

Mech Touch 6841

Chapter 6841 Anchor Mechs

Ves had made his conditions clear.

He did not outright reject the possibility of turning the Otalon Sprius into a giant version of the Greenaxe, but multiple conditions had to be satisfied before he invested a vast amount of resources into turning an ace juggernaut into reality.

Alexa appeared satisfied enough. She knew as well as Ves that he would not acquiesce to her proposal without imposing heavy demands.

This was the best she could obtain.

"Please promise me that if we embark on this project, I will be included among its contributors. I am not asking to become the lead designer. Gloriana can claim that honor. I merely want to ensure that I am permitted to apply my design philosophy to the juggernaut design."

That caused Ves to look intrigued. "If you want to become a meaningful contributor to the ace juggernaut design project, then my intervention isn't really needed. We both specialize in designing living mechs, after all. Considering my workload, I do not mind passing up this responsibility to you. It will not be easy for you to participate in such a huge and high-end project. Not only will you be swamped with work, but you will also have to reinvent a lot of new stuff on account of working on a juggernaut rather than a more normal-sized mech. The old rules do not necessarily apply anymore."

Alexa responded with a confident smile. "I am not afraid of hard work. You don't have to involve yourself in this project. I am looking forward to helping our clan realize such a miraculous machine. Can you imagine it, Ves? A living machine that is the size of a small but still respectable warship. Such a machine has never been made before. I have many ideas I want to implement in this unique design, but I can only work out a handful. I will do my best to develop new design solutions to ensure that it will be just as powerful if you had taken my place instead."

While Ves doubted whether Alexa could make up for his absence, he appreciated her courage. A good mech designer needed to have dreams and the guts to pursue them. There could never be improvement without ambition.

"Is that all you want to talk about?"

"I have nothing else to say, sir. Let us return to the workshop before your wife begins to make demands."

The pair of mech designers returned to the main workshop.

At this time, the amount of visitors had dropped. Many of the mech designers who had grown curious about this undertaking had to leave in order to prevent them from spotting any sensitive trade secrets.

The workshop acquired a much more solemn atmosphere now that the noise level had died down.

Gloriana had already sent the children away after giving each of them a kiss on the head.

Lucky and Clixie accompanied the kids and made sure they remained in good company.

Master Laila Rebecca Devos chose to remain behind long enough to bid Ves good luck.

"Given your past performance and the impressive nature of your latest design, the Minerva Mark II will undoubtedly set a new standard of excellence within your clan. The probability that you and your wife will fail to meet expectations is low. Only external interference can disturb you to the point of producing a disappointing outcome, but we will endeavor to prevent that from happening. By the time your team is done, I hope to witness the rise of an era-defining first-class ace command mech."

"If that is all you wanted to say, you could have transmitted a message to me, Master."

"I did not choose to remain here because of this reason alone." Master Laila looked amused. "I wanted to offer guidance to you as a member of the older generation. The Minerva Mark II design is so good that it can have a brighter future than you envisioned. If you agree to conduct one additional step in your work process, you may be able to yield greater rewards than normal, but only if your work passes muster."

Ves looked suspicious. "What do you mean by that, exactly?"

Master Laila moved Ves to the side and activated a privacy screen around the two. "There are many variations of mechs in use. There are first-class multipurpose mechs. There are aquatic mechs. There are heavy artillery mechs. There are tiger mechs. Many of them may be called mechs, but they actually diverge wildly in shape and performance. There are so many different designs and variations that it is easy to get lost in them all. The vast majority of them are quite average and highly derivative of each other, but there is a small proportion that are so good that they approximate the ideal mechs that our industry is striving for. These mechs possess value that is greater than their apparent value in the hands of their users. They are good enough to become symbols of our proud industry."

As she spoke, Ves did not really appear all that interested.

"I am not in the mood to listen to a mushy high-minded philosophical lecture. Gloriana is about to start soon, and she can get quite pissed if I am late."

Just as he turned around to walk away, Master Laila Devos placed a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"As your elder, you should at least respect my wisdom. I can promise you that what I am about to pass on to you is more than worth the small amount of time I am holding you back. Since you disdain listening to a comprehensive story, let me be more concise. If you think your mech is good enough to rank among the best in our galaxy, then you can make the risky decision to call upon a higher authority to evaluate it. If your confidence is not misplaced, your work will be designated as an anchor mech. This has many implications, all of which are good, hence why anchor mechs are so respected."

"What are anchor mechs?" Ves frowned in puzzlement. "Why haven't I heard of this before?"

"It is not a surprise that not a single Master or Star Designer has shared this secret to you. Only mech designers of the aforementioned ranks are capable of producing works that can eventually become anchor mechs. They likely assumed that you are not ready to present any mechs that meet the necessary standard. I have a different opinion about it given the excellence of your past works. The Red Association normally forbids us from sharing this information to Seniors such as you, but I have little respect for the mechers, and even less reason to follow all of its rules. Our civilization is under heavy strain. We cannot let bureaucracy and caution override good sense."

Ves grew even more confused. This anchor mech business sounded more important than he expected.

"What's the big deal about anchor mechs?"

"It is difficult to summarize the importance of anchor mechs in so little time." Master Laila Devos looked frustrated. "Introducing this subject to you at such a late time is an impulsive decision on my part. Normally, I would have restrained myself, but the threat to the Terran Alliance and the rest of human civilization has grown too great. By informing you about the existence of anchor mechs, I hope that you will think about applying your Minerva Mark II to become one of them. This will have many consequences. In exchange for sharing aspects of your ace mech to a higher authority, your Minerva Mark II will become showered with grace. Your work will become stronger and the mech pilot can produce a higher level of true resonance in advance."

These benefits sounded a bit vague, but also real enough for Ves to develop an interest in this business!

His brain was already working hard since the start of this meeting. Ves had already begun to connect a few dots.

"This higher authority you are referring too... happens to be A certain 'kingdom', right? Not a Saint Kingdom, but something different and far greater."

Master Laila wordlessly nodded with a serious expression.

Now this was beginning to make sense.

If anchor mechs originated from the Kingdom of Mechs and retained their significance with the Red Kingdom, then both of them had the power to elevate the performance of the Minerva Mark II!

Though Ves did not receive a lot of information, he could guess that so long as the Minerva Mark II passed a highly rigorous examination, the Red Kingdom may decide to designate it as an anchor mech.

That would supposedly turn the ace command mech into another representation of the best mech designs of red humanity, whatever that meant.

What was important was that the Red Kingdom should not be stingy in issuing rewards. So long as the Minerva Mark II met all of the criteria, it should definitely receive a boost as a reward for contributing to the development of mechs.

"Is there any price to send an application to designate my Minerva Mark II as an anchor mech?"

"The kingdom is programmed to 'punish' you if you fail." Master Laila Devos said. "This punishment can range from damaging your work to earning yourself a black mark. It is your responsibility as a mech designer to be able to objectively evaluate your work. If you are not self-aware enough to understand how good or bad your mech may be, then that is your fault. However, since I am encouraging you to take this step, you can trust my judgment that your upcoming work has a higher chance to succeed."

The price of failure did not sound pleasant. It certainly worked to deter mech designers who casually wanted to try their luck. Their applications would only waste the time of the Red Kingdom!

"What are the downsides if my Minerva Mark II passes the test?" Ves asked.

"The kingdom will know more about you and your design solutions than before." Master Laila Devos said. "This has multiple consequences, of which many you do not need to know at the moment. The most important consequence is that the Minerva Mark II will set a standard for all other mechs that are similar to it. The kingdom will begin to compare your work to other ace command mechs, expert command mechs and even standard command mechs. It will intelligently make comparisons between

your Minerva Mark II and other machines that are designed to function similarly. This is a great honor and responsibility for your work."

Ves began to understand what was going on now.

"Anchor mechs are used to calibrate the kingdom. Is this correct?"

"That is an oversimplified answer, but you are largely correct." Master Laila Devos responded. "The two kingdoms are intelligent and powerful enough to decide which mechs can represent the best of their classifications. However, it is dangerous for humans to entrust this important function to a piece of transcendent programming. This is why the human factor remains essential. The Star Designers set or adjust the criteria that mechs must satisfy in order to earn the designation of anchor mechs. Mech designers who are confident in their works must manually apply for evaluation with the help of a small ritual in order to call down the kingdom. Even if they produce better works, as long as they refuse to submit their applications, their works will not become the latest representations of the mech industry."

"Why are anchor mechs so important?" Ves asked as he still looked a bit lost. "For the kingdom to issue rewards to a passing work, it has to be damn important for stuff like this to exist. What is the purpose of calibrating it with these anchor mechs?"

"The shortest answer that I can give you is that it will make it easier for other mech designers to design similar mechs." Master Laila Devos answered. "It will employ a variety of subtle measures to assist your colleagues and peers into designing similar machines as yours. The invisible influence of the Red Kingdom will subtly help them design an ace mech that may be alive or may consist of archemetal. In short, every mech designer who attempts to design an archemech or a living mech will have a slightly higher chance to succeed than before."

"Doesn't this produce the same result as realizing my design philosophy?" Ves asked.

"No. This is not a shortcut to becoming a Master Mech Designer, as people originally assumed that only Masters and Star Designers are qualified to produce anchor mechs. It is exceedingly rare for Senior Mech Designers to make an anchor mech, but the benefits are also greater for you. Think about it, Ves. If more mech designers are able to design living mechs, their unique research and applications may inspire you and help you perfect your own design philosophy. It is another form of teaching your craft to the entire mech industry. The method of assistance is indirect, and so is the

remuneration that you can obtain in return. That does not change the fact that this is helpful to you. As long as you succeed, you can already earn a fraction of the privileges of a Master Mech Designer in advance."

Chapter 6842 The Meaning of a Kingdom

"I will take your... advice... under consideration." Ves eventually said when he heard enough. "Can I share this with Gloriana?"

"You may. The two of you maintain enough parity that she deserves to learn about anchor mechs in advance. I am certain that this disclosure will delight her. It is a great honor to be able to contribute an anchor mech to the kingdom. It is one of the most important criteria that Master Mech Designers compare themselves to. Those that are able to develop more anchor mechs enjoy much higher recognition and status. You will often find them leading entire R&D institutions and important departments."

"So this is like a secret game between Masters like you." Ves voiced his thoughts. "The ones who earn the highest score get to rank higher than the ones who don't manage to do as well. This makes sense as any work that is qualified to become an anchor mech is unquestionably the best among millions of mech designs of the same category at that point in time."

Master Laila Rebecca Devos sagely nodded. "It is a crude but convenient means of measuring our worth and success. It is not the only means of evaluation, mind you. There are mech designers who have never succeeded to develop a work that has earned the designation of an anchor mech, but are still respected due to their useful innovations and design applications. You are a typical example of that. Your total contributions vastly exceed that of ordinary Master Mech Designers because you have introduced revolutionary new possibilities. Now, I am introducing another means for you to make a greater contribution to the mech community."

To develop a mech that earned the recognition of the Red Kingdom was one of the highest professional honors that Ves could obtain.

It was better than winning a shiny medal for pulling off a military operation or earning lots of money as far as he was concerned.

This was because he was a mech designer first.

All other accolades paled in comparison.

For the first time since he embarked on his career, Ves finally saw an opportunity to open a crack into the Red Kingdom.

This indescribable wonder was the holy land of all mech pilots and mech designers in the Red Ocean.

To be able to contribute to its evolution and reshape how it exerted its invisible influence over every professional that worked with mechs sounded exhilarating!

Ves gained a greater understanding of why the Kingdom of Mechs and the Red Kingdom were called this way.

The kingdoms set the standard of what mechs were supposed to be in the Milky Way and the Red Ocean respectively.

