

Mech Touch 6851

Chapter 6851 Second Test of the Minerva Mark II

On the second day, the Larkinsons tested the defenses and mobility of the Minerva Mark II.

The absence of a proper Saint Kingdom massively reduced the Minerva Mark II's ability to resist or evade damage. The lack of strong amplification meant that the machine was less able to resist strong blows by force.

This was why the mech designers made sure to add multiple layers of defense just to make sure the machine could resist enough attacks.

The azure energy shield generator was stronger and more efficient than normal.

The Saint Commander quickly mastered the use of the Battle Skirt System. She was able to rapidly maneuver them into different formations that could cope against energy attacks, kinetic attacks as well as explosive attacks.

The archemetal components were also able to resist powerful attacks without any other forms of assistance.

What impressed everyone a lot was when Casella resonated with Dragon Scales.

The ace mech-grade hyper material proved its worth by making the Minerva's archemetal structure a lot more resistant towards damage.

Attacks that would normally crack or melt the armor all bounced off as soon as the Minerva's mech frame became amplified by a much more targeted form of true resonance than before!

It was a pity that Dragon Scales could not dramatically amplify the defenses of objects that were already physically tough.

The law of diminishing returns not only applied to the main mech frame, but also the Victrix.

Casella was finally allowed to make active use of the Victrix.

The silvery owl-shaped living fey flew around the Minerva with grace. The Mentalist Crystal embedded within its center bestowed the construct with an ethereal aura that granted it a charm that was difficult to ignore.

The fact that its subordinate spirit consisted of a fusion between the echo of an avian calamity beast and an off-shoot of the Minerva made it a lot stronger and livelier than normal.

It was not wrong to claim that the Victrix had turned into an avian surrogate of the Minerva!

The Victrix consisted of the same archetech and materials used to make the Minerva. It also enjoyed the protection of a smaller Close-Surface Azure Shield Generator.

Although its overall defenses were weaker than the mech frame it was paired with, the Victrix possessed substantially better mobility.

Under the expert control of the Saint Commander, the Victrix was able to evade incoming attacks with relative ease.

Of course, its evasion performance was not as good as the Dark Zephyr, but it was already impressive that it could come closer than any other mech that Ves designed.

After conducting thorough tests on the Minerva Mark II's ability to cope with damage, both Ves and Gloriana confirmed that the empirical data did not defy their expectations.

"It is just as we thought, Casella." He said in conclusion. "The absence of a Saint Kingdom is too much of a demerit, and the fact that your mech frame is not optimized for personal combat is another major handicap. At your current level of combat effectiveness, your ace command mech stands no chance against regular ace mechs. Your machine sits in the awkward position where it can easily defeat one or several

high-tier expert mechs, but would definitely get trounced by a single ace mech in direct combat."

"...Tell me honestly, sir. Can one of several expert mechs defeat my Minerva Mark II?"

Ves had to think carefully how to answer this question.

"If there are no friendly units nearby, the probability is... considerable. Expert mechs that excel at dueling or eliminating high-value targets will be difficult for you and your Minerva to fight against. I do not anticipate that one expert mech will pose a credible risk to you, but multiple expert mechs that are coordinating perfectly with each other may actually be able to take your machine down. The combination of combat specialization and teamwork is strong enough to overcome the gap in ranks and resonance strength."

The Saint Commander felt disappointed. She knew that it was unfair to compare her personal combat abilities against that of genuine combat fanatics, but she knew that the cosmos was not generous enough to enable her to fight under ideal conditions most of the time.

It was not difficult for enemies to figure out her weaknesses. If they wanted to eliminate her, they would try to confront her when she had fewer friendly units at her disposal than normal.

It was quite pathetic for an ace mech to fear the possibility of getting confronted by mere expert mechs, but that was an unfortunate reality for Casella and the Minerva.

"Don't feel so bad, Casella. We won't be able to test this out until tomorrow, but as long as you have at least a company of friendly mechs by your side, you can easily Enfeoff them all and let them overwhelm the enemy high-tier expert mechs. So long as the gap in performance is not too excessive, it is perfectly possible for dozens of weaker machines to overwhelm several genuine high-tier expert mechs."

"..."

Ves may be right, but ace pilots prided themselves in their transcendent strength. Even an ace commander such as Casella found it difficult to stomach all the sacrifices she made in order to empower her subordinates instead.

Just because she made the decision to specialize in commanding troops did not mean she had resolved her conflicting feelings on this matter.

Neither Ves nor anyone else could help her resolve the painful tradeoffs she made. Only Casella herself had to work out a way to come to terms with her development strategy.

"Although you may not want to acknowledge this, Casella, the reason why we made sure to keep your ace command mech slender is to make it easier for you to outrun your enemies. There is no shame for you to avoid a direct confrontation against individually powerful champions when this is your weakness. We fully expect you to monitor anything within your Command Field that can pose a serious threat against you and move away before letting such enemies get close enough."

The Saint Commander had little choice but to accept this reality. "I understand, sir. I may not like it, but that does not mean that I am intent on repeating my brother's mistake. I will not underestimate serious threats. If an enemy phase lord wants to pull me into a duel, then I will try to evade rather than fight back. There are other mechs that are much better equipped to handle such challenges. My true adversaries are enemy armies and fleets."

Out of all of the ace mechs of the Larkinson Clan, only the Minerva Mark II was most suited to eliminate a vast amount of regular troops.

Ves would rather have Casella continue to specialize in this direction than try to follow two different development trajectories at the same time.

She should be smart enough to figure this out as well.

"There is one final test we should conduct before we call it a day," Ves said. "We should test the range and influence of the Victrix. Please keep your Minerva in place and send out your living fey. Be careful not to move it too fast. Once it reached the edge of your Command Field, be careful about moving the Victrix past your domain field. It will either lose direction and hover in place, or it will extend your Command Field into areas that have yet to be covered by your mech frame alone."

Casella smiled. She had been looking forward to this test. There was too much potential in a Victrix that was able to spread her Command Field far outside of the Minerva's usual range.

The Victrix smoothly moved further and further away from the Minerva Mark II.

It took quite a bit of time for the living fey to cross over a hundred kilometers in a short amount of time.

When the Victrix approached the border of the base Command Field, Ves noticed that it only just became clear that the living fey was able to radiate a Command Field as well.

Its qualities were exactly the same, so Ves was not able to attribute this change for other reasons.

The Victrix stopped just before reaching the edge of the Minerva's native Command Field.

"How is it, Casella? Do you feel any pressure?"

"I am not experiencing any pressure at the moment." Casella replied. "The Victrix is still within my domain field. I have attached Eleiha to the living fey to strengthen my control over it. I am curious whether both or just one of them can move beyond the range of my Command Field."

"Alright. Try it out, but don't force yourself too much."

The Victrix began to move again. It slowly moved out of the Command Field.

From the moment it had completely exited the Minerva Mark II's domain field, Casella let out a painful grunt.

"Are you hurt?!"

No. It's okay. I did not expect this to exert greater strain on myself." Casella spoke as if she just got punched in the face. "This is not sustainable over an extended period of time. I am trying to deduce how I can lower the strain on my willpower."

Ves studied the projected feed that depicted the Victrix. He quickly narrowed his eyes.

"You are not actively resonating with the Victrix anymore." He remarked. "You are treating the living fey as if it is a missile that you have launched instead of an extension of your ace mech. Try your best to actively resonate with the machine."

The Saint Commander had already begun to do so. The Victrix glowed brighter as true resonance amplified its capabilities past anything that could get this close.

Her changed approach produced an effect.

Slowly but surely, a domain field extended from the living fey. Its radius was miniscule compared to the original, but Ves could already see that this was just the start!

So long as Casella was able to overcome the initial barrier, the Victrix should definitely be able to amplify the current results.

At least that was what Ves assumed.

The Victrix appeared to have moderate difficulty moving further away from the main mech frame.

Its Command Field also struggled to expand further.

"How are you doing, Casella?"

"I am experiencing greater strain than before." She spoke. "I am... not accustomed to it yet. Just as you suspected, the Victrix combined with my companion spirit can act as a remote relay for my Command Field. However, the strain on my mind grows stronger the further I move my living fey away. I think the strain will become more

bearable if my resonance strength develops further. I may need to devise a specialized technique as well."

They continued to conduct shallow tests with the Victrix. It was able to move further away at the cost of imposing greater strain on Casella.

It was clear that she was not adequately equipped to let the Victrix roam free outside of her native Command Field.

This at least gave everyone hope that the Victrix would one day be able to move to another side of a star system. In certain cases, this would effectively mean that there were two Minervas in the same battleground!

"How easily will you be able to increase the separation distance of your Victrix?" Ves asked.

"That is difficult to say, but... I think that repetition will gradually make it more bearable." The Saint Commander cautiously said. "It may turn out that sending out the Victrix is equivalent to exercising a muscle. I have never put myself under this sort of strain in the past. I hope that this means that calling upon this power will get easier over time."

There was no guarantee that this would be the case, but Casella believed that there should still be ways to train this particular capability.

"Has the Mentalist Crystal played an active role?"

"It has. I cannot fully describe its effects, but I can feel that it is actively helping the Victrix and my companion spirit sustain themselves outside of my range. It is also helping to extend the radius of its Command Field, though it doesn't appear to be too large."

The results were ultimately positive, but only mildly. The Victrix had a lot of potential in the future, but right now it was simply not strong enough to separate the two machines.

Chapter 6852 Third Test of the Minerva Mark II

After two days of testing, Casella gained a lot of familiarity in her new ace mech.

She did not obtain a good grasp on what the Minerva Mark II did best, which was commanding and empowering friendly troops.

The Larkinsons along with a few friends could only test this capability on the third day.

Many people looked forward to this test. After examining the basic capabilities of the Minerva, the ace command mech would finally be allowed to flex her power in the way she was designed to operate.

The tests had to take place in space in order to spare the planet of collateral damage.

The design team, Casella and the Minerva all teleported into the Tarrasque before the Bluejay Fleet moved to an asteroid belt that offered plenty of harmless practice targets.

The Devos Ancient Clan had already dispatched a small patrol force at the testing site.

The Devosans had volunteered several hundred of their fine first-class multipurpose mechs.

Compared to the Terran mechs assigned to the Bluejay Fleet, their Terran counterparts were slightly inferior in tech, but possessed a few other advantages.

One of the most notable traits of the Terran mechs was the fact that dozens of them wielded Destroyer weapons.

Ves initially grew quite impressed, but he soon realized that the standard mechs all wielded tier 7 Destroyer weapons.

These were still respectable weapons that could cut through armor more effectively than nearly all other weapons.

Even so, the concentration of Destroyer particles was too low to arouse much interest from Ves.

He had already read the textbooks on Destroyer technology that the Devosans had exchanged with him. He learned that there was very little challenge in producing low to mid-tier Destroyer weapons.

The real challenge started when attempting to create tier 3, tier 2 and especially tier 1 Destroyer weapons!

Their rarity rose dramatically with every jump, and so did their effective power.

As the Bluejay Fleet slowly met up with the Devosan force, a single Terran ace mech decided to make its presence known.

Many people held their breaths as they witnessed the emergence of one of the most powerful ace mechs in the New Constantinople System.

"The Wind of Destruction." A few people uttered.

Saint Alessandro Devos lived for over 2 centuries, and protected the Devos Ancient Clan for much of that time.

His Black Lord was a rather understated first-class ace multipurpose mech.

However, its rather plain black-coated appearance hid a lot of surprises.

Secrecy was one of the Black Lord's defining gimmicks.

The ace mech contained a few known integrated weapon modules, but nobody knew what it was fully capable of. The Devosans liked to hype up its mystery and even swapped in exotic and alien weapon modules from time to time.

This made the Black Lord almost impossible to counter. Those who collected a lot of intelligence with regards to its weapon loadout would soon discover that it had been partially rendered obsolete due to configuration changes.

However, the exotic tech that the Devosans liked to put inside the Black Lord was not the reason why the ace pilot earned his moniker.

