

## Mech Touch 6741

### Chapter 6741: Briefing Ketis

Every party had to come to an end.

After the 20th hour, the boundary that kept the door between dimensions open began to show signs of instability.

That spooked a lot of people. The scientists that had been studying it all day could not predict when the portal will actually close because they never studied anything like it in the past.

While there were plenty of people that were willing to take Ketis at her words, there were other people that did not want to suffer the consequences in case she was wrong.

People started to make their way out, whether they were willing or not. This was the first time that they entered a dimension that was filled with superdimensional materials.

Sure, the vast majority of it consisted of low-grade dirt that could only be used to build stronger fortifications, but that already represented quite a lot of value!

The higher grades of superdimensional materials practically made the first-raters salivate. From being able to fabricate mechs that could more effectively resist Saint Piercer arms, to crafting their own superdimensional weapons, the Blue Dimension had given red humanity such an enormous gift that it could change the course of the Red War forever.

As more and more people unwillingly left the 365th dimension, Ketis did not try to be stubborn and posture for posture's sake. She prudently agreed to leave the dimension well before the dimension breach was supposed to disappear.

She already knew that the System only promised that the tears in space lasted for their stated duration if they were not disturbed.

If an enemy attacked a temporary dimension door, the latter would definitely lose stability a lot faster, thereby causing it to disappear a lot sooner than it should!

Still, Ketis did not feel overly concerned if an enemy did show up and somehow blew up the dimensional portal.

It only cost 10 AP for her to create a short-lasting dimension breach that could bring her back to the material realm where she belonged.

Unfortunately, no traitor or saboteur took the bait. Perhaps they thought that since Ketis still carried the Heavensword, she could always make her way back to normal space.

The mining continued even after the Blue Dimension slowly hosted less and less people. The Red Three had produced enough automated mining vehicles that they could break down the blue islands without needing any instruction.

Everyone watched as the tear in space abruptly winked out exactly 24 standard hours after Ketis created it with the Heavensword.

That ended the first instance that red humanity harvested a bounty of precious resources from a different dimension.

Ketis did not have time to retire to her grand stateroom and take care of her children. A lot of powerful individuals and groups wanted to meet with her in private.

She only agreed to meet with the representatives of the Red Three.

This was how she found herself in a RA fleet carrier. She barely had any opportunity to sightsee as her route led her straight to a small but comfortable meeting room.

Just as promised, the Red Association, the Red Fleet and the Red Collective all sent only one person that was authorized to speak on their behalf.

Ketis wanted to keep this meeting simple, so she rejected the demand to let in more people.

This made the Terrans and the Rubarthans quite upset, but she figured that they could obtain the information they wanted through the Red Collective.

"Alright. I am here. I have already answered numerous questions before, but if you want me to tell you more, then I am willing to offer clarification... up to a point."

A woman from the Red Collective bowed. "We would not presume to impose ourselves on you. We are grateful for what you have done. We called for this meeting for your benefit as well as ours."

"That is true." A captain from the Red Fleet spoke. "The large amount of superdimensional matter found in the Blue Dimension has given us a much greater understanding of the nature of superdimensional matter. The structure-grade superdimensional dirt that everyone looks down upon may not be particularly valuable, but there is so much of it that many researchers and developers will have access to plenty of samples. Already, our local scientists have begun to make numerous discoveries that they would never have been able to make if they were only aware of superdimensional materials in theory."

The Red Fleet was able to keep up with the Red Association in terms of most scientific innovation. The fleeters possessed the best 'mundane' scientists and were likely a lot more organized when attempting to research the massive bounty from the 365th dimension.

"Through the Saint Piercer arms wielded by the native aliens, we have all learned how powerful superdimensional matter can be." The man from the RA spoke. "One of the reasons why the native aliens are able to press forward with their Red Tide Offensive is because more and more phase lords are wielding Saint Piercer arms. For months, the native aliens have taken advantage of their monopoly on superdimensional materials to bully and restrain our champions. We simply could not understand how their sharp and unbreakable spears are able to pierce right through Saint Kingdoms and breach through the armor of ace mechs as if they were made of butter. Now, we can find the answers to these questions and more because we have an abundant amount of staples to study and experiment with. This is but one of the significant gifts that you have bestowed upon our civilization."

"For the contribution that you have made, we have seen fit to bestow you with a large sum of war merits." The collie declared. "Its sum will pale in comparison to the value

of all of the superdimensional materials that we have been able to mine with your help, but the Red War is tying up many resources and assets."

Ketis nodded in understanding. "I do not care about war merits. What I care about is the quantity of superdimensional ore that my clan has been able to obtain from this brief interdimensional excursion. I have been informed that our clan has not harvested enough weapon-grade superdimensional ore to forge a mech greatsword for the First Sword. Can I exchange all of my war merits for enough weapon-grade ore to make up for the shortfall?"

An awkward silence ensued.

It was rather understandable that for all of the goodwill that they had shown her, they were more than reluctant to relinquish a significant amount of precious materials.

"Star Designers had already laid claim on the higher grades of superdimensional matter that we have collected in the last 24 hours." The RA representative said. "If it is necessary, we can relinquish a modest share of weapon-grade ore, but doing so will upset the plans of multiple mech designers of the highest rank."

That was not a good idea.

The Red Collective also shook her head. "Your purpose is noble, but it is ultimately too small. There are many cultivators among us that await artifacts that can massively increase their combat effectiveness against the enemies of red humanity. From assassins to human phase lords, each of them can perform their duties much more effectively once they receive superior gear. We are also willing to part with a small quantity of weapon-grade ore, but it would be best for all of us if the Red Association and the Red Fleet are willing to make equal contributions."

That was smart. Getting the entire Red Three to cough up 1/3rd of a share each was a much more bearable price to pay.

Of course, by denying the opportunity to meet Ketis' demand alone also closed the door to earning a massive amount of favor from the swordmaster.

The man from the RA frowned. It was clear that he was in private communication with a superior, or perhaps he was receiving direct instructions from a Star Designer!

Whatever the case, the mecher relented. "There are Star Designers that have already designed the perfect upgrades for the Ragnarok, the Heartpierdcer and other god mechs. The higher grades of superdimensional matter are that valuable. They can not only be used to make the god mechs tougher and more lethal, but with the right application they can also speed up their transluminal travel methods, thereby enabling them to come to the rescue sooner than what was previously possible."

Everyone else's eyes widened.

This was a big deal!

Almost every god mech was patrolling the frontlines trying to wipe out as many native alien fleets and bases they encountered.

While the god mechs were undoubtedly wreaking a lot of destruction, the native aliens were so numerous that they could still persist with their assault despite the frequent disruptions.

If god mechs were able to reach other star systems 20 or 30 percent faster, then that would be a gamechanger!

"Is it truly possible to increase the traversal speed of god mechs?" Ketis asked.

"It should be possible, but not in the short term." The RF representative spoke truthfully just to put the RA down. "Have you come across the idea that there is a connection between phasewater and superdimensional matter?"

"I have not thought about it." Ketis admitted. "But now that you mention it, perhaps they are strongly related. Phasewater... should also be a superdimensional substance by definition. If that is the case, then they should inhabit the 365th dimension or other compatible dimensions. Instead, they can only be found here in the Red Ocean."

"We are still looking for answers." The mecher said. "There are already theories that our scientists are working hard to test. One popular theory that has emerged so far is that phasewater should not be available in the entire material universe. For whatever

reason, a powerful third party has ripped a large amount of phasewater away and placed the liquids into planets."

"That is not the only theory that is gaining steam. There is another theory that phasewater is generated by phase whales accidentally evolving the ability to extract phasewater directly from the 365th dimension or another place. That, or they are able to directly create more phasewater."

The theories sounded interesting, but Ketis was not interested to delve into this matter.

"So there is a definite connection between phasewater and other superdimensional matter. The former may be different enough from the latter to show up in completely different places."

"Just so, swordmaster. Our researchers are continuing to study the relationships between phasewater and superdimensional matter."

Ketis did not see how that could be useful in the short term. She was much more interested in how her actions had strengthened red humanity.

"Please answer these questions for me. Is armor-grade superdimensional matter truly effective when used to withstand Saint Piercer attacks? Is weapon-grade superdimensional matter truly penetrating enough to cut through azure energy shields and spatial barriers with just a single swing of a weapon?"

"Yes to both questions." The RA representative said. "However, you should not believe in absolutes. Armor-grade matter can only partially withstand Saint Piercer attacks. The weapons wielded by the phase lords are much larger depending on the scale of their wielders. That already gives them an inherent advantage. As for weapon-grade superdimensional weapons, they only require one attack to remove one azure energy shield outright, but only up to a point. There are stronger azure energy shields and spatial barriers that can resist one strike. They can rarely resist two strikes, however. That is how powerful such a multidimensional weapon can be in the hands of the right wielders."

The Red Three did not loosen their criteria at all. If an ore was judged to be armor-grade or weapon-grade, then it could most definitely be used to increase the defenses of mechs and give them the ability to threaten enemy phase lords more directly!

No longer would the alien champions be able to hide behind their nearly impervious spatial barriers with impunity!

Chapter 6742: Raised Importance

The Red Three undoubtedly benefited the most from the unexpected opportunity to harvest resources from the Blue Dimension.

What they could not stand was how Ketis just decided to reveal this capability and open up a gateway to another dimension without warning!

If the mechers, fleeter and collies received advance warning of what Ketis was about to do, they could have made much more extensive preparations.

They could have transferred in professional mining personnel from other star systems.

They could have designed better mining shuttles and mechs before producing them in large numbers.

They could have developed a much more thorough flight plan and schedule in order to optimize the use of the small 20 meters by 5 meters portal.

They could have sent in a lot of scientists and high-end survey shuttles to delve into the many mysteries of the Blue Dimension.

"If we called in the Dimensional Architect and the Spacelock, then we may have easily been able to harvest a hundred times more gains." The RA representative shared one of his theories. "Their combined expertise and power over dimensions would have given us a much greater understanding of the nature of the dimensional portal generated by your Heavensword. They may even be able to extend the duration of the breach or even keep it open on a more permanent basis."

Though the mecher did not outright say it, she and the others who spoke on behalf of the Red Three all blamed Ketis for going about this in such a haphazard way!

She didn't even inform her own clan in advance of what she had in mind!

This had definitely contributed to a disappointing harvest of superdimensional materials for the Larkinsons. It was painful to be unable to harvest enough armor-grade superdimensional material to construct a whole mech out of it. The amount of weapon-grade superdimensional material was also only enough to build one short to medium-sized mech sword.

If the Red Three hadn't easily agreed to exchange the original war merits award with additional weapon-grade superdimensional ore, Ketis wouldn't have been able to secure enough of it to reforge the Decapitator!

What could she say to all of the accusations?

"Would you have believed me when I told you that I can open up a portal directly to the Blue Dimension?" Ketis said. "Would you have diverted so much people and stuff during this difficult phase of the Red Tide Offensive just because I told you that I may or may not be able to open up a temporary gate into a dimension where scientists have only theorized the presence of superdimensional materials? Do I have enough credibility that you would encourage the Dimensional Architect and the Spacelock to drop everything and travel to my location just to see if they could study and prolong a supposed breach between dimensions?"

"..."

"I find it hard that no one would take my claims seriously." The swordmaster spoke. "The Red Three have much bigger concerns on their mind. Even if you think that I am convinced I can open a portal to another dimension, would you truly think I am credible enough to bring over so many people and mining vehicles?"