If beast mechs suddenly became more powerful due to technological or doctrinal advances, mech designers would definitely produce a lot of works that successfully earned the designation of anchor mechs.

Once these beast mechs started to become anchor mechs at a greater proportion, the kingdom would steadily tilt so that it favored them more.

This made it easier for other mech designers to design machines that chased this dominant trend, thereby granting customers faster and more convenient access to superior mechs.

In other words, the mech designers who supported the rise of beast mechs successfully conquered a large amount of 'territory' inside the kingdom!

Naturally, when there were winners, there were also losers.

Mech designers who supported humanoid mechs inevitably lost ground as the kingdom deemed their anchor mechs inferior or outdated.

They would receive less support from the Red Kingdom. The next generation of mech designers would also become encouraged to develop 'superior' beast mechs.

There was always a way to make a comeback. As long as supporters of humanoid mechs worked hard enough and developed innovative solutions that put them at an advantage, then they could begin to conquer the territory they had previously ceded.

Ves began to imagine the Red Kingdom as a literal piece of land that floated somewhere deep in the imaginary realm.

With every passing day, the territories of every mech grouping shifted. Some lost ground while others managed to gain it. Others remained stable as the popularity of their kinds of machines remained unshakable.

This was the true meaning of a kingdom. A kingdom of mechs.

Ves also made another important realization.

The separation of the Red Kingdom was a foregone conclusion.

It couldn't be helped. It did not make sense to group mechs from the Red Ocean together with the mechs from the Milky Way.

The wider availability of phasewater technology, hyper technology, E-technology and most recently superdimensional technology and their associated materials would cause the mechs of the Red Ocean to diverge increasingly more from their Milky Way roots.

What made for a good anchor mech in one galaxy did not necessarily make for a good anchor mech in another galaxy!

Without any ability to transfer goods and mechs from one galaxy to the other one, the effectiveness of the Kingdom of Mechs would degrade as the differences grew larger.

A split was the most sensible decision to make. The Polymath was merely the person who did what was necessary, like taking a dying pet to the backyard before putting the animal out of its misery.

In any case, Ves appreciated that Master Laila Devos chose to share this little secret.

It was like receiving an invitation to grab his first piece of territory in the Red Kingdom!

Of course, the existing landholders were not willing to give up ground so easily. Their anchor mechs were all pretty good in order to occupy places in the Red Kingdom, but Ves remained confident that he could muscle his way into a small corner.

It should be a lot easier for mech designers like him to gain a bit of ground in the Red Kingdom during a time of rapid technological advancements.

Existing anchor mechs quickly became outdated if they did not keep up with all of the nifty new tech and materials that became available.

By taking advantage of the lag between the updates of established anchor mechs, Ves and Gloriana should be able to sneak his work in their midst a lot easier than usual!

He fully expected the rest of the mech industry to narrow the gap by developing powerful design applications based on their own specializations, but at least Ves would have at least one anchor mech to his name.

It should be an especially good accomplishment if he managed to earn it while he was still a Senior Mech Designer!

He threw Master Laila Devos a knowing look.

This was probably another reason why she did not participate in the upgrade process. She wanted to give Ves and Gloriana enough room to demonstrate their capabilities and prove that they did not freeload off a Master Mech Designer who lived for over 3 centuries.

As Ves approached his wife, he tilted his head to the side.

She got the message and moved to the side where they could talk in relative privacy.

"What is it, Ves?"

"I just learned about something really cool from Master Laila Devos."

He quickly briefed her on the existence and significance of anchor mechs.

His wife's expression changed multiple times. Her evolution was similar to his own. She ultimately became a lot more fired up than before.

"I always knew that we were improving rapidly to the point where our works could finally begin to compete against the best. While I am surprised that this opportunity had come years sooner than I thought, I am definitely going to fight for this chance!"

"Aren't you afraid of failing to meet the criteria set by the kingdom?" Ves asked with concern. "The penalty for presenting a mech that is ultimately not worthy is quite severe."

Gloriana cooled her enthusiasm a bit after hearing that. "Hm, you are right. We need to be more prudent. Let us at least complete the upgrade project before deciding whether we should submit our work to the higher authority. We will know by then if the Minerva Mark II is good enough. As far as the design is concerned, I am confident that it holds a strong advantage in this aspect. The combination between my archetech and your E-technology results in an excellent combination. When we add in the other features, the Minerva Mark II is destined to become a first-class ace command mech that will define all command mechs that come afterwards."

Her personality did not allow her to back away from this challenge so easily.

This was a direct test of her confidence in her own abilities!

For the sake of her ego and self-esteem, she could not allow herself to take on this challenge, especially when Master Laila Devos had expressed her belief that the Miracle Couple would succeed.

Gloriana not only made the determination to work as hard as possible to turn her next work into an anchor mech, she also began to think about the significance about its existence.

"I think I understand what anchor mechs mean." She claimed.

"Oh?"

"They are the completed works that have come closest to perfection at that moment in time." She said. "True perfection is not within our ability to attain. We can only rank mechs by how close they come to being the most perfect solution given the materials and tools we have available. To be able to make an anchor mech is the most truthful recognition of excellence that you can obtain in the mech industry. The criteria is set by multiple Star Designers who can be trusted to be fair and impartial in their standards. Since it is the kingdom that does the actual judging, no single individual can play favorites. Therefore, if your work becomes good enough to receive the recognition of the Red Kingdom, it is truly the closest mech to perfection in its respective market category."

Ves found it interesting that her take on this anchor mech business was different from his own interpretation.

Gloriana saw this game as a contest to design the most perfect mechs. She did not pay any significant attention to the territory and influence aspects.

She did not really care about setting standards or starting a new trend.

Her ambition was ultimately centered around herself. Only she could design the perfect vessel. Gloriana did not think that anyone else was qualified to take this job away from her. She was born to fulfill this grand goal.

"Ves."

"Yes, Gloriana?"

"Do you think that producing anchor mechs is an essential requirement to advancing to the rank of Star Designer?"

Ves widened his eyes. He had not even thought that far yet! Although they did not have enough information to determine the truth, he had a feeling that his wife may be right.

Only by proving their ability to design the best mechs would they have the capital to become a legendary Star Designer. It was inconceivable for a Master Mech Designer to break through without satisfying this core requirement.

"I think you are probably right. This is a game that is almost exclusively played by Master Mech Designers. It must be extremely competitive given what is at stake."

Masters that managed to conquer more territory in the Red Kingdom would presumably gain greater assistance from this powerful construct!

That assistance may play a crucial role in facilitating their breakthroughs!

"I have made another deduction." His wife said as she continued to look at old facts in a different light. "Every god mech has to be an anchor mech. They are too powerful to be left out of the ranking. The designers of these god mechs must rank at the top of the charts!"

Whereas Gloriana saw this competition as a ranking contest, Ves preferred to interpret it as conquering the territories of the Red Kingdom.

From his perspective, that meant that the Star Designers had grabbed the largest and most coveted territories of this kingdom, thereby dividing it into multiple strong camps.

Ves began to wonder which Star Designer conquered the most ground at this time.

Chapter 6843 Anomalous Activity

After a bit of a delay, the upgrade process commenced.

Both Ves and Gloriana had extra motivation to do a good job this time.

At first, Gloriana started off with the usual step by summoning Alexandria.

"Maow!"

The red companion spirit emerged from Gloriana's forehead and immediately bound all of the participating mech designers in a design network.

This design network enabled everyone to share each other's surface thoughts as well as deeper thoughts of their choosing.

Gloriana also added Saint Commander Casella Ingvar to the design network.

This would help every mech designer understand their client better. Each of them would know who exactly they served this time.

Casella made sure to keep a sober mind and avoid thinking about too many distractions.

Ves, Gloriana and Alexa Streon were already highly familiar with the benefits of the design network.

Beatrice Hendrix and Viktor MacMillan still had to spend a little time getting accustomed to working with other voices in their minds.

They started off slow, but quickly ramped up when they managed to establish their groove.

Gloriana had meticulously formed a plan. Everyone was already highly familiar with their work assignments. Since none of them were amateurs, they went to work without encountering any stumbles.

Gloriana undertook the most difficult task of fabricating the most complicated archetech components. Her mastery of archetech exceeded that of everyone else in the Larkinson Clan, so only she could complete these crucial assignments.

Ves and Beatrice possessed a shallower but still serviceable grasp of archetech. This allowed them to fabricate the simpler archetech components.

Ves mostly focused on fabricating the parts that would eventually turn into the Victrix, the living fey that would become an iconic companion to the Minerva Mark II.

Beatrice meanwhile fabricated the parts that would comprise the armor system and Battle Skirt System.

While they encountered plenty of difficulties due to their lack of fluency in archetech, the design network enabled Gloriana to provide constant advice and warnings without verbalizing even once.

This was a much more effective form of communication for them, especially when Gloriana was able to transfer images such as schematics and correction plans!

While the mech designers responsible for most of the fabrication work became busy, Viktor and Alexa undertook the tedious task of disassembling the Minerva Mark I.

The ace command mech had incurred minor damage here and there. The machine was already a little worn out due to past exertions. The Minerva hadn't been able to receive proper servicing beyond the minimum for more than a month.

Even so, the living expert mech still exuded a strong sense of order and control. Everyone could instinctively feel that she was a machine that was made for command!

Alexa and Viktor had to be careful about disassembling the mech. They had to prep the machine for a full rebuild, which meant that they had to separate a lot of parts in advance in order to make the process more efficient.

They could not afford to make the mistake of going too far. The living mech would not be able to sustain the cohesion of her spiritual foundation if there was simply not enough of the mech frame that remained intact!

The two mech designers had to work carefully and respectfully in order to prep the Minerva Mark II for a complete reinvention without killing her off entirely during the transition!

While all of this work sounded precarious, everyone completed the necessary steps without any issue for the time being.

They all knew what to expect. Many of them had already practiced the scenarios they would face in virtual reality.

Therefore, unless any accidents occurred that completely rendered the planning useless, it was rather hard for anyone to screw up in the process!

So far, work proceeded well. Ves grew satisfied with his output. Even if he was not as meticulous as his wife, he was still able to fabricate basic archetech components that did the job while also conforming to his artistic tendencies.

Another factor that helped to smooth everything over was the participation of the smart AIs!

The SF-02 provided excellent value to the design labs, but they were also able to assist in the workshop.

Polly, Momo and Aria all projected their feline forms every once in a while and provided light assistance whenever suitable.

Momo was especially helpful when it came to fabricating archemetal components.

The three smart AIs did not directly connect to the production machines and made sure to complete every production task on autopilot.

That would remove the human factor from the works. It also granted a disproportionate amount of control to non-humans, which was unacceptable!

In short, as much as Ves hated it, he ordered the smart AIs to restrict the depth of their capabilities and set their limits at a low threshold.

The SF-02 was highly capable of doing a lot more, but Ves felt it was enough to provide technical advice.

Of all of its smart AIs, Momo was obviously doing the best at the moment.

Momo provided Gloriana with information on the strengths and weaknesses of archetech. She was so effective that she was able to save a fair bit of time.

However, under no circumstances did Gloriana outsource all production tasks on any of the smart AIs in their entirety. She would rather delegate time-consuming work projects to her subordinates.

A day passed by. As their work progressed, the mech designers only took minimal breaks. They were too excited and committed to upgrading the Minerva to truly stop during the entire process.

As the mech designers began to work with more powerful and volatile materials, they made sure to be extremely careful when handling these expensive and dangerous materials.

They paid attention to unwanted interactions by keeping numerous volatile materials apart from each other.

They also made sure to be careful when combining dozens of different exotics and hypers into a single complex archemetal block.

None of the materials gave them any issues. The experts had already documented all of the potential dangers, and the mech designers were not stupid enough to violate these justifiable safety rules.

