

Mech 3821

Chapter 3821 Pressing Horde

"The glows of the Ferocious Piranhas are having an effect!"

"The pressure against our forward mechs has dropped. The fish-whales in the front are being debilitated by suppressive glows of the Flagrant Vandals!"

"Damn! The fish-whales are too mad and bloodthirsty! Their desire to attack us is too strong!"

Ferocious Piranhas or not, the hyper-aggressive hybrid creatures did not let a painful and disorienting glow stop them from biting through the mechs that stood in their way!

Still, the harmful glows acting upon their berserk minds helped a lot in disrupting instinctual behavior.

Their movements, their reaction time and their attacks deteriorated by at least 20 percent, causing them to become less scary opponents!

Some of them even slowed down to the point of frustrating the fish-whales pressing from behind.

The latter even resorted to biting the vulnerable tails of the monsters that had stalled!

"These monsters are cruel and heartless!"

"Keep killing them, then! Letting them live will only threaten our lives even further!"

Hundreds of white fish monsters had appeared on this side of the mining tunnel by now. There were so many meaty creatures in the way that many of them were actually pushed into the direction of the kilometers-long tunnel that the Larkinsons had initially dug!

The congestion grew so bad that more and more feral creatures that had been pressed to the periphery started to bite the tunnel walls!

"Ranged mechs, focus your fire on the fish-whales pressed against the tunnel walls. Do not let them reach the surface or the other mining tunnels!"

The vast quantity of fish-whales were beginning to become increasingly more unbearable to handle, and this was when the Golden Skull Alliance faced them in highly favorable conditions!

As soon as the hordes of fish-whales spread out and gained a lot more maneuvering room, the difficulty in stopping them and defeating them would skyrocket!

Even if their bodies weren't particularly strong, their vast numbers along with their aggressive behavior meant that mechs could easily succumb even if they defeated a lot of fish-whales!

"We can't allow them to play their game! Only by stopping them here can we deal against them in a controlled manner!"

The weaknesses of the stupid beasts had become increasingly more evident during this crazy tide. The fish monsters were too stupid to organize themselves and employ any hint of coordination in their offensive.

If they actually had any intelligence, they would have coordinated their movements to force a breakthrough at a specific location.

Their lack of ranged attack methods was a huge shortcoming. Although the growing numbers of fish-whales looked increasingly more formidable, the truth was that only the monsters at the front could inflict damage onto the defending machines.

The ones that were milling behind could not inflict any damage from a distance!

It was under these conditions that the Golden Skull Alliance slowly gained the upper hand.

While there was only a limited amount of space for their melee mechs to play a role, their ranged mechs had a lot more leeway.

Although the fish-whales could easily cope against heat and energy damage, the mechs armed with luminar crystal rifles weren't helpless in this situation.

"Switch to kinetic beams! We need to punch these monsters in order to disable them! Try to hit them on their heads. Knocking their skulls will concuss them long enough to turn them into prey for the fish-whales pressing from behind!"

The ranged mechs carefully fired their shots through the gaps in the shield walls. Their kinetic beams struck like getting hit by giant sticks.

The flesh of the monsters deformed upon impact. Any black eyes popped apart when a kinetic beam up close.

In certain cases, the ranged mechs succeeded in knocking the skulls of the fish monsters!

Although the beams rarely penetrated through the bone matter, the strikes often damaged skulls to the point where the fish monsters were no longer able to tell up from down!

In this situation, slowing or stalling the fish-whales bought valuable time for the mechs confronting the disabled creatures. Even if it only took a dozen seconds for the healthier monsters to tear the crippled monsters apart, this was more than enough time to rotate another mech to the front!

As the Golden Skull Alliance continued to adjust to the current crisis, Commander Melkor began to feel uneasy about this situation.

Though his Avatars were holding the flanks, he could not help but grow concerned about the future.

How many fish-whales did they need to kill in order to stop the tide?

If millions of fish-whales waited their turn on the other side of the portal, then the expeditionary forces would definitely get exhausted before they could win the battle!

"This is turning out to be a battle of attrition!"

If that was true, then the Larkinsons were not in a good position. Battles of attrition just happened to be one of their weak points as all of their elite forces were trained and equipped to fight quick and decisive battles!

The mechs of his Avatars weren't configured for long sieges and drawn-out offensives. The ranged mechs would run out of energy cells quickly while the melee mechs would begin to malfunction due to their accelerated wear and tear.

Although the mech forces could probably last for a few hours by rotating their mechs at the front on a regular basis, what if the tide never ended?

"We can't go on like this, general!" Commander Melkor voiced his frustration over the command channel. "We need to cut off the fish-whales at the source!"

"We are not ready to act, Commander. We are still trying to understand the threat and what went wrong with the second portal. Acting rashly has got us into this mess. We cannot repeat our mistakes and move before we figure out a way to resolve this problem by the root."

"Our mechs will get chewed apart by these fish-whales before you are done with 'analyzing' the situation!"

The Gold Beacon hovered closely behind a company of his Avatars. The custom ranged mech barked out one kinetic beam after another. Though only a portion of the shots hit

the more critical parts of the alien bodies, the added punch of its custom rifle's attack was quite formidable!

Even so, Melkor did not feel as if he made any difference with his new and pristine custom mech. The Gold Beacon was more of a command and control mech anyway, so he paid more attention to the ebb and flow of mechs and fish monsters than on his personal contribution to the battle.

It was because he was viewing the battle from multiple angles that he grew concerned about the sustainability of their current approach.

He briefly directed his attention to the nearby expert mechs that had not done much since the outbreak of hostilities.

The Minerva was hovering close behind the Sentinel mechs but had yet to extend its iconic Command Field.

The Blade Chaser hovered protectively besides the Minerva but otherwise did not sink its twin swords into any beast flesh.

The Shield of Samar and the Everchanger were only providing moral encouragement to the units stationed at opposite sides of the wide tunnel.

The Amphis and the Bolvos Rage were hovering in the far back without displaying any intention to attack the fish-whales.

There were a few other expert mechs on hand, but each of them were keeping their distance from the ongoing battle.

"Why aren't our expert mechs making a move?" Melkor wondered. "They can demolish dozens of these beasts at a time!"

"Our current mech forces can handle the pressure." General Verle replied. "We need your Avatars and the other mech legions to hold the line as long as possible without increasing our consumption. While our expert pilots can make a difference, it is a waste to expend their combat power on cannon fodder. Their power is great but their endurance is not endless."

The logic was sound but the people fighting against these violent beasts didn't care about that. It became increasingly harder for the defensive mechs to hold back the advancing beasts.

As numerous minutes went by, an alert sounded inside the Gold Beacon's cockpit.

"We have detected several variant fish-whales!"

Melkor immediately split his attention so that he could view the footage of a handful of abnormal hybrid whale monsters.

These ones clearly stood out from the swarm of white and pale fish-whales due to their size and different colorations.

Larger than an ordinary fish-whale, these crueller and older-looking monsters possessed dark blue hides that clearly attracted the notice of their lesser brethren.

In fact, the white fish-whales acted differently around the larger blue monsters!

As Melkor observed how the slightly smaller fish-whales pooled around the larger monsters without biting or bumping against each other, his body chilled for a moment.