"Your patriarch would have convinced us to take your claims more seriously. Why did you not inform him in advance?"

Ketis shrugged. "Do I need to tell him everything I do on a daily basis? He is not my father. I don't know how you do it in your own organizations, but here in the Larkinson Clan, Ves trusts me to do what is best for us without micromanaging us all of the time. He is too preoccupied with his own projects anyway. I did not have a good idea of what to expect. Can you blame me for not fully believing in the capabilities of my new blade? I don't even understand how swinging it can result in opening up a gap between dimensions. It is not as if I can actually control it. I just felt like trying it out



to see for myself whether its claims are true. Well, it turned out that none of it was an exaggeration."

Though her audience believed that she was referring to the Heavensword, she was actually talking about the Dimension Blade.

This was one of the word tricks that Ketis had learned from studying and observing Ves' speeches.

Though a part of her felt conflicted about the use of misdirection, she knew it was for the better.

She could already feel the wheels turning in the minds of the three first-raters. They all developed a rather negative impression of Ketis.

She was a mech designer but also a swordmaster. She was doing her best to channel the latter without being too obvious that she was putting on a charade.

In fact, everything she did was deliberate. Even the random and haphazard way she opened up the first dimension breach was intentional!

By opening up a portal to the Blue Dimension in such a random and unprepared fashion, Ketis cemented her reputation as an irrational, whimsical and impulsive individual!

Even if she was a good Journeyman Mech Designer, she was unable to temper her irrational side as a swordmaster!

There was no rational explanation why she fearlessly entered the Blue Dimension and remained inside for 20 straight hours while doing nothing aside from standing on top of her shuttle!

It was stupid, pointless and exceedingly risky, yet Ketis did it anyway out of a misguided sense of bravery or other unexplainable reasons.

All of this reinforced the narrative that Ketis was not that thoughtful and reliable outside of her mech design responsibilities.

Ketis actually felt regretful that her deliberate plan caused the Larkinson Clan to miss out on harvesting a lot more superdimensional materials, but she knew that this was the only way to make her narrative convincing enough.

So far, it seemed like her deception worked. The way the three representatives patronizingly advised her to be more considerate next time indicated that they were truly worried that she would open up another dimensional portal without any forewarning!

"How soon can you next open up another entryway into another dimension?" The RF representative asked.

"You can forget about taking a trip to another dimension anytime soon." She said. "From what I know, creating a tear in space like before is very costly. Don't ask me the details, I don't know myself. I can't give you a schedule because I don't know how long it takes to gather enough energy to open up another dimensional portal. I can only tell you that if and when it is ready, I will give you a few days of warning in advance. At the very least, I don't want my clan to miss out on the gains."

"Can you control the target destination, or does the Heavensword decide on your behalf?"

"I can at least make sure of that." She said. "Right now, I think the Blue Dimension is a really good destination, but if any of you are able to find dimensions that are filled with even better resources, then feel free to pass on your information to me. I do have to tell you that whatever is responsible for opening up portals between dimensions can't reach every possible destination. There are dimensions that are so high that they are currently beyond our reach."

"Does that mean that it is possible to reach these higher dimensions in the future?"

"Probably."

As the meeting finally wrapped up, the RA representative made one more important declaration.

"I have just received confirmation from my superiors. Congratulations, Swordmaster Ketis. Several god pilots and Star Designers have unanimously voted in favor of raising your galactic citizenship to tier 3. The contributions to society that you have already made is considerable enough to give us a significantly better chance of reducing our losses in the Red War. When we factor in the contributions that you are likely to make in the future, we do not rule out the possibility of promotions."

Ketis already expected that the Red Three would raise her galactic citizenship. She was previously just a tier 8 galactic citizen, which was pretty remarkable for a Journeyman like herself, but this was completely different!

"Ves will be jealous if I become a tier 2 galactic citizen before him." She said.

The mecher ruefully smiled. "To be honest, the contributions made by your patriarch have long earned him a promotion to the next tier, but each application to make this happen is vetoed by very powerful individuals. It is possible that you will receive similar treatment because you are still a Journeyman and swordmaster. If you are able to promote to a sword saint, there will be much fewer objections to promoting you to a tier 2 galactic citizen."

Ketis inwardly sighed. She used to laugh at Ves whenever he complained about the Evolution Witch blocking his attempt to improve his galactic citizenship.

Now, she had joined the club as well!

It was all because those damn human gods couldn't stomach the idea of turning a mere Journeyman and swordmaster into a tier 2 galactic citizen!

Ketis really wanted to walk up to them and give them a piece of her mind by chopping at them with the Heavensword, but she quickly stuffed this impulsive thought in the depths of her mind.

She coughed instead. "Understandable. I am making considerable progress in my swordsmanship ever since I devised my new theory. That said, I am single-handedly pioneering a route to becoming a sword saint. It will take time for me to succeed."

"Will you be able to open a portal to another dimension more frequently if you successfully advance to the rank of sword saint?" The woman from the RC inquired.

"Definitely." Ketis confidently answered. "Taking one step closer to becoming a sword god grants me greater mastery in everything involving swordsmanship."

That was true, but her actual meaning was quite different from what her audience thought.

Ketis merely believed that she would be able to complete a lot more Missions and more lucrative ones at that once she became a sword saint.

Her AP income would rise. This would enable her to redeem more expensive upgrades to the Dimension Observatory and create dimension breaches more frequently than when she was still a swordmaster.

The three representatives exchanged glances with each other.

"The Red Collective is happy to designate you as a senior associate." The RC representative said. "This comes with many benefits. For example, we are willing to provide you with greater support and access to cultivation resources in order to assist your progress. We are also preparing to open up a new division within our superorganization that will assist you in promoting and disseminating your reformed swordsmanship."

"We already have the Red Swordsmanship Federation."

"That is true, but it does not have enough connections with the Red Collective, Swordmaster Ketis. Do not underestimate the value of our initiative. This new division will enable cross-pollination between reformed swordsmanship and other fields of systematic cultivation. It will be easier to obtain complementary sword artifacts from the Industrial Department. We can also consult the cultivation scientists of the Cultivation Method Department to systemize and improve the progress of sword practitioners. Everyone will benefit from our cooperation."

Ketis felt a bit ambivalent about the RC swooping in and exerting more direct control over the development of reformed swordsmanship.

She had to admit that the Collies had proven to be remarkably competent so far. They could truly boost everything related to the warrior profession by relying on the synergies with other departments.

However, once the RC inserted its hooks into the swordsmanship community, it would become impossible to separate the two from each other!

Unfortunately, this was an unstoppable trend. The Red Collective possessed a legitimate mandate to regulate all forms of cultivation, and that included extraordinary swordsmanship.

It was better to accept the new reality than try to resist it. Besides, Ves already wielded considerable influence in the RC, so she was not without insider allies.

"Very well. You can do what you want."

#### Chapter 6743: Superdimensional Reservations

After Ketis concluded her meeting with the representatives to the Red Three, she finally took the initiative to report to Ves.

As his physical projection appeared, both of them stared at each other. There was not that much for them to talk about considering that they had both planned this in advance.

Ketis successfully attracted and misdirected the public's attention.

She believed that she had done a convincing job of selling the notion that the ability to tear holes between dimensions came from the Heavensword instead of another source.

If Ves wanted to, he could have used the Dimension Blade to open up a portal himself so long as he had 200 Ascension Points to spare.

However, he had made the strategic decision not to do this because it would attract way too much heat onto himself.

Ketis had voluntarily taken up this responsibility so that she could relieve a burden from Ves.

She strengthened the foundation of the clan by becoming another pillar that was strong enough to prop it up by herself if necessary. More and more people began to view the Larkinson Clan as an enduring institution rather than a flash-in-the-pan like before.

Both of them should feel satisfied in meeting their objectives. The only issue that disappointed them was the meager spoils. It had been difficult for Ketis to refrain from warning her fellow Larkinsons about a potential windfall, but in the interests of safety, she had to make sure to give off the impression that she had acted spontaneously.

Now, Ketis had attracted a lot of unwelcome attention, but not many people should harbor ill intent towards her.

After all, unlike Ves, she was not in control of what she had wrought upon society.

"We've managed to earn quite a haul." Ves eventually spoke. "We could have harvested a lot more if we attempted to tax the income that others have earned or even monopolize the portal entirely, but... you have made the right choice. Not everyone likes the Red Three, but they are the best of what our race has to offer. They can do more with superdimensional matter than most of us I think."

Ketis nodded in agreement. "I have already made a superficial examination of several samples of superdimensional matter. I can already tell that it will be different working with it than other matters. It is not enough to use normal tools to process the materials into useful goods. We have to work with transphasic tools but most ideally superdimensional equipment in order to shape everything properly. Normal equipment will just break and wear down at an accelerated rate due to dimensional interference."

That was logical. Superdimensional matter existed in a league of its own. At least phasewater came in the form of a liquid that could easily be manipulated. The harder stuff was a lot harder to shape. Perhaps they may eventually be more malleable when subjected to extreme heat, but that did not solve every problem.

"Since we've discovered that phasewater is a variation of superdimensional matter, then that makes this problem a little easier to solve." Ves judged. "We'll settle with transphasic tools for now. Even if this gear wears out faster than usual, we can use it as a stopgap to produce superdimensional tools. Once we have reached this stage, we

can do all kinds of stuff with it. Is it possible to use structure-grade or hull-grade superdimensional tools to create stuff made of higher-grade materials?"

"I don't know." Ketis honestly answered. "Nobody can answer this question as of yet. We are all starting to explore this for the first time. I do not think it will take too long for us to obtain answers. The Red Three have already begun to experiment with many different samples before the dimension breach closed."

The Red Three would lead the initial research into a new field once again.

Now that red humanity had gained access to at least one source of superdimensional matter, it was not impossible for people to figure out other ways to get their hands on the material.

Perhaps the Dimensional Architect found a more technological means to replicate the act of creating a portal to another dimension.

Perhaps another clever Star Designer studied superdimensional matter extensively and figured out a way to artificially produce more of it in a laboratory environment.

Perhaps a more sympathetic cosmopolitan cell had a change of heart and decided to share the method the Red Cabal used to create its infamous Saint Piercer arms.

Whatever the case, Ketis did not assume that she would hold a monopoly on being the only source of obtaining superdimensional matter. Humans could be quite resourceful if they wanted to. They just needed an opportunity.

Ketis just happened to give them one.

Now that the Red Three harvested so much superdimensional matter that they could figure out a lot of information that previously eluded them, they could unlock a wealth of possibilities!

"You're definitely famous now." Ves said with a smile. "Welcome to the life of a high-profile galactic citizen. You won't be able to fade into the background anymore. As long as you keep carrying the Heavensword, the Red Three will never let you out of their sights. Have they offered to assign an escort fleet to you yet?"

"They did." Ketis replied with a sour expression. "It will be a bit difficult for the mechers, fleeters and collies to form an escort fleet in the short term due to existing military commitments. However, they don't seem to take no for an answer. They want their mechs, ships and cultivators around me at all times, ostensibly to protect me from greedy humans or hostile aliens. I told them that I don't need the protection. My Heavensword alone can probably chop up my protectors if it exerts its power to the fullest."

"Don't be so quick to turn them away. They are a necessary evil for now." Ves said with a sigh. "Our clan is not strong enough to give us the protection that we need. Just bear with it for now. Besides, trying to intimidate our enemies with what appears to be an infantry-grade sword is much harder than a fleet composed of mechers, fleeter and collie assets. You are just borrowing the power and reputation of the Red Three to drive away the idiots. You will get disturbed on a daily basis if they are not present. After all, you can't expect the expeditionary fleet to say no to a bunch of powerful Terrans or Fleeters, right?"

