

## Mech 3281

### *Chapter 3281: Trial By Fire*

Getting beat up by three expert mechs was never an enjoyable experience. Venerable Orfan loudly made that known over the communication channel.

Venerable Dise was of the same mind, even though she wasn't as vocal about it. This was not what she imagined out of her first true battle as a proper expert pilot.

She was still glad that she finally received an expert mech that could fully translate her fighting style and sword techniques. She only had to look at Joshua and Jannzi to see what happened to the few Larkinson expert pilots who were left out of the expert mech party. The difference in performance was massive.

"It would have been nice if they could help lift the burden." She said through gritted teeth as she readied herself for another tricky attack run.

The First Sword parried a swooping strike from the Morko Mark II while also turning around to mitigate a simultaneous strike from the Paravad.

"Evil human! Your defeat is inevitable! Vulcan shall smite your demonic mech! Through fire and faith, that invincible armor of yours will not avail you for long!"

The dwarven expert pilot's constant string of nonsense did not make Venerable Dise's life more pleasant either, but she endured the vitriol for one important reason.

She needed to know as much about her opponents as possible. Without understanding their mindset and emotions that drove them to fight, it would take a much longer time for her to determine an appropriate strategy.

"Everyone can be defeated as long as I figure them out." She reminded herself.

Just as Venerable Merek Bulfuron patiently waited for opportunities to land a blow on the First Sword, Venerable Dise also bided her time in order to wait for an opportunity to grasp her chance.

She was highly cognizant that the Unending alloy armor plating of her expert mech was the only reason why she was able to hold off three opponents at a time. She could even opt to make risky counter-attacks if she thought that the dwarven expert mechs weren't respecting her threat.

Still, there was a limit to everything and the resonance-empowered attacks inflicted by the dwarves hit much harder than any other attacks. From the claw strikes of the Paravad and Morko Mark II to the relentless gauss rounds pouring from the Domingo

Daren, her First Sword was enduring attacks at a much higher frequency than she was designed to withstand!

If the armor wasn't being worn away, then the internals were sustaining constant shocks. The only consolation was that none of the Hivar Roarer mechs hit particularly hard. The Domingo Daren was the only expert mech that posed a greater threat. With double gauss cannons in every gun port, its punch might not be the highest but the firing rate was relentless!

If Venerable Dise wasn't so afraid of ruining her mech sword, she would have raised it and propped it up so that her expert mech could use its broad flat side as a makeshift shield.

However, the thought of using Ketis' great masterpiece that had been made with love and passion did not sit well with Dise. A sword was meant to cut and stab and this one was even more so to a serious swordswoman. Failure was not a valid excuse to tarnish the purpose of a great weapon!

As far as she was concerned, she was on a timer. She needed to figure out a way to reverse this adverse circumstance while she continued to resist the ongoing onslaught. If she waited too long for the situation to change, then the idiot dwarves would eventually get their way and fell her expert mech!

Though she hoped to gain aid from the other Larkinsons in the battlefield, it didn't appear the clan had any to spare.

Venerable Tusa was the best possible option, but he was no longer as sharp and fresh as before. Dise was afraid that the three Hivar Roarer expert mechs would turn on the Dark Zephyr and wear it down with far greater ease!

Though the Dark Zephyr excelled in speed and agility, the Paravad and the Morko Mark II didn't score low in these categories either. The Morko Mark II was probably fast enough to keep up with the Dark Zephyr. Once the dwarves managed to corner it somehow, the Dark Zephyr's thinner armor and worn state would last only a fraction of the amount of time!

"I need to solve this problem myself!"

Venerable Dise was not a stranger to getting outmatched. From the beginning, the Swordmaidens often had to outfight superior opponents. Though not every battle against domineering pirates turned out well, she and her sisters learned how to cope with pressure and shape their belief in their own strength.

Inferior mechs and numbers never scared the Swordmaidens. If battle against superior foe couldn't be avoided, then people like Dise trusted in their own skill and swordsmanship to grasp victory with their own hands!

"It's been a long time since I last felt this way."

Getting singled out by three enemy expert mech woke up a dormant yearning in her heart. The long months of peaceful training sessions had dulled her blade. No longer. Now that she was thrown in a battle for her own survival and the continuation of the Larkinson Clan, she was slowly getting back in her element.

In the past few years, her greater strength and progression compared to the rest of her sisters singled her out as a champion. The more power she gained, the more the Swordmaidens looked up at her. This made her feel responsible for their safety and prompted her to become their spiritual leader even if she wasn't in their chain of command.

Yet leadership did not come naturally to her. She was nowhere comparable to Commander Lydia who built up the Swordmaidens step by step by relying on her own vision, judgement and hard work.

Dise was a hunter at heart.

Prior to the Swordmaidens getting accepted into the Larkinson Clan, she regularly went on hunting trips. The frontier beyond civilized space featured plenty of untamed planets where alien environments bred strange and dangerous exobeasts.

They were even used as graduation tests for the Swordmaidens a long time ago. Every fully-fledged Swordmaiden had to hunt at least one exobeast on their own with just some basic clothes on their back and their trusty swords at their side. Ketis had completed this test and so did Dise.

The difference between the two was that Dise grew addicted to the experience. The tracking of her prey, the wait for the right opportunity and the glorious confrontation where she sought to stay alive against powerful creatures made her feel more alive than ever!

The accomplishment she gained from vanquishing an exobeast that weighed many tons and could easily crush her body flat with a single blow was indescribable.

She rarely gained the same degree of stimulation when she fought against enemy mechs. It just wasn't the same as human opponents used their brains to compensate for their lack of power. Dise didn't enjoy the mind game aspect of fighting against other humans. She much preferred to fight against opponents who forced her to rely on her instincts and her skills to overcome her challenges.

In this battle, she began to feel some of those dormant desires returning from hibernation. The effect was even stronger due to the fact that she was fighting against bestial mechs instead of humanoid mechs!

As the difficult struggle continued to progress, Venerable Dise increasingly had the illusion that she was fighting against a pack of three ferocious exobeasts instead of mechs piloted by people like herself.

The more she felt this way, the more she developed the urge to hunt them down like she had done many times in the past.

From the moment she started to see her current opponents as prey rather than peers, her piloting style underwent a subtle and indescribable shift.

After so much time had passed where the Swordmaiden expert pilot was engaged in high-intensity combat, she had become a lot more familiar with the First Sword.

Sure, she practiced with her expert mech before, but performing maneuvers under calm practise sessions was never as good as getting thrown in a trial by fire!

Under the threat of death and worse, Venerable Dise pushed herself as hard as possible so that she could refine and master her control over the First Sword!

The dwarven expert pilots were cruel taskmasters. They exploited every mistake she made and ruthlessly taught her a lesson whenever she became overconfident.

However, with the help of her dwarven 'tutors', she rapidly managed to flesh out her new post-expert mech fighting style and become more effective at piloting the First Sword.

This showed in the way she managed to evade more attacks and created more opportunities for her to make a counterattack.

Once she seriously began to snap attacks at her opposition, the Hivar Roarer expert pilots had become a lot more alarmed.

"Evil witch! You don't deserve to use that masterwork mech!"

She smirked. The angrier the dwarves became, the better she was doing.

The dwarven expert mechs weren't blind to what was happening either. Though Venerable Merek was content with the progress that he and his fellow dwarven expert pilots had accomplished, they were still far from breaching the First Sword's defenses!

"The human expert pilot is getting stronger!"

"We need to achieve a breakthrough."

"Then go in deep! I'll lead the way!"

Venerable Merek realized that he was fighting against an inexperienced expert pilot who still had much room for improvement. If that was the case, then playing it safe was no longer the wisest strategy.

He had to finish this fight as quickly as possible in order to strangle his opponent when she was still manageable!

The switch happened abruptly. Just as Venerable Dise became accustomed to the rhythm of the enemy attacks, now she was back to fighting for her life as the Paravad eschewed hit-and-run attacks in favor of applying constant pressure!

It was as if she was being attacked by a giant bird that was out for blood. The Paravad assailed the First Sword with a combination of claw and beak attacks. Sometimes, the avian expert mech smacked the humanoid expert mech with its wings, more for distraction than to inflict damage!

It took everything that Venerable Dise had and more in order to fend off the aggressive assault. Venerable Merek was a talented mid-tier expert mech who possessed an abundance of skill.

With the Paravad assaulting the First Sword madly from the front, the other two expert mechs focused on attacking from the flank and rear.

"Taste the power of dwarven engineering!"

Claws and gauss rounds pounded the areas where Venerable Dise couldn't muster up an adequate defense due to the necessity of keeping the raging Paravad at bay!

The expert swordsman mech was getting hit at a faster rate! All of the shaking and rattling from receiving powerful blows was probably not doing the internals any favors. Already Venerable Dise could tell that more and more components were switching from green to yellow conditions.

Though this was not necessarily a cause for alarm, the margin for error became smaller and smaller. Those stressed components could easily start malfunctioning if they continue to endure concussive shocks.

As the dwarven expert mechs kept piling on the pressure, Venerable Dise continued to release more sweat as she tried to keep her mech in working condition.

At one point, something within her boiled over. The hunter was never supposed to be the hunted. The prey that were trying to take her expert mech down were but mere bestial mechs that possessed limited, rigid movement restrictions that should still be exploitable to an experienced hunter!

"I see your weakness!" Venerable Dise shouted as she adopted a bloodthirsty grin!

The First Sword turned and parried the next attack of the Paravad with exquisite timing. While the expert mech piloted by the hero of the Hivar Roarers tried to recover quickly, the Decapitator swung true and managed to slice off half of the wing of Venerable Merek's proud machine!

With the excellent sharpness and power of the masterwork mech sword, the Paravad's armor stood no chance!

"Impossible! How can this incompetent human harm my beautiful expert mech?!"

### *Chapter 3282: Hunting Mechanical Beasts*

Who was the hunter and who was the hunted?

For a long time, Venerable Merek and his fellow Hivar Roarer expert pilots thought that they held the upper hand.

Sure, the infernal human expert mech possessed nigh-unbreakable armor, but by Vulcan's will the dwarven expert mechs were sure to vanquish this evil foe!

"It's just like playing those virtual games back when we were young." Venerable Merek told his teammates. "The boss fights aren't actually that hard. They just take so long because the bosses we're trying to kill are too tough compared to regular enemies."

This might be true, but the battle taking place at the moment was no game and Venerable Dise was not a rigid, AI-controlled character who attacked according to strict instructions.

She was an expert pilot as well, and she was more than tired of depending on Unending armor to keep her in the fight.

The essence of her fighting style was never about tanking damage! It was about evading attacks, outmaneuvering her opposition and relying on skill to gain advantages during violent exchanges!

The bestial mechs she was fighting against initially threw off her fighting rhythm. She trained and fought a lot against other human and humanoid opponents. Whether it was trying to outduel a fellow Swordmaiden in the sparring ring or trying to gain the better of Venerable Orfan in the few times they had the opportunity to cross weapons at each other in their expert mechs, Venerable Dise always associated mech piloting with human-like opponents.

Bestial mechs did not wield traditional weapons such as swords and spears. Instead, their weapons were inbuilt and came in the form of claws, teeth and other 'natural' armaments.

The only times Dise fought against opponents who utilized this kind of weaponry was when she was on the hunt. She never thought about matching blow for blow against exobeasts who relied on the lethality of their body to win because the difference in physical might was far too great!

It was different now. After getting attacked by the Paravad and the Morko Mark II too many times to count, she thoroughly understood their attack and movement patterns along with the habits of their expert pilots.

Though it was nearly impossible to regain the initiative in the face of constant attacks, a chance still existed.

This was how she managed to pull off her first proper counter-attack against the Paravad!

Just as Venerable Merek was shocked by the sudden explosion of aggression from the human expert mech, the First Sword did not let this successful attack become the extent of its turnaround.

"I smell weakness!"

The First Sword did not pursue the Paravad that had momentarily backed off after incurring a hit on its wings. Instead, it rapidly rotated along its axis and launched towards the Morko Mark II!

The other dwarven expert pilot expected the First Sword to follow-up on its initial assault on the Paravad. The avian expert light skirmisher therefore swept closer in the hopes of assailing the expert swordsman mech from behind.

Though the sudden turnaround was not within expectation, the Morko Mark II was not a light mech for nothing. It slowed down and veered to the side in order to stay out of the reach of the human expert mech's big and deadly-looking sword.

The pilot of the Morko Mark II did not expect the First Sword to charge up its masterwork sword with energy within a second and swing its blade, causing the surprisingly long and cohesive energy blade that extended out of its tip to cut off one of its claws!