"These blue ones... are commanding their younger brothers!" . com

The influence of the blue fish-whales wasn't great. They could only command the attention of around a dozen or two-dozen lesser fish-whales at most.

However, this was enough to turn a mindless mob into a more focused attack unit!

After the blue fish-whales managed to get their bearing, they released a soundless roar and charged forward with its fellow 'subordinates' acting as its spear!

"Careful! The blue fish-whales are approaching!"

The blue fish-whales not only advanced with greater momentum, but also possessed an invisible quality that caused any berserk white fish-whale in its way to move aside!

This gave the blue fish-whale and the rest of its formation a clear corridor to slam into the shield wall of the Living Sentinels!

"Ahh!"

For the first time since its completion, the Rigid Wall model failed to hold the line!

The blue fish-whales were not only larger, stronger and tougher than the ordinary fish-whales, they also used their limited control and intelligence to pull off several uninterrupted charges at once!

The power of these alien creatures along with the fact that numerous of them broke past the shield wall at the same time completely caught the defenders off-guard!

"Plug the gaps and annihilate the ones that broke through before they can disrupt our formations further!"

It was critically important for the defensive lines to hold against this type of swarming opponent!

Fortunately, there were plenty of reserves that took action.

The mech units dispatched by the Penitent Sisters and the Battle Criers had been waiting to respond to situations like these. Since firing any ranged weapons at the alien shock troopers could easily lead to friendly fire in this narrow and congested battlefield, only their melee mechs flew forward.

Spears and swords relentlessly attacked the white fish-whales from multiple directions. Even if they were following the orders of their betters, they were still fairly weak and vulnerable against determined mechs!

"Aghhh!"

The blue fish-whales on the other hand were much harder to deal with! Their hides were much harder to cut or puncture and they displayed significantly greater speed and combat acumen.

Their cruel eyes glinted as they feinted an attack on a Rigid Spine mech only to dart to the side so that they could use their extremely hard teeth to chomp through the rear armor of a Rigid Wall mech!

Although the Rigid Walls were able to take a lot of abuse at the front, their rear protection was a lot more limited.

The biting force of the blue-fish whales was so great that the monster easily tore through the rear armor with its first chomp.

After it chomped another time, its sharp and lethal teeth bit through the rear half of the cockpit and crushed the Sentinel pilot into pieces!

The Larkinson Army suffered its first loss since the start of this battle!

"Nooo!"

"Slaughter these blue monstrosities!"

An expert pilot could no longer hold back. Venerable Imon Ingvar grew furious as his Blade Chaser darted forward and sliced the body of the closest blue fish-whale!

Other mech units were beginning to handle the blue monsters as well, but not before the alien creatures successfully eliminated half-a-dozen defensive mechs!

The defensive lines became disarrayed, thereby giving the main body of the fish-whale horde a greater opportunity to push their opponents back!

"Alert! We have detected a second wave of blue fish-whales! This time, there are 17 of them! Each of them are preparing to charge our lines!"

"Stop them before they can pull off their attack run!"

Chapter 3822 Variant Creatures

Only a handful of blue fish-whales had already managed to breach the defensive line earlier.

Now, seventeen of them had emerged from the portal at once. From the way they spread out and took control over their lesser brothers, it looked like they were preparing to launch the same attack run!

"The blue ones are much stronger than the white ones! We can't let them go through with their charges!"

"What are our ranged mechs doing?! Shoot them down already!"

"We can't! There are too many white bodies in the way!"

Hundreds of ranged mechs were trying to land their attacks on the blue fish-whales, but aside from a few rare exceptions, each of their attacks fell far short!

While the white fish-whales were not that big and tough compared to an actual mech, they were still solid enough to absorb pretty much every ranged attack trying to pass through their bodies.

It took entire volleys to obliterate a white fish-whale, but that didn't help as much when another one immediately occupied the position vacated by its dead brother!

As the blue fish-whales were about to perform their organized charges, General Verle finally allowed the more powerful mech units in reserve to take action!

"The Minerva is moving forward!"

Up until now, Commander Casella Ingvar had done nothing aside from issuing orders and providing an invisible morale boost to the Living Sentinel mech pilots holding the line.

She was proud of her mech legion. She was also pleased that the combination of the Rigid Wall and Rigid Spine mechs held up so well against so much physical pressure.

Though the blue fish-whales had eventually managed to break through the shield wall, she did not blame her pilots for this failure. The more elite enemy units were simply a bit too strong for them to handle with their current means.

"It's time to take action, Minerva." She whispered.

As much as she agreed with General Verle's stance that this was just the start of an extended engagement, she did not feel comfortable with standing aside so that her troops could handle this challenge by themselves.

Part of the reason why mech commanders like her wanted to lead the troops from the front was because of their strong desire and obsession to do everything in their power to protect their comrades and succeed!

The Minerva glowed brighter as its Command Field expanded a bit. Even though Casella did not use it to lend her power to her fellow soldiers as of yet, the Sentinels and other friendly mech pilots gained a bit more confidence after they picked up her influence.

Not only that, but Casella also extended her influence among the hundreds of alien creatures that were madly trying to press forward.

It was easy enough for her to detect the blue fish-whales that were about to perform their formation-breaking charges. They were not only 50 percent bigger than their lesser kin, their bodies also exuded a lot more mass and power!

The threat they posed was much greater!

Aside from gaining greater awareness of where the blue fish-whales were located, Casella also tried to figure out how smart they were. How much autonomy and intelligence did these larger fish-whales possess?

"They're smarter than the white fish-whales, but what cleverness they've gained is entirely dedicated towards aggression and conflict!"

The blue fish-whales were also bred for war! Casella sensed nothing in them that spoke of an ability to think rationally or apply themselves to other pursuits than fighting.

The Minerva brought its custom luminar crystal rifle to bear. The Irvan was a transformable rifle that came with two firing modes.

This time, Casella had left the weapon in its marksman configuration. A long and heavy rifle that vaguely looked similar to the Amaranto's Instrument of Vengeance laid in the expert command mech's arms.

The weapon glowed as Casella and her expert mech generated a fair degree of true resonance.

At the same time, Casella switched the attack phase of her primary weapon to a slicer beam.

"If my attacks can't get around all of the cannon fodder, then let them go through the bodies instead."

When Casella pulled the trigger, the Irvan spat a deceptively thin but concentrated energy beam.

If not for the fact that Casella empowered it with resonance, few people and aliens would have noticed the powerful attack!

The beam instantly propelled forward and sunk through the body of a white fish-whale that was just about to slam its head against the tower shield of a Rigid Wall mech.

Then the beam penetrated through the other side of the injured fish-whale before passing through the body of the next alien victim!

More than a dozen white fish-whales fell victim to this unstoppable attack!

The craziest part of this was that the slicer beam hardly lost power after passing through all of those bodies!

When the thin beam finally struck the blue fish-whale, it accurately penetrated through the middle of the skull and cut through the brain that governed the monster's actions!

The blue creature thrashed and for numerous seconds before falling silent.

Commander Casella didn't pay much attention to the results of her attack. She had already estimated how much penetration power the slicer beam possessed after empowering it with her will.

Although the bodies of the white fish-whales were rather annoying, the power of an expert pilot and an expert mech was not trivial!

The Minerva adjusted its aim and fired a second shot!

An instant later, another blue fish-whale got injured!