The real reason why Saint Alessandro Devos became known as the Wind of Destruction was due to wielding an iconic tier 2 Destroyer sword!

At this tier, the Destroyer weapon was not only fully customized for use by the senior ace pilot, but also earned its own name.

The Sirocco stood out from many other Destroyer swords for its wavy blade. This somehow caused the highly concentrated Destroyer particles to become more prone to releasing destructive energy emissions.

That happened to make the weapon even more dangerous to wield than other tier 2 Destroyer swords!

However, the Wind of Destruction had tempered his willpower by wielding Destroyer weapons of progressively higher tiers for much of his career.

He had honed his willpower to subdue and maintain control over Destroyer weapons so well that not even the Sirocco could escape his grasp!

This allowed the Devosan ace pilot to leverage the advantages of the Sirocco while minimizing its weaknesses.

The Wind of Destruction earned his name by releasing devastating waves of resonance-empowered destruction energy with every slash of his wavy sword!

The Sirocco was so good at enabling these kinds of attacks that it could be used to release huge waves that could destroy a lot of weaker targets at once, or highly concentrated energy razors that possessed amazing penetration power.

The Tier 2 Destroyer weapon made the Wind of Destruction almost invincible at close range while also retaining much of his lethality at mid range.

Its integrated armaments were decently capable of damaging enemies from afar, but they were much better suited to assist in taking down tough opponents between sword moves.

The Tarrasque received an incoming transmission.

"Greetings, Saint Commander. Let us test your new machine and learn precisely why you will be feared by our enemies."

Well, the Wind of Destruction certainly sounded eager.

"Deploy every mech." Ves instructed. "Keep the RA mechs and Terran mechs in separate formations. We will not conduct any mock battles right away. We first want to test the parameters of the Minerva Mark II's Command Field without the interference of combat. This may take a while."

Many mechs launched into space. Each of the first-class multipurpose mechs possessed enough damage potential to tear the Minerva Mark II apart through sheer numbers.

Yet if they tried to do the same to the Black Lord, they would all get wiped out within seconds of moving into range!

This was the difference between a junior ace command mech and a senior ace multipurpose mech!

As the Minerva Mark II finally launched into space, Ves gained a better sense of the gap in power between the two machines.

This was good news to Ves. So long as the Devos Ancient Clan did not turn hostile towards the Larkinson Clan, Ves had nothing to fear from the current disparity.

A powerful ace mech could also withstand a lot more attacks without ever coming under serious threat.

Ves needed that the most today.

Once all of the mechs from both forces entered into space and assumed their formations, they all waited for the first test of the day to begin.

Ves transmitted his commands.

"RA mech pilots, please consider yourself to be on the same side as our Saint Commander. Terran mech pilots, pretend you are hostile against the Minerva Mark II and the rest of her comrades. The Command Field will attempt to intrude on you in different ways."

The pilots had already been briefed, but it was still important to give them extra reminders.

The Saint Commander briefly paused before trying to engage a large number of mechs and mech pilots with her Command Field.

She first focused on Commandeering a large portion of the 'friendly' RA mechs. Their mech pilots easily acquiesced to her control.

"How is it, Casella?"

"It is considerably easier for me to Commandeer non-living mechs so long as their mech pilots are cooperating." The Saint Commander reported back. "The Terran mechs that are designated as hostiles are not that much affected by my Command Field. Their resistance stops me from exerting direct influence on their minds."

"Can you override their resistance at your current level?"

"No. Absolutely not. Eleiha may be able to do this on an individual basis, but do not expect me to subdue entire fleets with my Command Field alone." Casella responded.

"Can you still collect intelligence on their mechs and pilots?"

"Yes, but I cannot collect too many fine details of their interior." The ace commander responded. "I cannot even penetrate the Saint Kingdom of the Black Lord. His willpower... is far too strong."

Ves nodded in understanding. "That is to be expected. Let us proceed with basic offensive and defensive tests. Please proceed with launching attacks at the nearby asteroids."

The RA first-class multipurpose mechs began to open fire at the asteroids with their eclectic collection of ranged weapons.

Gloriana's eyes immediately lit up as she studied the sensor readings.

"The damage inflicted by Commandeered mechs is considerably greater than before! The degree of true resonance affecting the Knights is considerably stronger, which is a great improvement over what the Mark I was able to accomplish."

"Are the Knights able to inflict damage comparable to low-tier expert mechs?"

"Ah, no. They are away from reaching that threshold. For now, the Knights still remain weaker than proper expert mechs, but their massive numbers more than made up for it, I believe."

Casella had already proven her capability to empower over 10,000 mechs at a time!

Whether all of these empowered mechs could still pose a threat against greater phase lords remained to be seen.

In any case, the damage inflicted by the Knights was impressive, but this was the Saint Commander's bread and butter.

"Casella, please employ your Enfeoffment ability to as many RA mechs as you can."
Ves requested.

The Minerva immediately made the switch.

Dozens of mech pilots gasped as they suddenly became subjected to a much greater external infusion of power!

"How many?!"

"57 mechs, which is an increase of almost 50 percent!"

"How strong?"

The newly Enfeoffed mechs wasted no time and began to open fire at the asteroids.

Their attacks hit much harder and blasted apart the asteroids with much greater ease!

The display of power was intoxicating. Compared to past results, Ves could already tell without performing any calculations that Casella's Enfeoffment ability had become fully unlocked with the help of the ace mech.

The resonance meters provided hard proof that all of those machines genuinely wielded greater power.

"These aren't Barons." Ves concluded. "Not at this level of power. There are enough data points to prove that these Enfeoffed mechs have reached the limitations of the previously theoretical standard of Viscounts."

These Viscounts might not amount to much, but they all happened to wield the power of mid-tier expert mechs!

This was a considerable step in the right direction. It opened up the future for the emergence of Counts and so on that wielded even more power.

"Viscounts, please switch your targets to the Black Lord."

The mech pilots did not question their instructions. The Saint Commander definitely planned this well.

57 Viscounts and hundreds more Knights opened fire without any hesitation.

The Black Lord's Saint Kingdom accepted every incoming attack, sapped much of their strength before allowing him to maintain the illusion of defying death.

It was impressive to see how the senior ace pilot was able to deal with massed attacks so easily.

Ves felt a little disappointed that the latest upgrades did not make the Viscounts powerful enough to pose a serious threat against senior ace mechs.

He was not sure whether the Viscounts could seriously threaten greater phase lords.

Perhaps it might still be possible with a little help.

"Casella, please try to Commandeer the starships of the Bluejay Fleet. Focus on the smaller hulls first."

Her Command Field fully encompassed all of the starships in the vicinity.

Now, Casella pressed her powerful will into the minds of the spacers of a destroyer.

The Saint Commander found to her delight that she was able to empower the warship, but only slightly!

"When the destroyer opened fire at a bunch of asteroids, our sensors recorded anomalies."

"How much stronger?"

"Roughly 10 percent. Do not fret, Ves. It will surely increase over time."

Ves grew disappointed. A 10 percent boost in power was nothing to scoff at, but it was not a dramatic increase.

The Larkinsons needed more power than that to confront its enemies in the short term.

Outside of ace mechs such as the Dark Zephyr Mark III or the Amaranto Mark III, warships should still remain the source of much of the firepower of the Premier Fleet and Bluejay Fleet.

"Can you improve upon your current application of your Command Field onto warships?" Ves asked.

"Possibly." Casella replied. "I need time to devise more specialized techniques. This will take time."

"That is good enough."

Chapter 6853 The Power of an Ace Commander

After conducting a number of basic tests, everyone gained a decent understanding of the power of the Minerva Mark II's new Command Field.

Commandeered mechs or Knights became moderately more powerful than if they got boosted by the Mark I. The performance increase was not dramatic, but still yielded a lot of extra power when applied on a large scale.

Enfeoffed mechs of Vassals received much greater benefits than before. Ves and Gloriana had specifically designed the Minerva Mark II to strengthen this specific aspect in particular. The results clearly showed that their efforts were not in vain.

The Viscounts as Ves arbitrarily decided to call them gained access to enough true resonance to roughly match the performance of mid-tier expert mechs.

Of course, these Viscounts still exhibited a large amount of shortcomings that made them inferior to true mid-tier expert mechs.

These factors ranged from mech configurations to skills. There was simply no way for Casella's Command Field to bestow all of these missing factors to the mechs that received her strongest form of empowerment.

Even so, granting 57 mechs the firepower of mid-tier expert mechs was impossible to match by any conventional force unless the disparity in numbers was enormous!

This was especially the case when factoring in that each of these Viscounts benefited from the superior skill, control and intuition of a multi-tasking ace commander!

"Casella, is there a way to redistribute the energy you expend on Enfeoffing mechs?"

"Please elaborate, sir."

"Instead of turning 57 mechs into Viscounts, can you turn 100 or 200 mechs into Barons?" Ves expanded his request. "There may be situations where you would rather have a battalion of low-tier expert mechs at your disposal rather than a company of mid-tier expert mechs."

"Hmm. I can see that. Let me try."

The Saint Commander began to alter the expression of her Command Field. It took a few minutes for her to mold her power in the desired fashion.

Soon enough, around 160 mechs shone with the familiar intensity that many Larkinsons were familiar with in the past half year.

"Not bad." Ves remarked. "160 Barons can do a lot of damage, especially if they are all heavy artillery mechs. Can you produce more Barons at this level of power, or have you reached your limit?"

Casella clearly attempted to stretch her power further, but failed to produce any further results.

"I am unable to do more... for the time being. It is as you have speculated. I have a finite 'pool' of energy that I can distribute to other mechs. There is not much flexibility at the moment. I can concentrate my energy into 57 Viscounts, but no further. Likewise, I can reduce the concentration and spread the same energy over three times as many Barons, but my power loses grip on mechs if I try to dilute it any further."

Those were oddly specific limits. Ves did not really care too much. He was more than satisfied with the current results.

Perhaps Casella would be able to employ her Enfeoffment ability in a more versatile manner after she increased her resonance strength and trained her Command Field further.

In the meantime, the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet could make good use of the incredible boost in firepower of 57 Viscounts or 160 Barons.

Ves still found it a pity that the Command Field's amplification still remained uneven.

Unfortunately, the loaned true resonance did not increase the defenses and mobility of the Commandeered and Enfeoffed mechs to the same degree.

This was already the case with the Mark I, and it was not that much different with the Mark II.

"The increase in defenses is moderate while the increase in mobility is low." Gloriana concluded after analyzing the data. "The multipliers are higher, but not as much as we had hoped. All of the mechs empowered by the Minerva Mark II still amount to glass cannons. They can strike their enemies hard, but they cannot withstand as much damage. Clever operation and control can help the Knights and Vassals survive the storm of combat, but this may not work out so well if our adversaries have grasped the intelligence related to our Saint Commander."

"That is why we added Dragon Scales as the second key resonating material of the Minerva Mark II." Ves mentioned. "We already tested how well it amplified our ace mech's physical defenses the day before. It is now time to utilize Dragon Scales as we originally intended."

If Ves and Gloriana solely wanted to amplify the physical defenses of the Minerva Mark II, then they could have resorted to other resonating exotics with a much higher defense coefficient.

For example, resonating with Solarium could amplify the physical defenses of the Amaranto Mark III by as much as 300 percent under ideal conditions!

In contrast, the Minerva Mark II's exterior only became 70 percent tougher, which would not help the ace mech all that much if attacked by a greater phase lord.

It was a good thing that Dragon Scales was originally designed to strengthen the defenses of spurs.

When employed by an ace command mech, this effect successfully transferred over to friendly mechs as well as starships affected by Casella's Command Field!

The Larkinsons proceeded to conduct very careful tests on unshielded mechs. Each of them endured attacks of different intensities in order to find out how much stronger their armor had become.

"The results vary according to multiple variables, but the amplification falls within our expectations." Gloriana reported. "The physical defenses of Knights are at least 3 times better than before. The physical defenses of Barons and Viscounts are at least 5 times greater than normal. This is a remarkable increase that can save many lives and keep many more mechs active on the battlefield than before. As for warships... the effect of Dragon Scales is minimal due to their enormous surface area."