"What technique is this?!"

The Morko Mark II hastily flew away while leaving one of its claws behind. This was a significant loss because unlike the larger and heavier Paravad, the Morko Mark II did not carry a lot of weapon systems.

For a time, the injured avian expert mech kept its distance and harassed the First Sword by firing its wing-mounted light positron cannons onto its surface, paying special attention to the armor sections that had already been damaged by previous attacks.

It was not a quick way to take down an Unending alloy expert mech, but the dwarven expert pilot did not want to get close to a frighteningly powerful opponent who could potentially chop his lightly-armored expert mech in half with a single blow!

"Watch out for this expert mech! It's not only insanely tough, but its attack power is also high."

The realization that the First Sword was able to launch highly damaging counterattacks caused the dwarven expert pilots to adjust their approach yet again. They were not stupid beasts who fought purely on instinct after all. Their dwarven heads heated up as they all did their best to figure out a new winning formula to this fight.

Venerable Dise did not intend to wait until they finished their thoughts. She was a woman of action and took advantage of the breathing room she gained for herself to hunt down her first expert bestial mech!

After briefly surveying the condition of the Paravad and the Morko Mark II, she opted against pursuing the two injured avian expert mechs.

Even though their armor was inadequate against the Decapitator's unnaturally sharp blade, they were too fast and mobile for the First Sword to catch up. Instead of wasting her time by futilely trying to play cat and mouse with them, she opted to go for a different prey!

The First Sword adjusted its course and and blasted off towards a bestial expert mech, but it wasn't one of the two that had been occupying most of Venerable Dise's attention.

Her expert mech was flying straight towards the Domingo Daren, the spinning expert turtle mech that had constantly been bombarding the First Sword with hard-hitting gauss rounds!

Most of the internal damage that the expert swordsman mech incurred was due to getting hammered from a distance all the time. Unending alloy was much more able to cope with the positron beam weapons employed by the Paravad and Morko Mark II, so they were not as threatening at the moment.

Previously, Venerable Dise never saw an opportunity to get close to the annoying Domingo Daren, but now that both of the avian expert mechs had backed off, she possessed a small but crucial window of opportunity to make her attempt!

"Get after the human expert mech! Don't let it get close to the Domingo!"



The Domingo Daren already noticed the threat and started to fly backwards while continuing its rotation. Its gauss cannons continued to spit out fire, both so that the reaction force could push it away even further and also so that the gauss rounds impacting on the First Sword would slow its advance!

In practice, the difference it made was marginal. Venerable Dise smelled blood and would not give up until she paid back the Domingo Daren for all of the knocks it inflicted on her new expert mech!

Venerable Merek and his colleague urged their avian expert mechs to catch up to the First Sword in order to dissuade it from attacking the Domingo Daren.

Though the expert turtle mech was not as helpless against melee attackers as the Crumbleshells, close quarters combat was not its home ground. Merek did not want to take any risks when it came to an abnormal expert mech that punched way above its class.

Since both the Paravad and the Morko Mark II were mobility-oriented expert mechs, they caught up well in time. The Morko Mark II could have launched its attack faster, but it was too risky to approach the First Sword by itself, so it took the time to circle around and time its attack with the Paravad.

"Go! It only has one sword!"

The two damaged but still operational bird mechs launched their attack runs at the same time, thereby putting Venerable Dise under quite a bind, but only for a moment.

Even before the two avian expert mechs began their simultaneous attack runs, she had already been trying to connect and resonate with the Decapitator.

She was not a mech technician so she did not understand the finer mechanics of what a masterwork weapon could do. However, she was a swordswoman and she knew a good sword when she saw one. She had already fallen in love with the lovely blade created by Ketis even before it was finished.

With all of the time she spent on practicing with the First Sword, she had already developed a good bond with the Decapitator. Now that she needed its power the most, she urged herself to go deeper and resonated with it at the same time she began to accumulate power for one of her sword techniques.

The Decapitator responded eagerly to her outreach and resonated with her will. Both of them wanted to destroy the bestial mechs that sought to rob the mech sword from Dise's hand and give it to the dwarves.

Just the thought that some dwarven expert mech would defile the Decapitator by holding it in its grubby hands was intolerable to Dise, the First Sword and the Decapitator!

The three elements united together and resonated as a single whole, causing not just the sword but also the expert mech itself to glow with power!

"Stop that human expert mech now!" Venerable Merek shouted as he sensed that the threat level of the First Sword had doubled!

Venerable Dise smirked. "Too late."

By pouring more power into her mech and its sword, Dise became so energised that her entire body felt electrified. The only thing that could have made this moment better was if her physical body was able to wield a sword as well!

Her sights along with the sights of her expert mech focused squarely on the Domingo Daren that was still attempting to create more distance while flying like a spinning saucer.

"MY SWORD HUNGERS FOR PREY! LET YOUR MECH BECOME THE FIRST BEAST IT SLAYS! SWORD OF LYDIA!"

Upon finishing this cry, the glow around the First Sword and its weapon expanded into a giant greatsword. At the same time, the expert mech gained a sudden boost of speed towards the Domingo Daren.

After overloading the flight system for a few seconds, Venerable Dise exerted her will once more, causing the resonance energy that took the shape of a giant glowing greatsword to propel forward at a much greater speed than the First Sword itself!

"What?!? That's the same sword energy that previously ravaged our ranks!"

This was a big and costly sword energy attack that not just any expert mech could unleash. It was incredibly strange that the First Sword was able to launch such a powerful energy attack without relying on the appropriate resonating materials.

Venerable Dise couldn't have channeled it properly with just her expert mech if not for her increased mastery in piloting her new machine.

The new sword style she developed after absorbing the systematic swordsmanship tradition from the Heavensword Association was also important.

The third reason why she was able to launch such an awe inspiring attack at such strength was because the First Sword was also a prime mech! Though its Unending

alloy plating had not absorbed much energy from Dise, she always deposited a little bit of herself during every practice attempt.

Though the energy only amounted to a couple of Ves worth of spiritual energy, it was enough for Venerable Dise to successfully execute one of her personal sword styles through the medium of her expert mech!

The giant blade remained surprisingly cohesive even as it traversed a hefty distance. Though the Domingo Daren did not blindly fly straight but also attempted to evade to the side, the Sword of Lydia energy attack advanced far too quickly and managed to pierce through the right side of the expert turtle mech!

A large amount of metal shards flung into space as the glowing sword had punched through the resilient exterior armor of the Domingo Daren and destroyed the twin short-barreled gauss cannon systems that was situated on this side!

The expert turtle mech's spin immediately grew unstable as it suffered significant structural damage.

Though Venerable Dise had exhausted much of her remaining energy in order to launch this intensive sword technique, she did not intend to leave her job half-finished.

"You're mine!"

The Paravad and the Morko Mark II launched bold and risky attacks in order to buy time for the Domingo Daren to retreat, but Venerable Dise squeezed all of the swordsmanship she had in her body to cope with the distractions.

She skillfully utilized the Decapitator to parry the claw attacks from the Paravad while ignoring the scratches inflicted by the single bird claw of the Morko Mark II.

Eventually, the First Sword caught up with the Domingo Daren which was just starting to gain control over its trajectory. Unfortunately for the dwarven expert mech, it had lost crucial time in which it could have used to maintain a distance to the enemy machine!

"My sword will not be stopped by a shell!"

With a single chop of the glowing Decapitator, the weapon's extremely sharp blade cut straight through the top of the Domingo Daren's armor!

*Chapter 3283: Domingo Daren*

Venerable Dise managed to outmaneuver the Hivar Roarer expert pilots!

With the Paravad and the Morko Mark II constantly on the First Sword's back, the Larkinson expert mech not only managed to avoid their blockade, but also strike a pair of blows onto the Domingo Daren, the expert mech version of the Crumbleshell!

As the powerful ranged support component of the trio of dwarven expert mechs, the Domingo Daren played a crucial role in the team.

Just like their regular mech counterparts, the Domingo Daren was responsible for providing ranged fire support. This crucial expert mech compensated for the lack of offensive power of the avian expert mechs and worked great at putting an opponent in its sight under constant pressure.

Indeed, Venerable Dise had long built up quite a lot of resentment for the damned Domingo Daren. Her sentiments were similar to the friendly mech pilots who had sought to destroy the spinning Crumbleshells only to get intercepted and blocked by the multitude of other Hivar Roarer mechs.

Now that she managed to disable a fourth of the weapon systems of the expert turtle mech and shove her blade through its thick shell shortly afterwards, the sudden expert mech fight took an abrupt turn in the other direction!

Despite being outnumbered by three-to-one, the three dwarven expert pilots had the illusion that they were the ones who were in trouble!

They had already fought against the human expert mech enough times to learn how frightening it truly was. The First Sword couldn't be measured against other second-class mechs. Its armor system not only provided it with a huge buffer, but its extremely sharp and hefty blade gave it as much teeth as a high-tier expert mech!

Though the dwarves believed that Venerable Orthox De Massie should be able overpower the First Sword, there was only one high-tier expert pilot in the Ferril punitive fleet, and he was currently fighting for his life against a human high-tier expert pilot!

"This can't be happening!" Venerable Merek uttered in disbelief even as he resonated with the flight system of his Paravad in order to reach his beleaguered battle comrade faster. "Why is this demonic human mech so strong!?"

For a moment, he thought that Vulcan had forsaken him and his fellow dwarves, that the great dwarven god had found the Ferrils unworthy.

That doubt came and went in an instant. Merek's will was not so easily shaken. His belief in dwarven supremacy was ironclad and his faith in Vulcan was absolute!

No matter what the evil human gods had sacrificed to create this unholy monster of an expert mech, the sword-wielding abomination wielding a stolen dwarven masterwork

weapon must be slain in order to make everything right and prevent the tall folk from destroying the dream of freeing dwarvenkind across the galaxy!

An overwhelming urgency swept across Venerable Merek's body. His entire will burst out, causing his entire expert mech to glow bright with power!

"FASTER! I MUST GO FASTER!"

The Paravad rushed forth at an even greater pace as Merek did not hesitate to burn his will to give his expert mech a greater acceleration boost than it had ever achieved!

Merek did not even realize that his resonance strength had reached a new record. It was only now that he no longer looked down on his opponent and truly recognized the threat of his enemy that he felt pressured to draw on his unused potential!

This was not an odd phenomenon in expert pilots. They were highly talented individuals who possessed the potential to gain infinite power. However, it was rare for expert pilots to be able to stimulate their drive and yearning for greater strength in times of peace.

Only a hard-fought battle was able to force both regular mech pilots and expert pilots to activate their unused potential. When their lives and the lives of their comrades were on the line and when their causes and convictions were at stake, that was when heroes stood out from the rank and file!

Now, Venerable Merek was one of many expert pilots in this battle that had grown in power if not always in mentality. Under his control, the Paravad became the incarnation of a predator bird as it rushed forward with great momentum!

Different from before, the avian expert medium mech did not lead with its razor-sharp claws. Though their underside mounting provided the Paravad with a large measure of safety when it performed its attack runs, it was insufficient in applying a high amount of physical force. They were most suited to perform hit-and-run attacks which had only yielded marginal results so far.

Against an expert mech with cheat-like armor, such attacks no longer sufficed for Venerable Merek.

It was for this reason that he decided to lead with its sharp and pointy beak first.

The strongest weapon system on the Paravad was not its claws, nor its wing-mounted positron cannons.

Its actual killer weapon was its beak which was not only made out of extremely dense and hard alloys, but also contained a special resonating material that provided this weapon system with a lot of punch!

The only downside of employing this weapon system was that Venerable Merek had to build up a lot of momentum in order to charge against his opponent with as much physical force as possible!

The greater the speed, the greater the collision. The greater the collision, the more devastating the Paravad's beak became!

As the avian mech raced forth with its wings folded to a narrower profile and its forward-pointed beak glowing in a bright silvery corona, Venerable Merek truly felt that he had become the Paravad for a moment!

"Hold the enemy in place! Don't let him escape!" Venerable Merek urged his comrades.

This was one of the weaknesses of the Paravad's all-out charge. When it sped forward with such great momentum, it lost nearly all of its maneuverability. Similar to the Valkyrie Redeemer, the Paravad was a marauder mech that possessed a versatile fighting style. It could adopt a cautious and elusive approach if Merek wanted to remain cautious but it could also go all-out and perform a high-risk maneuver that yielded an incredible payoff if it succeeded!