This time, the slicer beam failed to hit the brain but cut through the spine of the monster instead. This caused it to lose control over itself. When the blue fish-whale became increasingly more vulnerable, the white fish-whales no longer respected it anymore.

"The white ones are eating any blue ones that show weakness!"

This dynamic provided a lot more convenience to the troubleshooters that were tasked with eliminating the blue fish-whales.

Due to the cannibalistic behavior pattern of the fish-whales, the defenders only needed to draw enough blood for the surrounding fish-whales to finish the job!

This was highly convenient for Casella as she never needed to land another shot to finish off her targets.

As the blue fish-whales began their charge, the Minerva was nowhere done with eliminating all 17 of the high-priority targets!

Expert mech or not, the Minerva could only attack one of them at a time.

Fortunately, there were additional units on the job.

A mech company of Avatar ranged mechs focused their fire in a single direction. Even though there were lots of cannon fodder in the way, the constant attacks forcefully eliminated them one after another.

When a blue fish-whale finally entered the sights of the Avatar mechs, a torrent of kinetic beams slammed against the hardened body and skull of the leader monster!

While the continuous kinetic beams failed to punch through the skull of the blue fish-whale, the attacks were more than enough to stall and mess up its advance despite its tougher exterior!

"Let me help you, Casella." Venerable Joshua said as he covered a different angle with his own Vitalus rifle.

The Everchanger imitated the actions of the Minerva and fired resonance-empowered slicer beams that passed through numerous alien bodies before crippling the blue priority targets.

Although the damage output of the Vitalus was lower, it did not make much of a difference in this situation.

By the time the Larkinson ranged mechs eliminated 13 of the blue fish-whales in quick succession, the remainder had gotten close and threatened to slam through the defensive mechs once again!

"Countercharge the blue fish-whales!"

The shield walls parted a bit in order to allow for the passage of ferocious melee mechs!

In one area, a squad of Valkyrie Redeemer mechs of the Penitent Sisters charged forward and impaled a blue fish-whale in multiple different areas!

Though the resilient creature did not die in an instant, its crippled state had already doomed it in the eyes of its greedy cannibal brothers!

In another area, the Blade Chaser charged forward and stabbed its swords through the body of another blue fish-whale!

The power and maneuverability of the custom mech was excellent despite the ceiling on its performance. As an expert pilot, Venerable Imon was far superior against most opponents, especially the stupid fish-whales that only acted upon their feral instincts.

"I'm not done yet!" He snarled!

The Blade Chaser was surrounded by white fish-whales, but it easily squeezed through the bodies of the monsters whenever possible and cut them down with its twin swords when there was no other choice.

Soon enough, the custom swordsman mech approached another blue fish-whale and intended to skewer it in the same way as before.

However, the target in question was a lot more aware than its deceased colleague. The blue fish-whale actually aborted its charge in order to face the new threat!

After transmitting an invisible command, all of the white fish-whales around it swarmed towards the Blade Chaser as if they wanted to grind the powerful custom mech from all sides!

"You think I'm easy to ambush? Think again!"

The Blade Chaser sliced through the white fish-whales that posed an immediate threat and used the bodies of other creatures as its shield!

In some cases, the fish-whales became so eager to devour their dead or crippled brothers that they no longer paid as much attention to the Blade Chaser anymore!

"These cannibal creatures should have gone extinct a long time ago! Let me help you on your way!"

The Blade Chaser truly showed the potential of its exposive moves as it forcefully fought through numerous white fish-whales and finally sliced its blazing blades through the belly of the fish-like creature!

Just like other creatures, the blue fish-whale did not feel good after getting disemboweled. The white monsters no longer cared about completing their charge

against the human mechs and instead fought against each other to devour as much of the blue fish-whale as possible!

Imon briefly became distracted as he wondered whether the cannibals would morph into a blue fish-whale instead.

"It doesn't look like that will happen, thankfully."

Although the white fish-whales that had consumed the flesh of its superior brothers became stronger after they finished their meals, they did not undergo any qualitative evolutions.

In the end, the defenders smacked them down just as easily as they defeated the regular white fish-whales!

The Blade Chaser and the other melee mechs retreated once they finished their jobs. It was quite dangerous to remain outside of the shield wall for an extended amount of time. The tide of white fish-whales never ended!

A subsequent wave of blue fish-whales emerged half a minute later.

There were 23 of them this time, but with the lessons of their earlier success, the defending side managed to take them down with the same tactics as before!

Numerous people began to feel uneasy about this situation, though.

"We'll face an even bigger wave of sergeant fish next time!"

"Our mechs can't take them down from a distance. There are too many soldier fish in the way, and who knows what else will emerge from that portal?"

By now, the soldiers already came up with their own names for the two varieties of fish-whales. The white fish-whale became known as the grunt fish due to its weak and disposable nature.

The blue one became known as the sergeant fish because it always took charge of a limited amount of grunt fish in the immediate vicinity.

As the new names were being put to use, the Minerva, the Everchanger, the Blade Chaser and many other elite mech units did not slack off in eliminating the sergeant fish before they succeeded in breaking through.

As the defenders slowly adjusted to this rhythm, the portal suddenly disgorged a new fish-whale variant.

"Watch out! A red fish-whale has emerged!"

This one was much different from the previous two varieties.

First, it was larger than the sergeant fish and could rival the size of a full-sized mech!

Second, its body began to fluctuate as it was about to activate an intrinsic ability.

"TAKE IT DOWN BEFORE IT DOES ANYTHING!"

Casella reacted the quickest as she noticed the red one's arrival the soonest. The Ivan swung in the direction of the new fish-whale, but the creature disappeared before she could pull the trigger.

"Our sensors has registered emissions corresponding to the use of phasewater!"

"Where did the red go?!"

"It's behind us!"

The large and powerful red fish-whale emerged in the middle of an Avatar ranged mech formation!

Shortly after it appeared, it immediately slammed against the thin ranged mechs around it before biting off a third of the mech in front of its maw!

"The red fish-whale can teleport!"

Chapter 3823 Altered Portal

White fishes, blue fishes, red fishes!

It didn't end!

A constant stream of fish-whales continuously poured out of the large space portal with no end in sight!

Although the quantity of variant fish-whales arriving in the mining site was a fraction of the numbers of the white fish-whales, each of them exhibited power that equaled or even surpassed that of an ordinary mech!

The sergeant fish not only rallied nearby grunt fishes, but also utilized its superior toughness to charge through shield walls!

The more deadly assassin fish did not even have to approach the human defensive lines in the first place.

By utilizing the power of phasewater, this special and more advanced fish-whale directly teleported behind the shield wall and wreaked havoc with its tough and larger body!

Although the surrounding mechs stationed behind the immediate front quickly made short work of the lone assassin fish, the damage was already done in most cases!

"The assassin fishes are not larger and tougher than the sergeant fish, but also smarter! We cannot say whether they are able to analyze our formations by themselves or rely on data fed by other fish-whales, but they always manage to teleport where they can do the most damage against our mechs!"

"Fifteen of our ranged mechs have already been taken out of action while over forty have sustained varying degrees of physical damage!"

"Disperse our rifleman mechs and make sure that melee mechs are closer on hand! Call in additional space knights from our reserves and make sure they are ready to block any assassin fish from destroying our ranged assets!"