The swordmaster sighed. "I will try to negotiate a deal that is... agreeable to everyone. I will not let them drive me away from the frontlines, though. As a swordmaster, combat is essential to my progression. I can never stand by when fellow red humans are dying in droves. If I retreat from a war where the survival of my race and everyone I love is at stake, I may as well retire as a swordmaster."

"I think they will understand if you repeat this argument." Ves smiled in encouragement. "The Heavensword loves you precisely because you embody the virtues and ethos of a true swordswoman. That said, I doubt the Red Three will let you board enemy warships as casually as before. I bet the mechers and fleeters will seek to disable the enemy vessel from the outside while the collies will assign their most powerful cultivators as your honor guard."

"Ugh. Do not remind me of that. A part of me regrets what I have done, but... I will not let my selfish feelings get in the way of what must be done."

Ketis had demonstrated a form of sacrifice by knowingly inconveniencing her life in order to do what she thought was right.

Though she did not appear to have grown any stronger, Ves could sense that the weight of her decision had matured her to an extent. She was continuing to grow into a



leader who was gradually becoming more qualified to undertake heavy responsibilities.

The pair of mech designers continued to talk about other related subjects.

"I think your next goal is to turn the First Sword Mark III into a superdimensional mech, correct?"

Ketis nodded. "That is right, but I do not have enough armor-grade matter on hand to do that. I know that you have laid claim to the quantity that we have gathered, but is it truly necessary for you to take it away so soon when it will be years before you upgrade the Bastion?"

"Who told you that I am reserving the armor-grade superdimensional matter for the Bastion?"

The swordmaster blinked. "We were wrong?"

Ves smiled in amusement. "Evidently so. I can understand your confusion. Everyone thinks that the best defensive materials should always be used to upgrade the Bastion. I would agree with you if our schedules aren't already packed. No. Given that everyone expects the native aliens to make a critical offensive push in the short term, we need to use whatever we have on hand on solutions that will work out sooner rather than later."

"Which mech will benefit from our first batch of superdimensional matter?"

"My wife and I haven't made up our minds yet." He said. "Ace mechs should gain priority. A good argument could be made for the Dark Zephyr Mark III and the Minerva Mark II. It will be a bit harder to make the same case for the Amaranto Mark III. The Promethea Mark II is still too far on the horizon for me to consider. My preferred choice is the Riot Mark III."

"An expert mech?"

Ves nodded. "Not everyone will agree with this choice, but... I am willing to make a bet on Venerable Rosa Orfan. Her last performance did not end well, but she fought

well most of the time. The Riot Mark III is also an expert spearman mech that I am fond of. It has a lot of potential. If Venerable Orfan recovers fast enough and manages to break through in the short term, then the Riot Mark III can duel any lesser phase lord. As long as the machine is clad with superdimensional alloy and wields the tier 3 Destroyer spear, I think that there is no better melee offensive mech available to us that can fight against phase lords head-on. The Dark Zephyr Mark III can only play evasion games while the Amaranto Mark III, the Minerva Mark II and the Promethea Mark II cannot afford to get close under any circumstances."

What Ves sought was an ace mech that was brave enough to stall lesser and maybe even greater phase lords up close!

In order to make that happen, the ace mech had to be clad with armor plating that could effectively resist Saint Piercer arms.

One of the reasons why the Amphis Extremis failed to hold back the greater phase lords during the final battle of Viola Magnifica was because the ace offensive space knight did not dare to suffer even a single grazing strike from the enemy's Saint Piercer!

"There is another potential ace mech that could use this superdimensional upgrade. Your uncle Ark broke through as well during the last battle. His Lionheart can arguably become strong enough to threaten greater phase lords if it is protected by armor-grade superdimensional matter."

Ves shook his head. "No. It is not time yet for us to upgrade the Lionheart. We will have to wait too long. My wife and I can immediately start to work on the Riot Mark III Project after we have concluded the Minerva Mark II Project. Anything else will take too long."

"Have you thought about hiring more personnel to make your schedules lighter?"

"We have. We are working on it. That is all I can say."

Ketis still made a good point. Even she could see the problem with how Ves and Gloriana allowed themselves to become the bottlenecks of high-end mech design in the clan.

Chapter 6744: Good Leadership

"Why are you so stupid, Ves! The Riot Mark III is just an expert mech! Until Venerable Orfan has successfully broken through, she does not deserve to pilot a superdimensional mech! It is much more logical for us to use it to protect our ace mechs instead! We are still working on the Minerva Mark II Project, so we can easily incorporate armor-grade superdimensional matter in the design. I just need to gain access to samples as soon as possible so I can figure out whether it can be combined with archetech. Even if it is not possible, we can still use superdimensional matter to construct an exterior shell around an archemetal mech frame."

Ves winced a bit when his wife went on her usual tirade. He expected her to respond negatively to his tentative decision to reserve armor-grade superdimensional matter for the Riot Mark III as opposed to a 'worthier' mech.

"Not now, Gloriana. The kids are here, remember? Let's not disturb one of the few moments of the day when we can keep them company."

One of the consequences of their increased workloads was that Ves and Gloriana unfortunately had to make sacrifices in the amount of hours they spent with their children.

They still tried their best to be around their kids in the morning and the evening, but the children could only settle for school and their nannies in between.

Both parents had tried to bring one kid or another to their workplace when they had a free day, but that resulted in many distractions and far too little work being done.

Fortunately, the children were doing pretty well for themselves. They were smarter and more thoughtful than their peers and also understood the plight of their parents.

There were plenty of Larkinsons around them that could keep them company.

Sometimes, they stopped by their great-grandfather to hear about the old days of the Larkinson Family.

Other times, they played virtual games together.

"Meow~"

"Miaow~"

Naturally, the cats played a large role in keeping the children happy.

At this moment, Lucky was pressed up to Marvaine's side while Aurelia was gently brushing Clixie's fur. The two cats purred as they enjoyed this blissful moment.

Gloriana tended to stop yelling pretty quickly once she received a reminder that she was showing her ugly side to her children.

She threw Ves a mean look as if to convey that they were not done with this argument before plastering a smile on her face as she headed back to the living room.

"Aurelia, how are you doing at school as of late?" The mother asked as she sat down on the couch and embraced her oldest daughter in a hug.

"I already completed this year's mandatory courses in advance, mama." Aurelia spoke with reserved pride even as she continued to groom Clixie. "I managed to win lots of praises in my singing, dancing and music classes. I even earned the qualifications to perform in a theater. However, the theater shut down most of its scheduled programs due to martial law. More of us are being encouraged to take classes on military history and military theory. It is as if we are being prepared to attend officer school."

That disturbed Ves and Ketis. The Joan Devos Elementary School predominantly enrolled the children of the rich and powerful of New Constantinople VIII. The remainder were children who had shown exceptional intelligence and other gifts at an early age. It was pretty much one of the premier young talent factories of the Devos Ancient Clan.

The school's clear and obvious shift from civilian pursuits to military classes said much about the ancient clan's expectations of its future.

Even if red humanity managed to weather the Red Tide Offensive, the war between humans and the native aliens of the Red Ocean would probably drag on for many years. Society had to become a lot more militarized in order to meet the needs of the next few decades.

Ves and Gloriana exchanged worried glances.

Should they encourage their oldest and youngest children to pursue military careers as opposed to civilian ones?

After all, what use was there to become a good politician or mech designer when only fighting could give them a chance to fight for their own survival?

However, an entire civilization cannot be run by soldiers alone. They needed proper direction as well as scientists and engineers to arm themselves with the right gear.

At most, Aurelia and Marvaine should sign up for extra classes to learn how to defend themselves and how to find their places in an army if they were forced by circumstances.

"Aurelia." Ves gently spoke.

"Yes, papa?"

"Your tenth birthday is coming up." He said. "You know what will happen at that time, right?"

Aurelia paused in petting Clixie and adopted a more serious expression. "I will get to learn my genetic aptitude."

"That is correct. Genetic aptitude is not as important as before as everyone can become a Carmine mech pilot these days, but those with good aptitudes still enjoy a lot of advantages. If you ever end up having a high enough aptitude, would you prefer to attend the mech academy or a normal school?"

"I don't want to become a full-time mech pilot." Aurelia said with clear eyes. "I think I can do much more if I run the institutions that facilitate our soldiers rather than to become a soldier myself."

"You can always choose to become an officer, dear." Gloriana said. "Not a mech officer such as Saint Commander Casella Ingvar, but more like a normal officer such as General Quinlist Verle. Our family line must always maintain control over the military arms of our clan. Right now, the Saint Commander's popularity is growing by the day. The Larkinson Army is becoming more and more inclined to follow her orders over that of Ves, and that is not a healthy development. If we want to ensure our mech pilots understand who should be in charge, it is best if one of us sits at the top."

Aurelia looked confused. "Andraste is supposed to be in charge of the military, right?"

"Yes, but only if she chooses the command track." Ves replied to his eldest daughter. "If there is one lesson I have learned from observing so many high-ranking mech pilots develop before my eyes, it is that passion and doing what you like the most are most conducive to breakthroughs. Andraste, tell me honestly. Would you like to study to become a mech commander like Saint Commander Casella Ingvar or Saint General Ark Larkinson?"

"No way!" Andraste honestly voiced as she crossed her arms. "I mean, I will learn how to issue orders if I have to, but I want to become strong above all else. I don't want to sacrifice my own strength to make my minions stronger like Casella. I also don't want to become an ace commander like Uncle Ark who is only strong when he is popular. I want to be more like Saint Dise, who mainly relied on her skills and willpower to become strong!"

In other words, Andraste strongly preferred to stick to martial pursuits to the extreme.

Prospective champions like that tended to care less about other activities such as commanding troops.

In their opinion, it was better to delegate these tedious distractions to professional officers.

Though Ves did not entirely agree with this sentiment, he did not discourage his second daughter from pursuing her own dreams.

"Do you understand, Aurelia? Your younger sister won't be able to command any troops if she wants to become really good at fighting. I would not object if you want to become her commanding officer. A good mech can get a lot more stuff done on the battlefield if a competent commander is in charge."

Aurelia frowned and shook her head. "I will do it if I have to, but I think that there are enough Larkinsons who can do this job. I don't need to be in charge of our mech army. I can be in charge of the person who is commanding our troops instead."

Ves made another suggestion. "If you don't like to run a mech army, then you can also opt to follow a naval track instead. Our clan has the right to field 2 warships, of which 1 of them is almost ready to enter into service. I think that we will continue to earn more Warship Tokens as the war progresses. Soon enough, we'll be able to amass a sizable first-class warfleet that will form the core of our clan. It will be very useful if you know how starships work and how to command warships in combat. Learning to become a naval officer should also prepare you fairly well for civilian leadership positions."

That sounded more compelling to Aurelia, but she was not inclined to agree.

"I still want to follow my original plan." The first daughter stated in a calm but firm voice. "I think I can be much more useful if I run organizations such as the Larkinson Clan or the Red Collective. I have learned in school what good leadership can do. During humanity's worst moments during the Age of Stars, wise and farsighted leaders bravely stood up to the trend of xenophilia and advocated that our race can survive without appeasing alien bullies. I think we need that kind of leadership in the future when red humanity begins to go astray."

"Do you think we will?" Ves asked.