Venerable Dise wasn't blind. Even though she invested most of her attention towards hacking through the shell of the Domingo Daren, she already accounted for the quick reprisal of the avian expert mechs.

She didn't expect the Paravad to advance with such an exaggerated degree of speed and momentum! The enemy expert mech's will-infused beak exuded a particular sense of danger.

Her expression turned sour. Though she had already driven her sword through the Domingo Daren's turtle shell several times, she could tell that none of her attacks dealt fatal damage to the expert turtle mech.

Its defenses were high and its internals were more robust than she thought! It didn't help that the internal architecture of this turtle mech deviated a lot from a general mech. Dise thought that she had driven the Decapitator through the cockpit or the power reactor with every deep stab, but it turned out that the blade damaged nothing except some structural components, ammunition belts and other secondary components.

"These blasted turtle mechs!"

The designers of the Domingo Daren had taken full advantage of the unique properties that turtle mechs possessed. Unlike a regular human expert mech, there was no particular reason why the power reactor and cockpit needed to be mounted on the upper torso and why the mech engine should be placed around the pelvis section.

Its internal space was just one spacious bowl which could fit any kind of configuration. The turtle mech's relatively simple physical requirements provided mech designers with all kinds of choices that they would never be able to make if they designed a more restrictive humanoid mech!

When Ves paid attention to this fight, even he became impressed by the Domingo Daren's design concept.

"These turtle mechs look stupid but they're actually powerful and tricky to fight against. It's no wonder that the Hivar Roarers have turned them into a core part of their mech roster and combined arms approach."

Ves was so taken by the possibilities that turtle mech opened up that he developed a desire to design one himself. Compared to other bestial mechs such as tiger mechs, Ves did not need to study any non-human physiology and mechatronic theory. They were highly analogous to shuttles but were far better armored and controlled.

Like her husband, Gloriana studied the expert turtle mech as well, but was not as charmed by it. The lazy design offended her sensibilities. Its ungainly bulbous shape possessed no hint of femininity.

She didn't pay much attention to this at the moment. Instead, she narrowed her eyes at the footage and sensor readings of the Domingo Daren.

At first glance, she assumed the Domingo Daren was just a direct expert mech upgrade from the Crumbshell. However, when the First Sword breached its armor and exposed some of its internals, she began to spot parts and systems that should not belong to a defensive ranged mech.

After spending a few more seconds on analyzing the new data, her eyes widened. She activated an emergency command that directly connected her to Venerable Dise.

"Get away from the Domingo Daren's shell! Its a trap that can entangle your mech!"

The dwarven expert mech had already revealed its true nature halfway through her explanation!

The bulbous turtleshell split apart into segments that extended outward in an attempt to grapple and clamp down the First Sword!

Venerable Dise had never lowered her vigilance, though. She always maintained respect for her opponents and already remained on guard against unexpected surprises.

The Domingo Daren had always appeared too one dimensional for an expert mech. Seeing its shell unfold into a giant clamp only mildly took her by surprise.

With the instincts honed through many hunts against dangerous organisms. Venerable Dise already commanded her expert mech to blast off and escape whatever trap the dwarves were trying to pull!

Her quick thinking allowed the First Sword to distance itself from the Domingo Daren with plenty of time to spare, but her sense of threat never subsided.

The First Sword was still in the danger zone!

"What?!"

When the Domingo Daren's segmented shell failed to chomp its prey, its dwarven expert pilot did not show any disappointment.

"You can't get away!"

Numerous large modules in the inner structure of the Domingo Daren began to glow while consuming enormous amounts of power. A huge magnetic attraction force came to life that acted onto the First Sword's metallic frame!

The Larkinson expert mech's flight slowed down several times, but this wasn't all. The Domingo Daren detached its huge clamping mechanism and launched it forward!

This time, the clamp successfully trapped the expert swordsman mech in its jaws!

Though the First Sword attempted to cut at its bonds, it had only been able to cut off a single 'tooth' before the clamp immobilized its arms.

The humanoid expert mech possessed no leverage to wield its enormous sword!

The weakness of the humanoid mech form became very evident now. The First Sword was designed as a pure expert swordsman mech and possessed no integrated weapon modules. It possessed no tools at all to destroy the clamping mechanism that prevented its frame from flying away and kept its limbs immobilized.

"No!" Ves shouted in alarm as this drastic turn of events took place. "The First Sword needs help! Where's the Dark Zephyr!?"

"Venerable Tusa is currently supporting the opposite flank, sir!"

"What about the Amaranto!?"

"Venerable Stark is still locked in a firefight against the Slug Rider expert mechs!"

"Damn it, why haven't we sent the Shield of Samar or other mechs to free up the Amaranto!?" Ves demanded.



"We tried and it didn't work! The other Slug Ranger mechs are constantly supporting their own expert mechs. Our ranged contingent has no choice but to fight back against them in order to prevent a wipeout."

"Then what else is left?!"

"..."

#### *Chapter 3284: Righteous Charge*

The Domingo Daren resembled a Crumbshell on its surface, but actually hid a second purpose.

From a professional standpoint, Ves admired the imagination and commitment of the lead designer of this bestial expert mech. Not everyone was willing to design a mech that essentially turned it into a giant decoy that just screamed 'get close to me and hit me up close', only for that to be part of a nefarious plot to trap and immobilize an enemy expert mech.

It was not a design concept that fit an expert mech optimized for duels and solo engagements. It could only ever be employed when it fought alongside other friendly expert mechs.

The Domingo Daren's trapping elements were large, robust and almost impossible to break out of for a typical humanoid mech.

The insanely high defense factor of the First Sword's Unending alloy armor system was not capable of bailing Venerable Dise out this time. The clamping mechanism was well designed and did not have to rely on punching its sharp teeth through the surface of an enemy mech in order to keep hold of its catch.

The hunter and the hunted had exchanged roles yet again!

The First Sword exerted as much force as its limbs allowed, but the kind of state it was in at the moment was similar to a human being bound by rope.

If the rope was just hanging around, then anyone with a sword could easily chop it in half as long as there was enough room to move.

However, when the rope was bound tightly around a person's arms and torso, then there was no easy way for a person to break free. The amount of force it needed to exert from its arms was way too insufficient compared to the strength of sturdy rope.

Ves didn't need to perform any supplemental calculations with his implant to be certain that the First Sword could not free itself from this unorthodox trap!

Even though Venerable Dise was not resigned to this situation and tried out various different tricks by resonating with her expert mech, the First Sword simply didn't possess the options that could break the clamp holding it in place!

"Any other Larkinson expert mech won't fare better either." He realized.

When he substituted his other expert mechs in the same position, he did not think the results would be any different. Neither the Riot nor the Dark Zephyr would be able to escape from this kind of trap.

The only exception in the expeditionary fleet was the Bolvos Rage. The high-tier expert mech not only possessed greater mechanical strength due to the virtue of its high-quality materials and components, but also possessed numerous integrated weapons that could output considerable damage if it wasn't able to employ its handheld weapons.

Ves had grown too complacent after he witnessed the stellar performance of Unending alloy in mech combat. What happened to the Valkyrie Prime proved that expert mechs that excelled in attack power could still breach it under specific circumstances.

Special measures such as the secret trapping mechanism of the Domingo Daren could screw over an Unending alloy expert mech without needing to overcome its hard shell.

That was the job of other dwarven expert mechs!

"At least that's not unreasonable."

The Domingo Daren could only do so much. Its design revolved completely around its gauss cannons, its strong defensive shell and the trapping mechanism it held in reserve against cheeky melee attackers who thought they could slay a turtle by getting close enough.

The expert turtle mech's cannons weren't even able to fire at its trapped prey. The cannons, which were half-exposed due to the removal of the upper shell, didn't possess high elevation angles and weren't capable of firing straight upwards.

Even so, the First Sword was in place and could no longer maneuver freely. This turned it into a perfect target for any follow-up attack, and the first one had already arrived!

The first one to arrive was not the Paravad that had already built up a formidable charge, but the faster and lighter Morko Mark II that had already gone a step ahead!

Though the avian light mech lacked the raw power of its larger and heavier brother, it could still deal quite a lot of damage as long as it built up enough speed, which it had already done!

The Morko Mark II instead surged forward while leading with its remaining intact. Its dwarven expert pilot resonated strongly with the limb, causing it to channel a will driven by hatred, desperation and an overwhelming urge to break the unbreakable!

The attack happened in an instant. In one moment, the Morko Mark II was blazing towards the trapped First Sword with great intensity. In the next moment, the avian light mech had already passed by, its claws showing clear signs of damage but its expert pilot was more than satisfied.

It turned out that the Morko Mark II managed to rend one of the arms of the First Sword! Though the damage wasn't critical, the ugly tears and the damaged mechanical parts represented the first true battle damage the expert mech suffered.

Ves winced at the sight. He could already tell that even if the arm remained to the rest of the frame, Venerable Dise could forget about exerting any force with the crippled limb. It was metaphorically holding on by a thread at the moment!

Up next was the Paravad, which had built up so much momentum that there was a high chance that it could punch through the chest armor of the First Sword.

Would Ketis' proud work be the first Larkinson expert mech to fall in this battle?

This became a very real possibility as Ves tried his best to figure out a solution.

He briefly directed his attention to the other assets on the battlefield.

The remaining Swordmaiden mechs were too weak to do anything.

The Battle Criers were already out, and so was the Valkyrie Prime.

The Dark Zephyr's state was too awful to match up against any of the Hivar Roarer expert mechs, not that it mattered. Venerable Tusa was doing his best to prevent the heavily-disadvantaged left flank from collapsing.

The Eye of Ylvaine could have done something if it activated its new battle network, but time was way too short and its regular firepower was not strong enough to free the First Sword or substantially damage the enemy expert mechs.

The Amaranto, which Ves had regarded as the best option to provide support for the Larkinson Clan's other expert mechs, was being heavily suppressed by the enemy!

Even without the Gauss Baron, the Slug Rangers did their absolute best to keep the masterwork expert rifleman mech out of play as long as possible.

The dwarven opposition recognized the great threat of the Amaranto and decided that it could not be allowed to fire its potent luminar crystal weapon against a vulnerable target

again! The help it provided to the Dark Zephyr was just one of many instances where Venerable Stark managed to play a crucial role in the loss of a powerful asset.

If the Amaranto was allowed to attack other powerful enemies across the entire battlefield, then that would heavily suppress the activities of the dwarven expert mechs!

No one aside from Venerable Orthox wanted to get sniped by a potent ranged mech that had the potential to inflict crippling damage with a single hit. The suppression on the Amaranto was frankly unreasonable and put it under no less pressure than the Riot.

This was yet another consequence of getting embroiled in a fight where the enemy came with larger numbers. The Ferrils simply had more options at their disposal and could employ multiple solutions to the same problem.

In contrast, Ves and the rest of the expeditionary fleet was left with agonizing choices as they had to make difficult tradeoffs that supported one friendly mech unit at the cost of leaving other beleaguered mech units to their own devices!

No miracle happened this time. No mech pilot or expert candidate broke through at an opportune moment that could save the day.

In fact, several mech pilots from both sides had broken through during this engagement. The odds that at least one of them were able to push themselves beyond the limit was quite respectable.

The problem was that they didn't always last that long! Just like regular expert candidates such as Vincent Ricklin, anytime the warnet detected a mech that performed way above the norm, the AIs would perform a thorough analysis before concluding that the high-performing machine was either piloted by a promising talent or an actual expert candidate.

No matter the results, such mechs piloted by strong mech pilots were always targeted with great prejudice!

The goal was to eliminate them before they did anything that could reverse a losing trend or strengthen a winning hand by doing something as outrageous as breaking through.

Though the effort put into eliminating the talents identified by combatants or AIs was great, the cost would have been much greater if they waited until the targets in question broke through and wielded forced resonance to devastating effect!

"This is true war."

Such sights weren't common in other battlefields. In the Komodo War where the role of expert pilots was especially crucial, both sides did their best to strangle each other's talents and expert candidates in their cradle.

When Ves briefly studied the list of Larkinson expert candidates, he noticed that a couple of names had already been crossed out. The dwarves generally didn't waste their time on shooting down ejected cockpits but it was a different matter if there was a high likelihood they held expert candidates or talents that had the potential to become more.

Ves felt guilty for not even noticing them as they fought for the Larkinson Clan only to die before the expeditionary fleet had even reached the Red Ocean.

He reminded the kindness exuded by Lieutenant Hector Larkinson of the Living Sentinels. He was one of the few trueblood clansmen who seemed alright and would have been a fine addition to the expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan.