The intensity of the sudden battle heated up as the proportion of sergeant fishes and assassin fishes steadily rose!

Although the number of red fish-whales passing through the portal was still relatively constrained, even three or four of them could inflict real damage onto the more vulnerable mechs of the expeditionary forces!

Their signature teleportation tactics were extremely difficult to deal with. They only needed a few seconds to lock onto their coordinates and teleport behind the main line in an instant!

Although the Minerva, the Everchanger and a few other mechs always prioritized the takedowns of the assassin fishes over other fish-whales, the elite fishes attacked too quickly before they could all be taken out in advance!

"These sergeant fishes are getting harder to handle now that so many of them are appearing at once!"

Now that the assassin fishes attracted much of the attention of the expert mechs, it was up to the regular mech forces to eliminate the hardy blue fish-whales.

Although the mech pilots and mech officers were constantly coming up with better solutions and tactics against the sergeant fishes, when more than thirty of them appeared in a wave at a time, a few of them succeeded in pulling off their charges, making it more difficult for the mech forces to hold the line.

"We need more fast responders!"

"These blue fishes aren't that tough! Their rear isn't as tough as their front!"

Hundreds of mechs had already approached their limits and had to be pulled out of the frontline in order to replenish their supplies and undergo emergency repairs.

Fortunately, the amount of 'elite' fishes emerging from the portal still remained relatively scarce.

The more the expeditionary forces fought against the fish tide, the more they became proficient at beating the artificial race's crude and rudimentary tactics.

One of the greatest shortcomings of the fish horde was its lack of strategy and coordination!

The absence of a top commander that could coordinate the movements and attack patterns of all of the alien fishes meant that the enemy beasts never came close to utilizing its full potential!

General Verle and many leaders could already make many inferences about the nature of their current opponent by observing how incompetently the fish-whales attempted to overrun the mechs in their way.

The fish-whales may have quantity on their side, but they evidently didn't value them a lot. There was either a lack of truly intelligent commanders on their side or the vanguard troops pouring out of the portal were simply not valued enough to bother coordinating their actions.

Whatever the case, as long as the fish-whales acted like beasts, handling them was much simpler!

If not for their sheer quantity and the continuous arrival of more body mass, the mechs would have been able to push forward by now! At this moment, it was already challenging for the expeditionary forces to hold their ground and prevent the tide of fishes from gaining more space and room for maneuver.

While the various mech units did their best to cope with the tide of fish-whales, the leaders of the Golden Skull Alliance constantly discussed what they should do in the face of this threat.

"The fish-whales have already shown three different variants, but it is likely that they have more abnormal fish types in store." Director Ranya stated. "There are clear traces of artificial design in these creatures. They are biological products made for warfare, but what they have shown so far is not enough to compete against the strongest alien races in the Red Ocean. It is conceivable that there are even stronger, smarter and more bizarre fish-whale variants in their current habitat!"

Marshal Ariadne Wodin grew concerned. "If that is the case, then we must end this farce. We cannot allow this portal to continue disgorging fish-whales without limit! We need to destroy the gateway before it is too late!"

"No!" Ves vigorously disagreed! "The enemy force is strong, but we can handle them. What we have deployed so far is only a fraction of our combat power. We can defeat many more fish-whales as long as we fight on more open ground and as long as we employ our various trump cards. We do not have to destroy the portal right away, not after we have sacrificed two-thirds of the valuable resonating exotics that we have harvested from this site!"

Ves found it unbearable to put a stop to this venture even if it opened up a gate to an entirely different space!

It was one thing to turn away from the Garimel System without attempting to enter the Royal Tomb.

However, now that they committed to a gamble, Ves did not want to turn away from the game unless he could gain a prize at the end. Anything less amounted to a serious waste and a massive loss of opportunity!

"You are thinking about invading the territory of the fish-whales on the other side of the portal, am I correct?" Professor Benedict guessed. "I knew you might. Ever since we detected a hint of phasewater from the bodies of the assassin fish, your mind must have begun to turn. The existence of the red fish-whales proves that there is definitely a source of phasewater within their reach, and it must be significant if so many of them can teleport."

Ves smirked. "That's right. The numbers of the fish-whales may be greater than we can handle, but as long as they fight like beasts, it is unlikely that they will be able to utilize their numbers to their full potential. We can invade their territory like we are pacifying a wild, untamed planet. In any case, we don't need to stick around long enough to defeat every single fish-whale and colonize whatever territory is on the other end. We can just make do with plundering their source of phasewater and whatever other treasures the phase whales have left behind!"

The Glory Seeker leader looked shocked at Ves' projection. "Do you know what you're talking about?! We do not know how numerous they are, but what we are facing at the moment is just a fraction of their numbers! In addition, there must be stronger and wiser fish-whales in wait that are not in a hurry to confront us. If I was in their place, I would wait and allow the cannon fodder to exhaust the opposition. If we recklessly push forward and fight our way through the portal, we will be forced to confront these apex fish-whales in advance and in an environment of their choosing!"

As the discussion continued, Professor Benedict made another important announcement.

"We have completed a preliminary study on the nature and the behavior of the space portal. According to our scientists and the external experts that we have consulted, the spatial phenomenon that we have activated is different from the one before."

"How different is it?" Ves critically asked.

"If our analysis is correct... the space portal is stable and permanent! Through unknown means that we cannot fully explain, the space portal shows no sign of instability that characterized the smaller one that we have initially generated. The most likely answer to this is that the fish-whales or another source has employed special tech that forcefully anchors the spatial phenomenon and keeps it active as long as this 'portal device' remains active."

"What?!"

A lot of people attending the virtual meeting reacted with shock!

"Everything should have a limit." Marshal Ariadne frowned. "Can we destroy the portal on our end?"

"It is theoretically possible, but..." Professor Benedict consulted a few numbers. "Conventional attack methods will not affect the portal in the slightest. The only means we can utilize are weapons or devices that can directly affect the stability of spacetime."

"Don't we have dimensional smoothers and other anti-teleportation solutions in our possession?"

"There is no point in trying. They're too weak, marshal. The dimensional smoothers are strong enough to prevent warping ships from coming too close, but don't forget that the phase whales are the masters of space warping! Their understanding and application of phasewater and spatial technology can rival that of first-rate states!"

Ves studied the calculations shared by the Cross Clan. Although he didn't understand much about this specific field, he could clearly tell that the space portal was unprecedentedly strong and stable!

Unless the MTA made a move, it was impossible for the expeditionary forces to destroy the portal from this side!

"We need to make a decision." Ves said. "If we assume this fish tide is endless, we only have two options. We can either pull back from this moon and retreat from this star system while being hounded by a continuous stream of fish-whales, or we can push forward, enter the portal and take over whatever alien device is responsible for stabilizing the portal! By then, we can decide to pull the plug if the threat is too great or we can stay a little longer and loot whatever the fish-whales depend upon to grow so strong and numerous."

Nobody missed the fact that the Larkinson Patriarch favored the second option. It was a massive gamble but it also made sense if the portal couldn't be destroyed so easily.

"We do not know anything about the strength of the opposition on their home ground." Marshal Ariadne reasoned. "Entering the portal is an excessive risk. There is no guarantee that we will gain anything valuable if we push forward. We should cut our losses while they are still limited and beat a steady retreat. Profit may be important, but lives are even more important. We are not fighting for the survival of our fleet here. This cause is not worth the price we need to pay."