"I do not know." Aurelia shrugged. "It depends on how well we are doing in the Red War. Even if we do not get outright defeated, more and more people will grow weary of all of the fighting. Many of their relatives are dying every year. If our people begin to lose hope, they will advocate for peace or surrender. Good leadership can help them regain their confidence in themselves. I want to be a part of that. If I want to become good at inspiring the masses, then I want to take the best possible classes that I can take in the Red Ocean. Papa has done something similar with his memorable speeches, and he has never received proper training. I can do much better once I have mastered the proper skills."

Both Ves and Gloriana could clearly sense their eldest daughter's strong belief and conviction on this matter.

She was anything but a whimsical child who casually said they wanted to become a doctor or a lawyer.

Despite her youth, Aurelia already developed a clear understanding of her purpose and how she could best fulfill it. She also understood that she could not afford to take any detours. Doing so might broaden her horizons, but also spread herself too thin.

Gloriana couldn't help but soften her eyes as she bent down to kiss her proud daughter on the head.

"If that is what you want, then we will support you to the best of our abilities. You are right that good leadership is still very necessary in the future. I only hope that you are not born too late to have an opportunity to lead our clan and our society to a better future."

All of this talking and dreaming would become moot if the native aliens managed to breach the frontlines and wipe out red humanity from this dwarf galaxy.

Ves felt a renewed sense of urgency. He had to do more to arm his customers with stronger mechs and gear.

He already had an idea on what he could do in the short term. He mentally dug up the incomplete design schematics of the Riot Mark III and thought about applying an extreme transformation on the expert spearman mech.

He not only wanted to turn him into a superdimensional mech, but also a D-mech!

What would happen if he tried to combine the two? Was it even possible to make it happen, or would something go catastrophic wrong?

Chapter 6745: Harnessing Instability

After Ves and Gloriana put the children to bed, they retired to their own bedroom.

The cats had gone off to cuddle with the slumbering children, thereby leaving the parents with relative privacy.



Their vigilant bodyguards still kept watch over their principal. They did a good job of making themselves appear unobtrusive despite wearing formidable suits of combat armor.

In fact, the soldier cultivators dispatched by the Red Collective had increased their alertness.

They had multiple reasons to believe that the native aliens were about to launch several major operations in the near future.

Striking out at the inventor of Carmine mechs, kinship networks and many other dramatic innovations was a sound strategic choice!

Fortunately, the New Constantinople System was not directly located in a region of imminent danger, but that could change at any time depending on how the Red War unfolded.

As his wife got ready for bed, she turned her head to cast a suspicious glance towards Ves.

"The Riot Mark III."

"What's up?" Ves asked.

"I have noticed that you have become much more fixated on the Riot Mark III Project as of late." She spoke. "This is not normal. The Minerva Mark II Project that we are currently working on is a much more strategic priority for our clan. You have said so multiple times yourself. Saint Commander Casella Ingvar is the single-most important champion in our clan. Nobody can do what she can do. Not even 'Saint General' Ark Larkinson possesses the virtue of humility and sacrifice that is necessary to become a true mech commander. This should be more than enough of a reason to clad the Minerva Mark II with superdimensional armor plating."

She raised an excellent point, but Ves did not look as if he was willing to change his mind.

"I acknowledge that there is a strong argument to use up the armor-grade superdimensional matter on the Minerva Mark II first, but I have good reasons of my own to reserve it for the Riot Mark III." Ves calmly responded.

"And those are...?"

"The first point is that superdimensional matter is new to us." Ves quickly raised his palm. "I know that it shares a lot in common with transphasic alloys, but you know very well that it is different. I foresee problems with trying to integrate it into archetech. There is a large chance that the strange superdimensional properties will cause damage and other glitches when this new stuff is intertwined with more conventional forms of matter."

"It will not remain a problem for long. I am far from the only person who is working on solutions to increase the compatibility between superdimensional matter and conventional matter. Besides, we have already discovered that transphasic alloys suffer less disruptions when coming into contact with superdimensional matter. That gives us a solid direction to work towards." Gloriana retorted.

"I know about that, honey, but it will take time to improve the results to the point where it is viable to incorporate superdimensional matter into your archemechs. We cannot afford to delay the Minerva Mark II Project any further. Completing it at its current specifications is already enough, especially when we consider the addition of the Victrix. I expect that by the time we work on completing the Riot Mark III Project, the scientists of the Red Three have worked out most of the kinks. The timing is much better in this case."

His wife did not quite agree, but she did not bother to argue any further.

"What other reasons do you have to favor the Riot Mark III over the Minerva Mark II?"

"Well, the Riot is a melee mech that has always been designed around the concept of confronting enemies head-on. He needs superdimensional armor much more than the Minerva Mark II. The same can be said for the Bastion and other melee mechs, but I believe the synergy is greatest with the Riot Mark Mark III. When Tusa hands back the tier 3 Destroyer spear to the Riot Mark III, the result will be a scrappy fighter that can fearlessly entangle lesser and maybe even greater phase lords."

"Ketis has reserved all of our weapon-grade superdimensional matter for the First Sword Mark III, correct?" Ketis asked. "Why not complete the First Sword's transformation to a superdimensional ace mech by upgrading her armor as well? The application will be easier considering that the First Sword Mark III is not being designed as an archemech."

"The need is not as great so long as Venerable Orfan breaks through in the near future, which I fully expect to happen after she recovers from her injuries." Ves retorted. "Both the Riot and the First Sword are melee mechs, but their approach towards combat is different. The Riot is better armored but also less mobile. He inherently relies on his hard defenses to keep himself in the fight. The First Sword on the other hand is clad with thinner armor plating, but possesses superior maneuverability. The earlier battle has already proven that Venerable Dise is skilled enough at evasion that she can keep her machine out of harm's way even if she is confronting a greater phase lord."

"That is true, Ves, but it only takes one accident or misstep for the First Sword Mark III to get impaled. Ketis has foolishly chosen to deny my participation in her project, so the internals of this ace mech will break much easier. Once the First Sword suffers a crippling blow that impairs her mobility, her ability to survive the subsequent attacks is very low."

"I trust that Saint Dise is skilled and experienced enough to avoid that possibility from happening. This is what she is good at. Besides, the armor of the First Sword Mark III is not completely garbage just because it isn't made out of archmetal. It relies on an active form of transphasic armor system that can resist superdimensional attacks to an extent. I expect that all of the new studies on the samples of superdimensional matter will lead to an improvement in its performance. Perhaps you can even blend in a modest proportion of hull-grade dimensional matter to increase this parameter even further."

Even if hull-grade superdimensional matter was considered not good enough to be used on high-end mechs, that was only from the perspective of first-raters with very high standards!

Hull-grade superdimensional matter should still outperform most if not all variations of transphasic alloys in terms of defense, especially against other transphasic attacks!

"Besides, this is only a stopgap solution." Ves continued. "Once Ketis opens up a few more portals to the Blue Dimension, our clan should be able to harvest enough

superdimensional matter to clad a few more melee mechs with proper superdimensional armor. The First Sword, the Bastion, the Dark Zephyr, the Lionheart and other melee mechs rank high in priority. Ranged mechs such as the Prometheus and unfortunately the Minerva will have to wait a lot longer until they get their turn."

"..."

"I have already shown you the design of the soon-to-be-refurbished Tortuous Scream, Gloriana. The warship possesses formidable defenses of her own and can extend much of her protection to any mechs that take shelter inside of her hull. Unless there are good reasons to deploy the Amaranto Mark III and the Minerva Mark II in open space, it makes much more sense to keep them within our warship where they cannot be sniped or ambushed at will."

His wife frowned, but she eventually sighed. "Very well. While I do not fully weigh your arguments as highly as mine, I can acknowledge that your arguments are sound. I still believe that you are fixating on the Riot Mark III for other reasons, however. What exactly do you have in mind that makes you reserve our first batch of armor-grade superdimensional alloys to this machine in particular?"

Ves smirked. "I can't share the details to you yet because I still need Venerable Orfan's consent. I have a very ambitious plan in mind that should make it extremely powerful. The addition of superdimensional matter will complement my plan. It is better to apply it sooner rather than later."

"Not enough. I need more information."

Ves paused for a moment. He decided to throw his wife a bone.

"Do you know about the Chaos Armor that Jovy is developing?"

"I do." She said. "I do not understand the mechanisms, but I know it is meant to add more randomness to its performance through quantum mechanics."

"Chaos Armor is designed to be inherently unstable." Ves emphasized. "It is supposed to be formed out of a mix of volatile exotics and hypers that are still able to remain in balance just enough for the Riot Mark III to remain in good condition... most of the time. Now think about superdimensional matter. How do you rate its stability?"

"Low." Gloriana immediately responded. "It remains stable when it is left inside the Blue Dimension, but that is largely because it is exposed to vacuum or other superdimensional matter. As soon as it comes into frequent contact with conventional matter, the two begin to interact with each other, thereby generating changes that are mostly undesirable."

"Exactly. Right now, a lot of material scientists are working hard to figure out how to make the two kinds of matter play nice with each other. My idea for the Riot Mark III is that we don't entirely neutralize the interaction between superdimensional matter and conventional matter. This will admittedly make the Riot Mark III even more self-harming than usual, but the Chaos Armor will not only become a lot tougher, but also way more random and chaotic! Can you imagine it, Gloriana? Nobody will be able to predict how the Riot Mark III will fare against enemies!"

"That includes us as well." She pointed out. "This is trying to embrace randomness for the sake of randomness. Each time you deploy the Riot Mark III on the battlefield, you are rolling the dice. Your gamble may pay off when the Riot successfully relies on her Chaos Armor to hold back a greater phase lord. However, there is also a considerable risk that the variables will produce unfavorable combinations that cause the Riot to fold and weaken ahead of time. The mech will have to retire much earlier from the battlefield than expected."

"You are not wrong, but only if you discount the involvement of the pilot." Ves said. "While Venerable Orfan is not strong enough yet, once she advanced to the rank of ace pilot, her willpower should become strong enough to partially control for the randomness of the Chaos Armor. She can deliberately improve the results of positive outcomes while suppressing the results of negative outcomes. This is not only a good way to exercise her resonance strength, but also prevent her from becoming complacent."

"That is cheating."

"Every high-ranking mech pilot is a cheater." Ves gently reminded his wife. "The higher the rank, the more outrageously they cheat reality. The Chaos Armor that we are developing for the Riot Mark III takes advantage of this to produce a unique armor system that will define this machine."

The Chaos Armor should become the defining feature of the Riot as far as Ves was concerned. Not even the tier 3 Destroyer spear could match the importance of the Chaos Armor!

Best of all, Ves hadn't even mentioned his intention to turn the Riot Mark III into a D-mech to his wife.

If he was able to pull this off, then he expected the performance of the Chaos Armor to be thrice as good!

Even if Ves made life a lot more difficult for Rosa Orfan as a result, he still believed the tradeoffs were worth it as the Riot stood to gain an incredible amount of defensive power, enough to fearlessly duel against any greater phase lord!

"Hehehehe..."

"You are making that evil laugh again, Ves. Now I truly know you are up to no good."

"Hey, I only want what is best for Venerable Orfan and our clan!"

"Uh huh."

Chapter 6746: Mindstorm Alloy

Despite all of the excitement that took place as of late, work had to continue.

Ves chose to devote most of his design time on the Minerva Mark II Project.

The high-end mech design projects had risen in priority. There were too many expert pilots and ace pilots that needed to receive updated machines. The longer they had to wait, the more their strength remained suppressed during the following months and years of fighting.