He was not as sad about Tamarin Larkinson's passing. Though he displayed great heroism as he fought against the vengeful Molten Hammers alongside other fellow Avatars, his stance on putting trueblood Larkinsons on top of everyone in the clan was an undesirable political stance.

The stubborn knight mech pilot would have become a major obstacle to Ves if he broke through. Now that he was taken out of the equation, that was one less issue to worry about.

The only displeasure Ves felt towards his passing was that the Larkinsons didn't gain any replacements that could fill up the missing slots. Less expert candidates meant less expert pilots in the future. Though Ves was not in the mood to design more expert mechs after he completed the current round of design projects, he reconsidered his stance after seeing the consequences of bringing too few expert mechs to a battle once again.

"We need to do a better job of protecting and nurturing our expert candidates!"

At this time, the Paravad had reached its end run! After taking sufficient time to build up a formidable amount of momentum like a lancer mech, it had circled around until it faced the rear of the First Sword.

Now, its sharp and highly-charged beak thrust forward with the mass and speed of an entire mech behind this attack.

"It's coming!"

A silent collision that lit up the optical sensors took place! So much energy had been released that a lot of other sensors failed to make sense of the situation at the moment!

This blow was the culmination of Venerable Merek's desire to fell the evil human expert mech. In his will, no human armor was impervious or unbreakable. With dwarven power and Vulcan's blessing, the dwarven expert pilot was convinced that his righteous charge struck true!

It took a few seconds for the interference to clear up so that everyone could see the aftermath of the devastating charge attack.

*Chapter 3285: You Are Your Work*

When the Paravad drove its powerful beak into the First Sword, the warnet lost connection to the First Sword.

This was a bad sign and usually served as a prelude to the confirmation of the fall of a mech.

Ves' heart had sunk. He knew that it was too unrealistic to keep pulling rabbits out of his hat. After using up one trump card after another, the Larkinson Clan's deck had become a lot emptier.

An overwhelming sense of guilt and loss overtook his mind. Unlike the deaths of a couple of Larkinson expert candidates whose names and faces he barely remembered, Dise was a true friend.

He did not do right by Venerable Dise and the original Swordmaidens. He relied a lot on their strength to save his clan and his own hide but did not provide them much aside from the benefits that other Larkinsons already enjoyed.

The First Sword was finished late in the current round of design projects, so Venerable Dise only had a fraction of the time that Venerable Tusa enjoyed to thoroughly familiarize herself with the strengths and weaknesses of her expert mech.

It was no surprise that Venerable Tusa's performance exceeded that of any other Larkinson expert pilot. With a head start of around half a year, he not only mastered all of the performative nuances of the Dark Zephyr, but also had plenty of time to build up a deep accord with his expert light skirmisher.

On top of that, he also spent much more time in growing his resonance strength. True expert mechs were so much more conducive to the development of an expert pilot than a prime mech.

"Dise..." He sighed.

Ves could not imagine what Ketis was going through at the moment. The loss of yet another original Swordmaiden was another painful loss to someone who already lost a lot of sisters in previous battles.

Not only was losing Dise a great personal loss, but it also negated much of the effort put into designing and fabricating the First Sword. The expert swordsman mech was actually her first swordsman mech that she designed and realized by employing her own design philosophy.

No mech designer wanted to spend all of that blood, sweat and tears to create a fine mech for a specific client only for the machine to fall in its first battle!

Ves had already designed enough mechs to not become affected by such a setback, but he was quite concerned whether Ketis would also be able to take this blow without affecting her passion and enthusiasm for mech design.

In the worst case scenario, this tragic loss might turn into an enduring ache for her that would weigh her down for the rest of her life!

As the interference finally cleared up, Ves and many other people in the expeditionary fleet looked carefully at the result of the Paravad's powerful charge attack.

The fact that this dwarven expert mech lost its hard beak in its strike attempt did not look encouraging!

"How much of the First Sword is left?" Ves clung to his hammer as he watched on with a mixture of dread and hope.

"The First Sword... it's alive! It's still intact!"

Everyone who had the attention to spare looked shocked.

The First Sword, while still bound by the clamping mechanism of the Domingo Daren, was still in the same condition as it was before!

Aside from the ugly arm wound inflicted by the Morko Mark II, the First Sword did not exhibit any other major signs of damage!

The back armor which the Paravad had targeted with its beak was still in good condition. Though it was a bit banged up due to getting hammered by the Domingo Daren's gauss cannons, it did not feature the large and fatal cavity that Ves had expected out of the Paravad's collision.

Ves looked puzzled. "What happened?"

It didn't take much looking to find the answer.

Floating just before the First Sword was the Decapitator.

Previously, the sharp and powerful sword was rendered useless due to the captive state of the First Sword. Since the expert mech's arms were clamped down along with the rest of its frame, Venerable Dise wasn't able to swing the weapon at all. Its fingers which still gripped the weapon weren't strong enough to swing or heave the large and hefty blade around.

So how did it move out of the First Sword's grip, and what did it do to rescue the expert mech and most likely its pilot?

Ves took a good look at the floating blade that exuded a very different vibe when it was held in the First Sword's hands.

"...Sharpie?"

He recognized that sharp and distinctive vibe right away. The Decapitator possessed its own unique character, of course, but now Ves had the impression that he was looking at a supersized version of Ketis' Bloodsinger!

"This is impossible!"

Ves resisted the urge to rub his eyes as he stared widely at the blade. It turned out that Sharpie not only crossed a distance of many kilometers to possess the Decapitator, but also channeled enough power to block the Paravad's incredibly powerful charge to the point that it actually bounced back while losing its beak in the process!

"How?"

The sheer amount of improbable and impossible events that took place boggled his mind. A number of very clear rules had been broken in this brief event.

First, how could Sharpie exceed the maximum range that companion spirits were able to move away from their principals by a magnitude of so many kilometers?

Blinky couldn't even go past a few compartments aboard the Spirit of Bentheim!

Second, how was the First Sword able to stop many tons of worth of mech in its tracks, and without suffering any significant counterforce in return? How could the weapon empowered by Sharpie wield such a disproportionate amount of power by itself?

At the very least, the Decapitator should have smacked onto the surface of the First Sword when it was rammed by the Paravad!

Third, how was the sword even able to move by itself? Sure, Ketis' personal weapon was able to fly around, either on its own or with Sharpie directing its flight, but that was because the handle and sheath incorporated powerful low-profile gravitic modules that allowed the handheld weapon to float.



No such system was incorporated in the Decapitator. Ves still remembered its design schematics and he had personally witnessed Ketis putting it together step by step as she channeled all of her passion. Though it incorporated a small amount of electronic components, none of them were large enough to be able to lift the enormous blade, let alone wield it as if it was held by an actual mech!

"Impossible!" Ves uttered again as he tried his best to make sense of the situation.

After repulsing the Paravad's fatal charge, the Decapitator did not remain idle for long. It turned its blade and swung backwards in a remarkably simple motion.

The swing did not possess much force, yet effortlessly sliced through half of the clamps that held the First Sword in place.

If Ves had any doubts that Sharpie was present in the Decapitator, they had all been laid to rest!

On a hunch, Ves activated a live feed that provided him with a view of the main design lab.

"Ketis!"

She was not sitting behind her terminal like the other mech designers. Instead, she had stood up and practically dominated her entire corner of the design lab by channeling her will!

She held her Bloodsinger in her hands and lifted her head up as if to gaze straight through the structure of the Spirit of Bentheim so that she could track something at a distant part of the battlefield.

The power that exuded from her body looked as if she was expending a huge amount of power. Indeed, just after the Decapitator finished cutting enough bonds, Sharpie's influence disappeared from the weapon, causing it to turn inert again.

It had done its job, though. The First Sword was no longer as immobilized as before. It was able to squirm and free up a single limb with caught hold of the floating Decapitator before using its blade to hack the remaining clamps that kept the expert mech lock.

Soon enough, Venerable Dise had managed to free up her precious expert mech from the weakened grasp of the Domingo Daren!

What happened was so improbable that many people were still in shock at this time. Not even the dwarven expert pilots were able to process what had happened.

"Ah, Ketis!"

In the design lab, Ketis had retrieved a much-depleted companion spirit. She had drained so much of her energy and will in that crucial moment of time that there was hardly anything left in her. She collapsed onto the deck, causing considerable alarm among the mech designers and guards.

She had to be put on an emergency floating stretcher and be carried to the nearest medical bay. With several guards escorting her in person, Ves slowly let go of his concerns for her health.

While the freed and rejuvenated First Sword tentatively resumed the fight against the three Hivar Roarer expert mechs, Ves kept thinking back on what Ketis had managed to do and how it was possible for her to extend her spiritual reach at such a great distance.

"Is it spiritual projection?"

This was a possible answer, but not a satisfying one to Ves. Distances, like any other physical property, were kind of funky in the spiritual realm, so theoretically it was possible for him to exert his influence a lot further than his natural range in the material realm.

Yet even that had limits... at least he thought so. However, Ketis didn't have his spiritual sensitivity and shouldn't be capable of navigating the spiritual realm in the first place.

"Something much different is a work I think." He frowned deeper.

Eventually, Ves put together a simple list of facts.

"First, Ketis is both a swordmaster and a mech designer. She possessed the powers of both."

"Second, the Decapitator is a masterwork mech sword which she has personally designed and fabricated with all of her heart and passion."

"Third, Sharpie is capable of channeling different sword styles but most particularly the one it was born with, which happens to center around sharpness."

When Ves put these facts together, he made a number of highly unusual and potentially mind-blowing inferences.

Take the first point for example. Mech designers were able to extend the influence of their design philosophies to their works. This was why all of the Larkinson mechs out in space were alive and experiencing growth on a spiritual level.

However, what if the mech designer did not just possess a design philosophy, but also a force of will? Was the latter able to piggyback off the former and extend onto a work of the originator's own making as well?

"This isn't a sufficient explanation."

With his control over spirituality, how could he not have discovered such an amazing interaction himself? He could have projected a part of himself to any of the mechs that bore his touch and give them boosts of power whenever he was willing to make an effort!

This brought him to the second point. What made the Decapitator different from many other products was that it was a masterwork product. Though it was not a mech, to Ketis its sword-like nature was even more significant. No one in the Larkinson Clan was able to design and forge swords better than her, period.

If a masterwork sword of her own making allowed Ketis to treat it as something similar to the Bloodsinger that was by her side, then that had massive implications.

And she certainly did channel her power through her masterwork sword, or otherwise Sharpie wouldn't have been able to cross half the battlefield which broke many assumptions that Ves had made about spiritual interactions!

Ves tried to figure out the key point that made this possible. He quickly settled on the qualities of a masterwork.

He understood very little about what masterworks actually were and what concrete benefits they brought over other products.

Now, he suspected that he uncovered a great secret that most mech designers were clueless about!

"What are masterworks exactly? What kind of property could enable Ketis to reach so far and channel her power through the Decapitator?"

After making a lot of different theories, Ves stopped at an explanation that sounded incredibly illogical but nonetheless appealed to him as a creator.

"What if... masterworks are an extension of their creator? A living extension, maybe."

He didn't know why he came to such an unreasonable, unsubstantiated guess, but it was an explanation that resonated with his mech designer heart.

This theory could explain everything that just happened. If the Decapitator was not just a very well-made product but also a crystallization of someone's spirit and design philosophy, then it would not be inaccurate to state that a masterwork truly carried a significant component of its creator!

"There's a very simple way to test this crazy guess."

Ves fiddled the controls of his projection feeds and activated a new feed that showed the current state of the Quint.

Just like other Living Sentinel mechs, it was currently hanging back while firing its rifle at any dwarven mechs that were doing their best to reach the expeditionary fleet.

When Ves looked at his second masterwork mech, he raised his armored hand and channeled his spiritual energy while trying to reach out to the Quint.

"I am my work, and my work is I. Connect."

He felt a response that could only have come from a mech.

*Chapter 3286: A New Model of Masterworks*

A bomb went off inside Ves as he made a completely new realization about masterworks.

He had always known that what he figured out and what he had been told about masterworks was never the full picture.

The MTA's obsession of masterworks made it clear that they were definitely more remarkable than what Ves currently knew about them. He just didn't know in what way.

Now, Ves had the suspicion that he managed to peel a layer of mist today. The astounding instance where Ketis, who was situated far away from the thick of action, managed to cross a large distance of space and directly allowed Sharpie to descend on to the Decapitator. Not only that, but she also managed to wield the giant mech sword as if she was holding it in person!