It was due to all of the excellent documentation and exploratory research that Ves gained enough of an understanding of how to prevent a material as dangerous as Mindstorm Alloy from turning into the next weapon of mass destruction.

Fortunately, with careful handling, Mindstorm Alloy remained remarkably well-behaved. The same went for Dragon Scales, Solus Gas and other hyper materials.

Ves soon encountered a troublesome exception when it was time for him to whip out the Mentalist Crystal.

He had already retrieved it from the Vault of Eternity.

When he opened its container, Ves felt as if he was suffering from immediate illusions.

He struggled to absorb humanoid shapes. It took a lot of will to maintain a sober mind in the presence of a hyper material that was known to mess with minds!

Right now, the Mentalist Crystal that took a huge amount of money and effort to secure was not only making it difficult for Ves to maintain coherent thoughts.

However, more and more work assignments piled up that most people did not see anything wrong with this appearance.

The Mentalist Crystal actually did more than that. It began to affect the minds of nearby humans in an instant.

"What?! This crystal is acting out, and it is doing this all by itself!"

Ves suddenly realized that it was beginning to interact with everyone's rich thinking.

Their relative proximity to the Mentalist Crystal meant that as long as it was exposed to the public, it would definitely get robbed due to all of the confusion it generated!

Now that the Mentalist Crystal was acting up without any immediate cause, more and more people grew concerned.

Ves eventually found out that the Mentalist Crystal was beginning to absorb nearby energies and trying to make sense of it all even now!

"Is it alive?"

Ves couldn't answer this question.

What mattered was that there was something strange taking place. How was he supposed to process a Mentalist Crystal with exceedingly valuable properties!

As Ves struggled to get a grip on this volatile high-grade hyper, he suddenly developed a brilliant idea.

Instead of trying to suppress the Mentalist Crystal, Ves thought about letting it become active in a more controlled manner.

This altered the crystal's behavior and introduced a lot of new possibilities.

Ves began to think deeper on what he could do with this unexpected development.

He thought back on his conversation with Master Laila Devos.

She had good reason to believe that the Minerva Mark II would stand at the top of the ace mech classification.

That was because command mechs were inherently rare to begin with. High-ranking command mechs were so rare that each of them possessed their own separate identities.

It should be easier to turn the Minerva Mark II into an anchor mech when there was not much opposition from the beginning!

Ves concluded that a Mentalist Crystal could make a huge difference.

The problem was that he and the rest were not proficient in manipulating this mysterious and difficult object.

They had to learn on the fly if they wanted to have any hope of fully harnessing the power of the crystal.

Ves mostly relied on Blinky to analyse the Mentalist Crystal at first.

That was when an accident occurred.

The Mentalist Crystal abruptly absorbed the companion spirit among the captives!

This immediately caused Blinky a considerable amount of distress!

Fortunately, the Mentalist Crystal did not pose a threat against what it had just absorbed.

When Blinky experimentally started to flex his power, he found that the Mentalist Crystal seemingly opened a portal to a completely different place, among many other powers.

Mentalist Crystals just became a lot more interesting!

With the help of smart AIs, Ves was quickly able to organize all of the data. They also remained watchful for any sign of trouble from the Mentalist Crystal.

"I am getting closer to figuring out another application of a Mentalist Crystal." Ves told his wife during a brief break.

"Oh? What ideas do you have, sir?"

"Hmmm..." Ves frowned in thought. "My ideas are not mature yet. Give me more time to devise actual solutions."

The SF-02 also needed time to calculate different solutions. The more data at Ves' disposal, the more he could figure out what happened during the crucial ambush.

Whatever the case, Ves believed that as long as he discovered and implemented alternate means of defense, they would trickle down and benefit many other people!

"What are Mentalist Crystals, exactly?"

Ves did not know why he was asking himself this question, but he felt that the answer could help him develop better applications.

The lack of information was frustrating him! He knew too little about Mentalist Crystals.

Just standing close to one already amplified all of his emotions to an extent.

"I think they are crystallized brain cells." Gloriana guessed. "They are parts of the mind of an organism that has reached a form of transcendence. From this viewpoint, using a Mentalist Crystal may be asking for help from the source of all of the suffering and misery."

This was a rather bold idea!

A Mentalist Crystal might contain hidden memories and various secret information.

Nobody knew about it because they were never taught to access it in a strange manner.

If Gloriana's theory was right, then Ves might be able to find a way to access those memories!

Ves sent Blinky into the Mentalist Crystal again and tried to rummage inside for anything interesting.

However, his companion spirit faced a lot of resistance inside the Mentalist Crystal.

It was as if its own defenders rose up to expel all intruders!

Whether they were human or alien did not seem important.

"Have you made any progress, Ves?"

"I am getting closer. I am picking up more and more clues with the help of Blinky. I need to conduct a few more experiments before I can issue a verdict."

Chapter 6844 Death Echo

Ever since Master Laila Rebecca Devos informed Ves that the Minerva Mark II had the potential to become an anchor mech, he had already begun to engage in one of his bad habits.

He wanted to innovate on top of what was already in the mech design!

This was a rather reckless and impulsive decision. Skilled mech designers regularly followed their feelings and made minor deviations from their original design. This was rather normal as local circumstances might demand adjustments to hopefully produce a better result.

Factors such as context, production machines, materials and comprehension could all present alternatives that might produce a better or more suitable outcome than what the mech design proscribed.

Yet Ves intended to go much further.

He knew that Gloriana would hate him for this, but he was determined to give it a try!

Gloriana had already noticed his shift in attitude over the design network. She threw a mirthless glance in his direction. He pointedly ignored her feeble attempts to discourage him from going on an adventure.

Ves couldn't help himself!

Did he lack confidence in his Minerva Mark II design?

Not really, but he personally felt that even if it had the potential to become an anchor mech, it was only due to the inadequacy of the Red Ocean's mech industry.

Command mechs were rare in general. There were not many mech pilots who were willing to complete the additional studies required to command troops while actively participating in the fight at the same time.

They had to maintain enough cool to maintain awareness of the shifting battlefield, but also run hot with passion whenever they directly confronted enemies.

Most mech commanders never managed to find the right balance that worked out for their individual situations.

Many of them became too cold and rational to the point where they could never muster the passion and emotion to break through.

Melkor Larkinson was one of many examples of these failures.

Other mech commanders became too engrossed in personal combat that they lost their overview of the big picture. Even if they broke through, they had already become false mech commanders.

Saint General Ark Larkinson was a typical example of such a distorted case.

Only a minority of exceptional mech pilots such as Saint Commander Casella Ingvar managed to thread the needle and defy the odds.

How many success cases like Casella were out there in the Red Ocean?

Ves never bothered to make a count, but it was definitely not too many!

Compared to the much larger and more prosperous mech community in the Milky Way, the one in the Red Ocean was just a fraction of the size!

Ves did not dare to imagine that the Kingdom of Mechs would agree to bestow the designation of an anchor mech onto the Minerva Mark II.

Even with the accumulated advantages of archetech, phasewater technology, hyper technology and E-technology, the many mech designers of the Milky Way were not vegetables!

They had mastered their own forms of high technology! They also had access to unfathomable exotics with effects that no material in the Red Ocean could reproduce!

This was why Ves actually felt rather bad about the current situation.

If the Minerva Mark II could become an anchor mech just by following the original design, then he could not regard this outcome as a celebration of excellence.

He would instead see it as a condemnation of a weak mech industry.

Ves did not want to win this honor by taking advantage of a vulnerability.

His pride as a mech designer did not permit him to earn this accomplishment without making any special effort.

What he actually wanted was to produce a mech that was so unquestionably superior that it could still become an anchor mech in the face of much stiffer competition!

Only then would this victory become meaningful to him as a mech designer.

Even though he had not voiced any of his current thoughts to his wife, Gloriana only needed to pick up a few clues from the design network to become horrified at his choice!

Ves was like a gambler who eschewed a safe bet that would yield him a small profit in favor of a risky bet that would win him the jackpot!

If the previous approach had an 80 percent chance of success, the latter one had a 10 to 20 percent chance of success!

Any sensible mech designer would pick the former over the latter. The stakes were high. So long as Ves and Gloriana managed to produce a work that got recognized by the Red Kingdom, their path to becoming a Master Mech Designer would become shorter and smoother.

However, this benefit did not attract Ves all that much.

He was confident that he could break through sooner or later if he continued to progress his design philosophy.

In other words, Ves did not fear failure all that much.

Since that was the case, he may as well toss other considerations aside and work towards the best possible outcome!

Taking a risky bet made much more sense to him! Developing a powerful new innovation on the spot would definitely advance his design philosophy much greater than if he stuck to the original plan!

This was why Ves had been avidly studying the Mentalist Crystal in his possession.

After spending valuable time on thinking and examining the mysterious crystal from multiple angles, he could not pick up anything obvious from the white and translucent spherical orb.

The crystal did not contain any obvious spiritual remnants. Blinky had already taken a look inside and found that the Hunting Association had completely cleansed it of anything redundant.

What a powerful means.

The Hunters clearly did not want any accidents to occur. It would be bad if the Hunting Association delivered a Mentalist Crystal that still contained the remnant soul of a dangerous and savage calamity beast!

The thorough cleaning left nothing detectable behind. This gave Ves little to work with. The Mentalist Crystal was like an empty glass. Even he could not really produce anything out of nothing.

After a bit more thought, he decided he needed a little help.

There was no rule that prohibited him from soliciting advice from an external consultant.

He reached into one of his uniform pockets and withdrew a small masterwork statuette that depicted the Daughter of Death.

"Helena. Come out and give me a hand."

His 'eldest sister' took a few minutes to respond.

The statuette glowed until it spawned a small spiritual manifestation of a gray-haired girl with a lotus in her hair.

She looked around in confusion. "What do you want from me, brother? I do not know the first thing about mech design. Nothing in this workshop makes sense to me. I roughly know what these machines can do, but I have no idea how to operate their controls."

"I don't need your help with that, Helena. Take a look at this Mentalist Crystal instead. Can you detect any remnant of the exobeast that once grew this hyper material inside its brain?"

The Daughter of Death glanced down at the large and sparkling crystal. Its strong mental affinity caused it to exert a strange influence on living beings.

Even the manifestation of Helena became a little affected by its strangeness.

At first, Helena did not really detect anything noteworthy from her perspective. Even she could tell that certain parties had thoroughly scrubbed it clean of spiritual contaminants.

"This 'Mentalist Crystal' is interesting." She remarked. "I am not sure whether to regard it as a gift of the universe or the product of a fundamental natural law. Under a string of coincidences, I can see how a feral beast may be able to spawn this crystal and develop a degree of sapience that can eventually match or exceed human intelligence."

Ves reacted with surprise. He did not know that his 'sister' could discern so much information from observing the crystal!

"All of that sounds interesting, but is there anything left about the original creature that produced this crystal that is salvageable?"

"Hmmm... possibly." Helena said as she began to scrutinize the crystal further. "The process used to purify the crystal is overbearingly strong. This is a crude but effective solution. However... nothing is perfect. This Mentalist Crystal... still bears an invisible imprint of the deceased. You can think of it as the echo of the dead. The soul of the creature has passed on, but the imprint it has left behind in this crystal has remained. The cleansing process has overlooked this subtle variable because it has no consequence to the use of this crystal."

"Is there a way to strengthen this echo and bring it back to life?" Ves inquired.

"That is... I do not know." She reluctantly said. "This echo is very faint and feeble. To turn it into a living entity is like creating something out of nothing. It shouldn't be possible, yet your design philosophy has enabled you to do this many times. Perhaps..."

Helena continued to ponder for a minute. She then decided to take action.

He reached out with her arm and began to infuse death energy into the Mentalist Crystal.

Slowly but surely, a dark apparition of a calamity beast appeared over the Mentalist Crystal.