This was a huge improvement! It was worth it to opt for Dragon Scales as the second key resonating material for the Minerva.

Compared with a resonating material that improved the firepower of Commandeered and Enfeoffed mechs, Dragon Scales would keep mechs and more importantly their mech pilots alive across multiple intensive battles.

This perfectly aligned with the priorities of the Larkinson Clan. The Larkinsons needed to grow through adversity, but also make sure that as many of its soldiers stayed alive long enough to benefit from the rewards.

It would not do the Larkinson Clan any good to win 100 battles, but lose 99 percent of its soldiers in the process.

Ves would rather raise the survival rate to 50 percent even if that meant that his clan lacked the firepower to win half of its battles.

In any case, the inclusion of Dragon Scales meant that Casella's extraordinary offensive boost also came paired with a substantial defensive boost.

It could not save her Commandeered or Enfeoffed mechs from all dangers, but they should still suffer much less casualties than before!

"Let's proceed with the live practice sessions." Ves said. "We need to get a more realistic impression of how much of a difference these amplifications can produce. If the Minerva Mark II is anywhere near as effective as other ace command mechs, we can expect that any competition will massively favor the ones that are affected by the Command Field."

This was the test that everyone was looking forward to. The data all showed dramatic performance boosts, but it did not feel real enough unless a bunch of empowered mechs fought against unempowered mechs.

"Switch weapons to training mode." Ves instructed. "Set elimination threshold to 50 percent shield integrity. Let us start with pitting 200 Commandeered mechs against 400 unaffected mechs. In order to make this more interesting, let's split the RA mechs and Terran mechs evenly between both sides."

This meant that one side did not field only RA mechs while the other side only fielded Terran mechs.

It took a bit of time for the mechs to get organized.

The mechers and the Terrans clearly did not enjoy fighting alongside each other. Their standards, mech doctrines and protocols differed considerably from each other.

There was no way for them to establish any rapport in a short amount of time. They could only split off in their own detachments and try to fight separately alongside each other.

Compared to the Terran mechs, the RA mechs enjoyed one significant advantage. Each of them benefited from shield link technology, which meant that they could pool their energy defenses.

This made them a lot harder to eliminate!

However, the Terran mechs were not completely helpless in the face of this superior tech.

The Terrans already figured out that if they could put an obstacle between the shield links, they could interrupt the linkages.

The RA mechs also relied heavily on support mechs that were dedicated to acting as shield link relays to optimize the shield link networks.

So long as these support mechs got taken down first, it became much harder for the RA mechs to take advantage of shield link technology!

"Are you ready? Start!"

The mechs hailing from the side that belonged to the Saint Commander immediately began to light up with the tell-tale signs of true resonance.

Casella had opted to transform 57 mechs into Viscounts while turning the remaining 143 mechs into Knights.

While all of them consisted of first-class multipurpose mechs, Casella very deliberately turned Terran machines with a strong focus on melee combat into her Viscounts!

These mechs that roughly gained the attack and defensive power of mid-tier expert mechs immediately rocketed forward!

Although these machines were immediately met with intercepting fire from the 400 opposing machines, the defensive amplification from Dragon Scales helped to keep the Viscounts alive!

In the meantime, the 143 Knights maintained their distance and methodically concentrated their pin-point accurate firepower on dozens of enemy targets at the same time.

Although the Saint Commander was not an excellent marksman, her ability to handle different ranged weapons was still superhuman due to her high rank.

It only took her a few salvos for her to understand the targeting rules of most of the high-tech weapon modules of her Knights.

Their accuracy was already fairly high from the start, but most of the weapons simply did not miss anymore!

Even before the Viscounts closed the distance, the Knights had already taken out a bunch of opposing mechs!

Of course, Knights mainly concentrated their firepower on the opposing Terran mechs as they lacked the benefits of shield link technology.

While the Terran mech contingent tried their best to make up for this shortcoming by fielding support mechs that were able to deploy remote azure energy shields, the huge volume of resonance-empowered attacks easily crumbled these barriers!

The Knights may have only gained the firepower of quasi-expert mechs, but the modest amount of true resonance flowing through them made a huge difference!

Even if the opposing mechs outnumbered the empowered mechs by 2 to 1, the former could not afford to direct any attention to the Knights.

This was because the Viscounts had already closed the distance!

Even if the Command Field did not boost mobility as much as offense or defense, the Viscounts still made good use of the limited advantage in mobility to quickly close the distance to the slowest opposing mechs.

Energy shields quickly crackled as they withstood a torrent of ranged and melee attacks!

The Viscounts did not just focus exclusively on attacking with their swords and spears. They were all multipurpose mechs, so they constantly launched accurate attacks with the compact but still relatively deadly ranged armaments.

Their targets had no chance of withstanding these attacks!

Even if the power of all of these weapons had been dialed back for training purposes, they still inflicted a lot more damage than the weapons of unempowered mechs.

As soon as the azure energy shields of dozens of mechs dipped to 50 percent, they were already eliminated from the practice session.

The 'defeated' mechs no longer took action and drifted away as if they were dead.

The Viscounts continued to jump towards other enemy mechs.

No matter whether they hunted down RA mechs or Terran mechs, it made little difference to the Enfeoffed machines.

The performance gap was too vast and the drastically improved control meant that none of the unempowered mechs could mount an effective resistance!

Even if they concentrated their firepower, the Knights or Viscounts that came under heavy fire could always last long enough to retreat and hide behind other friendly units.

By taking full advantage of the benefits of the Minerva Mark II's new and improved Command Field, the practice session quickly came to an end.

Of the 200 empowered mechs, none of them had fallen!

Of the 400 unempowered mechs, each of them suffered defeat without exception!

"Impressive!" Ves' eyes lit up. "This bout may seem unfair when it involves mechs on both sides, but when we get to fight against the native aliens, I look forward to steamrolling their forces without needing to deploy too many assets."

This was the power of an authentic ace commander!

Chapter 6854 The Black Lord

The first bout already established the immense advantages granted by Casella's Command Field.

The next bouts only reinforced the advantages that she freely bestowed onto other mechs.

100 Barons easily crushed 500 unempowered mechs.

100 Knights struggled and ultimately overcame 500 unempowered mechs, but not without suffering a dozen or so casualties.

50 Viunts quickly vanquished 550 unempowered mechs, though the disparity in numbers was so great at the start that a handful of the formeruld not escape elimination.

It was only when the ratios became more absurd that the Saint Commander experienced a true challenge.

Depending on the type of mechs she was able to empower and what sort of opposition she faced, sheuld easily win fights where her forces were outnumbered 15 to 1!

This was a ridiculously high ratio and one that promised a lot of devastation in the future!

"I am rather worried." Glorianauldn't help but remark. "If Casella is able to Commandeer an entire mech division to this degree, everyone will set extremely high expectations on our limited mech forces. Both allies and enemies will take it for granted that we can easily fight against hundreds of thousands of elite phasefighters and several alien assault fleets. Casella's Command Field will define our forces so much that everyone will take it for granted that we can win these lopsided battles. One day, the native aliens will attempt to outnumber us by 30 to 1 or 50 to 1. We cannot possibly win a battle where we are so badly outnumbered."

Herncerns were valid. If the Saint Commander became an nic presence in the Premier Fleet, then everyone would automatically treat it as a fighting force that fielded at least 15 more mechs.

The weak wouldwer away, but the strong would remain fearless and hunt the Premier Fleet down!

"It is still worth it to have the Saint Commander around." Ves told his wife. "At the very least, our forces will bme so highly regarded by our enemies that not many of them have the guts tonfront us. The frequency of battles initiated by the native aliens will be much lower once Casella has earned more infamy among our foes. Even if we eventually get hunted down by a powerful alien fleet that can actually defeat us, Casella has access to many powerful features. It is not impossible for her to leverage the assets and resources at her disposal to gain tactical or strategic superiority on the battlefield. At worst, we can do our best to run away."

Vesuld not allow fears of disproportionate enemy response stop him from making full use of the Minerva Mark II in his Premier Fleet.

Might was right. This rule became especially apt in the current era.

It was better to hold greater power and hope that stronger enemies had better things to do than hunt down the Premier Fleet.

"Let's move on to the final battery of tests." Ves suggested. "We have seen how ridiculously powerful the mechs empowered by the Minerva Mark II can be at this level. True resonance holds an overwhelming advantage against opponents that lack its protection. What will happen if the Minerva has tonfront another ace mech?"

Ves and everyone else glanced at the Terran ace mech that had yet to take any action.

The Black Lord was a finely honed ace multipurpose mech. Its nic tier 2 swordntained a lot of power and animosity.

The Siro was made to annihilate.

Now that the Minerva Mark II needed to test her mettle against another ace mech, the Black Lord became more active and flew forward.

"This is not going to be pleasant for Casella." Gloriana said with a frown. "The Wind of Destruction is not as renowned as the Mace of Retaliation or the Messenger of Silence, but he is still a senior ace pilot that has honed himself in battle. He is five times older than our Saint Commander and has much more experience under his belt."

"This is not about winning and losing. This is about gathering data and giving Casella a valuable lesson on what will happen if shenfronts a hostile ace mech." Ves told his wife.

They just needed to stack the deck so that Casella still had enough power to resist her inevitable defeat.

Ves opened a direct channel to the Black Lord.

"Saint Alessandro Devos, greetings from the Larkinson Clan. Arding to our planning, we require your services in determining how effectively the Minerva Mark II along with hundreds of subordinate mechs can impede you. It is pointless conduct this test when you are fighting at your full power. Can you dial back your performance so that you can match the power of a junior ace pilot?"

"Holding back... is not in my nature." The Wind of Destruction responded with very obvious irritation. "For the sake of what you have done for the Devos Ancient Clan, I can reluctantly attempt tonform to your request."

Although the Black Lord still came across as a significantly more powerful adversary than the Minerva Mark II, the disparity was a little less than before.

The Terran ace pilot already began to make adjustments. The Saint Kingdom surrounding his ace mech visibly weakened.

Although the Black Lord still came across as a significantly more powerful adversary than the Minerva Mark II, the disparity was a little less than before.

Vesuld only shrug and proceed with the test.

"Casella, you will have 600 first-class multipurpose mechs at your disposal. These machines should all be familiar to you as you have empowered them or fought against them not too long ago. Try your best to inconvenience your sole adversary."

The Saint Commander knew how little chance she had of defeating the Black Lord.

That did not mean she gave up before the bout had even started.

As a saint, she needed to maintain her confidence and dignity of her rank.

Even if a victory was out of reach, she still needed to get as close to it as possible.

The lessons she should learn from this experience could ultimately help her perform better in the face of overwhelming opposition.

The bout started after the two sides moved away from each other.

Immediately after the countdown was over, the Black Lord raced across space and flew forward at a blazingly high speed!

Distant energy beams already came in from afar.

Many of the multipurpose mechs commandeered or enfeoffed by the Saint Commander expertly targeted the areas in which the Black Lord might evade towards.

These guesses mostly turned out to be wrong due to the uncanny intuition of the Wind of Destruction.

Casella had combined the firepower of all 600 empowered mechs to box in the Black Lord and guarantee at least a handful of devastating attacks.

However, the Black Lord's Saint Kingdom was so ridiculously strong that it negated pretty much all attacks.

The true resonance empowerment that Casella distributed to all 600 mechs amounted to nothing in comparison!

In a contest between ace pilots, the one with the stronger Saint Kingdom would easily crush anyone that was weaker.

Casella was especially at a disadvantage in this contest. Not only was her resonance strength a lot weaker, she also dispersed her extraordinary willpower.

This was the worst thing she should do when fighting against another ace pilot!

Only concentrated attacks could truly harm a powerful ace mech.

While the many attacks launched by the first-class multipurpose mechs were still strong enough to pose a certain degree of threat to the Black Lord, in practice their effectiveness was pretty low.