That did not mean he neglected his other projects. He still tried to keep up on developments related to the Arboreal Project as well as the unnamed Mergewater mech project that he was supposed to work on with the Hunting Association.

Aside from that, Ves had to spend a bit of time supervising the development of the Elemental Universe.

As one of the people who understood the building blocks of the MSTS the best, he had to spend a bit of time tutoring the new programmers and engineers of the new Elemental Universe Consortium how to adapt their work to a spiritual construct.

Programming code tended to behave a little differently when applied to purely spiritual systems!

It was as if a computer system possessed the ability to process feelings and emotions!

This added a lot of new variables as a depressed setting could result in a chain reaction of bad outcomes!

It was difficult for many programmers to get accustomed to the impaired predictability of spiritual systems. They had to deal with potentially fickle entities that could easily turn  $2 + 2 = 5$  according to their whims!

On the other hand, the Elemental Universe opened up a lot of new possibilities that people could never imagine when they worked on conventional virtual reality programs.

The option to induce actual emotions and make users experience the threat of death in a more authentic fashion massively increased the realism of many false settings!

The new consortium had specifically hired a lot of young, highly qualified and most importantly creative virtual reality developers. These newly employed workers possessed the drive and vision to fulfill the promise of the Elemental Universe, especially when they were given room to contribute their own designs.

Despite their enthusiasm, it would still take at least half a year before the most basic form of the Elemental Universe would be ready for general usage.

The upgrade to the MSTS was simply that big.

Ves just hoped it would be implemented in time to make a difference.

New and old pilots already made good use of the basic version of the MSTS. Several changes enabled Vulcan to support more frequent usage, which allowed the soldiers to polish their skills and gain more experience during this tense and critical period of time.

Ves continued to count the days until the Tortuous Scream arrived. He had already implemented a plan to enact a phased transfer of the Premier Branch.

He did not want to start too late and risk getting overtaken by unexpected surprises.

To that end, the Larkinsons had already begun to transfer all sorts of heavy assets and supplies to the ships of the Bluejay Fleet.

At this time, the Premier Branch already acquired enough first-class combat carriers and transport vessels to form a small fleet in itself.

It did not really amount to much, though. This was why Ves agreed to embed the ships into the existing structure of the Bluejay Fleet. This would keep Admiral Gori Tensen in charge and make sure that everyone was part of the same chain of command more or less.

Ves knew better than to add more confusion by propping up his own naval leaders.

Perhaps he might have tried harder to put his own people in charge if he was living in a time of peace, but now that every red human was under threat of extinction, Ves had little choice but to put his trust in Admiral Tensen and all of the other mechers and fleeters.

With all of these concerns weighing down on him, Ves did not dare to entertain too many distractions and tried his best to complete his contribution to the Minerva Mark II.

The Victrix originally envisioned by Gloriana was quite fun to design. His wife had already designed much of the physical structure of the living fey, but she thoughtfully preserved enough room for Ves to add his own visual flair to the construct.



For example, he designed the wings of the highly articulated owl fey to produce a green glow when they were active.

He also made the eyes larger and more expressive. They glowed in bright purple and contrasted nicely with the white living fey.

He dedicated more time than he would have liked on designing the crown. It was quite hard to visualize a crown that would work when placed on the head of an owl as opposed to a human.

Still, the silvery crown might not be too obvious, but it added a clear sense of authority to the Victrix without making it too overbearing.

As much as he would have liked to continue his effort to elevate the appearance of the living fey, he couldn't afford to spend too much time on its looks.

He already spent enough time on thinking about how he wanted to tackle this assignment while he was working on improving the exterior of the Victrix.

The Victrix was more than just an Ultimate Module. It was a living fey, so it needed to be able to act independently and project power well outside of Casella's Command Field.

"How can this be done?"

He came up with one theory.

The Victrix functioned as an extension of the Minerva Mark II.

Eleiha functioned as an extension of the Saint Commander.

Both the mech and mech pilot possessed their own 'companion spirits'.

What would happen if Eleiha resonated with Victrix?

Ves had a very large suspicion that this would produce a result that far exceeded the sum of its parts!

Though he did not have any way to test this theory at the moment, he was so confident in this interaction that he was willing to bet on its success.

As Casella's companion spirit, Eleiha technically did not possess extraordinary willpower of her own.

The silver winged snake was a natural qi cultivator that granted Casella the ability to exert control on a hostile mind.

The Saint Commander never used Eleiha this way because the companion spirit was limited by how far she was able to move from her principal.

Creating the Victrix should not only grant Eleiha the ability to move much further away from Casella, but also allow her to act as a conduit to channel the Saint Commander's willpower!

In short, the Victrix had the potential to become powerful enough to be treated as a slightly lesser copy of the Minerva Mark II!

"It would be like having two Minervas on the battlefield!"

Of course, this was not quite the case. The Minerva and the Victrix should be fully capable of projecting Casella's Command Field in two different locations.

What the two should not be able to accomplish was to double the Saint Commander's capacity to Commandeer and Enfeoff friendly units.

Casella was currently able to Enfeoff 40 mechs. Once she received her upgraded mech, Ves expected that to increase by at least 50 percent.

If Casella was able to temporarily upgrade 60 mechs to Barons, that did not mean that the Victrix would be able to Enfeoff another 60 mechs.

"The most likely possibility is that the two have no choice but to share the same quota."

If Casella Enfeoffed 30 mechs, then the Victrix could only do the same with 30 mechs at most.

This showed that the Victrix was not an instant game changer if her only power was to extend the range of the Minerva's Command Field.

If Ves wanted this to change, then he had to incorporate an ace mech-grade resonating exotic into the living fey.

Gloriana already selected an ace mech-grade resonating exotic for the mech frame of the Minerva Mark II.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar had already completed a test conducted by the Red Association that provided a quick overview of which resonating materials she was compatible with. The test was not as extensive as Ves wished, but he and his wife were able to find a good match.

Mindstorm Alloy was a very recent development that mixed both resonating materials and mind-attributed hyper materials to form a mix that could grant individuals with strong minds the ability to generate powerful psychic storms!

These storms were not as violent as they sounded. They were mostly able to disturb the minds of enemies in wide areas depending on the strength of the ace pilot.

What made Mindstorm Alloy very compelling to Ves and Gloriana was that it synergized better with a Mentalist Crystal than other mental-oriented resonating materials!

Both Ves and Gloriana felt that Mindstorm Alloy was a good addition to the Minerva Mark II.

One of the shortcomings of the ability granted by Mindstorm Alloy was that an ace pilot could only use it to generate a storm inside his domain.

This was not as much of a problem for Casella as her Command Field was much larger than the Saint Kingdoms of typical ace pilots!

Originally developed for other ace commanders, the inventor of Mindstorm Alloy had made it available to others in the hopes it would make red humanity stronger.

One of the other good points about Mindstorm Alloy was that it possessed medium resonance interference.

This meant that Ves and Gloriana could still add another resonating exotics to the Minerva Mark II design so long as it was not too onerous.

That was what Ves was doing at the moment. He scrolled down the list and tried to pick a material that would satisfy his requirements.

"The selection is not as big as I would have liked."

The Red Association's database listed many resonating exotics that were permanently out of stock since they could only be found in the Milky Way!

Though Ves could wait for the Oblivion Gate Consortium to gather the desired resonating exotics in the Milky Way and transfer it over to the Red Ocean in the next trade, that was still months away!

It was better if Ves stuck to a resonating material that was developed locally like Mindstorm Alloy.

"What else can I choose?"

After a bit more browsing, he narrowed his selection to two different ace mech-grade resonating exotics. Neither of them were perfect, but they fit the needs of Saint Commander Casella and the Minerva the best.

ST-668 Archon was a resonating alloy that effectively multiplied the true resonance of an ace mech when its Saint Kingdom was actively connected to sentient life forms.

The definition of sentient life forms naturally encompassed humans, but could also include aliens and even living mechs!

In other words, the greater the amount of Larkinson mechs that Casella Commandeered, the more extensively ST-668 Archon amplified her true resonance!

This brought many benefits, from increasing the Minerva Mark II's overall defenses to directly increasing her Enfeoffment quota!

Of course, ST-688 was not perfect.

It took a lot of active connections to ramp up its effect to a significant degree. It was worthless if the Minerva Mark II was left by herself.

A few hundred people hardly made a difference while a thousand would only provide a minor boost.

ST-688 Archon therefore specialized the Minerva Mark II in large battles. As long as Saint Commander Casella developed her resonance strength further and participated in battles involving millions of mechs, she should easily be able to amplify her true resonance by 30 percent or even more!

This was huge!

Though this resonating alloy could serve Casella well during her early and middle progression as a junior ace pilot, it would eventually turn redundant once she became a peak ace pilot.

This was because ST-688 Archon was unable to multiply an ace pilot's resonance strength above the hard limit of 1545 laves!

#### Chapter 6747: Dragon Scales

The fact that ST-688 Archon became redundant to ace pilots when they were getting closer to reaching the limits of their rank was a pretty big asterisk.

It was not too catastrophic as a mech designer could always swap out ST-688 for a different resonating material.

The problem with doing so was that all of the progress that the ace pilot had made to transform ST-688 into a more compatible resource through persistent willpower baptism became wasted!

Not only would Saint Commander Casella have to relearn how to fight with a different resonating material, she would also have to spend a lot of effort into becoming completely in tune with her ace mech.

This could add significant delays to her preparations to step on the road to no return!

Of course, this was not a dealbreaker. Many peak ace pilots tended to make a lot of changes to their ace mechs in the hopes of turning them into prototype god mechs.

What mattered was that the greater the changes, the more time the ace pilots had to spend on familiarizing himself with their new machines.

Swapping the key resonating materials of an ace mech was a pretty drastic change. Doing so removed and added powerful options to the ace pilot, thereby necessitating significant changes on how to approach combat.

"Before Saint Commander Casella reaches this point, she should benefit quite a lot from using ST-688."

The resonating alloy was like a cheat in that the Saint Commander was able to fight as if she had gained months or years of additional growth in resonance strength.

The importance of this boost could not be overstated. Resonance strength was a measure of how extensively a high-ranking mech pilot was able to distort reality with his willpower.

The higher the number, the more extreme the fabric of reality bent to the will of the pilot!

Resonance strength affected all factors of a machine. Their offensive, defensive, mobility and utility parameters all rose by different percentages depending on the height of numbers.

In addition to that, higher resonance strength affected the strength of resonating abilities, allowing high-ranking mechs to more easily outfight their enemies.

Resonance strength happened to be more important to Saint Commander Casella and the Minerva than usual because it directly affected the quality and quantity of the Enfeoffment effect.

As a non-traditional ace mech that lacked a Saint Kingdom, the Minerva possessed a diminished capacity to empower her own mech frame.

All of that missing power instead went on to boost the performance of many different mechs.

The problem with that scheme was that without Venerable Imon Ingvar, the Saint Commander was not able to concentrate all of her disposable power on a single subject.

Her current Enfeoffment limit was to elevate a mech into a Baron, which was equivalent to a low-tier expert mech.

Ves expected that once Saint Commander Casella received her Minerva Mark II, that limit should increase to the level of a Viscount, which should be equivalent to a mid-tier expert mech.

That was much better, but not enough to seriously threaten enemy phase lords, especially the more formidable ones!

The Minerva Mark II should be able to pose a serious enough threat against phase lords when she was able to Enfeoff mechs into Marquises, which corresponded to a high-tier expert mech.

That was about the same power as the First Sword or the Amaranto right before their pilots broke through!