So many incomprehensible and reality-defying events happened in this brief sequence that Ves would probably break his head before he figured everything out. The powers shown by Ketis belonged to her and her alone, so trying to copy her exact same methods was futile.

However, Ves was still able to gain a lot of inspiration from seeing her perform something that Ves had never imagined. He had created masterwork mechs before but never thought he could connect to them as if they were a part of his own self.

Ketis was different. She was much worse than him in the field of mech design when it came to experience, knowledge and practicality, but she possessed one great strength that genuinely received his admiration.

She had a great feel for swords. Her extreme dedication towards swords and swordsman mechs was reflective of how much she was willing to set aside just to concentrate on her narrow interests, and she was rewarded for that sacrifice by

developing an incredible degree of understanding, intuition and passion for her chosen calling!

Such a great confluence of strengths and advantages had the potential of producing innovative new results.

Only someone with an extreme mindset as hers would think of connecting with one of her best pieces!

The fact that she actually succeeded caused Ves to take his former student a lot more seriously. He had always looked down on her a little bit due to her younger age and gap between progression, but now he was feeling similar to how Master Willix must be regarding him sometimes.

"So this is what it's like when the student surpasses the master."

Ves did not feel any jealousy or displeasure at Ketis' success. Ves already developed a large and extensive toolbox of his own. Anything that his student made could also be adapted into his own toolbox if he wished.

This was exactly what he was trying to do at the moment. He had always yearned to empower his mechs and find a way to contribute further to battles between mechs.

If he could do what Ketis had just performed, he would no longer be relegated to the role of tech support!

Certainly, his current duties were not inconsequential. As one of the few Journeymen in the fleet, his insights of mechs and technology reached a high level. He had already made a real difference by passing on his insights on the strengths of his own mech designs and the weaknesses he spotted in the mechs used by the opposition.

"That's not enough, though."

Ves was a Larkinson, and there was fire in his blood. He might not be able to pilot a mech in battle, but if he had a more direct way of contributing to a battle, then he would definitely embrace it without a thought!

This was not the time to indulge in his fancies, though.

Mechs were still being torn apart as the battle continued to rage. The Living Sentinels were no longer able to remain on standby and had all been deployed to fight the advancing dwarves.

The battle between the different expert mechs grew more intense.

The Bolvos Rage and the Gatecrasher fought even harder against each other despite the progressively worse battle damage they incurred.

The First Sword was on a vengeance against the trio of dwarven expert mechs that had almost succeeded in pulling off their trapping scheme.

The Amaranto's fragile frame showed various degrees of damage as it teamed up with the Shield of Samar to resist the simultaneous onslaught of two Slug Ranger expert rifleman mechs.

The Dark Zephyr and the Amphis were trying their best to resist the bestial expert mech supporting the much more formidable left flank of the dwarven mech force.

Each of these flashpoints were crucial to both sides. The balance was so fragile and precarious that just a single change could have massive implications. Neither the expeditionary fleet nor the dwarven fleet could afford to lose any of the individual clashes! As long as one of them tipped over, a cascade might result that could trigger a complete collapse to the disadvantaged side!

The bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim had become busier than ever as the vessel's shield generators had reached their limits and her hull sustained various degrees of battle damage, some worse than others. Hundreds of damage control parties were running around to put out fires, throw away hazardous debris and recover bodies from collapsed compartments.

A heavy weight pressed on his heart. "We might lose it all. It only takes one spell of misfortune to make our suffering a hundred times worse."

He did not want to fall in this forsaken dwarven empire. He hadn't reached the Red Ocean yet! He was nowhere close to realizing his design philosophy! His daughter hadn't even been born yet! She was supposed to have a wonderful life ahead of her. How could he possibly allow her to fall in this stupid, backwater star sector?!

Just the thought of something happening to his precious daughter caused his breath to hitch. There was no greater motivation for someone to fight for than to ensure the life and happiness of their own child!

Parental love was what drove his own parents to exile themselves to the Nyxian Gap. Though Ves didn't need to do something so drastic, he must at least do his own part to ensure that nothing would ever happen to his baby!

"I need to come up with something quickly while the battle hasn't deteriorated beyond salvaging."

After he initially focused on the Quint and came into contact with his masterwork in a way that he had never done, Ves became subsumed by different theories.

He had no idea whether his assumption that masterworks were extensions of their creators was true. It could be that other mech designers such as Ketis looked at these great works in a different way. Ves just adopted this particular model because he was a life-oriented mech designer.

No matter what was the case, this happened to be a model which worked for him. The moment he adopted this new model of masterworks, the way he saw and interpreted them had changed.

He no longer treated them as discrete works that had little to do with him after he delivered them to his clients. They were transcendent creations that not only represented the best of what his craftsmanship had to offer, but also encapsulated his design philosophy to its highest potential.

He could sense the active nature of the Quint even though he did not look further into the details. Sentinel Commander Casella Ingvar was in the middle of a fight and was leaning heavily on the Quint to support her. The degree of cooperation he sensed from them was deeper and more extensive than anything he had seen!

"What a great mech." Ves sighed as he admired his own work.

He was a bit clueless on how to empower it, though. When Ves tried to transfer his spiritual energy over to see if that helped or anything, he ended up with no noticeable results.

First, transferring spiritual energy to the Quint was difficult due to the distance. The bond he held with the masterwork version of the Bright Warrior model was not that strong.

As an experiment, Ves briefly tried to connect to his other masterwork mechs.

"Let's see how they are doing."

He was able to connect to the Amaranto without much trouble since it was in the same fleet, but he wasn't able to reach out at all to his remaining two masterwork mechs.

"They're too far away!"

If he concentrated hard and tried his best to reach out his senses, he might be able to detect a faint trace of the Devil Tiger and the Little Angel. He could vaguely tell that both of them were located in the same direction which happened to point straight towards the Komodo Star Sector.

Aside from that, there was nothing he could do. "My ability to sense them will probably grow worse with distance. I'm not even sure if I'll be able to do this when I've reached the Red Ocean."

Obviously, there were limits to this technique. They might loosen if he advanced to Senior or higher, but that was too far away.

Right now, Ves needed to figure out what he could do as a Journeyman.

He spent an entire minute trying out different ideas. Most of them did not yield any improvements. The Quint was like a sieve where all of the spiritual energy he sent out was just flowing through it as if it was not able to make use of this gift.

This was not dissimilar to what happened if he did the same to a mech that was standing right next to him. He made a number of conclusions based on this outcome.

"Even if I can connect to my masterworks, it doesn't necessarily mean anything. I don't have a way to convert my juice into useful work."

It was like holding a battery. The object itself could contain enough energy to power the Amastendira, but without a real energy weapon or some other method to make use of the available energy, a battery alone was not capable of defeating a powerful enemy!

"I don't have any good offensive techniques." He realized.

Much of his spiritual research and development was oriented towards creation and mech design. His toolbox was filled with productive tools, but only a handful of them could be employed as weapons, which weren't adapted to mech combat.

"An even greater problem is that the Quint isn't acting as an open channel to my abilities."

Everything he tried to send to the Quint was getting dumped into space before dissipating. Due to these failures, he tried to think back on how Ketis managed to effectively project her power to one of her masterworks.

Unlike Ves, Ketis was also a swordmaster. This was an extraordinary combat profession and one that shared clear commonalities with expert pilots. As a result, the Swordmaiden mech designer was able to leverage her will and unleash unimaginable strength!

Ves wasn't able to do this, but thinking about Ketis' example caused him to develop an interesting idea.

"Ketis has a sword, but I have a cat."

One of the many elements that stood out from his former student's feat was that she did not control the Decapitator directly, but somehow sent Sharpie over to possess the weapon.



Though Ves initially had a lot of doubts about how Sharpie was able to displace itself so far away from Ketis without breaking her mind, his new model and theory on masterwork creations was able to supply him with an acceptable explanation.

"If a masterwork is an extension of its creator, then it should be able to anchor a companion spirit!"

This was a major conclusion that could change a lot! Perhaps Ves wasn't as helpless as he thought.

"Blinky!"

Mrow...?

"Wake up, you lazy bum. We're in the middle of a battle right now and it's time for you to make a contribution."

Mrow... mrow?!

"You heard me, Blinky. It's off to battle for you now!"

Mrowwww!

#### *Chapter 3287: Dwarven Suppression*

When Ves came up with the brilliant idea to dispatch Blinky to one of his masterwork mechs, he immediately thought that it had a high chance of working!

Though Blinky was not a clear offense-oriented companion spirit like Sharpie, the spiritual cat possessed his own unique strengths and abilities.

The only factor that Ves needed to be careful about was whether it was useful and appropriate to dispatch Blinky to one of his masterworks.

The first interfacing attempt between Venerable Orfan and the Riot came to mind. If Ves rashly inserted a strange cat in a mech that was fully occupied with supporting its mech pilot in battle, disruption and disharmony might result!

So before Ves tried to send Blinky out, he first had to make a choice.

"Should I help the Quint or the Amaranto?"

Both had their good and bad points. The Quint was a more developed living mech. It was also a relatively weak mech so that a fixed boost of power would result in a greater amplification of performance.

With regards to compatibility, Ves didn't anticipate too many problems. The Quint was a more idealized version of the Bright Warrior Mark I Version B, both of which were overseen by the Golden Cat.

Blinky's relationship with Goldie was pretty good so the latter shouldn't mind whether her 'little brother' intruded in one of the mechs under her purview.

"Still... what kind of impact will result from allowing Blinky to inhabit the Quint?" Ves wondered.

Although the Quint was a powerful modular mech platform that enjoyed several powerful upgrades since it was made, its foundation was still based on an ordinary Bright Warrior.

If Blinky's was able to increase its strength, how well would it perform? Ves seriously doubted that it would suddenly become as strong as an expert mech.

"It is more realistic to assume that its performance will probably reach the level of a prime mech."

Was an additional prime mech in the Larkinson Army's lineup useful? Yes, but not that much. His Valkyrie Prime and the Shield of Samar might be able to play a greater role in smaller battles, but with tens of thousands of mechs doing their best to smash each other to pieces, the power level of a prime mech was still too inconsequential to make a difference!

Of course, the story would be different if Casella Ingvar broke through. In his brief moment of contact with the Quint, he sensed a lot of strength and will from its mech pilot. The ongoing struggle was slowly polishing the expert candidate's will, bringing her closer and closer to apotheosis.

"Can I give her a little push?"

Ves didn't know. There was a chance that he was able to create an opportunity for Casella Ingvar to break through, but this was just a guess. He never tried anything like this before and was quite reluctant to mess with the mental balance of one of his key personnel.

"It would have been a different story if Imon Ingvar was still piloting the Quint." He muttered.

Imon was just a regular expert candidate who did not play a major role in the Larkinson Army. His sister was another story.

Ever since Casella Ingvar took over the mantle of commander from Magdalena Larkinson, the younger leader went on to become a successful and popular leader of the Living Sentinels.

Many of her subordinates looked up to her so any adverse outcome would have a disastrous effect on the morale of the mech legion.

There was also another reason why Ves was reluctant to perform his new experiment on the Quint.

"I'm not sure whether Commander Casella can handle the power that Blinky can bestow to her and her mech."

Compared to this dubious choice, Ves felt a lot more confident about dispatching Blinky to the Amaranto.

It was his most recent masterwork mech and he still remembered much of its details including how its luminar crystal rifle worked.

The Amaranto was also an expert mech that was expressly designed to channel extraordinary energy and abilities. Its tolerance for them was very high and Ves did not have to worry about exceeding its fault capacity if Blinky got to work.

There were also downsides to this choice. Blinky might not be strong enough to provide a substantial boost to the expert rifleman mech. The Amaranto also had less in common with Blinky. The only shared DNA they possessed was that they were both designed and made by Ves and they also shared a connection with the Illustrious One.

"Oh well, they're on the same side, so they must be able to get along. The future of the Larkinson Clan is at stake!"

Since time was short, he did not doubt his choice any further and began to establish a connection to the Amaranto.

Just like with the Quint, now that he regarded the masterwork expert mech as a living extension of himself, he developed the impression that he was touching another part of himself, though in a very diminished way.

The exact mechanics behind this interaction continued to stimulate his thoughts, but he did his best to suppress his inquisitive desires. This was a time of action, not research!

"You're up now, Blinky. Go out and do something useful!"

Mrow!

Blinky's objections were irrelevant. No matter how much his companion spirit wanted to stay behind and just let the Larkinson soldiers win this battle on their own, Ves just metaphorically picked his cat up by the scruff of his neck and threw the purple spiritual cat into the Amaranto!