Over 90 percent of ranged attacks simply missed their target!

The few attacks that did strike the Black Lord mostly bounced off its armor.

Unless multiple attacks repeatedly struck the same section of armor, it was too unrealistic to hope that all of these massed attacks could seriously harm the Black Lord.

"The Black Lord hasn't retaliated with its own ranged armaments." Gloriana noted.

If this was a real battle, then the Terran ace mech would have shredded the opposing machines with its integrated weapon modules. There was no need for the Black Lord to waste so much time on closing the distance.

The Wind of Destruction evidently did not want to end this session too soon. Hentinned to direct his Black Lord to weaken and block all incoming attacks.

Once the ace multipurpose mech finally came close enough to use its blade, the Black Lord dramatically swung the Siro a single time.

A large but dispersing wave of resonance-empowered destructive energies swooped forward before engulfing 20 empowered mechs!

Each of them immediately suffered so much damage that their energy shields dipped below 50 percent integrity without exception!

"Do not try to resist the Black Lord's attacks. Try to evade them whenever possible!"

The Black Lord became a lot harder to shoot down now that it had entered the midst of the formation of opposing mechs.

The ace mech began to swing destructive energy waves in every direction. Its dominating performance intimidated everyone, causing opponents to fight back with less confidence than before.

Yet the empowered mechs did not give up. Their mech pilots drove their machines forward and tried to entangle the Black Lord in a crush of mechanical bodies.

The Terran mechs were most eager to earn the honor of being able to lock blades with the powerful ace mech.

Although their rage was commendable, they were not strong enough to inconvenience the Wind of Destruction!

Although there were enough empowered mechs that managed to circle around evade these attacks, the Black Lord instantly turned around and struck the Terran mechs with such great speed that none of the machines were able to respond in time!

The Black Lord lazily swung its tier 2 Destroyer sword, releasing large waves of destructive energies that unceasingly eliminated any mech that got caught by the attacks.

Although there were enough empowered mechs that managed to circle around evade these attacks, the Black Lord instantly turned around and struck the Terran mechs with such great speed that none of the machines were able to respond in time!

Even if Casella was powerful enough to perceive the movements of the Terran ace mech, her Knights and Viunts were simply too slow to react in time!

The Wind of Destruction directly demonstrated why it was a bad idea for weaker enemies to confront a genuine ace mech.

Whether it was offense, defense or mobility, an ace mech that possessed advantages in all three areas would outright crush its opposition without fail.

No matter what tactic Casella employed, the Black Lord resolved all threats with overwhelming force.

The crushing performance of this singular enemy stripped Casella of all of the pride and satisfaction she accrued from the previous bouts.

After continually winning one lopsided victory after another, the Saint Commander received a necessary reality check that caused her to become more acutely aware of her vulnerabilities.

She was still too weak. Even if her command mechs were disadvantages against pure combat-oriented ace mechs, she still found it shameful for the Minerva Mark II to fail to pose a serious threat against her adversary.

After the Black Lord quickly hunted down the remaining Viunts and Knights, the ace mech floated before the Minerva Mark II.

Its Saint Kingdom pressed onto Casella and the Minerva. It was unnerving to fall into the powerful domain field of another ace pilot.

The Wind of Destruction's Saint Kingdom conveyed many urges and desires. His domain field expressed his eagerness to fight and destroy his foes. It was not particularly subtle or deep, but it worked out decently well for the ace pilot.

"For an ace commander, your performance is... disappointing. These 'Commandeered' and 'Enfeoffed' mechs pose no threat against my ace mech. Further tests involving my Black Lord are redundant as long as you fail to develop your power to penetrate defenses of mechs such as my own."

The testing session came to an end.

The Wind of Destruction had issued his verdict and promptly returned to its mothership.

It was clear that Casella did not take the other ace pilot's advice all that well.

Fortunately, she was mature enough to understand that she did not let this defeat derail her plans.

"Let us call this day." Ves suggested.

"We have yet to test the Mindstorm Alloy."

"We cannot recklessly launch into space and create psychic storms. We cannot conduct this sequence of tests another day. Casella needs to take a break and reflect on her experiences."

Chapter 6855 A Different Kind of Struggle

The Minerva Mark II finally completed her extensive battery of tests.

The Design Department collected a huge amount of useful data.

The Saint Commander also gained a much better awareness of what she was capable of with her upgraded machine.

The members of the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet also understood how much stronger they became after being blessed by Casella's true resonance.

The overall conclusion was that the Minerva Mark II held great promise. She might not be able to defeat powerful champions such as the Wind of Destruction, but she excelled in eliminating large amounts of regular units.

A day after the last tests, Ves met with the Saint Commander in private to discuss the conclusions they had drawn from all of the data.

"We have studied the numbers carefully." He told the ace pilot. "We also inputted the data into our SF-02 and conducted a large amount of simulations. You and your battle partner are most effective at eliminating enemy small craft, followed by enemy warships. Phase lords and phase whales pose a greater challenge to you, but they are so big and clumsy that you cannot continue to whittle them down at a distance. Only other ace mechs represent a problem to you. The inability for you to concentrate all of your true resonance in a single unit is a major shortcoming."

What he left unsaid was that Casella did not have this flaw in the past.

The precursor to her current refinement ability enabled her to channel all of her willpower to Venerable Imon Ingvar.

The reason why this worked was because of their close sibling relationship. They trusted each other so much that their willpower did not reject each other.

Unfortunately, there was no way that Casella could replicate this process without bringing back her brother.

Casella looked at him in the eyes while raising her cup of tea to her lips. The steaming cup of lavender tea was not to her taste, but she should appreciate its aromatic scent.

"Are you asking me to address this shortcoming?"

Ves shook his head. "How you wish to develop your career is your choice. I have no right to dictate how you should train your strength. Personally, I have always been a big believer of specialization. It is best if you stick to your current trajectory and give our troops the power to defeat at least 20 times their number. You do not need to worry about trying to kill enemy champions. We have other powerful mechs and mech pilots that are specialized for this role. One notable example is Saint Dise. The two of you working together is a perfect combination."

Casella looked eager. "I agree. After trying and failing to subdue the Wind of Destruction, I fully acknowledge my own weaknesses. I am not destined to become a duelist. It would be ideal if I can delegate this responsibility to Saint Dise. How long will it take to complete the First Sword Mark III?"

"Not too long," Ves smiled. "Ketis is operating extensively with the Red Association. This has caused her upgrade project to pick up a huge amount of speed. The First Sword Mark III Project should be complete within a month. If we are lucky, our new ace swordsman mech may be shipped to New Constantinople only shortly after our flagship arrives."

The Premier Fleet was slowly coming together. Key assets were still trickling in from various different places and networks.

Combined with Casella's work of rectifying the armed forces of the Premier Branch and opening up recruitment, it should only take up to 2 months before they would start deploying in the frontlines and fight the aliens up close!

That was a pretty tight timetable, but Ves was confident they would pull it all together.

"Is the prospect of adding the First Sword Mark III to the Premier Fleet enough, or do you want more? We can still recall the Dark Zephyr Mark III and the Amaranto Mark III if necessary."

The Saint Commander shook her head in rejection. "My answer towards this subject remains the same. Gathering 4 ace pilots in a single fleet is... excessive. We will either provoke an overwhelming enemy response, or we continue to deter all of our enemies in the Red Ocean. The latter is not effective due to the fanaticism of the rank-and-file alien soldiers. We can make a much better contribution if we spread out our ace mechs across the frontlines."

"Hm, that is a mature and rational decision." Ves complimented the ace commander. "The Premier Fleet should do fine with you and Saint Dise. The key is to remain mobile. It is not necessary to accept the opportunity to fight. What I cannot accept is to force a needless concentration. I am afraid that having 4 ace pilots around will cause us to develop delusions of grandeur. It may feel tempting for us to raid behind enemy lines, only to get concerned by an ancient phase whale."

Casella nodded in agreement.

The scenario he described may actually be true. The power of an ace pilot was great. Being able to deploy 4 of them was enough to defend a major star system.

"Since our Premier Fleet is getting closer to getting launched, I need to understand your objectives better." The Saint Commander said. "Do you have a more specific goal in mind aside from defeating as many alien forces as possible?"

Ves paused in thought. It was not easy to explain his full intentions, but Casella deserved an honest answer.

"You should already know the surface reasons, Casella. Earning war merits, defending red humanity, harvesting spoils, accelerating the growth of our troops and earning fame and glory on the battlefield are all valid goals. However, one of my highest priorities has always been to promote the growth of my design philosophy. I believe that being active on the frontlines and designing mechs in response to what I have witnessed in action is the fastest way to speed up my development as a mech designer. It is risky, but I think it works well in avoiding complacency. There is no better rush than the threat of death to keep my mind sharp."

The ace commander had no understanding of this, but she was willing to take Ves at his word.

She took another sip as she processed his words.

"Our clan has become less dependent on your support alone over the years." She said. "As far as mech designers are concerned, Gloriana and Ketis have become successful enough to support our clan in your absence. As for mech pilots, our growing collection of ace pilots will not stand by and let us fall. Our position is more secure than ever, but it is not that

easy to break into a higher level of society. Your breakthrough will solve many problems. You will truly be accepted among the leadership of red humanity once you have realized your design philosophy."

As much as Ves enjoyed the alades that he had won as a Senior Mech Designer, the mech industry still did notmpletely acknowledge hisntributions.

His deathuld erase many of the advantages that he had secured for the mechmmunity

Vesuld cut off this possibility so long as he broke through to the rank of Master Mech Designer.

Therefore, anything thatuld speed up his work was weme.

"Do you require any aid in your research? Do you need tollect special materials, or fight against specific opponents?"

"No. That will not be necessary, Casella. I already have a plan, and it is not difficult for me to gather the necessary resources."

The two Larkinsons fell into silence as they sipped their tea and thought about what was in store for them in the future.

Ves needed to speed up his journey to Master Mech Designer.

Casella wanted to grow faster in order to bme strong enough to revive her brother in full.

Although their goals did not match each other, their agendas aligned just enough for them tooperate with each other.

"I have a question, Casella. How was the experience of fighting against the Wind of Destruction?"

The ace commander made a sour expression. "I do not like to be reminded of that practice session. The Black Lord... made me feel completely helpless. If Saint Alessandro Devos wanted to, he would have driven his ace mech closer and eliminated me within seconds. That is how strong he is. There was no part in my brain that would tell me a way to escape this predicament."

Since the two were talking in private, Casella reluctantly dropped her guard and revealed her vulnerability.

The feeling of helplessness affected her more than it should.

Ves reached out and patted her palm with his hand. "I have been in similar positions as you in the past. The scenarios are different, but the concept remains the same. We cannot help but feel utterly weak when we meet those who are so much more powerful than us. Yet this is nothing special. How you react to the Wind of Destruction is similar to how other people look at you. This is all one big cycle."

This was how he saw the Red Ocean. From his perspective, it had become a tangled knot of relationships and threats.

"A part of myself still remains unwilling to avoid spending our time on training to become a better duelist." Casella said. "I have sacrificed so much to get this far, but my breakthrough still feels hollow without my brother by my side. He was supposed to be my champion, you know? It would have been fantastic if he broke through as well. He would effectively fight with both of our true resonances acting on his machine at the same time. The combination would have made him as strong as the Gemini Saints working together."

Ves smiled. "Perhaps you may be able to fulfill your wish one day. Nothing is impossible as long as you wield enough power. None of this is attainable in the short term, though."

"..."

A minute of silence passed before Ves carefully chose to ask a delicate question.

"Is there a way for you to lend much of your extraordinary willpower to another high-ranking mech pilot besides your deceased brother?"

"..."

"I have to ask this question, Casella. It has great strategic importance."

"...No." The woman forced herself to answer. "I trust Jannzi, Joshua and so on, but... my friendship with my peers cannot be close to the familial bond with my brother. I am sorry, but I don't think I can develop my current relationships with other powerful mech pilots any further."

Ves grew disappointed, but then he came up with another idea.