The Larkinsons wanted to push forward while the Glory Seekers wanted to retreat.

Both Ves and Ariadne turned to Benedict who spoke on behalf of the Cross Clan.

The Senior Mech Designer paused for a moment before he spoke.

"I have just talked to our patriarch. He is against retreating. He wishes for us to advance and challenge these fish-whales on their own turf!"

The consensus was pretty clear, then. The Larkinsons and Crossers both wanted to invade the portal. Whether they wanted to satisfy their greed or battlelust, neither of them wanted to stop just because they stumbled upon danger!

At this point, it didn't matter if the Glory Seekers had cold feet. They could only play along and make sure the expeditionary forces succeeded in their counterattack!

Chapter 3824 Vanguard Composition

Now that the Golden Skull Alliance decided to stop remaining passive, the leaders immediately formulated a plan.

Much of it was tentative and general as no one could tell what was on the other side of the portal.

Was it a secret phase whale mansion?

Was it a ruined alien city?

Was it a wild and undeveloped wilderness?

Was it a fractured space pocket that was already beginning to fall apart?

No one knew! People could make guesses based on what was pouring out of the portal, but none of them were confident in their answers.

The only way to know for sure was to head inside and confirm the situation on the other side of the portal in person!

There was no other way. The Larkinsons had already tried to sneak through hundreds of different probes, some of which were microscopic in size, but the dense crowd of fish-whales made it impossible for any of them to survive the journey!

Even the stealth probes dispatched by the Black Cats got taken down. The fish-whales appeared to be quite sensitive towards what was happening in their immediate surroundings. The elite variants were even more perceptive than their ordinary white brethren!

The Larkinsons and their allies had no choice but to give up their attempts to scout the enemy's terrain. They needed to push forward and pass through the stabilized portal without any solid idea of what they might face.

The dangers of such a mission could not be understated. Any mech that passed through the portal might encounter an alien defense mechanism that could instantly wipe them all out upon entry!

"The vanguard must be strong enough to push the tide of fish-whales back." Ves stated to General Verle. "However, they must not be important enough that their loss will hurt our overall strength. I will not approve of any plans to send our expert mechs in the first wave. Their loss is much harder for us to replace!"

It was virtually impossible to poach expert pilots from other organizations. These strong-willed individuals were usually loyal to a fault. Ordinary enticements didn't work on them, especially when their employers put a lot of effort into keeping them happy!

As such, the only way the Larkinsons could expand their roster of expert pilots was to nurture them from their own ranks. This was bound to be a slow and gradual process.

In comparison, it was much simpler for the Larkinsons to replenish their regular troops.

The clan lost hundreds if not thousands of mechs and mech pilots in prior battles, but the Larkinson Army always bounced back with relative ease.

The reason for that was that it was easy for the clan to make up for its losses. The Spirit of Bentheim could easily pump out mech after mech as long as the supply of raw materials was sufficient.

The Larkinson Clan also arrived in the Red Ocean with a surplus of mech pilots, so Ves had plenty of ready and able reservists to call upon to fill the missing positions.

Even if this pool of manpower ran out, it was not a big problem to go on the job market and hire additional batches of mech pilots.

While there weren't a lot of mech pilots for hire in a dwarf galaxy where security was in high demand, it was not impossible to hire hundreds of slightly inadequate pilots.

There were probably good reasons why these pilots failed to find satisfactory employment up until now, but if there was one thing the Larkinson Clan was good at, it was training and converting outsiders into loyal and reliable soldiers!

Due to these considerations, the Larkinson Clan, Glory Seekers and Cross Clan all mustered up the necessary troops.

Over a thousand mechs that were still on standby were called up to form the vanguard.

Among the Larkinsons forces, General Verle had decided to tap in the Avatars of Myth, the Flagrant Vandals, the Penitent Sisters as part of the first wave.

The mechs dispatched by these mech legions needed to face the brunt of the fish-whale onslaught. It was not enough for them to stand their ground. They needed to push forward and gain more space for the expeditionary forces!

General Verle quickly explained their next moves to Ves. "We do not know what is on the other side of the portal, but if we can control enough space, we can send in our second wave in order to secure a beachhead into enemy territory. This is just as important as we need to make sure we retain an escape route in case our forward troops encounter too many fish-whales."

The second wave consisted of at least 800 mechs and mostly consisted of defensive mechs and ranged mechs. The Living Sentinels, the Battle Criers and the Eye of Ylvaine were being tapped to help control the space portal on the other end.

Their job was to do the same as they were doing now, and that was to hold back any fish-whales from going forward!

In order to boost the defenses of the planned bridgehead, General Verle decided to call in the big guns. A mech company of Transcendent Punishers were on their way to the mining site as their firepower could play an immensely useful role in mowing down hordes of cannon fodder fish-whales!

"What about the Swordmaidens?" Ves asked. "You haven't mentioned them before. Given their inclinations, I am sure they would love to hack their big swords through the flesh of these alien creatures."

The leader of the Larkinson Army frowned. "Their role will be much more limited and specialized in this operation. The Swordmaidens are strong offensive assets, but their defenses leave much to be desired, sir. I am sure they can adequately handle individual fish-whales with skill and patience, but the nature of this battle does not allow them to

fight on their terms. Without additional defensive support, the fish-whale horde will rapidly damage and wear down the vulnerable Swordmaiden mechs."

The general was right. The Swordmaidens could deal a lot of damage but they weren't as good at taking it. The new Second Sword model designed by Ketis only partially addressed this shortcoming, and there weren't enough of the newer and stronger mechs in the hands of the Swordmaidens to make a difference!

Ves briefly hummed. "What are your plans for them, then?"

"I only intend to send in a limited amount of Swordmaiden units through the portal. It is not necessary for them to waste their time on fighting the grunt fishes. With their skill and offensive power, it is much better to deploy them against the elite fish-whales."

"That's a good idea. What of our expert mechs?"

"It is too irresponsible to put them in the first wave, but as long as we have secured a beachhead and confirm that the space portal is fully under our control, I recommend that we send in a limited amount of expert mechs. Three should be enough. We still need to retain enough on this side of the portal to defend our fleet from any other surprises that might occur."

There was always the possibility that the fish-whales or another threat might emerge from a different direction.

Leaving the fleet vulnerable to raids and greater attacks was unacceptable to Ves! The starships and capital ships were the foundation of his clan. He could still afford to lose whatever mechs and personnel he sent through the portal, but once he lost his fleet, it was game over!

"Which expert mechs will we send through the portal?" Ves asked.

"Well, you can already count on Patriarch Reginald Cross to lead the vanguard." General Verle answered in an exasperated tone. "With the Bolvos Rage taking the lead into invading fish-whale space, we do not have to dispatch too much firepower. I am currently thinking about sending in the Minerva to lead our troops, the Dark Zephyr to scout the unknown enemy terrain and the Shield of Samar to help defend the beachhead."

Ves especially liked the decision to send in the Shield of Samar. With Venerable Jannzi guarding the crucial portal, the chances that the fish-whales could cut off the vanguard's escape route were much lower!

Even if an accident took place, he would rather lose Venerable Jannzi than Venerable Joshua!

Still, there were other assets that Ves did not want to lose.

"The Minerva..."