At this time, the Amaranto was still engaged in a fight of its life. Its armor was chipped and damaged from getting hit by numerous pieces of debris. Some of the more ugly marks were made by glancing blows from the powerful gauss rifles of the dwarven expert mechs!

"Abominable human mech! Only dwarves are allowed to make masterworks. Your existence must be erased!"

"The Gauss Baron must be avenged!"

Venerable Davia Stark did not let herself get affected by the senseless words of her attackers. The fanatical Slug Ranger expert pilots had been berating her since the start of their attack on her but still hadn't managed to destroy her machine entirely.

She had to work hard to keep her mech in working condition, though. If she just fought against a single dwarven expert mech, she would have been able to defeat it by using the Graveyard as cover.

That wasn't possible now that she was attacked by two expert ranged mechs at the same time!

The cooperation between the Slug Ranger expert mech pilots was good. They maintained a healthy distance from the Amaranto and each other while constantly firing their empowered gauss rounds at their target.

Since the two enemy expert mechs were oriented at different angles from the Amaranto, there were many instances where her cover was made invalid!

Even if the Amaranto was able to block the attacks of one expert rifleman mech huddle behind the hull of a ship, the other enemy machine simply had to go around and gain a clear line of sight of its target's vulnerable sides or rear!

The Amaranto would get in deep trouble if that happened because the defenses of her mech frame simply wasn't good enough to withstand even a single powerful attack from its two opponents.

Venerable Stark was forced to reposition the Amaranto ahead of time in order to avoid exposing its weak sides to one of her current foes. This not only wasted a lot of time, but also constrained the amount of times she was able to fire her rifle.

"I can't support the other Larkinsons in my current state!"

This was exactly what the dwarven expert pilots were trying to do! Even if the Amaranto was acting way too cautiously to expose itself to their sights, it was constantly on the run, giving it no chance to contribute its firepower to the other parts of the battlefield!

The suppression of the two enemy expert mechs also prevented the Amaranto from launching solid attacks on them both. The Slug Rangers obviously weren't new at this and had developed a good method to suppress a powerful ranged threat!

The reason why the dwarven approach worked so well was because the Larkinson expert mech was never designed to withstand hits with its lackluster armor system. The relative fragility of the Amaranto constantly forced it to borrow the hull structure of starships in order to resist attacks in its stead, but that was not an ideal solution.

In fact, the Amaranto had taken advantage of the Graveyard's defenses so much that the defensive salvage vessel could not take any further attacks!

"Venerable Stark, please base your defense on our other starships. The attacks launched by enemy expert mechs are too powerful for the Graveyard's hull to resist! Our capital ship urgently needs more breathing room to perform damage control functions. Please use the following lists of ships as your defensive aids. They're not as resilient as the Graveyard but their loss is more tolerable."

The instructions from high command forced Stark to reposition her Amaranto to other vessels. The sub-capital ships of the Larkinson Clan turned into sacrificial barriers as the Amaranto used their large but flimsy structure to buy more time at the cost of accelerating the destruction of valuable assets.

The dwarven expert pilots had no qualms about tearing apart the starships of their enemy!

"I need more backup." She said as she continually dodged the gauss rounds that were fired in the Amaranto's direction.

It was not as if General Verle attempted to help out. However, the regular mechs that were sent to attack the enemy expert mechs were either shot down by the dwarven expert mechs or attacked by other dwarven elements.

The Shield of Samar which arrived later had helped for a time, but the dwarves quickly found out that the prime mech was little more than a mobile obstacle!

Venerable Jannzi had very little to offer in a battle of this level. Her space knight could easily withstand the attacks of the enemy expert ranged mechs, but she was unable to do anything that could help in defeating the opposition. Venerable Stark was forced to move her expert mech away from the Shield of Samar after a time.

The dwarves were constantly paying attention to this firefight!

General Kebrinore's well-founded fears towards the Amaranto drove him to counter every plan that General Verle attempted to enact in order to free up his strongest individual ranged asset.

Only a powerful external factor could break this stalemate, and Ves hoped that Blinky was strong enough to meet the threshold!

The transition was rather abrupt. In one moment, Blinky was settled nicely inside Ves' head. In the next moment, the spiritual cat had the illusion of being squeezed through a very long and narrow straw before ending up in the spiritual space of the Amaranto!

Mrowww!

Fortunately, the Amaranto did not react violently to the arriving guest. Ves had already warned the living expert mech in advance.

"Hmmm. Strange."

Ves began to see double as he had the impression that he was in two places at once. His perspective from the Amaranto was severely limited, though.

The expert mech was currently filled with power as Venerable Stark actively resonated with the machine in order to keep up its battle performance. Blinky did not feel comfortable after being affected by Stark's powerful and resentment-filled will!

Mrowww... mrow...

As a stranger to the Amaranto, Blinky seemed to fall out of place. Both the expert mech and the expert pilot were already concentrating fully on keeping themselves alive! How could the intruding cat possibly lend a hand to them under these circumstances?

Ves had an idea.

"Venerable Stark." He said over a priority communication channel. "I may be able to help you break this stalemate, but I will have to do something new and unprecedented. Don't be surprised if your expert mech suddenly gains power. No matter what happens, try your best to roll with the changes and see if you can leverage the added power that I'm trying to bestow. Are you willing?"

"I don't have any other choice." The older woman said as her stress levels continued to rise.

"Then let's begin. I think you can probably feel a cat somewhere in your mech. Try your best to welcome him and avoid hindering him as he tries to help. There's one change you must do, however."

"And that is?"

"Switch the attack phase of your rifle to kinetic beams."

Though Venerable Stark had many questions, she decided to trust Ves. She switched the attack phase crystal that was currently active from a positron beam crystal to a kinetic beam crystal.

"Done. What else?"

Ves began to grin. "Get ready!"

*Chapter 3288: Powered By Ves*

Blinky was not a regular cat. He was the Star Cat, a spiritual entity split from Ves' own essence and given a life of his own. He was simultaneously an autonomous existence as well as an extension of his source.

All of this meant that Ves could choose to keep himself separated from his companion spirit or to embody Blinky so that the lines between them blurred.

Right now, Ves was only partially embodying his cat. Blinky was able to wield the powers of his own body the best.

If Ves took direct control, he wasn't sure if he was able to channel his companion spirit's various strengths effectively. There were still substantial differences between a spiritually-sensitive human and a spiritual existence that was literally designed to manipulate and digest energy!

He first instructed Blinky to leverage his abundant spiritual energy reserves to empower the Amaranto in some way.

Just as expected, this didn't work. If it did, Ves could have rode in the cockpit of any expert mech and just supplied it with a huge amount of spiritual energy to amplify its performance.

"Spiritual energy is not a good medium to empower an attack anyway."

The reason why high-ranking mech pilots were able to pair so well with powerful mechs was because of will and resonance. They leveraged a different power system that was much more suited for combat applications.

In contrast, the spiritual abilities that Ves and by extension Blinky were able to utilize were much more helpful in the design lab or mech workshop.

"It's a good thing that creation isn't Blinky's only strength." Ves smirked.

Since the companion spirit's birth, Ves only paid attention to Blinky's productive capabilities. Being able to supply a huge amount of spiritual energy that was compatible with him on demand along with being able to form a design network that connected different mech designers together provided a huge amount of utility to his mech design activities.

This was obviously not going to be relevant on this occasion. Ves wasn't directly capable of boosting the performance of an existing mech with his spiritual abilities.

So he turned to Blinky's other strength. Upon his silent urging, his companion spirit began to draw power to another facet of his abilities.

The shrunken Worclaw crystal embedded onto Blinky's forehead began to glow as he activated it. As best as Ves had learned and figured out, this mysterious alien crystal served as a resource and a focus for a different type of energy that was very rare in human civilization.

The Alshyr race took advantage of the energy their tyrannical bodies were able to channel and subsequently dominated a significant portion of the galaxy!

Now, Ves wanted to do something similar, though he and Blinky were obviously much clumsier when it came to harnessing Worclaw energy.

First, Blinky needed to draw the energy from an existing source. Though the Worclaw crystal possessed a reserve of it, Ves did not believe it was enough.

The most abundant source of Worclaw energy happened to be his own body! The volatile energy cycle generated and sustained by his Jutland organ had long been useless to Ves. In fact, it even posed a hazard to his health as excess Worclaw energy could lead to a dangerous buildup that might one day explode his own body!

Yet now that he was about to make an attempt to channel it into an expert mech, he was worried he didn't have enough to achieve a sufficient result!

"Well, it's not as if I can do anything about it. I am only able to make do with what I have." Ves shrugged.

Getting Blinky to siphon the Worclaw energy stored in his body when the cat was in a different location was difficult.

However, owing to the companion spirit's inseparable bond with Ves, the additional Worclaw energy eventually ended up in Blinky's crystal organ through an unexplainable method.

The huge injection of Worclaw energy caused Blinky to take on a different vibe. His purple starry body began to glow brighter and also gained a more mighty aura!



"Blinky! Don't keep all of that energy for yourself! You need to channel it into the Amaranto somehow!"

Mrow mrow!

How the hell was Blinky supposed to do that? He was an energy converter, not a magical cat that came straight out of a cartoon!

Ves knew this and tried to work together with his companion spirit to channel all of that Worclaw energy in the Amaranto without blowing it up. He had a hunch that the expert mech's rifle was the key.

Several different entities connected together and tried to work out a solution to channel Blinky's powerful energy into the crystalline rifle of the expert mech.

An unheard event took place where a mech designer, his companion spirit, a living expert mech and its expert pilot simultaneously bonded together to achieve a single goal!

Unfortunately, none of them knew how to channel Worclaw energy into an effective application! They lacked the expertise to know what to do with it. Even Blinky, who developed several crude applications on how to use it, was not able to direct it towards the Amaranto's weapon.

Ves realized he needed additional help.

"Illustrious One! Give us a hand!"

He drew over the luminar design spirit. The Amaranto bloomed in several different lights as the Illustrious One's presence grew more active and extended his influence to Blinky!

Under the Illustrious One's direction, Blinky was able to find the correct method to channel the Worclaw energy he accumulated to the luminar crystal rifle.

The weapon, which had always been glowing in different lights, suddenly grew brighter as a powerful sense of might emanated from its crystal construction!

The distraction was so great that the two dwarven expert mechs assaulting the Amaranto sensed the threat.

The naked threat exuded by Worclaw energy could not be hidden! Launching a surprise attack was out of the question for Venerable Stark.

Several seconds passed as she attempted to find a window of opportunity to shoot at the Amaranto's attackers, but the Slug Ranger expert pilots had become a lot more vigilant in response to the obvious power-up that the Amaranto was experiencing.

The dwarves expended a lot more effort into making sure that the Amaranto would not have any opportunity to fire its gun at them. As long as Venerable Stark attempted to snap a shot at one of her two attackers, the enemy would also have a clear shot at the fragile masterwork mech!

"I can't get a clear shot!"

The Amaranto's rifle was brimming with a different kind of power, but Stark did not experience any benefits from it. In fact, if the rifle kept bottling up all of the Worclaw energy, it might reach its limit soon!

Ves began to think quickly.

The best solution was to leverage other assets such as the Shield of Samar to act as a barrier, but the dwarven expert pilots already countered those attempts.

The fact that General Verle did not dispatch any further assets to free the Amaranto signified that the Larkinson Army really couldn't spare any further help.

The Amaranto had to save its own skin.

In desperation, Ves came up with a stupid idea.

He considered it stupid because it was not an efficient application of Worclaw energy.

He didn't want to resort to it, but he saw no other choice. As long as it was effective, he was willing to pay a price.

"Just like Ketis." He whispered.

Ves quickly communicated his plan to all of the other entities. Blinky, Venerable Stark, the Amaranto and the Illustrious One all became aligned with him and readied themselves for something completely unprecedented.

"Here goes nothing!"

Ves closed his eyes and drew out more Worclaw energy from his body. Blinky's Worclaw crystal thrummed with power, so much so that the cat desperately tried to offload as much of it to the Amaranto as possible.

With the Illustrious One there to help and regulate this volatile and potent energy, the Worclaw energy did not go out of control. Instead, it began to surround the Amaranto into a strong shield for a small instant!

The entire expert mech exuded so much light that it was as if a new star was born on the battlefield!

However, only Ves knew that this state could not be maintained for a long time. Shielding a small cat-sized entity like Blinky was incomparable with trying to shield a full-sized mech! The enormous difference in scale demanded such a huge expenditure of energy that the supply would probably run out in a couple of seconds!