"Wait. If family ties are so important to you, then what about a husband? What about children? Do you think your bond with them can grow strong enough for them to bear most of your power?"

Casella looked genuinely taken aback by this suggestion.

"I... have not contemplated marriage, let alone having kids. I have always been preoccupied by work and combat. My social life is nonexistent. The current state of the Red War is too dire for us to relax."

Ves sighed. "You cannot set aside your personal life all of the time, Casella. You need to experience what being human is like in order to better understand the people you are protecting. Wouldn't it be nice to find a life partner to share your most intimate feelings with? Isn't it great for you to experience motherhood and raise your own children? Each of them have the potential to become a powerful carrier of your true resonance. Your brother definitely would not want you to remain depressed and lonely after his demise. I think he wants the opposite from you. The best way to make him happy is to live a real life. Marrying the love of your life and propagating your bloodline is a great way for you to do this. Do you wish to honor your brother's legacy?"

The Saint Commander faintly looked out of her element. For all of her acumen in combat, she was woefully unprepared to tackle a different kind of struggle.

Chapter 6856 Single Parent Option

Even an ace commander could get stumped.

Casella Ingvar never really engaged in this aspect of her personal life. Why should she? She had far too many responsibilities to spend her time on leisure activities.

Her work was her life. The Larkinson Clan needed a leader that the clansmenuld look up to. Casella had tried her best to do them all justice, and she liked to think she did a better job than most people.

However, all of her dedication to the expeditionary fleet and the Larkinson Clan left her with little room to live a life of her own. She had no hobbies and maintained no friends who weren't directly related to her work one way or another.

The Saint Commander never really saw anything wrong with this. She had managed to trigger her apotheosis twice in a remarkably short amount of time, though the circumstances behind the last one were ideal.

Still, the Larkinsons clearly needed a strong acemmander more than a sentimental expertmmander at this time.

It was only now that Ves directly broached this subject that Casella truly rgnized this shorming in her life.

Her brother had always been the only family she needed in order to feel fulfilled. By investing so much of her feelings into Imon, he served as her all-in-one emotional pillar.

That made thensequences of losing him so much harder for her to stomach.

Now that she had lost the only relative she truly cared about, all she had left in her heart was a void that she never attempted to fill.

A part of that was because she still maintained the determination to restore her brother in the future. Why try to replace Imon when sheuld eventually get him back somehow?

However, she rgnized that this was not really a healthy way to process her grief.

It was too abnormal for her to have no one else in her life to receive her love and affection.

Her love life, or the absence of it, even became a matter of strategy!

The lack of a mech pilot who would bear her full love and power deprived her of an agent that would help her defeat powerful champions such as the Wind of Destruction.

If a mech pilot such as Imon Ingvar or another loved one was in the field, the last practice session would have ended a lot differently!

Even if the Wind of Destruction ultimately came out on top, at least Casella and her agent would have made a decent showing.

"Don't you have anyone in your life that you would have a closer relationship with?" Ves asked with genuine concern in his voice.

The woman shook her head. "No. I have no attraction to others. I have always treated others with the utmost professionalism and respect. Never more. My busy schedule has often prevented me from socializing with others. Due to my command position, I am often obliged to maintain my distance to my subordinates. It is the best way for me to maintain my authority. Inappropriate relationships can get in the way of effective transmissions of orders."

Casella was one of the highest-ranking military leaders in the Larkinson Clan. She was certainly the most high-profile and famous one to be certain. All other leaders would not be close to matching her prestige.

This made it easy for her to take command and impose her own vision on the armed forces, but it also made her more detached and aloof from the lower ranks.

It was unthinkable for her to start any intimate relationship with her subordinates.

"What about the other expert pilots and ace pilots of the clan?" Ves asked.

Casella snorted. "They are not under my consideration. My peers pursue their own passions and goals. I can respect that, but we have little in common aside from the shared desire to protect the Larkinson Clan. Besides, many of them have already started their own families. They are more diligent in this regard."

"What about starting a relationship with an individual outside of our clan? I have never prohibited this behavior. Venerable Brutus Wodin is happily married to Commander Sendra Larkinson for example. Their pairing is rather unlikely, but they somehow made it work despite belonging to two different organizations. Is there anyone outside of our clan that you would like to know better?"

The Saint Commander did not resist this suggestion out of hand. She made an earnest effort to think about whether the thought of dating an individual outside of the Larkinson held any appeal.

Unfortunately, no name came up. She had met many respectable expert pilots and ace pilots from other groups, but she never detected any spark that could be nurtured into a serious relationship.

She shook her head. "I am afraid I must disappoint you. There is no one among the Glory Seekers, the Crossers, the Adelaides or the Boojays that I am interested in. Most of their expert pilots and ace pilots are predominantly at least two generations older than myself. As for mortals, none of them possess the mental fortitude to relax in my presence."

"Are you only taking men into consideration, or have you considered women as well? Have you also looked for candidates outside of the military? What about mech designers? They might not be able to match you in strength, but they should be able to keep up to you in terms of intellect. The contrast in professions can introduce a lot of novelty in a relationship. The two of you are less likely to grow bored with each other."

Ves kept introducing different possibilities, but none of them sounded appealing to Casella. The Saint Commander truly did not resonate with any of his proposals.

The woman raised her palm. "Stop. I appreciate your interest on the matter, but I truly cannot think of any person that I would like to develop a relationship with. You can order me to find one, but I do not think I can complete my objective. Love is not a product that you can engineer into existence. The fact of the matter is that I am simply

not interested, least of all now. So long as the Red Tide Offensives continue to devastate our territories, I can never allow myself to relax. Not truly. I hope you understand."

That disappointed Ves. No matter in the short term or long term, it was vitally important for the Larkinson Clan for Casella to find a partner that she should entrust her power with. The benefits were too great for the clan to miss out on. To allow Casella to maintain a solitary life was criminal from their perspective.

Both Ves and Casella agreed on this matter.

Yet trying to solve it was not that simple. Casella was right when she said that love could not be engineered.

Ves tried his best to come up with alternatives.

"What about... having a child while forgoing a relationship?" He offered.

That caused the Saint Commander to frown. "Are you being serious?"

"It is not ideal, but it is still a viable possibility for you. Rather than force yourself to fall in love with someone, you can skip all of this marriage stuff and simply have a child. The Larkinson Biotech Institute can easily develop a high-quality designer baby that is based on your genes and the genes of another individual. If you think that bearing the fetus in your belly is too dangerous or debilitating for you, the LBI can always put your unborn child in an artificial womb. It will only take 9 months of waiting for you to welcome a brand new son or daughter."

"..."

Her desire to serve her clan better compelled her to seriously consider this possibility.

The proposal made by Ves momentarily stumped Casella. She had not considered the possibility of having a child outside marriage. A part of her felt repelled by this suggestion, but another part of her considered it to be a practical solution to her problem.

Her desire to serve her clan better compelled her to seriously consider this possibility.

"I am not that eager to resort to this option, but... if there is no alternative, I may be open to taking this route." She reluctantly said.

"Great! I will send a message to Vice Director Maria Abselon. She will make sure that the LBI will prioritize this project above all others. The sooner the biotech experts start their preparations, the better the output. Your child deserves to be special. Our geneticists and specialists have developed a new series of designer baby formulas that rely on calculated insertions of mind-attributed and life-attributed hyper materials. The designer babies derived from these formulas should be a lot smarter and healthier than their baseline counterparts. They are also working on other series that possess other advantages, such as a strong affinity for one of the five classical elements. None of them are cheap, but our clan is fully willing to reimburse the expenses for choosing one of these powerful options."

The Saint Commander became a little overwhelmed by the impromptu sales pitch. She never paid attention to the designer baby industry. She had not realized that it had developed to such an extent.

It made a lot of sense now that she thought about it. Every parent wanted their children to be special and powerful in their own way.

If they had an option to spend money to produce stronger offspring, it would be stupid to ignore this option!

"I apologise, sir. I am not ready for this. I need to be more psychologically prepared to contemplate this option. I can only promise you that I will be open-minded when it is time to make this consideration. At the very least, if I have chosen to accept the mantle of motherhood, I will not be making use of an artificial womb."

That caused Ves to look slightly concerned. "Pregnancy and mech piloting is a problematic combination. It is one thing to do so during peacetime, but it is another thing to do so during wartime."

"If I go down this route, then I will take measures to avoid intensive combat." Casella promised. "It is easier for me to do so than others. An ace command mech is not expected to take direct action. As long as another ace pilot is present to share the burden, I have little concerns about my own safety and the health of my child."

"There are also the effects of your domain on your unborn child." Ves pointed out. "Studies have shown that children who grow up under the strong influence of a high-ranking mech pilot's aura tend to have... abnormalities. Not all of them are detrimental, but it would be wrong to say that all of the changes are positive."

Children of high-ranking mech pilots tended to mirror their strongest parent to a closer degree than normal.

They wouldn't turn into outright clones, but the similarities tended to be uncanny.

Some parents took pride in this mimicry.

Others became regretful at how little their children were able to pursue their own paths.

Casella had not made it far enough for her to develop an opinion on this controversial subject.

Ves was just glad that he and his wife did not have to worry about this problem. Their own children looked up to their parents, but did not get exposed to the strong willpower of high-ranking mech pilots on a daily basis.

There were even expert pilots and ace pilots that deliberately tried to avoid personal contact whenever possible just to preserve the 'free will' of their own children!

"I will think about it in my own time." Casella said. "All of this is too much for me. I am not accustomed to waging this kind of battle. It would be more ideal if I can find a spouse that I can put my guard down. A child deserves to be raised by two parents instead of one. I am afraid that even if I bear an offspring, I would not have enough time to give the baby the love and affection that he or she deserves."

"You don't need to be worried about that, Casella." He smiled. "The Larkinson Clan is one giant family. There should be plenty of Larkinsons who are willing to lend a hand."

Chapter 6857 Second Superdimensional Mining Operation

As much as Ves held a vested interest in having Casella expand her family, it would take at least a generation for him to benefit from this development.

It was still better to tackle this issue early rather than later. The stronger the Saint Commander became, the more problematic it was for her to raise her own child.

After sending Casella, Ves dealt with another important development.

While he and his wife studied the data collected from all of the tests in order to figure out whether the Minerva Mark II needed further tweaks, Ketis had been particularly active over at the expeditionary fleet.

On the same day the Minerva Mark II had taken shape, the famous swordmaster finally opened another temporary gateway into the Blue Dimension.

It had taken a lot of work and effort for her to be able to do so in a short amount of time.

Ves had become too preoccupied with his present affairs to handle this business. The Minerva Mark II Project and the Final Glory Project demanded so much commitment that he could not afford to add another major distraction to his life.

Casella demonstrated mental fortitude then him. She not only dedicated much of her time in realspace on rushing the First Sword Mark III Project, but also spent even more time inside the System Space on completing a large amount of Missions.

Even if she limited herself to picking the low-hanging fruit, she still spent multiple months on designing different mechs and performing different swordsmanship feats without anyone else knowing any better.

In fact, she did not have to bother with hiding her efforts to complete different Missions anymore.

She could openly request the Red Association and Red Fleet to supply her with special materials or technical support. She merely had to pretend that she was trying to fulfill the expectations of the Heavensword.

Ketis found it disgustingly easy to fool the mechers and fleeters into supporting her endeavors. They only observed what they wanted from her. She even felt a little guilty about drawing on their limited resources when they had to juggle many other responsibilities.

This was why she tried to repay their trust and material support as best she could by scrounging enough Ascension Points to open another dimension breach.

Due to lack of time and suitable Missions, Ketis still took around 2 months to earn a little over 400 Ascension Points.

That was not enough to purchase any of the consequential upgrades of the Dimension Observatory.

This was why Ketis decided to invest part of those AP into herself. She reserved 200 Ascension Points on various enlightenment fruits as she urgently wanted to absorb new knowledge and strengthen her foundation as a mech designer.

This was not a purely selfish gain. The greater her competence as a mech designer, the easier it was for her complete mech design-related Missions.