"There are too many reasons why she should be a part of this invasion." General Verle replied. "First, we need a leader with enough competence, intelligence, experience and prestige to lead the troops on a separate battlefield. It is especially important that the highest commander in the field is strong enough to resist the demands of Patriarch Reginald Cross."

Anyone could guess that the high-tier expert pilot was eager to provoke the biggest fights that he could handle!

This wasn't necessarily bad as long as he had the strength to confront his opponents, but what if he miscalculated? What if he poked the hornet's nest?

Someone like Commander Casella Ingvar could counterbalance Reginald's influence and make sure that the troops did not do anything excessive.

Though Ves was highly reluctant to risk such a precious asset, the amplification that Casella could provide was too good to pass up. It was especially useful in operations like these where directly strengthening hundreds of troops was much more useful than bringing in an additional expert mech!

"Very well. Let's do this then. When will you be able to start?"

General Verle glanced at the time. "We will be ready to move in one-and-a-half minutes. Most of our mech units are already in place. Get ready for a major turnaround. We plan to make a number of big moves in order to interrupt the fish-whale tide and push them all back."

They did not have to wait long before the expeditionary forces were ready to begin their counterattack.

Even if their preparations weren't perfect, General Verle and the other leaders were unwilling to give the fish-whales more time.

Who knew what other fish-whale varieties might show up over time!

Before a possible fourth variety of fish-whale could emerge through the portal, the Golden Skull Alliance finally enacted its plan!

The Everchanger made the first move. The expert mech moved forward and began to exude more power!

Its green corona grew brighter as Venerable Joshua actively resonated with the Iridescent Mercury integrated in his expert mech!

At the same time, the Everchanger switched its glow to one formed by a familiar combination of design spirits!

The unique influences of Lufa, Zeigra and Qilanxo all combined together in order to form a disorienting glow that characterized the Ferocious Piranha model!

Of course, the fish-whales had already displayed a certain degree of resistance towards its mental effects, but they were not completely immune to the disturbances!

After the Everchanger activated its resonance ability, its glow encompassed the entire battlefield!

Hundreds of fish-whales slowed down as they partially lost their concentration. The Everchanger not only disrupted their rhythm, but also slowed down their offensive!

"Reginald!"

After hanging back all this time, the leader of the Cross Clan finally went into action.

The Bolvos Rage had already begun to accumulate power and momentum as it advanced forward.

The shield wall in front of its path automatically parted aside so that the powerful expert mech moved to the front.

Though the nearby fish-whales rabidly attempted to chew through the high-tier expert hybrid mech, its resonance shield was too strong! None of the biting and collisions shook Patriarch's Reginald's resolve!

Once the Bolvos Rage had reached its peak state, the mech flashed with light and power as it unleashed all of its ranged weapons at full power!

"FOR THE GLORY OF THE CROSS CLAN!"

Several powerful positron beams seared through the bodies of dozens of grunt fishes!

Their bodies stood no chance against the might of a volley of resonance-enhanced beam attacks!

The beam unleashed by the chest-mounted positron cannon was especially deadly! Its passage had left a clear line of burned and defeated fish-whales in its wake!

Not only that, but a pair of missiles surged forward and split off only to detonate with incredible power at the sides! Their massive blasts tore through the bodies of at least thirty fish-whales while damaging at least twice that amount!

If that wasn't enough, the shotgun in the hands of the Bolvos Rage had barked out once, spreading pellets that practically mowed down dozens of fish-whales in an expanding cone in front of the powerful hybrid expert mech!

"ADVANCE!"

The Everchanger and the Bolvos Rage had opened the way forward!

Chapter 3825 Shoving Fish

The fish-whales were completely caught off-guard!

It wasn't difficult to surprise these feral and uncoordinated beasts, but that wasn't enough to push back the tide of alien monsters.

Only a huge amount of shock power could interrupt their momentum and make them recede!

The initial volley unleashed by the Bolvos Rage happened to kill over a hundred fish-whales outright!

Though Patriarch Reginald was not able to repeat this power move for the moment, the expert mech in his hands continually unleashed death and destruction at a pace that others could not match!

After so many different incidents and battles, the Bolvos Rage finally encountered a battle scenario where its mech type and configuration could fully utilize its advantages!

The fish-whales that showed up so far weren't strong enough enough to overwhelm the Bolvos Rage. Neither their quantity or quality were sufficient as every fish-whale attack simply bounced off its stupendously powerful resonance shield!

In fact, Patriarch Reginald did not even have to worry too much about the response from the alien fish monsters.

With the Everchanger constantly suppressing every fish-whale entering the current battlefield, the Bolvos Rage had it easier than ever. There were so many fish-whales in front that Reginald did not even have to put much thought into aiming his powerful weapons.

No matter where all of the positron cannons and other weapon systems were aimed at, their firepower was bound to demolish tens of fish-whales at a time!

The stupendous might of this single expert mech completely changed the battlefield.

While more fish-whales continued to pass through the portal at an uninterrupted pace, the Bolvos Rage nonetheless succeeded in stopping the enemy offensive by raking through their lines with impunity!

As Ves watched the turnaround from the command center, he gained a completely new appreciation of hybrid mechs.

"This mech type is a bit difficult to employ in the right circumstances, but in situations where there are lots of cannon fodder, there are only a couple of other mech types that are more effective against these opponents."

Swarms of cannon fodder units were hard to deal with for most expert mechs. Most of them were designed to deal against powerful single targets as opposed to wiping out as many weaker targets as possible.

The only mech types that could do better in this situation was an expert artillery mech or an expert striker mech.

Ves was especially keen on adding the latter to the Larkinson Clan's mech lineup in the future.

Although expert striker mechs weren't really great at dueling other expert mechs, they excelled at wiping out entire mech companies in quick succession!

Against a swarm of fish-whales, the expeditionary forces would have never been pressured to this extent as long as there was a single powerful flamethrower-wielding expert mech in sight!

Though it was still questionable whether an expert striker mech could keep spitting out flames for hours on end, it was already enough for it to take action occasionally in order to relieve the pressure.

The Bolvos Rage continued to bull its way forward at a steady pace.

The expert mech had advanced so far from the defensive lines that the fish-whales couldn't resist attacking it first!

Every nearby opponent ignored their prior targets that were further away and mindlessly charged the expert hybrid mech as if they were heat-seeking missiles!

That was exactly the wrong move to make!

No matter whether they were grunts, sergeants or assassins, none of the fish-whales could do anything to take down the Bolvos Rage in a short amount of time. Their

misguided aggression not only failed to contain the powerful expert mech, but gave the other mech forces much more room to maneuver!

The latter part was especially important. There was ultimately a limit to what a powerful mech could do to push back the enemy.

Commander Casella's eyes glowed as she infused more power into her Command Field.

"Sentinels! Advance!"

The main shield wall units moved forward with indomitable power!

The Rigid Walls and Bright Warriors no longer held their positions but flew forward with their battered but still-intact tower shields up front.

Any fish-whale that happened to be in front of them were unable to halt the advance.

This was not just because many of them were attacking the wrong target or because they were being suppressed by the Everchanger. The influence from the Minerva massively boosted the effective combat performance of Commandeered mechs!

"We are invincible!"

"None of these fishes can last against my spear!"

"Shove these alien monsters back!"

