were many other high-ranking mechs as well as ace mechs that could use superdimensional armor plating, but only one was worthy to be the first.

Venerable Jannzi and the Bastion's performance in the previous battle only reinforced the belief that the pair were so committed to protecting the Larkinsons that they were willing to sacrifice their lives to fulfill their mission!

Though Jannzi failed to break through in the end, she had demonstrated the truthfulness of her conviction. Everyone treated her with more respect as a result. She more than deserved a powerful defensive upgrade to her expert mech.

"Has there been any objections about his decision to claim all of the armor-grade superdimensional ore?"

"No." Vincent replied. "If there is, I haven't heard about it. I don't have any ears in the Design Department."

Ketis could already guess that Gloriana had opinions about how to best make use of the superdimensional materials.

"What about the higher grade?"

"Ah, the amount of weapon-grade superdimensional ore that we've managed to gather is much less. However, mech weapons don't take as much materials to build, so there may be just enough to make a really sharp and powerful sword."

Ketis grew more interested. "Enough for a greatsword?"

"No. Just enough for a smaller one like the Everchanger's Heartsword. Time is not up, though. Our mining crews are still hard at work trying to strip away more cone-shaped islands. Maybe we'll be able to gather more by the time the temporary dimension door fizzles out. If you want to gather enough weapon-grade superdimensional ore to upgrade the First Sword's Decapitator, then you may need to play nice with the Red Three. They are much better at stripping the Blue Dimension of resources than us. I bet that they have managed to gather more than enough weapon-grade ore to construct 3 superdimensional mech greatswords."

That gave her hope of being able to use this unexpected development to upgrade the First Sword's weapon.

She could already imagine the First Sword slicing spatial barriers apart with a single swing and decapitating lesser phase lords in an instant!

"Good idea. I have already scheduled a meeting with the Red Three in order to answer their questions and talk about the future. I am sure I can close a deal that will make up for the shortfall."

Forging a superdimensional blade became imperative to Ketis.

She was not satisfied with reforging the Heartsword. The Everchanger already obtained the Bitter Scimitar anyway. The First Sword had greater need for an upgraded weapon, and Ketis was determined to answer the call!