Once she digested all of the enlightenment fruits that expanded and deepened her knowledge base, she spent another 200 Ascension Points on opening a passage to the 365th dimension.

Of course, many powerful groups had been waiting for this move. Ketis made sure to give the clan as well as all of the other powerful players advance warning before she opened the breach.

The Larkinson Clan, the Red Association, the Red Fleet, the Red Collective, the Terran Alliance, the Rubarthan Pact, as well as delegations from other major groups quickly gathered their harvesting fleets.

Each of them had built a large number of more thoroughly designed mining demimechs and vehicles.

Each of them were precisely designed to move in and out of the 5 by 20 meters breach as efficiently as possible.

Human High Command had even empowered a committee that was responsible for organizing the 24-hour mining extravaganza.

They sorted out the traffic rules, the qualifications for participation, the quotas on vehicles and demimechs, the construction of defenses and prefab mining bases, the taxes levied on superdimensional matter and so much more.

Ketis and the Larkinsons felt grateful for all of this preparation work. They could never organize the next superdimensional mining operation as quickly and effectively.

The intervention of a higher authority also prevented any single player from throwing its weight around.

Although the distribution of vehicle quotas and so on was not completely fair, the committee had done its best to keep everyone at least somewhat happy.

Different from past expeditions into the Blue Dimension, the major players also brought more exploration and research-related craft and personnel.

The major players were grateful that Ketis and Heavensword gave them an opportunity to harvest generous amounts of superdimensional matter, but it was not healthy or sustainable to rely on this pairing for so much of their strategic resource needs.

The Red Three and the first-rate colonial superstates had already dedicated a large amount of funding, resources and institutional support to developing an alternate way to access the 365th dimension.

Ves was not in a position to know how much progress they had made, but he had no doubt that they saw the second opening into the Blue Dimension as an opportunity to conduct critical experiments.

Neither Ves nor Ketis minded their activities. It would be great if they succeeded. That way, few people would become so dependent on Ketis to secure another trip to the Blue Dimension.

Due to the much more extensive preparations this time, all of the participants who entered the Blue Dimension during the 24-hour window managed to bring back a considerably greater haul of superdimensional matter than before.

"The density of floating islands is a little less than in the area that corresponds to the Davute System." Ketis reported to Ves over the comm. "It appears that there are locations where superdimensional matter is more readily available than others. We got lucky the first time."

"Did you end up harvesting less strategic resources than before?"

"No. It is the opposite. We have prepared many more mining vehicles and facilities this time. We also organized a much more professional crew. All of this has helped us secure 50 percent more superdimensional matter than before."

"How much mid-grade and high-grade superdimensional matter did you secure this time?"

Ketis briefly recalled the numbers. "I estimate that we have harvested enough hull-grade superdimensional matter to cover the hull of two 500-meter long sub-capital ships. Our harvest of armor-grade is disappointing. We managed to secure enough to cover an entire superdimensional mech along with 30 percent of another machine. We have managed to obtain the same amount of weapon-grade superdimensional matter as last time, which is disappointing."

In other words, the second haul yielded more mid-grade superdimensional matter but significantly less high-grade superdimensional matter.

That was good news when it came to constructing a warship or a juggernaut, but it was bad news to mech designers who wanted to create more superdimensional mechs.

"Do the numbers on armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter already factor in the concessions made to the Devos Ancient Clan?" Ves critically asked.

Ketis nodded. "My report is based on the net figures. I have already included the taxes paid by various parties. I have also deducted all of the concessions and payments that our clan has made to different groups for whatever reason."

That was good news. That meant that the Larkinson Clan probably managed to obtain more superdimensional matter from the Blue Dimension, but ultimately had to give away a lot of armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter to meet its contractual obligations.

Although it was painful for him to lose all of that high-grade superdimensional matter at this time, the Devosans had transferred the secrets of Destroyer Technology as well as a second-generation World Tree Seed to the Larkinson Clan.

The latter might not have much use in the short term, but Ves still considered it to be a vital strategic asset.

So long as the Larkinson Biotech Institute and the T Institute figured out how to upgrade its capabilities, the World Tree Seed could potentially become an amazingly effective tool for plunder.

It could also be used to quickly transform a lifeless rock into a brand new home planet for the Larkinson Clan.

"I suppose you have plans for the high-grade matter that you have harvested."

Ketis nodded. "The First Sword Mark III will become the first full superdimensional ace mech of our clan. This is the right time for us to do this. The Mech Supremacist Faction has been very helpful in solving all of the technical problems and puzzles associated with trying to transform raw superdimensional matter into stable and workable alloys. The lessons that we can learn from upgrading the First Sword will help us in subsequent projects involving superdimensional matter. Besides... out of all of the high-ranking mech pilots of our clan, Saint Dise is the most suited to make the most out of the capabilities of a superdimensional mech."

Ves fully agreed with her statement. It was not just a selfish decision to turn the First Sword Mark III into the first full superdimensional mech.

"I have high expectations for Saint Dise and the First Sword Mark III. As soon as the two have completed the initial trials, I want you to transfer them to New Constantinople. Our Premier Fleet has received an amazing power-up by bringing the Minerva Mark II online, but that still leaves us vulnerable to enemy champions. We urgently need an ace pilot and ace mech that excels at dueling phase leaders, especially the mean ones that tend to be found in the Upper Zones."

A bit of tension spread over the communication channel. The physical projection of Ketis clearly was not comfortable with this decision.

She ultimately bowed her head. "Saint Dise is eager to tackle a greater challenge. I have seen the footage of the Minerva Mark II at work. That kind of amplification will attract a lot of unwelcome attention from the Red Cabal. The Saint Commander will need the strongest possible protection that our clan can provide. The First Sword Mark III is the undisputed best in this role."

This could be regarded as the unspoken price for hogging so much superdimensional matter and using it to trick out her favorite mech.

Besides, they all knew that keeping such an exceptionally powerful superdimensional ace mech in the Middle Zones was just asking for trouble.

"Don't worry, Ketis. The Premier Fleet will take off in a month or two. We are just waiting for the Tortuous Scream to arrive and for the Saint Commander to complete the reorganization and expansion of our first-class forces. We are trying to minimize time spent in port because we cannot afford to remain idle while the aliens keep taking human territories."

"Dise will be pleased to hear that." Ketis said. "By the way, aside from turning the First Sword Mark III into a superdimensional mech, I am also extending the same treatment to my personal gear. Once I have mastered the basics of working with superdimensional matter, I intend to upgrade my Bloodsinger and my combat armor with weapon superdimensional matter respectively."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "I thought you intended to upgrade your suit of combat armor with armor-grade superdimensional matter."

"That was my plan, but my 'partners' objected to that. They do not want me to get into combat without enjoying the highest possible protection. The mechers even promised

to cover the weapon-grade superdimensional matter needed to upgrade my combat armor. I have no reason to reject their generous offer."

Wow. That was a nice gift. A suit of combat armor did not require that much superdimensional matter to make, but every gram remained precious.

"I look forward to seeing you in action with your new gear." Ves said with a smile. "You don't need to rely on a weapon as overkill as the Heavensword most of the time. You can slice straight through bulkheads with a superdimensional Bloodsinger. Your suit of combat armor should also offer you ample protection against vehicle-grade or even mech-grade armaments. Don't get too arrogant, though. I am pretty sure you can still get blown to pieces if you are struck by a warship-grade cannon."

Ketis sardonically smiled in return. "I am more worried about getting caught on an enemy warship that has self-destructed. This is why my partners insisted on wearing a suit of heavy combat armor instead. The additional mass and buffers massively increases my chances to survive a calamity. You should see all of the nifty high technology at my disposal."

Chapter 6858 A New Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

As exciting as it was to secure another sizable haul of superdimensional matter, it would take time for the Larkinson Clan to process them all into powerful assets.

The good news was that Ketis had deliberately delayed the completion of the First Sword Mark III Project just to make sure that she had enough weapon-grade and armor-grade superdimensional matter available.

Saint Dise and her soon-to-be-upgraded machine would definitely become a credible threat against most phase lords.

Her relatively low resonance strength might work against her under certain conditions, but the exceptional properties of superdimensional alloys should be more than powerful enough to compensate for her shortcomings.

The Saint Commander already looked forward to having such a powerful duelist at her disposal.

The Premier Fleet may still be small, but with two completely different ace pilots watching over the troops, the Larkinsons could easily demolish enemy fleets that were five if not ten times more numerous.

Ves already had his eye on the next projects that could make good use of superdimensional matter.

The completion of the Amaranto Mark III Project and the Minerva Mark II Project meant that Ves and Gloriana could finally work on the previously shelved Riot Mark III Project and the Promethea Mark II Project.

While the Design Department had already made a few strides in the Riot Mark III Project, technology had advanced considerably since its inception.

The availability of superdimensional matter also introduced new possibilities and paradigms.

All of this meant that the mech designers had to throw away pieces of their old work and start over again.

Ves did not mind this as he genuinely looked forward to turning the Riot Mark III into a proper superdimensional mech. The use of superdimensional alloy granted much more powerful advantages to the expert spearman mech than the previous combinations of transphasic hyper alloys.

That did not mean that the work that Jovy Armalon put into incorporating the so-called Chaos Factor into the armor system became obsolete.

He just needed to invest extra time to adapt his proprietary solutions to an all-superdimensional armor system.

"I do not mind the extra work." Jovy reassured Ves when they met within the Tarrasque in order to talk about the upgrade project. "It is a privilege for me to work with superdimensional matter in such a capacity. I have already completed several courses on how to make proper use of superdimensional matter in mech design. Completing this project will qualify me for participation in other research projects or mech design projects related to superdimensional matter. My standing within the Red Association will rise even further."

"Is that important to you, Jovy?"

"Not all of us are able to build a new clan from the ground up, Ves. My entire life and career is tied into the RA. Not that I am complaining, mind you. I believe in our mission. We are doing the right thing, especially now that we are operating under the leadership of god pilots and Star Designers."

Ves was not so sure whether he agreed. God pilots and Star Designers may be incredibly powerful in their respective fields of specialization, but that did not necessarily translate into good governance.

However, this was not the time to voice these kinds of doubts. Everyone was relying on these powerful figures to bail them out and help red humanity survive.

"Do you know what the mechers are doing with the latest haul of superdimensional matter?" Ves asked. "You don't have to share any classified information with me. I just want a general idea if you are allowed to share what you know."

Jovy did not answer immediately, which was a strong indication that he possessed relevant information. The question was whether he was in the mood to share.

"Information about how we allocate high-grade superdimensional matter is no longer strictly a secret anymore. This is because its usage has become an ongoing political affair. Many different factions desire to reserve it for their own god mechs and R&D projects. Since the Fist of Defiance was the first god mech to undergo superdimensional conversion, the Survivalist Faction has relinquished any claim on the second haul. At this time, the Transhumanist Faction and the Expansionist Faction are fiercely contesting the right to claim the armor-grade and weapon-grade superdimensional matter collected by the Red Association."

Ves looked intrigued. This had great implications.

"Which side has the advantage?"

"I cannot say." Jovy shrugged his shoulders. "There are many rumors circulating among the mechers, but many of them are spread by one faction or another in order to build momentum or stifle the momentum of others."

"That doesn't really answer my question."

"In my impression, the Transhumanist Faction is troubled by the fact that we have yet to figure out a safe implementation of superdimensional matter in organic products. The Transhumanists are eager to secure as much superdimensional matter as possible in order to research viable solutions to combine biotechnology with superdimensional technology. This may take months or years, but any successful research result will greatly benefit the Evolution Witch. She can become a much more fearsome terror if her Geneforger has become superdimensional."

Ves could easily imagine such a scenario. The Evolution Witch was one of the nastiest adversaries of the Red Cabal. The native aliens would probably be frightened out of their wits if Divine Lucie Miyazaki became nigh-unkillable after her superdimensional upgrade!