In addition to that, if Casella was able to attain a higher effective resonance strength with the help of ST-688 Archon, then she might be able to convert 60 or 80 mechs into Marquises ahead of time!

That was an incredible amount of high-tier expert mechs on a single battlefield!

At that point, the sheer quantity of high-tier expert mechs should produce qualitative changes, especially if the original mechs already happened to be powerful first-class mechs.

The huge quantity of Marquises should be enough to strike fear in the hearts of phase lords!

Even if an individual Marquis was still not able to win a duel against a genuine high-tier expert mech due to multiple factors, the former at least matched the latter in terms of true resonance!

What did this mean in concrete terms?

Lesser phase lords would get shredded when they got targeted by so many Marquises!

Greater phase lords would endure serious pressure, perhaps to the point where they had no choice but to retreat.

The Minerva would no longer be as helpless as in the last battle where her Barons ultimately posed too little of a threat to slow down the likes of the Herald of the Void and the Lower Herdmaster!



Ves actually felt tempted to pick ST-688 if not for the fact that it was heavily reliant on the quantity of people available.

ST-688 would also complicate Casella Ingvar's progression down the road.

Furthermore, he was not sure whether it was a good idea for the Saint Commander to gain superiority through numbers alone.

Her development might go astray as her boosted strength diminished the importance of more qualitative factors such as her leadership skills.

Ves wanted to seek a viable alternative so that the option of ST-688 would not push Casella into a corner.

He eventually found one in the form of Dragon Scales.

Despite its name, it had nothing to do with the scales of a lizard exobeast.

It instead stood for a ace mech-grade resonating alloy that was aligned with the metal attribute.

The effect of Dragon Scales was quite simple.

It was able to strengthen the physical toughness and other defensive parameters of all friendly metallic subjects within the domain of an ace mech!

Dragon Scales was originally developed for ace drone mechs that deployed a lot of spurs.

These spurs tended to collapse and fall apart quickly when used in duels against other ace mechs.

In order to make them tougher and last much longer on the battlefield, Dragon Scales came into existence.

The name conveyed the ideal to make spurs so tough and resistant towards damage that it could turn an ace mech invincible when stacked together!

Although the performance of Dragon Scales in reality fell short of this ideal, it was still a fairly successful product.

It also happened to be compatible with ace command mechs, though it behaved a bit differently in these cases.

The effect of Dragon Scales was proportionate to the strength of an ace mech's domain field.

The Saint Kingdom of an ace drone mech was typically strong, so its spurs received a massive boost in defensive power.

The Command Field of a more classic ace command mech like the Minerva was much weaker but more dispersed.

This meant that Dragon Scales could only provide a more moderate boost in defensive power.

However, since Casella was able to Commandeer 10,000 mechs or more, this meant that she was able to make a lot of assets a lot more survivable than before!

"This is perfect for throwing lots of melee mechs onto the native aliens!"

Melee mechs bore the greatest risks in battle. This had never changed, but the differences in casualties became especially lopsided in the Red War.

Most of the weapons used by the native aliens were so strong that melee mech pilots had significantly lower survival rates than ranged mech pilots!

It was costly to deploy melee mech units against serious enemies. No matter whether their side had won or lost the battle, the melee mechs always paid a price.

If Casella was able to bolster the defenses of every Commandeered mechs by just two or three times, then that could make a massive difference in losses over a longer span of time!

"Her Command Field can also affect subjects other than mechs."

She had already demonstrated the capability to Commandeer human starfighters to a slightly lesser degree back when the RF still fielded them in considerable numbers.

This gave Ves hope that she would also be able to Commandeer starships one day if she had a reason to expand her capabilities in this direction!

The Saint Commander would partially resemble the Demon of the Sand or more famously the Technomancer, who also relied on empowering warships to saturate their opponents with overwhelming firepower!

So long as Casella was able to bestow her true resonance on increasingly larger warships, she may even be able to transform a warship as immense as the Tortuous Scream into a much more impenetrable bulwark!

Naturally, Ves had a very high interest in making vessels such as his own flagship tougher and more defensible.

"Our clan lacks champions that can bolster the defenses of our fleet." Ves sighed.

The problem would become a lot less severe if Venerable Jannzi was able to trigger her second apotheosis.

However, the Bastion was just one living mech. She could only defend one large hull or a handful of smaller hulls at most.

This was not enough for a fleet that consisted of at least a dozen different starships!

The only way to bolster their defenses and increase their chances of surviving a lengthy campaign was to empower their defenses on a more universal level.

Dragon Scales had the potential to make that happen, but only if Commander Casella actively expanded the scope of her Command Field to encompass warships.

Ves was a bit reluctant to encourage Casella to develop her power in this direction.

By focusing on expanding her versatility, she would have less time to spend on improving her hard power.

Dragon Scales also benefited Commandeered subjects more than Enfeoffed subjects. The latter enjoyed a better defensive boost, but not that much due to diminishing returns. Since this was the case, it was much better to spread the benefits to as many friendly assets as possible.

"This resonating alloy is also rather passive in its usage. It doesn't provide a direct offensive boost to different subjects."

Stronger defenses often proved to be insufficient in the battles of the present day. It took strong attack power to quickly penetrate the defenses of the native aliens.

Even so, stronger defenses could give the mechs and warships that already possessed adequate weapons a much greater chance to survive, allowing them to get off more attacks than otherwise!

Besides, Casella's Command Field already bestowed a qualitative boost in offensive power.

As Ves continued to weigh the pros and cons of ST-688 Archon and Dragon Scales, he could not make up his mind.

Although they both steered the Minerva Mark II in different development directions, one was not inherently better than the other.

He decided to present his dilemma to his wife.

Gloriana's answer was simple.

"I can see why you are struggling to make up your mind. Frankly speaking, we do not have the right to make this design choice. We should brief the Saint Commander of her options and let her decide."

"Hm, you are right."

They did just that. When the Saint Commander patiently listened to what key resonating materials she could choose from, she remained silent for half a minute before she voiced her opinion.

"Both key resonating exotics have their merits." She said. "I am more interested in immediate benefits than long-term payoffs. ST-688 fits my criteria quite well. It matters little to me that it becomes worthless once I become a strong enough senior ace mech. I am more willing to exchange long-term pains for an immediate boost in combat power."

"That is quite magnanimous of you, Casella." Ves remarked.

"Dragon Scales can also serve an immediate purpose in the short term while also remaining highly useful in the long-term." The Saint Commander continued. "Its benefits to the mechs under my influence are massive, as helping them survive when struck by the primary or secondary gun batteries will make it much less costly to employ melee mechs against enemy warships. This resonating alloy will make our mech army much more effective at culling a large number of mundane assets. No matter how heavily the enemy outnumbers us, they cannot defeat our forces so long as we do not go down fast enough."

She was completely right!

Chapter 6748: Limiting Attrition

Ves presented Saint Commander Casella Ingvar with compelling choices.

ST-688 Archon and Dragon Scales both had the potential to qualitatively improve the performance of the Minerva Mark II to a large extent.

Their unique properties would also mutate the Minerva Mark II by expanding her capabilities in different directions.

Adopting ST-688 Archon would make the Minerva more dependent on large mech armies to reach her full potential.

Casella did not mind this. Ace commanders generally tended to make a greater difference in large-scale battles. Even if their Command Fields did not encompass every friendly combatant, their presence and leadership alone had a positive effect on morale and coordination.

Besides, it was not as if her Minerva became worthless if she was left with only a couple of hundred mechs by her side. She was still able to Enfeoff enough of them, turning them into Barons or Viscounts that could help her defeat opponents that outnumbered and outgunned her forces by ten times or more.

As far as Casella was concerned, ST-688 Archon fit extremely well with her current needs. She was a fresh ace commander whose resonance strength was still measured at the bottom end of junior ace pilots.

She was still too weak.

With lesser and greater phase lords showing up at the frontlines in increasingly greater numbers, ace pilots bore a greater burden than ever. They were the only champions who could drive away or kill these alien powerhouses.

ST-688 offered her a chance to increase her ability to cope with these phase lords. She could Commandeer more mechs and boost their individual firepower a little further. It also allowed her to Enfeoff more mechs and increase their temporary power even further.

In short, the ability to increase her resonance strength by 10 percent, 20 percent or higher in the later stages of her career as an ace pilot was definitely a powerful boon!

It would drastically shorten the amount of time that was necessary for the Saint Commander to reach important thresholds and gain the power to defeat the enemies that mattered.

This was especially relevant in the Red War as humans who had become stranded in the new frontier lacked time the most. If they had a few more years of development, they could have put up a much better fight against the native aliens.

As for the problem of ST-688 becoming redundant as she approached her peak? Casella did not care.

She was more than willing to face a little more hardships in the far future so long as she was able to become a lot more effective on the battlefield in the present day!

If that was all, then selecting ST-688 Archon as a key resonating material for the Minerva Mark II sounded like a braindead choice if not for the fact that there was a compelling alternative.

Whereas ST-688 promised to amplify the Minerva's strengths, Dragon Scales mostly served to plug one of her major weaknesses.

Due to the mechanics of her Command Field, the Minerva's empowerment was not equal.

Weapons generally hit a lot harder, but defenses received less of a boost. Casella did not really understand why this was the case, but she was clearly able to tell that her Commandeered and Enfeoffed were not able to withstand that much more attacks.

This was rather dangerous as empowering any of these machines instantly turned them into high priority targets.

Their effective firepower multiplied by at least several times while their defenses only increased by a fraction of that boost.

This effectively turned every Commandeered mech into glass cannons!

Any decent alien tactician understood that it was necessary to neutralize these mechs as quickly as possible before they could do more damage.

Targeting them may be difficult as Casella's empowerment also increased the mobility and control over the machines, but as long as the retaliatory attacks were plentiful enough, no amount of evasion could prevent mechs from getting struck down.

Melee mechs suffered especially badly because of this. Whenever Casella assigned melee Knights to attack enemy warships, they were always met with a torrent of intercepting fire!

The Red War had dragged on long enough for the native aliens to understand that humans really liked their mechs.

This caused the major alien races to design new ship classes and refurbish their older hulls to mount a lot more tertiary gun batteries than usual!

Big guns were much more effective when used to take down fortresses and other warships, but their tracking speeds and firing rates were too inadequate when used against small craft.

Smaller guns possessed much better advantages in this regard. A typical alien warship could easily accommodate hundreds of them. Without burdening their systems too much.

Despite their smaller sizes and calibers, their firepower was still vastly superior to mech-grade armaments!

This made it a nightmare for melee mechs to attack enemy warships.

It was undeniable that employing melee mechs resulted in much faster takedowns. Their space suppressor modules still remained extremely effective at weakening any manifestations of phasewater technology up close. Casella's empowerment amplified their performance even further, thereby causing enemy warships to rapidly lose their most important form of protection!

Yet even as her melee Knights were able to strip enemy warships naked at prodigious speeds, they were also prone to suffering a lot of damage in return!



Casella tried to minimize their chances of getting hit as much as possible by making them circle around the hull at high speeds. It certainly helped, but as long as a warship had enough rapid-fire guns, a handful of mechs always became unlucky and got shredded to pieces!

The problem became even worse when the aliens armed their warships with an abundance of transphasic missiles.

By changing them to specialize in crushing mechs across large areas, these expensive missiles always produced painful casualties unless they got intercepted in time.

In short, the native aliens had become increasingly wiser to the methods employed by red humanity.

The enemy did not have the ability to deploy melee mechs themselves, but they had plenty of alternatives to choose from if they wanted to get rid of small craft at close range!