Its shape appeared vague and insubstantial at first, but it began to gain definition with every passing second.

The creature that originally produced the Mentalist Crystal appeared to be a large and monstrous feathered bird.

Ves grew intrigued.

"What are you doing, Helena?"

"I am adding substance to the echo of the beast that this crystal originally belonged to." The female spirit replied. "It may look impressive, but don't be fooled. I can't bring back the dead when there is nothing of substance left. What I am doing is the equivalent of filling a bird-shaped balloon with death energy. The death echo is only a reflection of a once-powerful avian calamity beast."

Ves stared deeply at the so-called death echo. It only retained the shape of the calamity beast, but not the spirit or mind.

This was not an ideal outcome, but he could work with it. If his theories were correct, this may be enough for him to activate the greater potential of the Mentalist Crystal!

The exertion on Helena's part was not small. Her manifestation frowned as she continued to pump the death echo with more of her death energy.

"Alright, that is the limit of what I can do at this time." She said. "It is nothing impressive, but that is because the death echo cannot accommodate more without losing cohesion."

"Thank you, Helena." Ves smiled. "I will take it from here. Can you stay and make sure to keep this death echo docile. I am going to try to breathe life into it, but I am afraid that my life energy will produce unwanted reactions with all of this death energy."

"I can do that, brother."

Ves did not breathe life into the death echo himself, but instead called out Blinky again so that he could carefully channel life-attributed E energy in a controlled manner.

The companion spirit remained cautious at first.

With the help of Helena's strong control, the death echo did not exhibit any strong or dangerous reactions.

Seeing that the death echo remained stable upon contact, Blinky carefully began to increase his output of life energy.

The death echo quickly began to change with the infusion of a completely different kind of energy.

The echo's appearance gradually became brighter and more colorful.

Its wings started to shine in different metallic shades. Its feathers grew sharper and more defined.

What was most remarkable was that the death echo actually started to show faint signs of coming to life!

Ves was keenly able to sense that this was not an illusion. For whatever reason, the Mentalist Crystal seemed to possess an extremely hidden reservoir of data and fed it to the death echo, causing the latter to gradually regain the mind and spirit of the original calamity beast!

"It's... working!"

Chapter 6845 Feathered Steelwing Bird

Ves was creating quite a distraction for the people who remained in the private workshop.

He completely disregarded the attention of others. He became completely fixated on his own experimentation.

Blinky continued to release life energy from his Blinkyverse.

As life energy was Ves and the companion spirit's primary attribute, the Blinkyverse actually contained an enormous reservoir of this energy. He had no concerns that he would run out of it anytime soon.

Now that Blinky was becoming more active, he was doing more than infusing life into the death echo formed by Helena.

A lot of life energy spilled over and spread across the workshop. The other mech designers became slightly invigorated, while the parts they created so far absorbed a bit of life energy as well.

Of course, that did not mean that all of the tools, parts and materials would come to life all of a sudden.

Engaging the Living Workshop ability was useful when he was fabricating a brand new mech, but it was relatively pointless for upgrading existing living mechs.

The Minerva was already alive and had grown so strong after absorbing Casella Ingvar's feedback. It made no difference if the new parts were infused with a little life energy.

Perhaps only Alexa Streon possessed the capability to further the growth of a living mech like the Minerva, but she needed to grow a lot stronger to make a difference at this level.

In any case, as Blinky continued to breathe life into the death echo, a miracle slowly unfolded before everyone's eyes.

The calamity beast seemingly came to life.

Ves had no illusions about what he was doing. What he was doing was more akin to creating a new spiritual product than reviving a dead creature.

The death echo contained no remnant of the deceased exobeast's soul. Since the original ingredient remained absent, Ves had little choice but to create a new spiritual product based off the mind-attributed E energy that the Mentalist Crystal concentrated in and around its structure.

The resulting spiritual product just happened to conform to the 'blueprint' established by the death echo.

Helena's handiwork essentially served as a template that allowed Blinky to create a new spiritual product that closely matched the original calamity beast.

The new life form could therefore be regarded as a clone or a successor rather than a return of the original spirit.

Whatever the case, Ves did not go through this trouble to create a close copy of the calamity beast's original spirit without a good reason.

As the death echo slowly transitioned into a spirit that became increasingly more alive and intelligent, Ves made sure to keep a constant eye on the Mentalist Crystal.

Just as he suspected, there was a strong bond between spirit and object.

The two were tied to each other. The calamity beast spirit was naturally anchored to the Mentalist Crystal, enabling it to survive so long as it remained intact and whole.

The spark of intelligence shining from the increasingly more substantial spirit's eyes showed that it was already beginning to process complex thoughts.

"Ves..." Gloriana couldn't help but voice her concerns this time. "Are you sure that what you are doing is... safe? Exobeasts are not safe. If you try to bring them to life again, they will always turn against humans."

"That is not always the case." Ves shook his head in disagreement. "Qilanxo, the Phase King and so on are all pretty loyal to us. I think that there is a difference between a pure spiritual entity and an actual living organism. It doesn't matter if this bird thinks it can initiate a breakout attempt. Without a powerful body, it is way too vulnerable, and it should be smart enough to understand this fact."

The newborn spirit already started to look subdued. It displayed clear signs of vigilance towards Blinky and the spiritual manifestation of Helena.

The Daughter of Death smirked as she was staring at the spirit. She only needed to flex her death energy once in order to get her message across.

That did not assuage Gloriana's concerns.

"What is the purpose of all of this, Ves? What are you trying to accomplish?"

"I am trying to enhance the utilization of the Mentalist Crystal." Ves responded. "Have you noticed how close the new avian spirit is tied to this hyper material? The two have reached a degree of integration that is very close to the original. You can't produce this effect by trying to bind other spirits to the Mentalist Crystal. That is like transplanting an organ that comes from a third party. There will always be a degree of incompatibility that will inhibit the power of the crystal."

His wife did not look convinced, but that was okay. Ves preferred to let his work do the talking.

After noticing that the newborn spirit had reached saturation, Blinky ceased to feed it with life energy.

The Star Cat flew closer and began to examine the spirit from multiple angles. The companion spirit's observation revealed no obvious problems and confirmed that a strong connection existed between the bird and the crystal.

Though the spirit was clearly at the mercy of others, he still retained a bit of the pride of its original. The bird tried to puff up its chest and spread its metallic feather-covered wings.

With the help of his strong mind energy, the spirit was even able to convey vestiges of its own memory to others!

Ves closed his eyes and sampled the alien impressions. He could feel flashes of pride, cunning and brutality as he became engulfed by images of flying in the air, ambushing unsuspecting exobeasts and tearing apart hunting mechs with its exceptionally sharp beak and claws.

When the avian exobeast was still young, it had to be careful and avoid a lot of prey. It went hungry plenty of times during its youth.

Yet as it continued to grow smarter, the avian began to distinguish itself from other exobeast.

It learned how to track beasts that were powerful when awake, but vulnerable when they slept in their burrows.

It knew when to wait for other birds to leave their nests before swooping in to devour the eggs or chicks.

It also learned to avoid the small but incredibly deadly human hunting parties as they entered the hunting preserves and sought to take down challenging creatures.

Over time, the avian exobeast continued to grow in size and strength.

Powerful exobeasts that could previously snap the avian in half now turned into its prey.

One of the turning points in its evolution was gaining the ability to fire out its own reinforced feathers!

Not only that, but it was able to control the flight of its feathers so that they would return to its wings after they had cut apart another exobeast!

After gaining the ability to launch and control sharp metallic feathers, the avian exobeast's growth rate surged.

Its body increased in size at a prodigious rate. Its feathers grew harder, sharper and more numerous.

Once it finally became the apex predator of its own habitat, it had grown bold enough to fly high in the sky, giving the beast a glimpse of many other hunting grounds!

As the mutated beast became increasingly affected by the instinct to hunt down strong prey, it suppressed this urge and tried to stay put in its familiar territory for as long as it could.

The avian beast had already figured out that it might stumble upon enemies that it could not handle.

The human and occasionally their much larger metal constructs always conveyed lethal danger.

No matter how much the avian beast had grown, this had never truly changed!

What was worse was that the bird occasionally felt watched or even threatened by invisible observers.

These hidden observers were definitely related to these small but amazingly clever humans.

The bird began to fear for its life.

The humans intruded in its territory and hunted the lesser prey with distressing regularity.

Most of the time, they won, but there were also times where they lost.

Even so, the bird could not help but notice that the hunters never sent anyone too strong in comparison to the prey they tracked and killed.

Did this mean that there were stronger humans out there that could pose a fatal threat against itself?

This was likely the case!

The avian exobeast therefore decided to go against its instincts and stay put even if it slowed down its evolution.

It even began to hide itself by holing up in a cave. By appearing as little as possible, it hoped to escape the attention to those that could threaten its life.

Even when it evolved into a larger and more formidable calamity beast, the increasingly larger bird never threw caution to the wind.

It was a pity that the humans had never lost track of the calamity beast.

When a hunting party of mechs set off into the hunting preserve, they returned with a precious Mentalist Crystal and some of the most valuable body parts of a once mighty creature.

Ves blinked again. He consciously pushed away the illusions of the original creature's life.

"I will call you the Feathered Steelwing Bird." He addressed the newborn spirit directly. "If you have inherited at least part of the memories of your predecessor, then you should know that you cannot defeat us. If you cooperate with me, I can assure you that you will remain alive. I am responsible for giving you life. I can easily take it away. Do you understand?"

Although the avian spirit did not know how to nod, it nonetheless conveyed its submission through its mental activity.

"You will soon become part of a greater work. Stay put and settle your new condition. I will come back to you later and integrate you into your new life."

There was no need for Ves to explain himself any further to this spirit.

It probably wouldn't understand anything of what Ves had in mind.

"You can go now, Helena."

"Are you sure? I can continue to keep this new bird honest."

"That is not necessary. It is scared stiff in your presence. Let us give it more breathing room."

As Helena's manifestation disappeared, the workshop seemed to go back to normal.

Though Gloriana most definitely wanted answers from him, he simply waved his hand in her direction and resumed his fabrication work.

He continued to invest much of his attention to preparing all of the parts related to the Victrix.

Many of the complicated parts could only be made by Gloriana. He paid attention to her work through the design network in order to make sure her output remained compatible with his intentions.

One of the most challenging work assignments was the fabrication of parts made out of high-end materials.

Their energetic activity and other complications reduced the margin of error and increased the chance of mishaps.

Fortunately, his workload was not beyond his own skills. His wife understood his capabilities too well and made sure he was never over his head.

By the time all of the parts of the Victrix became available and ready for assembly, Ves thoroughly inspected them all before moving them to another section of the workshop.

Unlike the main mech frame, the Victrix was a completely new addition to the Minerva concept.

Ves did not have to go through the tedious and slow process of incrementally replacing a few parts at a time.

Most of the assembly process therefore became a breeze to Ves. The difficulty of working with archetech was largely based on how the production of archemetal components required a lot of special expertise. Putting them together was like assembling a prefab structure.

The Victrix quickly began to take shape. Ves had made a few artistic improvisations to the contours and appearance of the soon-to-be-living fey. He subtly made it resemble the Feathered Steelwing Bird.

At a certain point, he carefully inserted the Mentalist Crystal inside the center where it enjoyed the most protection.

The newborn spirit was confused by what was happening, but Ves did not bother to provide much clarification.

"Soon."

Chapter 6846 An Unnatural Fusion

Ves came close to realizing his latest idea.

He had completely assembled the Victrix, but had yet to pair it with the Minerva.

Gloriana and the other mech designers had to put in a lot more work in order to assemble the upgraded mech.

The process of disassembling numerous parts before slotting in archemetal components was a long and delicate process.

It was also necessary in order to preserve the Minerva's life.