"Personally, I am in favor of securing immediate short-term results." Jovy continued. "The Huntsman may have grown more estranged from the Expansionist Faction, but the two still make a slight effort to maintain a united front. The Huntsman has not remained idle during the Red Tide Offensive. You may not be aware of this, but he has hunted down more phase leaders than other god pilots. He has especially been working to hunt down phase lords and phase whales that have been hiding inside pocket spaces. A superdimensional version of the Heartpiercer can become a much more effective hunter of native gods."

That sounded a little more compelling, but Ves doubted whether the Huntsman truly needed this upgrade. He was already strong at hunting ancient phase whales. A superdimensional upgrade only made sense if he was at risk of getting ganged up by multiple powerful ancient phase whales at once.

"The Huntsman is... a logical choice, I suppose. He likes to throw spears at his enemies. I hope he doesn't inadvertently give our enemies more weapons to arm their phase lords."

"That shouldn't be a problem, Ves. A god pilot should have enough power and mastery in his weapons to prevent such mistakes. Besides, it is not necessary to arm him with

spears that are made out of high-grade superdimensional matter. It is already good enough for him to use spears made out of mid-grade superdimensional matter against most opponents. Only the strongest of enemies should merit the use of his best armaments."

The Red Association and every other group harvested a lot more low to mid-grade superdimensional matter.

While the lesser stuff did not receive as much appreciation as the much more powerful high-grade superdimensional matter, that did not mean they were worthless.

The mechers needed to make the best use out of limited resources. If a job could be completed by using inferior assets, then there was no reason to employ more expensive goods.

"Are any of the RA's ace mechs in line for a superdimensional upgrade in the near future?" Ves questioned. "It might help with triggering the long-awaited breakthroughs of numerous peak ace pilots."

Jovy responded with a single nod. "Many people have proposed the same theory. There is an argument to be made to forgo superdimensional upgrades for the Army of One, and it is picking up steam every day."

"Let me guess. People are growing impatient at the continued lack of breakthroughs. Granting superdimensional capabilities to the mechs of peak ace pilots may give them the critical boost of confidence they need to finally step on the road to no return."

The RA Senior's expression turned tense. "That is the theory, yes. Our own researchers have come up with their own versions of the 'Heaven Earth Man Trifecta' originally proposed by Ketis. Each of them may differ on the details and terminology, but they are all in agreement that a stronger mech translates into a higher breakthrough success rate. This is not particularly problematic. What does concern us is that peak ace pilots have learned about these theories as well... and have begun to believe in its apparent truth."

"Oh."

"Mech pilots are not scientists. They do not understand the scientific method. They are unable to make a distinction between spurious claims and widely accepted theories backed by empirical proof. They are soldiers who are trained to base their judgments on their feelings and intuition as opposed to peer-reviewed studies. Statistics might as well be dark arts to them. The point I am trying to make is that they do not need the kind of proof that mech designers such as ourselves demand in order to form their opinions. As long as they think a theory sounds good, they are inclined to treat it as a universal truth."

Ves clasped his hands on his lap. He thought hard about what Jovy just said.

"If I am interpreting your words correctly, you are saying that these ace pilots have essentially come up with a new superstition. If their mechs are upgraded with superdimensional matter, they have a good chance of surviving the Mech Body Merger Process. If they lack this precious upgrade, they are doomed if they attempt to traverse the road to no return. That is... rather typical of all mech pilots, not just peak ace pilots."

Jovy snorted. "Well, we are afraid that it has already turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts. This is why there is growing pressure to allocate superdimensional matter to the upgrade of all of their senior ace mechs. Many peak ace pilots that have previously made the determination to break through regardless of their chances have now lost their courage, though they are loath to admit it. The good news is that they will not delay their embrace of destiny as long as we supply the necessary superdimensional upgrades. The bad news is that as long as they have yet to receive anything, they are more inclined to sit and wait until their turn has arrived."

It sounded rather cowardly, but these peak ace pilots shouldered the burden of protecting trillions upon trillions of red humans. Failure translated into death with no exceptions. The permanent removal of a peak ace pilot from the frontlines represented a considerable setback that made it harder for the remaining humans to hold the native aliens back.

The ace pilots therefore did not worry about their own lives, but the lives of many other people!

"What if it is not enough?" Ves asked. "What if a bunch of peak ace pilots got the superdimensional upgrades that they wanted for their mechs, initiated the Mech Body Merger Process and promptly died as they are unable to survive the process of becoming energy-based life forms that are sustained by their willpower alone? What if

the probability of success has risen from 0.1 percent to 30 percent, but all of the ace pilots who tried to ascend to godhood perished due to being unlucky enough to fall into the remaining 70 percent?"

Jovy pressed his lips. "You recognize our concerns. The scenario you have painted has a serious chance of coming true. If superdimensional matter does not give them the confidence they need to succeed, then this will turn into a wasted investment. You should be aware of what happens to the mech and mech pilot if they are unable to survive the Mech Body Merger Process."

"Total annihilation." Ves whispered. "Their bodies and hardware will break down into disordered energies. This is an irreversible process that has a 100 percent lethality rate. No pilot has ever survived the Mech Body Merger Process after they have failed to complete it in its entirety. This is a big contributor to how few manage to become god pilots in the end."

"If the god pilot candidates fail and die, then that is on them. What we cannot accept is the fact that they will take their powerful and expensive ace mechs with them to the afterlife. Do you know how much super-class materials and experimental tech is concentrated in those mech frames? To see all of them evaporate into radiation is a massive loss to our entire civilization!"

In other words, it was impossible to recycle the superdimensional matter from the mechs of ace pilots who failed to complete their ultimate breakthroughs!

Chapter 6859 Superdimensional Trade

Ves and Jovy did not linger on the topic of peak ace pilots and their newfound obsession for superdimensional matter.

They soon diverted their attention to more pressing business such as the Riot Mark III Project and the Final Glory Project.

The latter remained a priority to Ves, though he admittedly spent more time on finalizing the Minerva Mark II Project than the mech that the people of red humanity needed the most.

Fortunately, now that Saint Commander Casella Ingvar received the machine of her dreams, Ves could finally direct more attention and resources to completing this suicidal machine.

"Good work on developing a cheap fuel formula that is volatile enough to add a lot of extra punch to an explosion."

"Thank you, Ves. It took a large amount of effort to find a formula that can be synthesized out of cheap and commonly available resources. The fuel mixture is one of many failed products. Not only is it volatile enough that it is prone to exploding, it has also proven to be corrosive to machinery that is made out of low-quality materials or lacking in protective coating. That said, it is also affordable and fairly powerful, which suits our purpose well."

Ves nodded in agreement. He could see why this fuel mixture had been stuffed into an archive despite its advantages. The corrosive effect made it so that every device that utilized this fuel mixture had to be made out of higher quality materials or receive special protective coating that had to be replaced on a regular basis. Both of these measures added a significant amount of cost to the end users, which ultimately defeated the goal of developing a cheap and easy product.

The fuel mixture was therefore highly unsuited for use by most machines. It wasn't a good choice for missiles and other expendable munitions due to its lack of stability and risk of eating through containment if left in storage for too long.

It only made sense for the Final Glory Project. So long as the people that employed this mech waited until the last day before filling in the fuel tanks, the suicide mechs should be able to remain stable and intact long enough to fulfill their ultimate purpose.

It did not even matter all that much if an accident occurred. A 0.1 percent accident rate might be enough for a mech designer to get into trouble, but now that human civilization in the Red Ocean was slowly crumbling apart, hardly anyone cared about these minor transgressions.

So long as the Final Glory Project remained useful enough, the mechers wouldn't mind its imperfections.

Besides, Ves put Jovy in charge of this. The Survivalist Faction had their own way of doing things. This was not the time for the mechers to act pedantic and stick to the rules.

"Have you managed to complete the work done on the sacrificial components of the Final Glory Project?"

"I think so." Ves responded. "It was really troublesome to devise a means to fuel the explosion of a self-destructing mech with the spirit of its pilot. I had to work out how to bridge the gap between imaginary and material. The conversion process also has to happen in an instant. The use of hyper materials is essential as most human souls are not that powerful unless they have made significant cultivation attainments. What they are good at is behaving like a catalyst to detonate much larger stores of energy. There is an inherently transformative aspect to real spirits. With the right ritual and mindset, anyone in contact with a large amount of hyper materials can produce an extraordinary explosion that can inflict a lot of damage. How much, I cannot say. I don't have enough data for obvious reasons."

There was no way for him to test the Final Glory Project when piloting it was supposed to be a one-way trip.

Perhaps he could spread the prototypes to a couple of planets that were under imminent attack from the native alien advance, but that did not sit well with Ves.

For a mech as serious as this, Ves had an obligation to present his target audience with a complete iteration of the Final Glory Project.

He did not want to take advantage of desperate people and turn them into his unwitting test subjects.

Although Ves did not always place much value in rules, he still valued the fundamental principles of a mech designer.

"Does it matter what hyper materials are being used?" Jovy asked.

"Not completely. You can refer to other studies and applications of using hyper materials to enhance explosive munitions. The use of fire hypers will generate more heat. The use of earth hypers increased kinetic damage. You can combine different hyper materials to produce a combo effect that may be greater than the sum of its parts, but I don't think anyone has the time or inclination to figure out optimal combinations. I don't have any high expectations for this. So long as there are enough hyper materials, the suicide mech will mainly rely on the quantity of E energy to add extra power to the explosion."

Jovy looked intrigued. "I can understand your stance on the matter. This is not a project where we have time to delve deeper into this subject. It may be useful to conduct a deeper study if you can think about utilizing this application in a larger mech design project. I think that kid Zanthar may be interested in your current theories and findings. His specialization happens to be relevant to the subject matter."

"Hm, that is a good idea. I am not sure whether he will be able to make anything out of this. I will be glad if he can extract something useful out of my work."

The two continued to go over other aspects of the Final Glory Project. Everything else looked in order more or less. The overall designs did not feature a lot of complexity or high performance. It instead possessed a lot of tolerance for deviations.

This was necessary because Jovy needed to convert the set into mech templates. The more generous the tolerances, the easier it was for producers to slot in whatever materials they had in abundance and produce their own localized versions of the suicide mech.

The Final Glory Project had not yet reached that stage. The design team still needed to refine and optimize the design a little further before Ves was willing to let Jovy loose.

"The SF-02 will help a lot in this regard." Ves said. "The completion of the Minerva Mark II Project means that a lot of processing power has opened up. I will let Polly, Momo and Aria analyze the designs and figure out optimizations through trial and error. It is a rather stupid and wasteful approach, but you can't deny that it is effective up to a degree."

There were not that many other projects in the works that urgently needed so much processing power.

The Riot Mark III Project for example was still in a stage where ingenuity mattered a lot more than raw calculations.

"I would have tried to apply for the use of additional processing power from the Association if I could." Jovy said. "However, it is impossible for us to justify this usage when we are working on a non-compliant mech design."

Ves casually waved his hand. "It's okay. We are already allocating more resources to this relatively minor project than is strictly necessary. Most customers won't even be able to notice the small optimizations to their suicide mechs. It is not as if they will pilot it longer than a day. We should try to make their final rides as comfortable as possible, but even if there are a few flaws, they won't live long enough to issue any complaints."

That sounded rather macabre, but Ves merely considered it a fact of reality.

As long as the Final Glory Project fulfilled the most essential requirements, there was no need to obsess over non-essential factors. This was also why Ves did not want the project to last too long.

After Ves and Jovy completed their discussion on the Final Glory Project, they had a bit of free time left to talk about other developments.

"According to the Evolution Witch, it is almost time to conduct the exchange of goods through the Oblivion Gates." The RA Senior deliberately spoke to Ves. "We have already begun to conduct studies on whether it is possible to upgrade the Oblivion Gates with mid to high-grade superdimensional matter. We strongly believe that their functionality can be strengthened or expanded upon with the right application of superdimensional technology. The ultimate hope is to enable persistent trade or to allow humans to transit between galaxies once again. The issue is that we have only just begun to explore this new and exotic field. It may take years or decades to realize any major improvements."