With the added power and coordination of Casella's Command Field, the mechs advancing at the front make such quick work of the fish-whales up front that it was as if they were clearing a lane of snow!

"Rifleman mechs, clear the way towards the portal!"

The Larkinson mechs armed with luminar crystal rifles shone as Commander Casella did not hesitate to expand her influence towards them as well!

Normally, the energy weapons were not that effective against the fish-whales. The alien creatures weren't particularly tough, but they possessed a lot of body mass that could absorb a lot of energy damage before their critical organs were at risk.

Even switching to kinetic beam mode did not massively improve the effectiveness of the luminar crystal rifle.

It was a different story now that every expert rifleman mech gained a hint of the power of true resonance!

Though Commander Casella was not that strong of an expert pilot at the moment, the modest enhancement she extended to the surrounding mechs was enough to qualitatively transform their damage output.

Their positron beams succeeded in punching through the flesh and blubber, allowing them to scour the internal organs and in certain cases the brain of many grunt fishes.

Other beam types proved to be effective in different ways. The slicer beams were able to penetrate through the bodies of three or four grunt fishes at the same time while the kinetic beams turned out to be quite effective at concussing the sergeant fishes!

With the support of the Commandeered ranged mechs, the mechs forming the shield wall were able to accelerate their forward progress as there were a lot less enemy bodies in the way!

"Watch out! Four assassin fishes have just emerged from the portal!"

The distinctive red fish-whales stood out so much from their white brothers that it was impossible to miss their arrival.

Though the assassin fishes paused for a moment as the Everchanger's disorienting glow affected them from afar, their urge to attack the opposition was too strong for them to remain distracted!

As the assassin fishes prepared to make their signature teleportation attacks, Commander Casella was already attempting to preempt their moves!

A torrent of empowered slicer beams passed through the bodies of any grunt fishes in the way and struck the heads of all four red fish-whales!

Though the elite creatures were too tough to get taken out by the slicer beams that had weakened after penetrating through multiple bodies, the attacks still interrupted the actions of the assassin fishes!

This bought more time for the Minerva to take action itself. With its Irvan rifle in its most powerful firing mode, the expert command mech fired one powerful beam after another that possessed enough power to demolish the brains of all of the high-priority threats!

"The current wave of assassin fishes are no more. Keep up the advance!"

More fish-whales were being defeated than the new arrivals could make up for, but Commander Casella didn't feel comfortable with the current pace.

If a fish-whale with a different color showed up, the momentum of the expeditionary forces might get stalled again!

This was why it was important to reach the portal and secure a beachhead on the other side before more variables came along!

"Swordmaidens, strike the fish-whales and clear a path forward!"

"With pleasure, commander!"

Two Swordmaiden mech companies advanced from the rear. With the help of Commander Casella's intimate control over the mechs under her command, the shield wall units perfectly parted whenever the Swordmaidens mechs were about to pass through.

The greatsword-wielding mechs soon went into action!

With the shield wall close at hand and always ready to provide support, the Swordmaiden mech pilots had few scruples about this fight. They boldly drove machines forward and used the biggest and most brutal moves to chop apart these meaty targets!

"Don't hit their skulls! It takes too much power to crack them open."

"Try to tear through their bellies. Their internal organs are vulnerable from below!"

The Swordmaiden mech pilots quickly figured out the most effective ways to eliminate the grunt fishes. Their thick flesh and blubber parted easily enough when struck by the sharp and heavy blades of the Second Sword and Bright Warrior mechs.

Compared to the all-rounder mech model that the Swordmaidens had long been dissatisfied with, the new Second Sword model completely met their expectations!

Their added power, control and fit were so much better that the few lucky mech pilots assigned to the new model were fighting as if they were experiencing nirvana!

The Swordmaidens had assigned their limited quantity of Second Swords to the best and most skilled of their pilots.

As a result, the Second Swords were killing the stalled grunt fishes twice as fast as the greatsword-wielding Bright Warriors!

"There's no comparison between these two mechs. The Second Sword is literally made to fight like this! All my moves are flowing so much better that I can't go back to my old mech!"

Not everything went right for the Swordmaiden shock units. The fish-whales weren't completely paralyzed and they began to muster up more and more power to eliminate the Swordmaiden mechs that were on the attack.

It didn't help that Commander Casella wasn't able to Commandeer the Swordmaiden mech pilots as effectively as with other groups.

The Swordmaidens developed a persona that disdained looking up to gods or any other higher authorities.

They only worshiped their own strength!

As such, Commander Casella wasn't able to sync up with them as much as she did with her Sentinel mech pilots.

Fortunately, the Swordmaidens were confident but not stupid. They were quite aware of how their mechs might not feel so good anymore after getting smacked head-on by a fish-whale tail.

Whenever their circumstances turned dicey, they did not hesitate to retreat. The defensive mechs under the influence of Commander Casella always moved quickly to support the troubled Swordmaiden mechs and relieve their pressure.

Through these tactics and more, the human mech forces not only mowed down an unprecedentedly high amount of fish-whales, but also managed to get close to the stabilized portal!

"Hahahaha! None of you fishes can stop my expert mech! If I was piloting my Mars Project already, you weaklings would have made way a long time ago!"

Patriarch Reginald was enjoying himself as he rendered many fish-whales into scorched and cooked piles of flesh.

The dead creatures fell into the diagonal tunnel beneath in droves and slid downwards under the pull of Iron Crusher's weak gravity.

Thousands of the beasts must have slid down the seemingly bottomless tunnel as the expeditionary forces did not give the living fish-whales the opportunity to satisfy their cannibalistic urges!

After wiping out a wave of blue fish-whales head-on by blasting them with an empowered shotgun blast, the Bolvos Rage finally arrived in front of the portal!

"Get out of my way, fishes!"

The powerful expert hybrid mech had already fired all of its weapon systems at full power, but it still had a lot of power left in the tank. Patriarch Reginald did not hesitate to fire multiple powerful volleys right through the portal despite not knowing what was on the other side!

In fact, no one knew whether any of their ranged attacks would even reach the other side of the portal.

"It's working! The portal doesn't allow for the transmission of visible light, but all of those attacks must have struck the fish-whales that were above to arrive!"

With no fish-whales clogging up the way forward, Patriarch Reginald did not wait any longer.

"See you on the other side!"

The Bolvos Rage fearlessly passed through the large portal and instantly reached another destination!

Chapter 3826 Mysterious Enclave

For the first time in an indeterminate amount of years, a stranger had stepped into a foreign realm.

The surrounding native life forms grew confused as an entity that was completely different from themselves had abruptly invaded their territory.

The fish-whales around the ruined and derelict portal site had already been hit by the energy attacks launched from the other side of the portal.

Now, a strong and powerful metal monster had emerged. In this space that was dislocated from the main reality, none of the creatures had ever seen anything that resembled a humanoid combat mech!

Stupid as the fish-whales might be, they recognized a foreign intrusion and a threat when they saw one. The Bolvos Rage that had arrogantly intruded into their territory was not only different from the fish-whales they were accustomed to interacting with, it also radiated clear hostility towards their kind!

In the airless environment that was somehow illuminated by the filtered rays of the blue supergiant star that was situated in the heart of the Garimel System, the large number of fish-whales released silent roars that their bio-engineered senses were somehow able to hear and charged at the foreign intruder in unison!