Naturally, Ves did not stand by and cheer everyone on. He pulled up his sleeves and pitched in as well.

Despite the disruptions caused by his impulsive decisions, Ves was glad to see that the rest of the upgrade process went according to plan more or less.

Gloriana had done an excellent job at fabricating the most complicated archemetal components.

Alexa Streon and Beatrice Hendrix clearly lacked expertise in this field, and it showed as their output was visibly worse in quality and refinement.

His wife was not really happy with that, but it was not worthwhile to redo all of the fabrication work in person. It would take way too much time and consume a lot of expensive resources.

She had little choice but to turn up her nose and accept this suboptimal outcome. She could only console herself that the work completed by the other mech designers did not consist of core components. Their relatively minor imperfections should only have a minimal effect on the overall performance of the Minerva Mark II.

Gloriana could still hold in her temper so long as the Minerva retained her masterwork quality.

As the upgrade process began to reach the latest stage, the new ace command mech already started to exude a lot of power and majesty.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar already adored her new machine. Her yearning had grown with each passing day, but it was only on the final one that she truly desired to pilot the ace mech that would accompany her throughout all of her struggles of the coming decade.

"You have outdone yourself, sir." Casella emotionally spoke as she looked up at the impressive ace mech that had already acquired a modernized version of her iconic silver, green and gold coating. "I have yet to enter the cockpit, but I can already feel my Command Field buzzing with anticipation. Compared to the Mark I, the Mark II makes me feel as if I can finally liberate my domain field. I cannot wait to find out how far my Command Field extends."

"If you're lucky, it may be able to envelop an entire moon." Ves responded with a smile. "It would be even better if you can unfold it across an entire planet, though I am not sure how well you can control your forces when they are spread across an entire globe."

"Ahem." Gloriana interrupted the pair as she was in the process of putting the finishing touches on the impressive mech frame. "The Minerva Mark II is not yet complete. You still need to complete one more step, Ves."

"I am aware. I was just waiting for the Minerva to reach this stage." Ves said with a smile.

"Will you finally explain to us why you insisted on transforming the Mentalist Crystal?" She asked. "That bird spirit looks dangerous. Why are you thinking about merging it with the Minerva? Is it even possible to do it without causing great harm to the spiritual foundation of our mech? What if the damage you cause exceeds the benefits gained from your stunt?"

Her questions raised valid concerns. As Ves began to make the preparations for the next step, he thought over how he should describe his plan.

"I have always thought that there is more to Mentalist Crystals than what is obvious on the surface." Ves told his wife. "They are one of the few hyper materials that is directly spawned in the brains of particularly clever exobeasts. This has always led me to believe that a cleansed Mentalist Crystal is an incomplete product. It simply cannot reach its full potential without attaching it to a compatible spirit. The creation of the Feathered Steelwing Bird has strengthened the crystal. Just take a look at the Victrix."

At this time, the Victrix had yet to turn into a living fey, but the spur was already beginning to show signs of life.

The echo that had come to life already caused the Victrix to exude a strong mental influence.

Ves only had to stay close to it and feel his mind beginning to accelerate. It was quite a fascinating effect. He expected the Victrix to provide a powerful boost to the Saint Commander.

As Gloriana studied the Victrix with her own senses, she failed to detect anything special.

"I do not see what difference it makes to inhabit the fey with a beast spirit."

"You are not looking closely enough. Well, I don't blame you because the Mentalist Crystal is not visible anymore. Have you noticed that when the Feathered Steelwing Bird came to life, the Mentalist Crystal no longer became as dull as before?"

"What are you implying, Ves?"

"Where do Mentalist Crystals come from?" He asked.

"The brains of powerful and intelligence exobeasts." Gloriana supplied the standard answer.

"That is true, but how do these crystals grow?"

"..."

"Let me share with you my own theory, Gloriana. I cannot explain the selection, but I suspect that once the prototype of the crystal has emerged, it will continue to grow in size and potency over time. I am not sure what kind of matter is needed to create the physical structure of the crystal, but it is unlikely that the mutated beast can directly convert his brain matter into a crystal. Whatever the case may be, the point I am trying to make is that I think that the Mentalist Crystal integrated into the Victrix is no longer static anymore. It used to be an object that is similar to an unchanging carcass. Now that I have breathed life into it, the crystal has gained the possibility of growing and evolving once again."

She widened her eyes. "That... is a bold theory! Do you have any proof to back up your assertions? I can think of many groups that will be interested in acquiring a Mentalist Crystal that can actually grow stronger and larger."

"Not quite." Ves disappointingly shook his head. "I have only observed very minute differences, but these signs can be attributed to other reasons. Just trust me on this matter. I have a strong feeling that the Mentalist Crystal embedded into the Victrix

will be able to grow into a formidable piece of technology. However, if we want to ensure that Casella and the Minerva are able to retain strong control over it, we have to turn the Victrix into a proper living fey as well as an Ultimate Module."

Gloriana narrowed her eyes. She knew that this would not be simple.

"How?"

"There are several ways I can choose from, but I would like to keep both spirits alive and able to cooperate with each other." He said. "I will attempt to forcibly merge them together. This will probably be a painful process, but it will be necessary to retain the qualities of the Victrix while simultaneously serving the Minerva."

"The 'Feathered Steelwing Bird' will resist. It is in the nature of an exobeast to struggle to survive."

"I know. This is why I need the assistance of the Saint Commander." Ves said before turning to address the ace pilot. "Casella, I need your help. My wife is correct that the avian spirit will resist what I am planning to do. I need you to summon Eleiha and use her power to subdue the Feathered Steelwing Bird. The latter is not only newborn, but very weak and underdeveloped. It should be a breeze for your companion spirit to dominate the creature and bring it to heel."

Casella had been paying attention to the avian spirit before and did not think she would encounter any hindrance.

Eleiha will easily be able to dominate a spirit of this caliber."

"Then let us prepare."

They did just that. After a bit of a delay, the silver winged snake began to dive into the Victrix and impose its dominance onto the Feathered Steelwing Bird!

Just as expected, the latter was unable to put up a resistance. Eleiha crushed it due to multiple reasons, but channeling Casella's willpower proved too much!

This became very important when Ves operated on the Minerva's vast and strong spiritual foundation.

After employing his usual methods to create a subordinate spirit, he did not wait for his efforts to settle.

He immediately proceeded to merge the Feathered Steelwing Bird with the new subordinate spirit!

This naturally produced a lot of pain between the two. Ves prioritized expedience over comfort. He really could not do much about the excessive pain.

Fortunately, the Minerva was an incredibly resilient ace mech. She was able to endure the punishment and work to promote the fusion.

This was pure torture on the part of the Feathered Steelwing Bird. If not for the fact that it shared a lot of similarities with an artificially created subordinate spirit, the two wouldn't be able to get along in the slightest!

Gloriana looked less and less comfortable with what was happening. She was unable to follow what her husband was doing. He had improved way ahead of everyone else in the clan.

"If this does not kill the Minerva outright, your experiment will still cause our ace mech undo harm. We can forget about turning it into our first anchor mech."

"Be patient, Gloriana. Good stuff always take time to ferment. Besides, I am not planning to compromise the Minerva."

Ves carefully observed the spectacle before he made an important decision.

He commanded Blinky to move forward and deliver a shattering blow onto the Feathered Steelwing Bird!

This almost killed the avian spirit!

It had most certainly suffered a lot of damage and had lost most of its consciousness. This was a dangerous state of affairs and left the avien spirit completely vulnerable to manipulation.

Eleiha was able to exert much more extensive control over the Feathered Steelwing Bird!

Mental hijacking happened to be the companion spirit's forte. She lacked practice in exercising her dangerous ability, but the companion spirit would learn rapidly with each passing attempt.

Slowly but surely, the fractured pieces of the Feathered Steelwing Bird gradually lost their independence.

The Minerva's subordinate spirit may be young, but the odds were so stracked in its favor that it was definitely the dominant partner in this merger!

As Ves continued to observe the fusion taking place, his grin grew wider.

"It is working!"

"How?" Gloriana asked. "You always told us it is a bad idea to merge different spirits together. Why does it feel the Minerva Mark II is not constrained by this rule?"

"That is because we are not putting the entire spiritual foundation of the Minerva Mark II at risk. Even if the subordinate spirit encounters an accident and dies, this is still an acceptable loss."

"Sir, the strong tap that you have given the subordinate spirit has worn off." Alexa Streon warned her superior.

"Damn!"

The fusion proceeded well at first, but outside interference and other factors caused the process to become less stable!

Ves moved back to the Victrix and noticed how the Feathered Steelwing Bird acquired greater momentum.

This was the majesty of the strong!

The Mentalist Crystal was already generating significantly more activity than before!

This was not necessarily a good sign. Despite the suppression from Eleiha, the Feathered Steelwing Bird inherently resisted the fusion.

Ves had a potential solution for this. He grinned as he reached into his toolbelt and retrieved a special tool.

Gloriana looked perplexed. "That hammer shouldn't be used for this purpose."

"I think it can help." He grinned as he raised the Hammer of Brilliance and struck it against the surface of the Victrix!

The entire construct seemed to shudder as Vulcan's influence overtook the Feathered Steelwing Bird.

The avian spirit froze, causing it to become exceptionally vulnerable!

Chapter 6847 Controlled Chaos

From the moment Ves struck the Victrix with his Hammer of Brilliance, an unprecedented reaction took place.

The injured and suppressed entity that Ves casually named the Feathered Steelwing Bird received such a jarring whack to its metaphorical head that it became paralyzed!

At the same time, the subordinate spirit recently created from the Minerva continued to fuse with the avian spirit.

As the energies originating from Vulcan coursed over the entire structure of the Victrix, this fusion process transcended common sense.

Pressure emanated from the Victrix as the profound reaction tapped into the power of the Mentalist Crystal and other hyper materials, causing them to feed into the ongoing process!

While all of this was taking place, Eleiha appeared lost.

Casella's companion spirit had been trying her best to suppress the Feathered Steelwing Bird, but after Ves struck the Victrix with the Hammer of Brilliance, Eleiha's role had changed.

She too became affected by the inspiration granted by Vulcan.

During her momentary fascination, Eleiha almost began to meld with the fusing spirits.

Her imprint onto the Victrix deepened as the changing fey increasingly molded itself to her presence.

All of these interactions and more took place at the same time.

A sense of unholiness began to spread from the inactive fey.

The Mentalist Crystal inside the Victrix began to produce strange phenomena on its own.

Snippets of memories appeared to Ves. None of them belonged to him. The flashes of memories depicted an avian exobeast trying to eke out a living on an untamed planet as well as an expert command mech leading troops in battle!

The flashes of memories continued to alternate between the two before they strangely began to meld together.

Ves gained strange and conflicting images in his head.

One showed the Minerva flunging steely feathers at a hostile exobeast.

Another depicted an avian calamity beast soaring through space while empowering a large number of mechs under the influence of a Command Field!

Though the memories did not make any sense, Ves took this as a sign that the two spirits had already reached a considerate state of fusion.

More strange phenomena occurred around the Victrix. The inclusion of a Mentalist Crystal along with the presence of other volatile materials such as Dragon Scales caused a lot of different energies and materials to interact with each other.

It was beautiful.

Ves looked absolutely fascinated by what was taking place. He never imagined that a Mentalist Crystal could spark so many new phenomena that he had never witnessed before.

He did not fuss over the data and sensor readings. He did not make any effort to find an explanation of what was going on. He simply... stood and enjoyed the spectacle as if he was a bystander.

Pure appreciation welled up from him as he became enamored by what his actions had wrought.

"This is controlled chaos."

Control. Chaos.

These two words normally did not go together, but Ves believed that they happened to be the right words to describe what the Victrix was going through.