This was why the Saint Commander usually liked to elevate ranged mechs to Knights and Barons the most.

Their offensive power was already good, so the boost provided by her true resonance was always great.

As for the lackluster increase in defensive power, Casella was able to disregard this shortcoming so long as her Knights and Barons maintained enough distance from the enemy.

However, there were times when Casella clearly preferred to Commandeer more melee mechs, but declined to do so because the price in blood would be too great.

In the last battle that took place in the Viola Magnifica System, Casella could have taken down more enemy warships if she Commandeered more melee mechs.

The Larkinson Clan fielded plenty of them. The mech pilots were willing to surrender much of their control and autonomy over their machines to her as well.

She ultimately declined to do so because the stakes weren't high enough to warrant the heavy sacrifices.

The Viola Magnifica System was already as good as lost at the time. The only control that humans had over the situation was determining how much of a price the native aliens had to pay to conquer the star system.

Ultimately, the aliens paid a lighter price because Casella was unwilling to drive so many Avatar, Swordmaiden and Penitent Sister mech pilots to their graves.

Now, Casella saw a way to change this constraint.

If she chose Dragon Scales as a key resonating material for the Minerva Mark II, then she would be able to Commandeer and Enfeoff melee mechs much more aggressively!

While it was clear from the information provided by Ves and Gloriana that Dragon Scales did not make her Knights invincible, their margins of error would become much greater than before!

The more she developed her resonance strength, the more exaggerated the increase in hard defenses. Many melee mechs that would previously get blasted to pieces would instead be able to survive long enough to retreat out of the line of fire and make it back alive!

The differences might not be drastic in a single battle, but over time Dragon Scales could result in the continued survival of a huge amount of melee mech pilots!

These were precious lives. Not only were they Larkinsons who often had family in the clan, they also possessed different talents.

Who knew if any of them could become the next expert pilot or ace pilot of the Larkinson Clan one day!

In a conflict as grueling and irreconcilable as the Red War, the human race was locked in a struggle that could drag on for decades.

This war of attrition tested both sides for their ability to achieve their outcomes while minimizing their cost.

To that end, Dragon Scales possessed great strategic value over the long-term. So long as the Larkinson Clan fought in a large number of low to medium-intensity battles, this key resonating exotic could be the key to minimize attrition and enable the Larkinson soldiers to live long enough to develop their potential!

Aside from that, Casella could also follow the patriarch's recommendation and learn how to apply the effects of Dragon Scales onto non-mech subjects such as starships.

This did not come easy, but now that she had become a Saint, she found that it was possible for her to stretch and shape her Command Field over time.

It was similar to training a dog to perform tricks. Doing it once or twice did not yield much results, but as long as Casella remained persistent, her effort should slowly produce changes and improvements over time.

The more time she spent on training her Command Field, the more she could change its behavior and mechanisms.

She had already talked to other ace pilots such as Tusa and Linda Cross, and they both explained that they saw this as an opportunity to direct their own pathway towards godhood.

This was one of the defining traits that set ace pilots apart from expert pilots!

The ability to take more active control over the development of their own strength allowed them to strengthen their existing powers, develop new abilities and complete their comprehensive combat system!

Therefore, if Casella wanted to, she could deliberately expand the scope of her Command Field and make it more effective when applied onto starships.

Yet... was that truly how she wanted to fight?

There was a clear difference between desire and necessity.

Necessity urged the Saint Commander to embrace the benefits provided by Dragon Scales and move towards preserving the lives and assets of any friendly unit that fought under the influence of her Command Field.

Necessity also compelled her to choose the more immediate benefits of ST-688 Archon and ramp up much faster than normal. This key resonating alloy could help her become a deterrent against enemy phase lords much faster than usual!

Both were equally valuable in her opinion, but necessity alone should not dictate her choice.

What did she want for herself?

What kind of god pilot did she aspire to become one day?

She thought of her goals and conviction.

That immediately brought up a host of unpleasant memories.

One of her goals was to protect the Larkinson Clan, but it was no longer her only fixated.

Her ultimate goal was to become powerful enough to bring her brother back to life.

Imon Ingvar should have never died. Casella refused to accept the reality that he was gone forever.

Since god pilots were powerful enough to blatantly violate the laws of reality, how much more powerful did she have to become in order to reverse the timeline of her brother's death?

There had to be a way!

Casella hardened her eyes as she understood much better what she needed to do in order to make her deepest wish come true one day.

"I have made a decision." She announced the two physical projections. "Both key resonating materials have their strong points, but I would rather prefer to enjoy the benefits of one over the other."

Chapter 6749: The Goal of an Ace Commander

Ves stared curiously at Casella's physical projection.

He badly wanted to know the answer. Her decision would have far-reaching consequences for the Minerva Mark II, her future combat performance and the development of their clan.

No other expert pilot or ace pilot could exert this much influence over the Larkinson Clan than the Saint Commander!

Ves already voiced his own preference. He believed that the Minerva Mark II would definitely become successful regardless of whether she made use of ST-668 Archon or Dragon Scales.

However, if Ves made a consideration based on his own safety and the safety of his family, then he had a slight preference for Dragon Scales.

Starships were powerful, but they were also large and obvious targets.

Against powerful enough enemies such as phase lords, most vessels lacked the capability to survive a direct confrontation.

The Saint Commander had the potential to change that by resonating with Dragon Scales and developing her Command Field in a more defensive direction.

However, Ves and Gloriana did not have the right to make decisions on behalf of the ace commander. They could only present the viable options to Casella and let her decide for herself.

Ves did not bother to skew or manipulate the information on the two key resonating alloys.

Doing so might increase the probability that Casella would pick Dragon Scales, but it was a dishonest practice that broke the rules of his profession.

Mech designers existed to serve mech pilots.

He should never treat his mech pilots as his property to use as he saw fit. Such a mentality went against the spirit of a service provider and would eventually lead him astray.

As long as he remained determined to become a Star Designer one day, he could never allow himself to slip too far away from the fundamental tenets and principles of a mech designer.

Therefore, he tried to be as honest as possible when presenting the various pros and cons of ST-688 Archon and Dragon Scales.

He even mentioned that if Casella still did not feel satisfied with the options available to her, he could continue to look for other compatible resonating materials, though doing so may delay the completion of the Minerva Mark II Project.

Ves believed he had done his due diligence in this regard. All he needed was Casella's answer.

No matter what decision she made, Ves had a professional obligation to realize the mech that his client wanted to pilot, not necessarily the mech that served his purposes the best.

It would be great if the two mechs were identical to each other, but Ves did not dare to get his hopes up. What Casella wanted from her ace mech may ultimately be different from what he envisioned.

"The two choices that you have presented to me can roughly be categorized as an offensive and defensive upgrade." Casella voiced her own thoughts over the remote

comm session. "When I think about how I want to fight against our enemies in the future, I have a clear idea of what I do not want to become."

She took a deep breath and flicked her gaze to the side.

"I do not want to become an ace commander who mainly cares about earning glory and improving my reputation by winning victories. There is nothing wrong about winning per se, but the troops that are under my command are not tools that I should relentlessly exploit until they are completely spent. Every battle demands a sacrifice. The greater the ambition, the greater the amount of losses our side will suffer. There are those who care less about the death toll than others, but I refuse to be counted among them. Every clansman's life is precious. I am not naive enough to believe I can prevent every casualty from occurring, but I should at least do everything in my power to ensure that most of my troops will live long enough to enjoy their victory... or survival."

The heavy emotions in her words made it very clear why she leaned in this direction.

Both Ves and Gloriana exchanged glances with each other.

Casella had quickly established herself as an impeccable commander and saint.

She already demonstrated exemplary behavior and leadership back when she was an expert commander, so none of this was new.

The only flaw that marred her perfect life and career was the death of her brother.

This traumatic accident not only triggered her breakthrough, but also scarred her down to her very spirit.

"As the Saint Commander of the Larkinson Clan, killing the most formidable enemies on the battlefield is not my primary concern." Casella continued to speak to the Miracle Couple in the hopes that they would align the Minerva Mark II according to her ideas. "My main objective is always to keep our clan alive and to preserve the lives of as many soldiers as possible. That does not mean I intend to avoid all possible battles. There may be occasions when we must put our troops at risk on the battlefield

in order to prevent a future where more of our clansmen will get killed. We must have the courage to fight our battles, but we must also have leaders who will do right by our mech pilots. Right now, there are too few mech officers that I know of who can find the right balance."

The Saint Commander touched upon a dilemma that plagued every officer.

Any leader gained a lot of responsibilities when put in charge of a group of people. This granted a lot of power to the individual in charge. He or she could subsequently use the power of the collective to achieve many goals that were otherwise impossible to fulfill by any single person alone.

Yet when a military commander led a force of soldiers in combat, every decision came with serious consequences.

A mistake could cause hundreds of Larkinsons to lose their lives.

A switch in strategy could preserve the lives of many clansmen, but also condemn other Larkinsons to their deaths.

It was not easy for Casella to bear this burden. Losses were inevitable, but that did not mean she could remain unmoved by these tragedies.

She refused to allow herself to become immune to the sadness that came from the death of every subordinate!

Casella did not want to become fixated on success to the point where she ceased to care about the many earnest soldiers that did not hesitate to put their lives under her care.

"So you have chosen to go for Dragon Scales?" Ves asked in confirmation.

The Saint Commander firmly nodded. "That is correct, patriarch. I am not rejecting ST-688 Archon because it is problematic to use in the long-term. I am rejecting it because I prioritize keeping more of my troops alive than to offer them like chess pieces to the enemy in the hopes of earning fame by defeating powerful phase lords. There are too few expert pilots and ace pilots that are doing their best to protect our



regular forces. I do not blame them as they are shouldering their own burdens, but I am in a good position to accomplish what they cannot easily do themselves. Under my command, no Larkinson will die unjustly. That is my promise."

She had made a serious vow. This pretty much cemented her choice of key resonating materials and locked in her development trajectory.

While Ves was happy that her choice coincided with his own priorities, he was not as happy with the fact that her decision was driven by trauma rather than an aspirational reason.

"You made the right choice." Gloriana remarked in a softer voice than usual. "Saint General Ark Larkinson certainly cannot be as generous as you. Despite being an ace commander himself, his solution towards enemies that are threatening the lives of his subordinates is to kill the most powerful adversaries while looking good in the process."

Ves felt the need to interject. "To be fair, that is how most expert pilots and ace pilots operate. An argument can be made that you can prevent a lot of casualties on your side by breaking the enemy leaders and senior officers as quickly and ruthlessly as possible. That partially happened during the latest battle of the expeditionary fleet. Saint Stark, Saint General Ark and Venerable Joshua successively struck down three orven lesser phase lords. That broke the backs of the orven troops and caused them to withdraw without caring about their original objectives."

From what he heard, the dramatic loss of those orven phase lords generated a lot of discontent between the alien races.

Although the orvens were not stupid enough to pull out of the grand coalition organized by the Red Cabal, the bipedal aliens certainly harbored much less trust towards their fellow aliens. Their coordination with other races had visibly deteriorated on other battlefields, thereby giving the human defenders greater opportunities than before.

"We already have enough expert pilots and ace pilots that excel at killing enemies." Casella explained. "Saint Dise will be ready to chop off phase lord limbs once she receives her upgraded First Sword. Saint Isobel can use her fire to burn down swathes of weaker enemies once she recovers and pilots the new Promethea. Joshua has gained a powerful blade that has already made him strong enough to kill a lesser phase lord

with assistance. As for the good Saint General... just because I do not like his approach towards mech command does not make me blind to his effectiveness on the battlefield."