Ves looked at his friend. Jovy clearly sounded a bit hopeful when he talked about the Oblivion Gates.

The continued lack of breakthroughs among peak ace pilots had made more and more people eager to find salvation in other ways.

It seemed that certain people were beginning to pin more and more hopes into the Oblivion Gates.

"I have no expertise on this matter." Ves said. "Over in the Milky Way, my mother and Master Moira Willix are in charge of this stuff. I think they have a high interest in superdimensional matter. They may be able to speed up any research related to superdimensional matter if they can transfer samples to the right parties. The Oblivion

Gate Consortium has gathered many powerful interest groups that have a large number of researchers and facilities at their disposal."

Jovy looked a little hesitant. "We know that, Ves, but we are reluctant to trade superdimensional matter to the Milky Way. Our first problem is that we have ample reason to believe that a small quantity of superdimensional matter will occupy a disproportionate amount of transportation capacity. Their special characteristics make it so that a small block of superdimensional matter is much larger if all of the additional matter shunted into other dimensions are counted."

That... sounded like a huge impediment!

"Are you sure that is the case?"

"We can only confirm this theory by attempting to trade superdimensional matter during the next trade, but there are few who are willing to brave the risks. The reason why we believe this theory holds credence is that we are encountering similar limitations through other means of teleportation. For example, when teleporting your body, do you know that we must expend enough energy to teleport a small juggernaut? Most of our teleportation technologies behave similarly when interacting with superdimensional matter. The effect is even stronger with the case of these new materials."

Superdimensional technology was the big brother of transphasic technology.

Phasewater was much more accessible, but its superdimensional properties were rather weak and tame.

It did not surprise Ves all that much that superdimensional matter was much harder to teleport.

This was a considerable weakness that forced people to make difficult tradeoffs when it came to conducting trade through the Oblivion Gates.

Ves definitely believed that the Oblivion Gates could be upgraded with superdimensional matter.

The problem was forgoing other trades just to send enough superdimensional matter to the Milky Way to upgrade the Black Oblivion Gate.

"Wait a minute."

Ves suddenly realized that it was not necessary to conduct such an elaborate trade.

If he wanted to, he could earn 200 Ascension Points and spend it on opening up a dimension breach into the Blue Dimension.

So long as the region of the Blue Dimension that corresponded to the Milky Way was also occupied with floating islands of superdimensional matter, the Oblivion Empire and its allies could mine lots of superdimensional matter for themselves!

This was a great way to power up the family that Ves cared about back in the old galaxy!

However... doing so might reveal that the Heavensword was not the relic responsible for opening temporary gateways into the 365th dimension.

Chapter 6860 Ferocious Piranha Mark IV

There was no hurry to supply superdimensional matter to his relatives back in the old galaxy.

Ves was not willing to reveal his capacity to open up dimensional breaches in the Milky Way.

He also did not want to spend too much of his AP on opening up dimension breaches. It was better in the long run if he earnestly saved up the massive amount that was necessary to create permanently active tears in space.

He may change his mind on this matter if he needed anything urgent or if his mother and Master Moira Willix managed to develop a powerful application of superdimensional technology.

Until that happened, it was better for him to save his AP and hope that others could manage without his assistance.

He decided to push this matter aside and direct his attention to his work.

Several days passed by in relative peace.

As Ves waited for the day the Premier Fleet could finally set off and make a difference in the Red War, he finally received welcome news from his direct disciple.

"Sir? The first batch of Mark IV projects are finally done. Would you like to review the end results?"

"Yes! Let's bring over the Saint Commander as well. She would love to take a look at the next generation of living mech designs that we are about to publish."

This was how Ves, Alexa and Casella came together in the design lab.

"I have heard that your clan has finally designed proper updates for the mainstay models of our clan."

"Sort of." Ves responded. "I wouldn't really call them 'proper' updates by my standards. I have mostly remained hands-off on these mech design projects. Alexa here has supervised most of the work done by the different design teams. I only made sure to update every design to the seventh generation of living mechs, but once I was done, I did not pay close attention to the projects anymore. My schedule is too packed. I don't have the luxury to give my full and undivided attention to every single mech design project these days."

Casella frowned. She did not like what she heard.

"Does that mean the Mark IV's are not as good as they could have been?"

Alexa Streon answered on behalf of Ves. "I have diligently supervised the design teams that have completed most of the design work, Saint Commander. If the patriarch took charge of the projects, then he may have been able to devise transformative solutions that could represent an evolution of our old mech concepts. This is one of his greatest strengths as a mech designer. The design teams are predominantly led by

Journeyman Mech Designers who cannot match his ingenuity. They have mostly worked on incremental and generational upgrades that are straightforward."

"I think I already understand what you are saying." Casella thoughtfully responded. "Instead of trying to reinvent our old mech lines, your design teams have predominantly tried to update your existing works to the Hyper Generation without being too adventurous, is that correct?"

Ves nodded and smiled. "That is true more or less. I put a bit of effort into designing basic but serviceable Ultimate Modules for all of the updated mech lines. That is probably my most creative contribution to the different projects. It is not that the design teams are incapable of innovation. They just did not want to take too many risks for fear of ruining the mechs that our clansmen in the expeditionary fleet and the various side branches are already familiar with. The Mark IV's should be regarded as purely iterative updates."

It was rather similar to taking the same product and giving it a more modern coating. The surface looked new, but the underlying components did not experience any revolutionary changes.

The Saint Commander grew a little disappointed after making this realization.

While she had already separated herself from the expeditionary fleet, she still cared a lot about the clansmen who continued to entrust their lives on tried and true Larkinson mech designs.

Many of the mech models utilized by the Larkinson Army also happened to be commercially available.

This could have a big impact on tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of mech pilots that already made use of LMC products!

Numerous years had passed since the start of the Age of Dawn. More and more hyper mech models became available on the market. Each of them opened up new possibilities to harness the power of E energy.

LMC mechs such as the Ferocious Piranha Mark III or the Valkyrie Redeemer Mark III lacked this integration.

The only ways they could make effective use of E energy were to purchase third-party variants or apply hastily designed mod kits to existing mechs.

Neither solution sounded ideal to the loyal customers of the Living Mech Corporation.

These people no longer had to make use of unreliable solutions anymore. Once the LMC released the Mark IV's, many new and existing customers could finally make use of living mechs that were designed to natively leverage the power of hyper technology and E energy!

After Ves made sure that the Saint Commander knew what was about to come, he gestured for Alexa to proceed with the presentation.

The Journeyman Mech Designer began to project the design of a familiar looking mech.

"Is that the new Ferocious Piranha?" Casella asked.

"Yes. As you can see, the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV looks almost identical to the previous iteration that is currently being used on a large scale. This is a deliberate design choice as we expect most customers to upgrade their existing Mark III's to this new generation. The greater the similarities, the more convenient it is to implement upgrades. In fact, the design teams have tried their best to retain as many parts of the Mark III's whenever possible. Even in the instances where this is not viable, the newer parts should ideally match the shape and dimensions of the older parts."

It became clear that upgradeability was one of the highest priorities of the Design Department.

The Larkinsons greatly valued their living mechs. Those that had fought alongside their battle partners for multiple years should not be discarded just because their hardware became obsolete. It would be great if they could receive a technological refresh while retaining their existing lives.

It was for this reason and more that mech designers of the Design Department worked hard to make the upgrade process as affordable and convenient as possible. The

Larkinsons wanted to lower the threshold of upgrades to the point where all owners of the Mark III's would make the logical decision to upgrade their existing LMC products.

Ves liked to think that the Design Department succeeded. As he studied the design of the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV, he could see how well it preserved the original concept of this mech line.

"What are the details?" The Saint Commander asked.

"The Ferocious Piranha is still the fast and agile light skirmisher that this mech line is known for." Alexa replied. "Just like the Mark III's, the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV is split between the Larkinson Edition and the Standard Edition. The former is still a transphasic quasi-first-class mech, while the latter also remains a non-transphasic second-class mech. The Standard Edition is a straightforward iterative upgrade, but the Larkinson Edition has gained an extra capability."

The former Terran activated a projection that displayed simulated footage of a Ferocious Piranha Mark IV closing in on an elite phasefighter.

Unfortunately for the light mech, the elite phasefighter possessed superior straight-line mobility and managed to keep its distance from the pursuing mercs.

Just as the alien pilot thought he could get away, the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV flitted forward as if it was a flighty butterfly.

This enabled the light skirmisher to abruptly move forward and take its alien target by surprise!

Saint Commander Casella grew impressed. "It looks similar to teleportation, but that is prohibitively expensive for products like these. Is it related to warp travel?"

"Yes. Mr. Adrian Marceau happens to specialize in developing instant combat warping systems. They do not work too well in regions that are heavily interdicted by the enemy, but other than that, Marceau's proprietary tech has given the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV a powerful option that can be useful in a pinch. The Standard Edition unfortunately has to make do without this additional feature."

The Standard Edition may be lacking, but it still offered a good value proposition to many customers.

The Larkinson Edition was simply better after gaining instant combat warping upgrades.

"Regardless of the editions, the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV's retains the glow that is somewhat effective at breaking the concentrations of enemy mech pilots. This is a core feature that we are trying to preserve as best as possible. The gimmick is not as powerful as before, but it can still distract most enemy mech pilots."

The infamous glow of the Ferocious Piranha used to paralyze every enemy in the vicinity of the light skirmisher.

The good times did not last.

Constant exposure to E energy radiation not only strengthened the spiritualities of humans, but also the aliens!

Even if the latter did not have any clue about systematic cultivation, just the exposure to exotic radiation alone was enough for their spiritualities to grow several times stronger.

As an ace commander, Casella was aware of this trend. She knew that there was little that Ves or any other mech designer could do to strengthen the glows of the Ferocious Piranhas.

"The glow is one of the most attractive features of the Ferocious Piranha line." She stated. "If it is not as effective as before, it needs other advantages in order to remain relevant in the battles of the future."

Ves shook his head. "For reasons we have explained before, the Mark IV does not try to rethink the Ferocious Piranha concept. It mainly relies on generational upgrades in order to remain competitive. For example, it is a seventh generation living mech. It receives many of the benefits that other living mechs have access to since the release of the Mark III. This includes Ascension Runes, living mech cultivation, embedded

auxiliary qi cultivation instruction, hyper keystones and Ultimate Modules. Each of these solutions enrich the Ferocious Piranha concept and gives our customers compelling reasons to upgrade to the latest editions."

None of the features mentioned by Ves were weak.

Ascension Runes enabled third order living mechs to structurally plan their growth trajectories.

Hyper keystones enabled portions of the living mechs to survive and potentially revive after their original mech frames got blown to pieces.

Ultimate Modules often functioned as trump cards for living mechs.

Casella focused on the latter. "What is the Ultimate Module for the Ferocious Piranha?"

Ves activated another projection that displayed a pair of unusual-looking knives. "These are the Piranha Teeth. They are specially designed weapons that rely on hyper technology to accumulate rage and purification-attributed E energies. Once the Piranha Teeth have reached saturation, the mech pilot can choose to expend all of that energy to empower the next strikes of these special knives."

"That sounds... rather simple."

"That is deliberate. I did not have enough time to design a more elaborate Ultimate Module for the Ferocious Piranha Mark IV. I stuck to a tried and true solution in order to satisfy the minimum requirement. Don't underestimate the Piranha Bite Ultimate Ability. So long as the knives are fully charged with the aforementioned E energies, they can probably collapse the azure energy shields of most elite phasefighters. The downside is that it takes a long time for the Piranha Teeth to charge themselves up again."

It may sound basic compared to the other Ultimate Modules that Ves designed, but those were custom jobs for individual expert mechs and ace mechs.

It was unreasonable to expect the same level of creativity and ingenuity for standard mech designs.

Besides, more powerful and elaborate Ultimate Modules often required the use of more expensive materials. They were also difficult to fabricate. Many of them could only be handmade by Ves.

The Piranha Teeth on the other hand could be fabricated in any production facility as long as the workers followed his instructions to the letter.