Ves had the illusion that he had captured the essence of his design philosophy in an oversized fey.

He exercised control by gathering specific ingredients together and combining them into a single package. He had put a lot of thought behind the selection of each powerful factor.

Yet once he brought them all together, he largely left them alone as they interacted with each other.

Each interaction caused changes, which spawned new interactions that caused other changes.

Ripples upon ripples of activity fed into each other, causing the Victrix to become the host of increasingly more changes that were largely organic and unpredictable in nature!

The less Ves could maintain an overview of what was happening, the more delighted he became.

What he created was a work of art that transcended words.

He not only appreciated what he saw with his eyes, but also his spiritual senses.

He doubted that many people could see the Victrix and the activity taking place inside from a perspective that closely matched his own.

They would fail to recognize the inherent beauty and harmony that only he could see. Perhaps the closest person who could fully appreciate what he had wrought through his own labor was Alexa Streon, but her mind was far too orderly to value this spectacle.

That did not lower his evaluation of this instance of controlled chaos in the slightest!

Ves felt grateful for being able to witness such a unique display.

He had taken considerable risks in order to set this situation up, and the outcome already exceeded his expectations!

Not everyone reacted as happily as him, however.

"What... what have you done, Ves?" Gloriana spoke in a fearful whisper.

"I don't know." Ves honestly replied. "I just put a bunch of cool stuff into the same container and attempted to blend them together. I have my suspicions on what is going on, but if I am being honest, I have little understanding and no control over what is happening at the moment. I have not been able to anticipate this at all, but I am sure that this process is going somewhere. Either the two spirits will fuse together, or... something else will happen. If it is necessary, I will deal with the consequences in case there are any problems."

"You are speaking as if you are attempting to create a monster."

"That is within the realm of possibilities." Ves nonchalantly said. "However, I don't think it will come that far. The subordinate spirit from the Minerva has a much stronger core. The only reason why it is struggling to subdue the Feathered Steelwing Bird entirely is because it is fighting on the opposing side's turf. The fight will settle over time. There is no way the Minerva will find herself at a disadvantage for long."

Gloriana frowned. Seeing that she was unable to obtain any clear answers from her husband, she stared at Casella before shifting her gaze at the nearly complete Minerva Mark II.

The ace command mech was supposed to be her crowning achievement of her career so far.

She had very high hopes in her ability to create an anchor mech, but the mysterious stunt that Ves just pulled off on threatened to destroy her dream!

Unfortunately, there was no point crying over spilt milk.

She knew what kind of mech designer Ves could be. Although she would not admit it, Gloriana already took his propensity of getting enslaved by his own inspiration into account.

The main reason why she was able to tolerate his infuriating behavior was because he usually produced amazing results.

Even if his gambit failed this time, that did not necessarily condemn him. He had already produced so many wild successes by following his distressingly regular flashes of inspiration that he could afford to slip up every now and then.

Just not this time.

Especially this time.

The Minerva Mark II had to become an anchor mech.

Gloriana could not accept any other outcome.

This was why she could not keep her emotions under check. The volatility generated from the Victrix caused her to feel so distressed that she found it difficult to calm down.

It was impossible for Gloriana to relax and take it easy like her husband!

Where Ves saw an opportunity to elevate the Minerva Mark II to a higher level, Gloriana only saw a potential threat that could ruin the very same mech!

"How long will this last?" She asked.

"I don't know." Ves shrugged. "I don't think it will take longer than a day, but it may not end very soon. My best estimate is that we need to sit tight for a couple of hours. Can you observe the transformations taking place inside? Not only are two spirits fusing into one, the Mentalist Crystal also appears to be undergoing mysterious changes. Now that it has become connected to the Feathered Steelwing Bird, what is happening to one is also reflected to the other."

He called up a projected interface that displayed the data readings related to the Mentalist Crystal.

The hyper material was in an active state. It was constantly under stimulation, which caused it to produce activity that stimulated other factors.

Gloriana grew concerned as she noticed the escalating trend.

"According to the data and my own observations, a positive feedback loop has formed. The Victrix will continue to bear more and more pressure. What happens when the pressure surpasses the living fey's limitations?"

"I guess it will explode if we do nothing." Ves shared his guess. "We won't let it go that far. If this positive feedback loop isn't subsiding, we should try and interrupt it. We don't have to let an accident play out before our eyes. We just need to be observant enough to pick the right time to intervene."

Ves had no intentions of doing so at this time. He believed in his work and was confident that the Victrix could pass the first test in its short existence!

Fortunately, through the combined efforts of Eleiha and the Minerva, the two managed to impose greater control over the volatile activity.

The Mentalist Crystal that previously exhibited an eagerness to cause trouble gradually lost steam.

"It's happening." He whispered. "The fusion process has reached the final stages."

Slowly but surely, the Feathered Steelwing Bird arose from the Victrix.

The apparition of the once mighty calamity beast looked a lot sharper and more predatory than the more rounded form of the owl-shaped Victrix.

While Ves had tried his best to alter the form of the latter to become more aligned with the former, there was only so much he could do on short notice.

It didn't matter too much.

Ves could feel that the transformed subordinate spirit and the Victrix were still firmly tied to each other!

At the same time, the new version of the Feathered Steelwing Bird had obviously turned into an off-shoot of the Minerva!

"Success!"

In order to make sure that he had succeeded in his goal, he accessed an internal optical sensor that could display the current state of the Mentalist Crystal.

"What?!" Gloriana grew alarmed at what she saw. The internal view was not that great, but it still provided enough clarity to see the crystal's current state. "The crystal... has mutated!"

This was a frightening sight to her! Her cranial implant suite utilized small Mentalist Crystal fragments as the core ingredients. One of the assumptions behind their usage was that the Mentalist Crystals harvested from deceased exobeast had turned static and unchanging.

As far as she was aware of, there was never a case of a Mentalist Crystal growing after it had been harvested!

Yet that was exactly what the interview view showed. The changes were rather subtle. Not only had the Mentalist Crystal increased its radius by 0.3 percent, crystalline growths had also engulfed the support brackets keeping the spherical object in place.

"The crystal is alive." Ves made a powerful statement.

There were huge differences between living and dead Mentalist Crystals.

While he was not sure what the former could do, he was happy that the Victrix had gained a powerful hyper material that could continue to grow stronger over time!

Ves nudged his wife. "Let's complete our work. Now that the Victrix has reached this stage, we should complete the remaining linkages to the Minerva Mark II. The two are meant to work together."

"You... you are right. We need to complete the upgrade process."

The remaining work was not that complicated. They spent a bit of time scanning and studying the Victrix to make sure it had reached stability before fully linking up its systems with the main mech frame.

When the mech designers all stepped back, they knew that they had put together a unique ace command mech.

"The Minerva Mark II... is finally finished." Gloriana tiredly declared.

The ace mech and her living fey stood proudly before them. The pair conveyed both power and erudition at the same time.

Now, the question was whether the final outcome was good enough to be recognized as an anchor mech.

Chapter 6848 The Value of Growing Crystals

After the mech designers came out of their highs, they gradually began to perform the necessary follow-up duties.

Gloriana tasked Viktor, Beatrice and Alexa to thoroughly scan and inspect the entire mech frame and the living fey. She also ordered them to put away the remaining materials and clean up the mech workshop.

She then proceeded to march up to Ves while keeping her temper repressed.

"Ves!" She hissed. "At least tell me that your actions yielded a good result. Please tell me that you did not ruin what should have been a perfectly good machine."

"What I've done should definitely be worth it." Ves said with a smile. "The diagnostics show that all of its systems remain functional. There are anomalies in relation to the Mentalist Crystal, but the cradle that it is resting in is inherently designed to deal with all sorts of contingencies. A small growth in size won't necessitate an immediate redesign. Don't you understand what I have managed to make?"

"What did you make, Ves?"

"I revived a Mentalist Crystal that is already embedded into a mech, well, a fey to be more precise! Just look at these readings! The passive emissions of the revived Mentalist Crystal have already increased by over 30 percent. If you use your companion spirit to study the Victrix in further detail, you will find that its concentration of mind-attributed E energy has increased by the same proportion. This is just the start. If my suspicions are correct, the Mentalist Crystal will continue to grow in size and power over time. The more it grows, the greater the assistance it can provide to our Saint Commander!"

The significance of it could not be overstated. Ves had turned another impossibility into a reality.

Even Gloriana could not ignore this fact.

"If the crystal continues to grow, you do know that we have to expand the Victrix, right?"

"This is not a particularly different or time-consuming project." Ves responded. "If we are short on time, we can simply scale up the design of the fey while adding additional modules to fill up all of the extra space. We shouldn't have much trouble with upgrading the Victrix without delay. I intend to keep the Saint Commander within the Premier Fleet, so we can always repair or upgrade the Minerva Mark II whenever we have time."

That was a powerful advantage. Ves even thought about recalling the Dark Zephyr Mark III and the Amaranto Mark III in order to maximize the advantages of those mechs.

They worked best when operating within a Larkinson mech force!

"Are you happy with the results?" Gloriana asked as she began to accept what Ves had done.

She was roughly able to feel the strength of the Mentalist Crystal and the Victrix, but she was not able to judge it as well as her husband. She had largely delegated the design of the living fey to him, so her understanding of it was not as good.

"Why wouldn't I be happy?" Ves gently smiled. "Mentalist Crystals remain alive and can continue to grow as long as they remain inside the brains of the beasts that have spawned them under unclear circumstances. The moment these crystals are taken out, they turn into dead objects that can no longer grow again. I am pretty sure that the Victrix is unique in that its crystal has been revived. The only other way I can think of that can produce a similar result is to capture a mutated beast alive and transform it into a biomech without killing it. I have no idea whether that is even possible, but I can imagine that it would be extremely dangerous to pilot such a monstrosity."

Ves was sure that a handful of research groups had tried this out in secret, but he did not think their attempts yielded any success.

"Does that mean that you have introduced a potential danger to the Minerva?"

He looked closely at the Victrix. "Unlikely. The Minerva should have successfully converted the Feathered Steelwing Bird into her subordinate spirit. The disparity in strength and age should have ensured that the living mech is minimally affected by the hostile spiritual product, but a small degree of contamination is inevitable. I am not too worried. So long as Casella continues to subject her living mech to her willpower baptism, it is impossible for the Minerva Mark II to subvert her control."

In order for the living mech to rebel against the mech pilot, the former had to overcome the latter.

Perhaps it was possible for standard mechs to defy their mech pilots, but Ves could not see how an ace mech could possibly defeat the willpower of an ace pilot.

The strength of an ace mech rested in its powerful material body.

The strength of an ace pilot rested in her mind and willpower.

An ace mech would always lose when it pitted its weakest aspect against an ace mech pilot's greatest strength!

This was why Ves did not fear the risks of attempting to assimilate the Feathered Steelwing Bird into the Minerva. He judged that the potential dangers should not be consequential enough compared to the huge payoff.

"There is another reason why I enacted this change without consulting you." Ves spoke up again. "Have you realized the implications of a living Mentalist Crystal that is completely within our control?"

His wife shook her head. "I am not following your train of thought."

"Mentalist Crystals generally grow in proportion to the beasts they originate from. A crystal from a mutated beast is smaller and weaker than that of a calamity beast. The ones we managed to procure came from a calamity beast. They are pretty much the most powerful version that the Hunting Association can procure. However, this should not be the limit to their growth. I believe that if an organism with a crystal ever ascends into a god beast, its Mentalist Crystal will become incredibly powerful. It would become so strong that even god pilots are able to derive substantial benefits from using it. Yet the Hunting Association never harvested such a ludicrously powerful crystal. Do you know why?"