Her eyes grew heavy when she spoke about Ark. She fully acknowledged his strength. Now that he had finally managed to overcome his bottleneck, his growth had become unlocked.

So long as Saint General Ark remained true to himself, there should be no way for him to stagnate until he had reached the limits of his current rank!

That was not necessarily what Casella wanted to see. The Saint Commander still blamed Ark for her brother's demise, so she had a vested interest in staying ahead of the older man.

Even if the Larkinson Clan benefited more if Ark became stronger, Casella simply could not accept a reality where she was forced to bow her head to him due to a disparity in strength!

She needed to become stronger and make much more significant contributions to the clan if she wanted to prove that her command style was ultimately better!

"Alright." Ves eventually nodded. "We have noted your selection. We will begin to procure a stock of Dragon Scales as soon as possible. It should be fairly easy to integrate it into the mech frame as well as the Victrix. If this works the way I think it does, you can impart a stronger boost in physical defenses if you keep your living fey close to the Minerva. If you choose to dispatch Victrix to a more distant location, then the defensive boost will cover a greater area at the cost of lowering the magnitude. Does this sound acceptable to you, Casella?"

She thought for a moment before nodding. "I can work with these mechanics. It would be great if I can use the Victrix to reinforce the defenses of friendly units in distant locations. The Victrix should particularly be useful when employed in indoor environments depending on how compact you can make the fey."

"It won't be too small, Casella. The Victrix is loaded with many features, but also needs to be robust enough to survive on the battlefield. That said, the living fey will still be a lot more compact than a mech, so you can indeed make use of the Victrix in the manner that you have described."

The Victrix could be used to support infantry assaults or facilitate infiltrations.

Casella mentioned another point. "You have mentioned that there is a potential synergy between Dragon Scales and warships. I think that this is an idea worth exploring. When I am finally able to pilot the Minerva Mark II, I will make sure to work towards this goal. Mechs are strong, but mechs alone will not win us the war."

Chapter 6750: New Strategic Options

"Are you happy, Ves?"

"More or less."

Ves and Gloriana gathered together in order to make the arrangements.

After the Saint Commander made her choice, the pair of Senior Mech Designers immediately began to order a sizable batch of Dragon Scales.

They subsequently began to perform the initial calculations and simulations on how the Minerva Mark II would perform if her Command Field gained the benefits of Dragon Scales.

"It is difficult to estimate the increase in defensive performance on mechs affected by her Command Field." Gloriana said while furrowing her brows. "There are too many variables at play. Based on the publicly available data on other ace mechs that have made use of this key resonating materials, Knights can expect to become at least 3 times tougher at Casella's current resonance strength. Once she becomes stronger and reaches the threshold of a senior ace pilot, I expect the multiplier to become higher, but not in proportion due diminishing returns. Knights will only be 5 or 7 times harder to destroy than before. That is still a good amount of improvement, but it is disappointing by the standards of ace mechs. What are your estimates about Enfeoffed mechs?"

"Barons should start with a multiplier of at least 5 according to my very loose estimates." Ves judged. "However, the scaling becomes more and more detrimental as Casella's resonance strength continues to grow. At the latest stages of Casella's growth trajectory, Dukes and Princes should only become 20 times tougher to defeat due to the influence of Dragon Scales. Otherwise, their attack power will always far outpace their defenses."

This was a pretty massive increase, but it did not automatically mean that Casella could turn any random group of mechs into temporary ace mechs.

There were still a lot of shortcomings that effectively caused them to be a lot weaker than genuine ace mechs.

Even so, as long as the quantity was great enough, such a massive force of Dukes and Princes might be able to pose a credible threat against ancient phase lords!

At the very least, Commander Casella would probably be able to match the combat power of an RF dreadnought at this stage.

As Ves and Gloriana continued to run the numbers, they became increasingly more convinced that the Minerva Mark II would become incredibly useful to the Larkinson Clan and red humanity as a whole.

"Dragon Scales is a good match for Casella." Ves concluded. "It is not only able to help her fulfill her goal of keeping her subordinates alive, but also allows her to empower lots of melee mechs without fearing that they will drop like flies. The only issue is that the effects of Dragon Scales ironically scale poorly with any improvements in resonance strength. That is one of its biggest shortcomings. Commandeered and Enfeoffed mechs will not experience any drastic improvements in defenses going forward."

Gloriana did not look too upset about this. "That is not as detrimental as it sounds. None of these mechs are supposed to endure too many hits in a fight. Even if they cannot stop themselves from getting struck by enemy units, they only need to be resilient enough to withdraw under their own power. Small increases in defenses can be the difference between keeping the mech functional and seeing it crumble before your eyes."

Mech designers conducted a huge amount of studies on how extensively they should raise the defenses of their products.

Excessive increases in defensive performance might keep the machines alive much longer than average, but the cost of doing so became increasingly more exorbitant.

Many clever mech designers and researchers had therefore sought to develop the perfect formula to calculate the optimum defenses to bestow on each mech design.

While they failed to formulate a single universal formula that won the approval of the entire mech industry, their studies still revealed a lot of useful information.

The most important part was that the main concern that mech designers should have when improving the defenses of their machines was to determine how much they were willing to pay to push back the breakpoints of their products.

Mechs could endure varying degrees of abuse but still keep going.

If a hostile enemy force was able to land 5 attacks onto the machines on average, then improving the defenses of the latter just enough so that they could endure 6 attacks would lead to a massive increase in survival rate!

It could make the tougher mechs raise their win rate from 50 percent to 70 or even 80 percent against the same opponents!

Of course, this was a vast oversimplification of the kind of math and calculations that went into this kind of stuff.

All Ves needed to know was that the effect of Dragon Scales would continue to become more useful as Casella grew stronger.

The law of diminishing returns was annoying, but at least it should not result in a completely flat line.

"Much will change once the Minerva Mark II comes online and takes charge of our first-class fleet." Gloriana told her husband. "Our entire approach towards combat will change. Not only will the mechs under the influence of the Saint Commander hit much harder than before, but they can also withstand much more attacks. Over time, Casella will also be able to Commandeer our starships, thereby causing them to enjoy the same benefits to a lesser degree due to drastic increases in mass and volume."

"What are you trying to say, honey?"

"Are you not able to realize it yet? Think! Casella can easily turn mechs that are considered cheap or less powerful into nearly unstoppable quasi-expert mechs! She can multiply the performance of the cheapest first-class mech such as your Yellow Jacket into an asset that is just as powerful as the best first-class multipurpose mechs of the Red Association! She can do so in such great numbers that she can practically lead a ragtag swarm of mercenaries and instantly transform them into a highly coordinated elite mech corps! Such a force can operate alongside our regular first-class fleet!"

Ves did not like the sound of that!

"Are you saying that the Saint Commander can bring greater value to our clan by operating outside of our first-class fleet and mech force?"

"Not always." She admitted. "There may be times where it is better for her to empower our main mech troops so that they can drive away powerful phase whales or break open the defenses of enemy fortifications. Outside of that, we can gain far more by operating two powerful forces instead of a single extremely powerful one. Think about conducting raids in enemy territory. If we know that the defenses of the targets within our reach are fairly weak, we can instruct Saint Commander Casella to operate independently and use cash to hire a large amount of affordable mercenaries that are willing to fight under her direct control. What is important about this is that this stratagem remains viable even if you are only working with mechs as basic as Yellow Jackets!"

He understood the point that she was trying to make. The Minerva Mark II effectively opened up a lot of new options, but the most important one was that it became viable for the Larkinson Clan to employ a lot of cheap mercenaries.

No matter how poorly they fought in a fight, as long as the basics were in place, Saint Commander Casella could always transform cannon fodder into elites!

Though Ves initially felt reluctant to entertain the notion of separating the Minerva Mark II from his first-class fleet, the more he thought about it, the more he recognized its benefits.

Splitting up was often necessary in order to sweep an entire region of space or to fulfill two important objectives at once.

Maintaining only a single fleet kept everything simple, but it also imposed a lot of limitations.

Ves had already experienced moments in the past where he wished he had a second force in reserve or deployed in another region.

Having Saint Commander Casella lead a detachment composed of cheap and disposable mechs would be great.

There was one problem with this setup.

"Saint Commander Casella mostly cares about her fellow clansmen." He said. "She probably prefers to stay with our main fleet. If we try to make her lead a bunch of random mercenaries, then she will only do so if our main forces remain relatively safe in her absence. One of the sources of her pain comes from being separated from her brother when he died. She doesn't want to experience such a tragedy again."

This might pose a few complications in the future, but it should still be manageable.

They just needed to figure out that fielding a second mech force comprised of mercenaries and other miscellaneous troops would make the clan safer.

"Let us get back to work. Now that we have determined the combination of key resonating materials for the Minerva Mark II, there should be no further ambiguous about our vision for this ace mech."

The differences between the Minerva Mark I and Mark II finally became significant enough.

The latter was no longer a straightforward evolution of the former.

Instead, the Mark II relied on two key resonating exotics to expand her repertoire and plug one of her major shortcomings.

Mindstorm Alloy granted the Saint Commander to directly debilitate enemies within the range of her Command Field.

This was a rare and precious means for Casella to directly exercise her power on the battlefield.

Compared to other choices such as empowering the luminar crystal rifle of the Minerva Mark II, the effects of Mindstorm Alloy could be activated with very minimal delay.

This was important as the Saint Commander could instantly generate a psychic storm onto enemies that were on the verge of killing vulnerable mechs and mech pilots!

Other solutions might work, but only if they responded fast enough. Nothing could beat the speed of a psychic storm!

The power of such a measure should not be weak, especially if it was further amplified with a precious wholly intact Mentalist Crystal.

Ves therefore considered Mindstorm Alloy to be a defensive measure as opposed to an offensive measure.

Its job was to give Casella the ability to disrupt the thinking and activities of enemy soldiers long enough to bail out friendly mechs.

A psychic storm could eventually grow strong enough to knock unprotected alien soldiers unconscious or outright turn them braindead if the Saint Commander continued to develop her resonance strength!

Even if the aliens developed countermeasures to protect their precious minds against her psychic assaults, she should still be able to conduct a lot of interference, thereby creating many openings for her Knights and Enfeoffed mechs.

With the addition of the effects of Dragon Scales, every friendly mech operating under Casella's Command Field should suffer minimal casualties so long as the battle was under her control!



If the Larkinsons previously lost hundreds of mechs when fighting against an alien assault fleet, all of the improvements associated with the Minerva Mark II could reduce those loss figures to the single digits!

Aside from a rare handful of mechs that got wiped directly from existence by the primary gun batteries of an alien battleship, no other mechs should be at significant risk of getting wrecked!

In fact, Casella's influence on the survival rate of mechs and mech pilots would become so drastic that Ves worried about whether it became detrimental.

"If the Saint Commander pampers our standard mech units too much, the rate of breakthroughs will plunge." Ves said with concern. "She needs to exercise her power with greater restraint if we want other mech pilots to develop their own potential."

"I can think of two possible solutions on the top of my head." Gloriana responded. "You can adopt my earlier suggestion and dispatch Saint Commander Casella elsewhere. You can also seek out more challenging enemy forces. We can take on elite alien fleets and win with confidence. There will be an element of risk, but as long as our intelligence is accurate, we should be able to avoid most accidents, though we cannot possibly account for every occurrence."

"That is what tends to get overconfident people killed."

"Hey, who is the daredevil among us, Ves?"