"Stark!" Ves shouted as he felt as if his vitality was literally being drained away! His internal energy cycle was growing so weak that it even showed signs of collapsing!

Venerable Stark did not waste any time. She put her complete trust in the remarkable energy shield that had formed around her expert mech and abandoned all attempts at trying to evade attacks.

Two resonance-empowered gauss rounds almost instantly slammed into the Amaranto's new shield!

Though the shield immediately lost a lot of power to the point where it was about to collapse, it had done its job!

By abandoning all pretense of evasion, Venerable Stark was able to spend enough time to bring the Amaranto's glowing crystal rifle to bear on the slightly slower of the two dwarven expert mechs.

She resonated with both her expert mech and its rifle, causing her to develop a strong feel for the properties of Worclaw energy!

After she locked her target with her sights, the dwarven expert pilot felt an immediate threat!

Yet no matter how much effort the Slug Ranger expert mech tried to dodge or block the incoming threat, there was no way that Venerable Stark was going to let her opponent off after bullying her for so long!

"DIE DWARF!"

A huge explosion of light engulfed a quarter of the battlefield as an enormous burst of energy and light exploded from the giant beam that fired from the Amaranto's rifle!

When the beam disappeared as soon as it became visible, a large portion of the battlefield fell silent.

"This..."

The Slug Ranger expert mech that got struck by the Amaranto was completely dead.

Venerable Stark's aim struck true. Though the dwarven expert mech managed to move slightly to the right from where she aimed, this was not enough to avoid the blow!

The Worclaw-enhanced kinetic beam not only punched through the dwarven expert mech's resonance shield, but also slammed through the frontal armor of the right torso. The attack did not stop there and continued to drill straight through the internals of the expert mech before exiting from the back!

This wasn't all. The enormous kinetic force that burrowed straight through the dwarven expert mech's frame also spread out to other parts of the inner torso. It was as if a violent tornado had ravaged the entire insides of the enemy expert rifleman mech!

The cockpit, the power reactor and almost every other component was completely crushed or shredded apart. The poor dwarven expert pilot didn't even have any time to eject from his doomed machine!

Many friendlies and enemies fell silent as they witnessed this awesome display of might. Though the Amaranto had already showed an impressive level of performance before, it took too much time and other resources for the Amaranto to fire a full-powered beam.

Now, it only took a short instance for it to fire a kinetic energy beam that exceeded that power level!

Of course, what all of these gaping observers didn't know was that all of that power didn't emerge from nowhere.

"Urgh! What a huge drain!"

Ves felt as if his mother had sucked his body dry of energy! The only reason he didn't collapse to the deck was because his armored body was already sitting on a chair. However, the Amaranto expended such a great proportion of available Worclaw energy that he felt utterly drained!

He immediately pulled Blinky back into his mind and commanded his companion spirit to do his best to generate as much Worclaw energy as possible in order to fill up his shortfall.

When Ves managed to regain a bit of strength, he observed what was happening now that Venerable Stark had one less enemy to worry about.

It was as if she had gotten rid of her shackles. Though the Amaranto had lost its extraordinary power boost, the remaining dwarven expert pilot was no longer able to suppress the Amaranto!

"I know your weakness!" Venerable Stark hissed as she was fully invested in paying back for all of the grief she suffered! "You couldn't beat me when you had a buddy. You're even less of a challenge now that you're by yourself!"

Now that she didn't have to worry about getting flanked, she was fully able to use a nearby sub-capital ship as her fortress. No matter how many shots the enemy expert mech fired, all of its powerful attacks sunk into the structure of the Larkinson vessel without posing any threat to the Amaranto!

She didn't even bother to switch firing modes. She resonated with her crystal rifle and fired a weaker but still impressive kinetic beam that slammed straight into the enemy expert mech!

Metal debris exploded from the dwarven machine as its entire chest armor had been caved in! Though the expert mech was still operational, the powerful impact locked up some of its systems long enough for the Amaranto to fire a follow-up shot that landed straight into its damaged chest!

This time, a larger shower of debris exploded into space as the entire upper torso of the remaining Slug Ranger expert mech disintegrated into pieces!

Despite expending so much energy, Venerable Stark only became more encouraged by the quick kills. The Amaranto gained more momentum and gained a much more aggressive aura!

"The Amaranto... is truly unleashed!"

Ves, General Verle and many other people knew that the Ferril expeditionary fleet had no more assets left to keep the Amaranto in check.

The elimination of two of their expert mechs happened so quickly that General Kebrinore hadn't even been able to issue emergency orders to adjust to this adverse turn of events!

Before this battle, Davia Stark never held any animosity towards the dwarves. She even sympathized with them due to their tragic history.

Now, all of her sympathy towards them was gone. At the very least, she developed an undying hatred to the Vulcanites who thought they had a right to kill humans without a cause!

"You dwarves are no different from the sandmen!" She issued her verdict.

The moment she made this comparison, she already sentenced the dwarves before her to death!

Now that it was truly unburdened from enemy attacks, the Amaranto instantly began to intervene in the battles between other expert mechs.

Her next targets? The dwarven expert mechs that had almost pushed the heavily-damaged Riot to the brink!

*Chapter 3289: Disconnected*

The battle in Fordilla Zentra had reached a new stage after the Amaranto quickly got rid of the two Slug Ranger expert rifleman mechs in quick succession!

Almost no one was able to adjust to this rapid turn of events in time!

Both the expeditionary forces and the dwarven soldiers respected the masterwork expert mech a lot. In fact, the latter dreaded the Amaranto so much that they fully dedicated two of their expert mechs to suppressing it when they could have been more useful elsewhere.

Though the calculations of General Kebrinore and his staff were on point, they never expected the Amaranto to possess an unreasonably strong energy shield and kinetic beam discharge!

The sensors registered a huge amount of anomalous data. The kinetic beam was something completely foreign to the dwarves and the dual empowerment of resonance and Worclaw energy produced an astonishing amount of firepower that the Amaranto's first solo kill could never resist!

The expert mech fell unjustly as far as the Ferrills were concerned. It had done so well in pressuring and cornering the Amaranto for a long time. The dwarven expert pilot not only made sure to never let Venerable Stark take a proper breath, but also anticipated many of her moves and ploys ahead of time.

The characteristic dwarven toughness of the Slug Ranger expert mechs were not for show. Compared to other expert mechs, the dwarves generally built their dwarf-statured machines shorter but much more robust. Paired with a slightly oversized flight system, the dwarven expert mechs turned into surprisingly effective duelists who excelled at taking down enemy expert ranged mechs!

The only major shortcoming of the Slug Ranger's take on the expert rifleman mech was that it did not allocate enough capacity on bolstering its offensive power. The caliber of the gauss rifles were lighter than they could be in order to make sure the machines carried enough ammunition and energy cells to last a fairly long time.

Of course, this lack of firepower was relative. Other than performing a bit inadequately against heavy-armored expert mechs, their damage potential was more than sufficient enough to defeat other powerful machines, including the lightly-armored Amaranto!

"By Vulcan's bushy beard!"

"Our expert mechs..." A dwarven voice despairingly said.

"How can the Slug Rangers fail so badly all of a sudden? First they lost the Gauss Baron by a single expert light skirmisher, now they lost two-to-one. They're dragging us down!"

The overall state of the battle hadn't changed yet, but everyone knew that this sudden turn of events would have a highly profound influence on the rest of the large and complicated battlefield. The careful balance that existed before could potentially be broken at any time.

This was the oppressive nature of a powerful offense-oriented rifleman mech! Even if the Amaranto continued to remain at the near, its unparalleled firepower and precision meant it could participate in any other duel between mechs in this open battlefield.

The pressure that Venerable Stark's expert mech exerted on the dwarves was so great that many of their great machines were already fighting more cautiously than before.

"Look at them reign in their arrogance." Commander Melkor smirked for the first time in a very long time. "Get ready, men! This is the time to turn the tables against the dwarves! They've been picking on us for a long time by relying on their superior numbers. Now let's see how they will fare when they're on the backfoot!"

The expeditionary forces moved quickly to switch to a more offensive posture. While there were still plenty of strong and sturdy dwarven mechs left on the battlefield, the morale of their mech pilots had taken a lot of hits.

During all of this fighting, the human mech forces had yet to lose a single expert mech. Sure, the Dark Zephyr, the Riot and the First Sword had all lost most of their battle effectiveness and were all in bad shape, but their resilient and largely-intact Unending alloy exterior caused the dwarves to have the impression that the human expert mechs were still in good condition!

In contrast, the Ferrils had started off the battle by bringing twice the amount of expert mechs but already lost four of them! This was a disastrous result that caused many Vulcanites to doubt the strength of their own expert mechs.

Were the enemy expert pilots that much better than their dwarven heroes? Had the Vulcan Empire been lying to them about the superiority of dwarven craftsmanship? How else could the dwarven expert mechs fall so easily?

The contrast in performance between the resilient human expert mechs and the sudden failures of the dwarven expert mechs was too shocking!

General Verle had always played close attention to the behavior of the dwarven soldiers. He clearly sensed the wave of doubt and confusion spreading throughout the Ferril mech forces.

He immediately sensed a great opportunity! He opened a communication channel to Calabast right away.

"General?" The spymaster asked.

"Do it. I want to see as much confusion as possible."

"Roger that, sir."

Calabast closed the communication channel and smirked. "I've been waiting for this. It's finally time for us to party."

"Squeak..." Arnold responded as he laid lethargically on a floating cushion next to his owner's throne in the command center of the Blinding Banshee.

"Commence Plan A! Take down their warnet!" She ordered!

The Black Cats had remained so low-key during this battle that everyone forgot about them. Though they provided various forms of intelligence support, they never showed any teeth.

Instead, they bided their time and kept building up their preparations.

It was not as if the Black Cats wanted to do more, but their ability to interfere and disrupt the enemy's military-grade command and communication systems were limited.

The Molten Hammers, the Slug Rangers and the Hivar Roarers were well-funded and well-rounded mech divisions that had all of their bases covered. Their counterintelligence and virtual security experts were all professionals who not only did their best to protect their own systems, but also attacked the various virtual networks of the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers on a constant basis!

It was not easy for the Black Cats to sabotage the dwarven mech fleet.

Fortunately, the Ferril Provincial Army possessed one fatal weakness.

They brought less cats than their opponents.

As soon as the Black Cats went into action, a large amount of disruption erupted from the dwarven fleet.



The Great Ram, the Lemogo Distat and the Roost simultaneously experienced information warfare attacks that somehow bypassed all of their security measures!

Data centers blew up, command centers became disconnected and various backup systems failed to active properly.

Though not all of the crucial command and control systems had been affected, many essential processing and data analysis systems glitched out to varying degrees!

Coordinates were erroneously shifted by as much as hundreds of meters. Many ranged volleys went wide before the dwarven ranged mechs woke up and stopped acting in coordination with central command.

Dwarven mech units received false orders from their supposed superiors. This caused them to open up holes in their defensive lines or prevent them from overrunning a weakened human position.

Human mech units weren't being registered on the warnet, thereby giving the dwarven tacticians a false impression of the state of the battlefield. Units being sent to stop a single human mech company were instead being overrun as there were actually three times as many enemies in those positions!

Chaos erupted across the dwarven lines as all of these sabotage measures took effect!

The dwarven warnet which had previously been responsible for making tens of thousands of dwarven mechs work in lockstep with each other had suddenly turned into a giant liability!

"Why are we getting all of this junk data?"

"Our flagships have gone crazy!"

"Forget about the instructions from the rear! We're on our own now! Cut off your connection from the warnet and don't accept any transmissions from the fleet until the techies have fixed their miss."

The unreliability of the dwarven warnet and the lack of proper communications from their superiors caused many mech units on the battlefield to fall back to local control. Though this did not affect their direct battle strength, They lost their ability to act according to a greater strategy and position themselves where they were most needed!

In addition, their compromised morale took yet another plunge as the dwarven mech pilots felt as if they were increasingly losing control over the situation.

If that was not enough, the Blinding Banshee finally showed off her own capabilities! Though many clans criticized the acquisition of a dedicated capital-grade espionage ship, Calabast was determined to lay those voices to rest today!

The thin, needle-like hull of the Blinding Banshee began to expand as hundreds of ECM arrays unfolded along her hull. The ship poured a lot of power in them, causing them to project a powerful interference field that engulfed the Hivar Roarer mech units that had previously been doing well on the expeditionary fleet's left flank!

"Our channels are blocked!"

"Our backup networks are getting flooded with false data!"