Gloriana looked fearful. "Too dangerous. Exobeasts are strong in body but weak in mind. Their lack of intelligence is why they can never dominate the Red Ocean. If they happen to become smarter than any human aside from our Star Designers, then they can pose an existential threat against all of us. Calamity beasts with Mentalist Crystals need to be killed as soon as possible in order to nip this threat in the bud. The dangers of trying to allow them to become god beasts before killing them are too great compared to the rewards. Just one successful escape can haunt our civilization for a long time."

Intelligence was a very important variable. The native aliens were generally not as smart as red humanity in multiple different areas. This should have made it easier for red humanity to defend its border regions.

Yet because the Cosmopolitan Movement continued to supply the Red Cabal with a huge amount of human intelligence, the native aliens were doing better than they should!

It was already bad enough that the native aliens were able to think much smarter under the guidance of the cosmopolitans.

It would be a nightmare if any god beast managed to become enlightened and gain a huge amount of knowledge and wisdom with the help of such a strange crystal!

Compared to playing with fire, the solution realized by Ves was much safer, though it was not necessarily more attainable.

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar needed to advance to the rank of god pilot before the Mentalist Crystal could become a resonating material that was worthy of a god mech!

A greater authority soon joined the conversation.

"Ves may be correct about his theories regarding the growth potential of the enhanced Mentalist Crystal."

Both Ves and Gloriana turned to Master Laila Rebecca Devos.

She did not linger around in order to witness the entire multi-day fabrication run, but she made sure to return when the upgrade process was about to reach its end.

That enabled Master Laila Devos to be present just in time to witness the last parts of Ves' outrageous stunt.

"Master... about the subject we spoke about before..."

"The fact that you have 'revived' the Mentalist Crystal without causing any catastrophic consequences is a powerful advantage." The Terran Master said with an approving smile. "Its power combined with how well it fits into the configuration of

the Minerva Mark II should provide ample proof that your work this time is truly best in class. I am but one voice among many, but in my professional judgment, your work deserves recognition."

That was as powerful of an endorsement as she could give without being too blatant about the true subject.

There was a risk that Master Laila's judgment did not conform to the standards of the Red Kingdom at all, but Ves did not believe this to be the case.

He had talked with Master Laila Devos enough times to understand that she did not hold any ideas or principles that were too extreme.

She came across as pretty normal and sociable for a woman who had lived for over 3 centuries.

Master Laila clearly developed a stable and sober demeanor due to her strict upbringing and assuming many responsibilities.

Ves even suspected that this may be the reason why she had never managed to become a Star Designer.

She was too sane and normal to develop an overwhelming obsession with a specific field!

Every Star Designer that Ves was familiar with all developed their obsessions to impossible extremes.

No sane mech designer could ever go that far if they continued to prioritize stability over extremes.

That should not affect her judgment when it came to this important matter.

Both Ves and Gloriana exchanged silent but knowing glances.

"We will check out the cockpit first." He said before he and his wife floated up and entered the cockpit after manually keeping it closed.

The interior of the cockpit of the Minerva Mark II was a bit cramped to comfortably fit two individuals.

Both Ves and Gloriana itched to whip out their tools and make more room inside the cockpit, but they restrained their urges.

"Before we begin, are you sure you want to take this step?" Ves asked as he held his wife's risk.

Gloriana scowled. "Let us proceed. I am willing to accept the penalty if my confidence is misplaced."

The reason why the two wanted to move inside the cockpit was that they could conduct the ritual without attracting any unwanted attention.

The ritual was specific but not that big of a deal. All it really did was to summon the Red Kingdom's attention while sending an invisible request.

As the couple completed the ritual, they waited in silence.

"..."

"..."

"Is anything even happening?"

"I am sure we followed the instructions without error." Ves said with a frown.

"Well, the kingdom has always worked in mysterious ways." Gloriana speculated. "It is possible that it has already processed our request. We simply lack the means to notice the differences."

The process was underwhelming to them. They expected to witness a partial descent of the mighty Red Kingdom, or an illusion that caused them to enter a mystical fairy land of mechs for the first time.

Instead, Ves and Gloriana witnessed... nothing.

The two mech designers lost patience and scrambled out of the cockpit. They quickly descended and returned to the older woman.

"Master, do you know whether..."

"It is done." Master Laila Devos did not keep the pair in suspense. "You are fortunate that the kingdom recognizes a treasure as well as us. Whether the unexpected transformation of the Victrix has made a difference or not, I can assure you that it has become an example that many mech designers should strive for. It may not be possible for other mech designers to gather the phasewater, Mentalist Crystal, resonating exotics and so on to design a command mech that performs closely to the Minerva Mark II, but they can still use their own means to derive weaker but more practical command mechs through their own efforts."

Her verdict confirmed that the Minerva Mark II earned the designation of an anchor mech!

Chapter 6849 Need for Patience

"Master Devos, if our work has managed to earn recognition from above, why did we fail to notice any signs?" Gloriana asked.

"Anchor mechs are not supposed to be obvious to laymen and mech designers below the rank of Master." Master Laila Rebecca Devos responded. "This is a competition that is primarily aimed at my peers and I. The two of you have made good use of the opportunity to participate early, but the rules do not fully account for your low ranks. It is not a surprise that there are... glitches."

Even the Red Kingdom still had flaws.

"I understand." Ves said. "We are mech designers. We do not need any flashy ceremonies or rituals. It is already enough for us to know the truth. How quickly will the Minerva Mark II grow as a response earning more favor from above?"

"It should be relatively slow enough to avoid attracting too much attention. It is difficult to provide a convincing explanation if your Minerva Mark II abruptly grows strangers from one second to the next. By spreading out the improvement over months, it is unlikely that those who are not keeping a close watch on the ace mech will notice anything unusual, or if they did, attribute it to the kingdom."

That sounded about right.

"Will the two of us notice any differences outside of the Minerva Mark II?"

"You will, but the changes will be subtle." Master Laila Devos replied. "If I have to make concrete guesses, then it should be marginally easier for third-party mech designers to acquire the ability to design living mechs. Mech designers will also find it easier to comprehend the alien technological principles that are necessary to understand archetech beyond its surface. Aside from that, you will also enjoy slightly greater favor from the kingdom, but you should hardly notice the difference. It can still make a difference when it counts."

Both Ves and Gloriana nodded in understanding. They guessed that they would probably have an easier time breaking through, but they were still years away before they were worthy to become Masters.

They talked a bit more, taking care not to mention anything too sensitive.

Unfortunately, Master Laila Devos was not able to share much more information related to anchor mechs.

The Miracle Couple would not be able to brag about their accomplishments to others. The Red Association would not send them official certificates. Most people wouldn't even notice that the Minerva Mark II had become a little more special.

However, it made sense when Ves thought about it a little further. If the Minerva Mark II deserved to become renowned across human civilization, then she would do so based on her excellent design, her ingenious tech and her stellar performance on the battlefield.

Compared to her superior combat power, a plaque that commemorated the Minerva Mark II as the first anchor mech built by Ves and Gloriana did not seem important in comparison!

"Forget about it." Ves said. "Master Laila, we would like to have the cooperation of your clan for the purposes of testing the Minerva Mark II. We intend to conduct a limited test in space and involve hundreds if not thousands of mechs. We would also like the cooperation of an expert mech and possibly an ace mech. Is it possible for your ancient clan to put your forces at our disposal?"

This was quite a serious request. Master Laila could not decide on this matter alone. The other leaders of the Devos Ancient Clan needed to agree with this request.

"We are willing to lend you a hand, but we cannot dispatch our forces too far from their designated positions. Give us 3 days to complete the preparations. Until that time, you are free to find a safe location and test the Minerva Mark II's solo performance. I highly recommend you measure the living mech's baseline performance before moving on to stress testing."

Her suggestion was sensible, but Ves lacked a lot of patience.

Gloriana answered in his stead. "We can wait for 3 days to conduct more thorough tests. In the meantime, we will begin to test the basic functionality of the Minerva Mark II and her Victrix starting from tomorrow. We are all too exhausted to conduct any tests."

Saint Commander Casella Ingvar did not exactly look pleased with this small delay, but even she had grown a little fatigued from staying awake for so many hours.

She looked as if she was a stimulant addict who just got told that she would be getting her fix tomorrow instead of today!

Ves found it rather funny that the cool and self-controlled ace commander would react this way in the face of a brand new ace mech that was still out of reach for a day.

However, they truly could not help it. The mech designers needed to rest and internalize everything that happened. It was not a good idea to conduct potentially

risky tests without properly resting their minds. They needed to be attentive in order to respond to potential accidents.

Before Ves retired for the day, he approached the Saint Commander, who had since walked up to the feet of the Minerva Mark II and placed her palm onto the archemetal exterior.

The ace commander looked as if she was reuniting with a lover after a long separation.

A part of her still felt lost. She had yet to pilot the upgraded Minerva and did not have a good grasp on how much their combat effectiveness had improved.

Both of them understood on an intellectual level that they could definitely do a lot more than before, but the changes were not tangible enough.

"The feeling is different." Casella said with a frown. "The Minerva has grown stronger... but also changed in other ways. I can feel a split mind of sorts. The Victrix is a lot more vicious, bloodthirsty and aggressive. It is not the most comforting presence."

"Understandable." Ves remarked. "When you interface with the Minerva Mark II for the first time, do not hesitate to show the Victrix who is in charge. That should be enough to keep it compliant."

The Saint Commander grunted in acknowledgement.

There was no need to give any detailed instructions to an ace commander. She should be more than competent to handle this situation.

"Do you think you are equipped to fight the battles of tomorrow, Casella?"

"This improvement has come early enough. We cannot afford to show weakness against the rampaging aliens. With the vast improvements of my new ace mech, I have become much more confident in my ability to repel the alien invaders. If there is no phase lord support, I cannot see how a conventional enemy raiding fleet can defeat us despite outnumbering us by several times."

"That sounds like an analytical answer. Can you give me an answer that is purely based on your heart?"

"I... am not entirely clear what to share with you, sir. I feel delighted, but in an abstract fashion. I will not be able to feel fully satisfied unless I am able to pilot the Minerva Mark II in reality."

"Tomorrow." He told her. "Be patient. We will let you take the Minerva out for a spin tomorrow morning. We might even test the performance of your Command Field in isolated cases so that we can take detailed scans. We can conduct more elaborate tests the day after that. As for three days later, the Bluejay Fleet and the Devos Ancient Clan will lend us enough forces to simulate a small to medium engagement."

The Saint Commander lit up a bit. She looked forward to testing her greater capabilities in a real test environment.

"I am looking forward to testing the many new features." Casella began to display a genuine smile. "Mindstorm Alloy and the Victrix increases the versatility of my ace mech."

The combination sounded powerful enough, but both of them were relatively untested products, which significantly reduced its actual market price.

THat would hopefully change once more advanced tech trickled down into society.

Ves merely rolled his eyes when he witnessed that sort of behavior, but continued to spread their innovation across the stars.

"War will continue to engulf the Red Ocean." Casella spoke about another subject. "The Agamemnon Upper Zone has already witnessed their scouts. It is only a matter of time before the fighting escalates.

The aliens had grown confident and greedy enough to divert to working for under employees.

That way, even if one of their pincers encountered obstacles, they still had more to overthrow the god of this thing!

The next day came later than people wished.

The first activation should not be a big deal, so they moved out into the clearing around DIandi Base and set the Minerva Mark II in the middle of a field.

Casella had already changed into her piloting suit and made her way to the cockpit.

The children all nagged their parents until they were allowed to observe the first activation of the Minerva Mark II.

"Hihihhi!"

"Hihihhi..."

Aurelia and Andraste ran around and laughed as they played a game among themselves.

Half a minute later, their cats joined in as well.

"Meow."

"Miaow!"

The two running daughters made for a stark contrast with the grim environment.

Ves meanwhile sat down and held Marvaine in his lap.

The boy eagerly wanted to learn what made the Minerva Mark II so powerful.

"There are many reasons why the Minerva Mark II has become so impressive, but I cannot fully explain it to you all. What is important for you to know is that you should stick to your own ideas and have the courage to pursue them. Reality will try to push back, but if you are strong enough, you will be able to resist all of the pressure."

"Ohhh..."

"That said, you should only make risky design choices if you are strong enough to absorb the consequences of failure." Ves gently taught his son.

"How do I become stronger as a mech designer?" Marvaine asked.

"Do not fight by yourself. Humans are capable of extensive cooperation, and it makes a lot of sense to join forces. Our clan invests a lot of resources into building up the camaraderie between fighting troops. These are the soldiers who will be protecting you in the following years."

Ves felt a little concerned about Marvaine. His two daughters gave him the sense that they could rely on their good sense to avoid a lot of potential trouble.

Whether it was reliable or not was quite substantial.

Marvaine was not satisfied with the answer, though.

"Is there a way for me to fight directly?" The boy asked.

"Absolutely not."

"What about becoming a phase lord? Can I become a phase lord like you, father?"

Marvaine looked so cute when he wanted to plead with Ves to obtain the necessary knowledge and materials.

Ves coughed. "I do not recommend you to follow this path. We do not fully understand the nature of phase lords. Not many humans can turn into phase lords. If you really

want to gain a giant True God and start to smack stuff around, then there are many alternatives that are better."

Mech designers were never supposed to take action in the first place. Ves' insistence on avoiding anything too serious meant that he gained a unique qualifier that he could be dangerous when startled.

"The Minerva moved!" Marvaine exclaimed.

"So soon?! We haven't fully synced everything correctly. What is it doing?"

The Minevera... has taken a few steps forward." Marvaine described. "I don't see anything wrong with its movement. The ace mech hadn't toppled over or anything."

"For now."

Ves quickly put down his work and raced towards a nearby terminal.

He could observe many different sensor readings. Much of them produced results that vastly exceeded what they originally expected.

"I... am... free!"

The Saint Commander felt much more at ease when piloting the ace mech.

Her growth was no longer constrained by other factors anymore!

Chapter 6850 First Test of the Minerva Mark II

The Minerva Mark II was so much more powerful than the Mark I.

Although not much time had passed, technology advanced extremely rapidly during the Phasewater Generation and the Hyper Generation.

In addition to that, the Larkinson Clan had become much wealthier and more capable than before.

People like Ves used to dream about designing first-class mechs a decade ago. Now, he could do it at any time and know that he had the capital to produce them en masse.

The leap from an outdated second-class expert mech to a genuine first-class ace mech was enormous.

The difference in tech, materials and refinement was so great that Casella couldn't help but become overtaken by the novel experience.

As the Minerva fed her with a huge amount of data that was far in excess of what other ace mechs supplied to their pilots, the Saint Commander was able to process it all with disturbing ease.

The influence of the Mentalist Crystal helped a lot with lifting up her mind. She felt considerably smarter by having this powerful resource at her disposal.

Yet even with this rare hyper material, Casella's mind was not weak, so she was already able to absorb and process the large amount of data without feeling burdened.

That gave her a much better understanding of the power she wielded. The numerical differences were vast in many areas. From energy shield capacity to the firepower of her newly upgraded luminar crystal rifle, the Minerva Mark II could unquestionably defeat 10 copies of the Mark I if everything else remained equal.

Yet beyond the huge technological performance uplift of the Minerva Mark II, what Casella appreciated the most was the liberation of her domain field.

The Mark I stifled her willpower and true resonance. The expert mech was only ever designed to accommodate expert pilots, so from the moment she exceeded that threshold, Casella felt as if her machine had turned into a slave collar that she had outgrown.

Although she did not literally choke herself by piloting the Mark I, it was still a distinctly uncomfortable experience.

She had been forced to hold herself back and restrain herself from exerting her new capabilities in a forceful fashion.

If she threw caution to the wind, then there was a real risk that the Mark I would break due to being pushed so far past its limits!

It was only now that she piloted the Mark II for the first time that the feeling of constriction had disappeared entirely.

Even without listening to the long-winded lectures of Ves or Gloriana, the Saint Commander could feel through her man-machine connection with the Minerva Mark II that she could channel all of her willpower without reaching any limit for a long time.

In fact, her current resonance strength was still low enough that she was not even able to sense the upper limit!

This meant that she could pilot the Minerva Mark II for a long time without having any concerns about needing another upgrade due to constriction!

As Casella continued to resonate with her Minerva, she rapidly grew more familiar with the resonating exotics that allowed her to amplify her domain field.

It was a lot harder to resonate with these materials, but so long as she exerted her full strength, she immediately noticed that her Command Field not only became significantly stronger, but also spread across a dramatically larger range!

Her Minerva Mark II covered the entirety of Diandi Base without any problem. It even spread below ground while encountering only moderate resistance.

Dense matter or highly voluminous matter impeded the spread of her Command Field, but not to a strong extent.

The differences became more pronounced as her Command Field continued to spread across the rural landscape where Diandi Base was located.

Nothing seemed to escape her senses as her Command Field spread. She was able to count every individual tree, detect many hidden listening devices, gain a view of the interior of every house and accurately map out every single human individual that lived in the region.

The amount of information was so overwhelming that Casella could not handle it even with her ascension to sainthood and the cognitive boosts provided by the Mentalist Crystal.

She quickly had to filter out the vast majority of data collected by her Command Field in order to prevent herself from getting overloaded.

In the meantime, her Command Field continued to spread as she resonated more and more with her machine.

When the resonance meter of her Minerva finally stopped at around 158 laveres, Casella quickly figured out that the radius of her Command Field stretched as much as 145 kilometers!

Compared to the 10 or so kilometers that Casella worked with before, this was a huge increase in range!

It was more than enough to cover several large but friendly fleets.

Her Command Field could even cross an entire battlefield and cover enemy forces so long as they engaged in combat!

That was a huge boon!

As long as their hyper defenses were not strong enough to block or weaken her Command Field, she would not only be able to collect a lot of intelligence about her enemies, but also generate psychic storms directly inside the hulls of enemy warships!

Of course, it was a fantasy for her to be able to wipe out the weak and vulnerable alien crews of enemy battleships all by herself.

Casella could already feel that Mindstorm Alloy was a powerful and high-end ace mech-grade resonating material.

Its potential was great, but its requirements were also demanding. She probably needed to exert a lot of willpower in order to produce a strong or large enough psychic storm.

Range also played a large role. Casella needed to try it out to be certain, but she could intuitively feel that it was much more costly to generate a psychic storm at a distance as opposed to right in front.

This meant that her Minerva Mark II needed to participate more actively in combat and occasionally take the risk to approach her enemies in order to flood many of them with psychic storms.

She grew a little disappointed after making these realizations. It was likely that she could only realize the true potential of Mindstorm Alloy after her resonance strength rose further.

The only consolation was that she could instinctively feel that the potent Mentalist Crystal gave her a boost that should have made it more bearable to resonate with the Mindstorm Alloy.

It could mean the difference between a usable and unusable resonating ability in her current state!

She shook her head. This was just the first activation. The schedule did not accommodate any tests of the Mindstorm Alloy as it was much safer to conduct trials in space.

As her Command Field had reached the limit of its range, Casella briefly became fascinated by how she was able to gain a huge degree of awareness of multiple nearby villages, towns and cities.

The data that she was able to gather from the latter was especially huge!

Casella found herself forced to strengthen her filters once again so that she did not gather an excessive amount of data on every human that lived in the settlements.

She needed to be thorough about this. She could not afford to get overwhelmed by data when her Command Field finally enveloped an enemy fleet.

The Saint Commander proceeded to spend the next ten minutes expanding and improving her filters even as she directed her Minerva to perform many basic movements.

The experience of controlling the mech frame was entirely different. The limbs had much more strength and the mech frame was considerably stronger and more resistant towards damage than before.

The conversion to archetech gave her a very different sensation of how much she could push her new machine. The alien architecture granted her numerous advantages that probably wouldn't be relevant unless the ace mech found herself locked in combat against a real adversary.

However, she appreciated the safety margin all the same. The effects of Dragon Scales, the Battle Skirt System and the Close-Surface Azure Energy Shield Generator provided her Minerva Mark II with excellent protection against assassination attempts.

The only way the defenses of her mech could become any better was if it incorporated a lot of high-grade superdimensional matter.

Unfortunately, the mech designers rightfully reserved their limited supply of superdimensional matter to other high-ranking mechs that needed it more.

After the Minerva had run through all of the basic motions on land and in the air, the ace mech finally moved on to more interesting tests.

"Casella, are you ready to try out the newly upgraded Irvan transformable luminar crystal rifle under atmospheric conditions?"

"I am." She said as her Minerva floated in the air while carefully holding the aforementioned weapon in her arms. "Please give me targets to shoot at. I am eager to learn how much firepower I have at my disposal."

"Please wait."

Bots flew in from behind and took their places. None of them really made any attempts at evasion as they wouldn't be able to move fast enough to give an ace commander a real challenge.

Since this was mainly a test to determine the effective firepower of the upgraded Irvan, all of the target bots happened to enjoy strong protection.

"Eliminate the unshielded bots first. Make sure your rifle is set to marksman mode. Also make sure to use the purple fire beam attack phase crystal."

"Acknowledged."

The Minerva smoothly raised her rifle and pulled the trigger.

A fiery purple hyper laser beam of considerable strength struck a bot that was largely composed of multiple layers of transphasic hyper alloy plating.

The Minerva repeated her action against other bots, each of which was protected by thicker and thicker armor plating.

"Switch your Irvan to SMG mode."

The high-end luminar crystal rifle transformed. Its lengthy barrel folded away while the rest of the weapon became slimmer and more compact.

This enabled the Minerva to easily wield and shoot the weapon at fast-moving enemies at closer ranges.

Its firepower clearly suffered, but its firing rate rose so much that it could still pose a threat to most enemies.

The results provided the Larkinsons with a lot of useful information. They quickly determined how effective the Minerva Mark II could confront enemies by herself. They roughly understood how she would fare against elite phasefighters, smaller alien warships, larger alien warships and phase lords.

While Casella most definitely enjoyed the fact that she had much greater firepower at her disposal than before, she was not blind to the fact that it was still a lot less than that of a typical ace mech.

"Please tell me how the firepower of my Minerva Mark II compares against the firepower of the Amaranto Mark III."

"...Well, there is no comparison, really." Ves plainly admitted. "The Amaranto Mark III shares much of the same tech, but provides much more support for her much larger luminar crystal rifle. The Instrument of Vengeance also contains multiple features that your Irvan lacks. It can mean the difference between one-shotting a lesser phase lord or slightly weakening its spatial barrier. Your Irvan is not an Ultimate Module and also isn't amplified by any key resonating materials. Furthermore, it also lacks Harry Kaikkonen's exclusive ERC luminar crystal weapon technology, which basically allows you to strengthen your damage output by leveraging your emotions. Most importantly, the absence of a proper Saint Kingdom is a huge handicap."

The Saint Commander did not feel happy about this, but she understood why her Minerva was plainly not as good at dealing damage.

"I understand. The Irvan should only be used in self-defence."

"That is our intent in its design." Ves confirmed. "We completely designed the Minerva Mark II in a way that treats your Vassals as your primary weapons, your Knights as your secondary weapons, your Mindstorm Alloy as your special weapon and your Irvan as your holdout weapon. We could have strengthened your luminar crystal weapon by a considerable degree, but that would have entailed tradeoffs that weakened your Command Field or weakened the defenses of your ace mech."

The message was very clear. The only reason for the Minerva Mark II to fight with her luminar crystal rifle was if something had drastically gone wrong!