"How did they manage to solve our encryption?!"

The momentum of the dwarven mech divisions had been completely stalled at this time now that even their most successful units were unable to press their advantages!

The sabotage wasn't total, though. Calabast never anticipated that this act of sabotage would confound the dwarven security experts for long. After two minutes of fumbling, the dwarves quickly restored most of the functionality of their warnet. They largely did this by leaving their flagships out of the equation.

The damage was already done, though. The dwarves no longer trusted the warnet as much. The three flagships that had turned into a liability were unable to provide any support, which was very inconvenient since they not only hosted the most competent and authoritative personnel such as General Kebrinore, but also contained the most processing power and the most extensive databases!

The replacement warnet that the dwarves managed to put up simply wasn't the same, and it showed.

The unsung hero responsible for sabotaging the three flagships wasn't in a condition to admire his handiwork.

Among the huge amount of debris that was drifting away from the battlefield was a certain mechanical pet.

"Meow! Meow!" The cat silently cried out!

Lucky's Misfortune Harness was in bad condition right now. A portion of its left side had shattered and many places also showed signs of melting.

One particularly powerful blow even went on to damage Lucky's resilient tiger-striped body. Though his Rorach's Bone-infused structure was already trying to restore the damage, the cat was woefully short of energy to accelerate the process.

The stealth shuttle that had quietly transported him behind enemy lines and allowed him to hop onto the crucial dwarven flagships were nowhere to be seen.

The dwarven fleet had eventually sussed out the stealth shuttle's presence and shot it to pieces, leading to the deaths of all of its crew and the involuntary space walk of the only cat aboard!

Though Lucky possessed limited means of moving in space, it was wholly inadequate in a huge and expensive battlefield in space. What was even more troublesome was that the active combatants were slowly moving further and further away from the battle debris.

"Meow!"

Though Lucky already transmitted a distress signal to the Larkinson fleet, who knew when they were able to pick him up.

In the worst case scenario, the expeditionary fleet might get beaten or find itself in a hurry to leave the star system!

Even if he was not an organic creature who would die when exposed to space, he didn't want to drift outside the star system and spend millions of years crossing hundreds if not thousands of light-years of distance while encountering absolutely nothing while in deep space.

Lucky would rather defect to the dwarves than drive himself crazy from isolation!

"Meeeeeeoow!"

If the cat gained much better maneuverability in space, he wouldn't need to rely on other vehicles to move himself around. He definitely needed to remedy this shortcoming in the future!

*Chapter 3290: Terror at a Distance*

The Golden Skull Alliance had inflicted yet another blow to their dwarven foes!

The timing of the massive information warfare attack of the Black Cats was just right. Under the steady leadership of leaders such as General Kebrinore, the dwarven mech forces could have mitigated the adverse consequences of losing two dwarven expert mechs in quick succession.

For example, the dwarven general could have ordered hundreds of Slug Ranger artillery mechs to abandon all of their priorities and focus solely on suppressing the Amaranto.

The dwarves could have dispatched a large suicide force of Hivar Roarers mechs to bypass enemy lines and attempt to eliminate the Amaranto up close at great cost!

They could have even allocated other expert mechs to suspend their current mission and chase after the Amaranto despite letting off other human expert mechs.

General Kebrinore belatedly realized that he had made a crucial error.

"I should have ordered more of our expert mechs to eliminate the enemy masterwork mech. If one of our Molten Hammer expert mechs had joined forces with the Slug Ranger expert mechs, the three should have easily completed this task."

In fact, this was his plan from the beginning. He first requested three expert mechs each to gang up on the Riot and the First Sword since they were closer and needed to be eliminated as well.

In any normal circumstance, an offensive expert mech would never be able to survive longer than a couple of minutes when they were assaulted by three machines of similar strength.

An expert mech's defenses simply couldn't withstand so many attacks, or so the dwarves thought.

General Kebrinore and his entire staff never imagined that the two seemingly ordinary human expert mechs boasted armor plating that was much more formidable than the exterior of a heavy mech!

A two-minute chore turned into a slow and grueling quagmire that lasted more than twenty minutes. The performance parameters of the two human melee expert mechs were so unreasonable that the Molten Hammers and Hivar Roarers couldn't even risk pulling away some of their units.

With the ability to resist most blows with very little consequences, the Riot and the First Sword could easily switch to aggressive fighting styles that traded blow for blow. That would have led to a chain reaction of setbacks that was not worth the tradeoff.

Even with this unexpected surprise, General Kebrinore still thought the situation was under control. As resilient and threatening the human expert mechs turned out to be, they were constantly being worn down by the steady and persistent dwarven expert mechs.

At least, that was what he thought.

It was not unusual to make miscalculations in battle. What was more important was to build up a tolerance for failure and have plenty of contingency plans ready should a situation go south.

However, before General Kebrinore could issue a proper response to the unleashing of the Amaranto, the Great Ram, the Lemogo Distat and the Roost all turned into liabilities, causing them to get disconnected from the dwarven warnet.

The remaining Vulcanite officers throughout their fleet were scrambling to pick up the slack but their plans, vision and competence were nowhere near as comparable as the highly-qualified command staff aboard the sabotaged flagships!

This outcome was actually the true reason why General Verle wanted to make the Black Cats take action at this time.

If they pulled off this move any further, then the momentary disruption in command and control wouldn't have led to any further consequences.

Yet now that the Amaranto no longer had nearby threats to worry about, the momentary loss in coordination also affected the coordination of the dwarven expert mechs! She also didn't have to worry about any dwarven commanders ordering the enemy expert mechs to charge her position anytime soon!

Though the affected dwarven expert mechs were still able to keep in touch with nearby friendlies, they could forget about cooperating with more distant units!

The stage had been set for the Amaranto's proper introduction. Without the interference of the Gauss Baron and the other expert mechs of the Slug Rangers, Venerable Stark finally found an opportunity to vent all of the grievances that she had built up towards the dwarves!

The impressive masterwork expert mech bloomed in rainbow colors as Venerable Stark drew on her fury in order to make up for her earlier expenditures.

Though she had already exhausted much of her will and mental focus to endure up until now, her mind was unbreakable and her desire to achieve her goals drove her to never step back!

Her eyes bloomed as her connection with her mech caused her to clearly spot the thousands of targets that were ripe for the taking from her perspective.

Of course, she didn't need to waste her time on eliminating the enemy's rank-and-file. Her attention drew towards the Molten Hammer expert mechs that were assailing the Riot.

At this time, Venerable Orfan had almost bottomed out her strength. Her expert mech endured several punishing attacks that were aimed precisely at its vulnerable joints.

As a consequence, the Riot had lost both of its legs, its entire right arm and several components of its flight system, all in a span of a few minutes! Its mobility, force

exertion and many other combat parameters had dropped to the point where its end was not long in coming.

It was admirable how the Riot still managed to put up a fight despite its rapid deterioration. Venerable Orfan adjusted to the adverse circumstances as much as possible and was still able to pose a limited threat even if her expert mech only had a single arm left to wield its spear!

Seeing that the Slug Ranger expert mechs had failed to take down the Amaranto, the attackers of the Riot became a lot more desperate to finish off their target!

As long as the Molten Hammers were able to take down this incredibly annoying and resilient mech, they could advance towards the Amaranto and contain it again.

Yet before the dwarven expert pilots could do so, the Amaranto finally made its move!

Moments before, its crystal rifle muzzle briefly switched from expert mech to expert mech. It was as if Venerable Stark was shopping for groceries.

Eventually, she set her sights on the mech that posed the greatest and most acute threat towards the Riot.

It was not the Firemason, which had caused the Riot to heat up a lot and even burn some of its exposed components.

It was not the Bashravar, whose massive hammer had forced the Riot to sacrifice its legs in order to prevent getting struck in a more crucial area.

Instead, Venerable Stark locked her sights towards the Trementine, the dwarven axeman mech that had the potential to cave in the Riot's heavily-damaged exterior with one more blow!

It only took a short amount of time for Venerable Stark to set her target, resonate with her luminar crystal rifle and fire a powerful kinetic beam towards the Trementine!

"You're not hitting me!" The expert pilot of the axe-wielding machine shouted as his mech instantly jerked aside.

He had already been paying attention to the Amaranto's movements. As soon as his instincts screamed a warning, he had immediately aborted his expert mech's attack run in order to perform a quick evasion maneuver.

The Trementine even turned around in order to expose its strongest frontal side towards the Amaranto in the distance. Along with holding its axe flat so that its wide blade functioned as a makeshift shield over the chest, there was virtually no chance that a

moderately powerful attack from a ranged expert mech would be able to overcome its defenses.

"I'm a Molten Hammer! I'm not afraid of getting hit!"

Yet much to the dwarven expert pilot's surprise, the Trementine hadn't been struck from the front.

Instead, his cockpit began to blare an alarm as his expert mech told him that it had incurred serious damage. When the dwarf tried to find out where his mech got hit, he discovered that a third of the Trementine's flight system had shattered!

The consequences were immediately obvious. The Trementine lost a lot of flight power, causing its acceleration and other movement characteristics to fall to the point where it was barely able to move faster than the much more sluggish Bashravar!

"What happened?!"

It turned out that just before Venerable Stark pulled the trigger, the Amaranto's rifle seemingly shifted to another target that was in another direction. The faint beam that fired from the crystal rifle initially looked as if it was indeed striking at a distant target, but for some inexplicable reason its beam had curved and nearly-instantly struck the Trementine's exposed flight system from the sides!

This was a major setback to the Trementine! If the enemy expert mech attempted to attack the dwarven expert axeman mech from the front, then only a portion of its frontal armor would have sustained damage.

Yet because the kinetic beam bypassed the front and managed to strike its much more vulnerable flight system at a tricky angle, the Trementine experienced an immediate loss in initiative and battle effectiveness!

"Thanks, Stark!" Venerable Orfan sincerely said as she tried her best to keep her shambling Riot alive. "Could you do me a favor and cripple the Firemason as well? This damned expert striker mech is cooking my internals to a crisp!"

A flamethrower-wielding mech usually didn't pose much of a threat to well-armored machines. However, their ability to damage other mechs jumped by a huge margin as soon as the armor of their targets had been breached.

Venerable Stark obliged by taking careful aim in order to fire a second shot.

The Firestorm's expert pilot somehow figured out the Amaranto's intentions. A dark cloud hovered over the dwarven expert mech as it pulled back and tried to go on the defensive.

This was much harder than it sounded due to its inability to shield against attacks from an angle! No matter how the Firestorm changed its orientation, against a beam that could literally bend by up to 45 degrees, it was impossible to keep its flight system out of the enemy's firing line!

Several minutes passed. The Amaranto continued to glow brightly yet Venerable Stark exhibited an admirable degree of patience despite her desire to slay these murderous dwarves!

After fourteen tense seconds had passed, Stark finally spotted an opportunity. The Amaranto's rifle quickly adjusted its aim before firing a light beam that struck the Firestorm's still-intact resonance shield dead ahead!

The Riot hadn't managed to land any attacks on the Firestorm, so Venerable Stark was forced to strip away this layer first.

Once the Firestorm became exposed, Venerable Stark fired her luminar crystal rifle yet again, this time damaging just 15 percent of her target's flight system!

Even though the impact to its mobility was much less impactful this time, the Firestorm's mobility and evasion characteristics had dropped to the point where Stark found it to be an even easier target than before!

"I'm not letting you go!"

The Amaranto did not rush to fire its rifle at its maximum firing rate. Instead, Venerable Stark patiently resonated with the luminar crystal weapon in order to make sure she hit true and hard enough to achieve concrete results.

After several more follow-up shots, the Firestorm's flight system was hit from so many different angles that it only retained forty percent of its original mobility!

It became increasingly harder for the Amaranto to cripple the alert expert mech's flight capabilities entirely, but Venerable Stark never thought about finishing off an alert opponent.

"The Molten Hammer expert mechs are different from those of the Slug Rangers." She reminded herself.

The expert melee mechs were built slower and tougher. Venerable Stark and her expert mech would have to expend a lot of energy in order to penetrate their frontal armor.

She didn't know how many more shots she could fire in her current condition, but she didn't think she could go on endlessly.



In order to achieve the greatest impact on the battlefield while expending as little resources as possible, she decided to focus solely on crippling the enemy expert mech's mobility!

As long as all of them became as slow as a snail, they effectively posed no threat anymore! The expert mechs would be floating uselessly in space, unable to catch up to any enemy units or move to a more favorable position!

The Amaranto's ominous rifle swayed towards the Bashravar.

"It's your turn now."