Though Patriarch Reginald was fascinated by the alien environment and the sheer amount of fish-whales that was surrounding his position, he did not show any fear towards the feral fish monsters that were propelling their way forward.

"Weak! Do you think that quantity is enough to overrun my expert mech? Let me show you what a real expert mech can do!" The Cross Patriarch roared!

At the same time, the Bolvos Rage glowed with power. Its multiple weapon systems, which had already grown hot and strained after firing them at high power multiple times, became stressed once again as their controller forced them to fire at close-to-maximum power!

The entire surroundings lit up in a flash bright enough to blind the fish-whales as hot and powerful positron beams burned through the bodies of over a hundred fleshy monsters!

However, all of this devastation only eliminated a fraction of the fish-whales in the area!

Thousands of them milled around in this strange low gravity planetary environment. So many of the white creatures were pressed against each other that it was as if the Bolvos Rage had ended up in the middle of a titanic flesh structure!

Still, the Bolvos Rage was hardly done with its outburst.

Shortly after firing its myriad of powerful energy weapons, it lifted up its short but substantial shotgun and fired multiple times in different directions!

By the time the Bolvos Rage emptied the drum magazine of its shotgun, thousands of sprays of blood soaked the surroundings in a tide of red as the bodies of all of the fish-whales were run through by many penetrating pellets!

Although ordinary shotgun pellets shouldn't have been powerful enough to penetrate the bodies of the fish-whales to this extent, when backed by the powerful resonance strength of the Cross Patriarch, the shotgun in the hands of the Bolvos Rage reached an entirely new level of lethality!

Only other expert mechs that were able to resist the reality-distorting effects of hostile true resonance were able to negate the enhanced damage.

It was a pity that the fish-whales lacked this capability. None of them had ever demonstrated any hint of extraordinary prowess!

Even the most deadly assassin fishes were only capable of performing their teleportation ability by relying on phasewater-infused bio-organs.

Since the alien creatures were unable to muster anything comparable to a high-ranking mech, Patriarch Reginald had become completely unscrupulous!

Though the constant attacks unleashed by his Bolvos Rage rapidly consumed its resources, its expert pilot did not relent because he had an important mission.

The Bolvos Rage was tasked with clearing the immediate surroundings so that the next arrivals had enough space to deploy into formation!

The next wave of mechs soon arrived. Several assault-oriented mech squads belonging to the Avatars of Myth and the Cross Clan flew out of the portal and quickly deployed into formation despite entering a completely different environment.

The combination of offensive space knights, swordsman mechs, lancer mechs and other armored machines provided the arriving squads with a lot of pushing power.

Though the mighty Bolvos Rage had already freed up a lot of space around the portal site, the surviving fish-whales weren't staying idle.

Too many of them still remained alive! They surged forward and quickly filled up the space that were previously occupied by their deceased brethren!

"They're coming!"

"Interrupt their approach and slow them down! More are on their way!"

While all of the fighting was going on, one of the mechs that had arrived into the unknown pocket space did not actually stick around.

The new Light Hunter mech instead lingered at the portal entrance and ran all of its sensor systems at full power in order to record as much observation data as possible!

At the same time, the mech channeled a lot of energy into its signature Samasel Orb. The module grew hotter as it began to perform a sweeping active scan in a 180 degree angle of the immediate surroundings!

Many details about the terrain, the mechs, the distant environmental features as well as the weird space and sources of light entered the databanks of the newly-built scout mech.

At the same time, the Light Hunter received an extensive data burst from the Bolvos Rage. The high-tier expert mech had entered the mysterious pocket space a bit earlier and captured its own data.

Once the Flagrant Vandal mech had completed its brief mission, it passed through the portal once again.

The expeditionary forces residing in normal space urgently needed this crucial data so that they could gain a better idea of the circumstances on this side of the portal!

The safe return of the Light Hunter mech at least proved that entering the portal did not equate to instant death.

"It is safe to enter the portal!"

"A large horde of fish-whales are swarming close to the portal, but they are no worse than the ones we have fought so far. Clear them out and establish a temporary fort at the gate site!"

The biggest source of doubt that made many people hesitant about entering the portal was the inability to know what would happen when they entered the portal.

Now that the collected data showed that the other side was not only stable, but also not an enemy stronghold, the next squads of mechs fearlessly poured into the portal.

The tables had turned!

After enduring the constant invasion of the fish-whales into the mining site, the human mech forces could finally enact their revenge against the hostile alien races!

The amount of melee mechs rapidly rose as they arrived in batches and quickly fought to interrupt the tide of fish-whales and push them back when possible.

The initial struggle was difficult. Even after the Gold Beacon and several ranged mech companies had arrived to provide firepower support, the sheer quantity of fish-whales made it difficult to defeat them quickly enough to prevent them from using their numbers to their advantage!

"There's too many of them! Our mechs are getting battered by all of the alien bodies!"

"We're getting outflanked in multiple directions!"

"Careful! The sergeant and assassin fishes are about to attack!"

With the blue fish-whales charging at the mechs from the front and the assassin fishes attacking the human machines from the rear, the vanguard suffered a lot of damage all of a sudden.

Hordes of grunt fishes descended upon any damaged mech that was unable to control its own movement anymore. Their toothy maws crunched and tore the mechs into several pieces.

Few mech pilots managed to survive this onslaught!

During this critical period, there was practically no room for the cockpits to eject.

Even if they did so, they were liable to fly right into a tide of feral and bloodthirsty fish-whales that mercilessly crushed the ejected modules into pieces!

"Backup is coming! Hold your ground!"

The vanguard troops were still pouring through the portal without stopping!

In a short amount of time, several hundred mechs had emerged and began to work earnestly in pushing back the sheer quantity of fish-whales.

Soon enough, several notable units arrived.

The radiant Quint piloted by Isobel Kotin and the ostentatious B-Man piloted by Vincent Ricklin both arrived at the same time!

Due to receiving a brief information package prior to entering the portal, neither expert candidates became lost upon entering the mysterious pocket space.

"Fear not, men! Your savior has arrived!" Vincent roared as his custom hybrid mech went to town on the enemy fish!

Although his B-Man only possessed a small fraction of the firepower of the much more impressive Bolvos Rage, it still had its good points.

The most distinctive advantage of Vincent's custom mech was that its main armaments consisted entirely of kinetic weapon systems!

A dozen missiles launched from the rear launcher module and slammed into the fish-whales before exploding the bodies into bloody particles!

The gauss cannons integrated into the mech fired one round after another. Each of them struck with enough force to stun or cripple a grunt fish!

If that wasn't enough, the small laser weapons mounted on the side of the B-Man's handsome-looking head peppered the nearby creatures with laser beams. Though the damage was hardly fatal to the alien creatures, it still contributed to the fight!

Overall, the B-Man was practically in its element right now! Vincent was having the time of his life as he could fire all of his weapon systems with little concerns about getting attacked.

The fish-whales were so stupid and mindless that they only focused on attacking the closest enemies. Only the assassin fishes possessed the intelligence to bypass the closest targets in order to attack the weakest enemies.

With the Bolvos Rage and the many melee mechs blocking the overwhelming majority of hostile fish-whales, the B-Man fired all of its weapon systems with no concerns about running out of ordnance.

All of the rounds and missiles were meant to be used! Saving them up was pointless as the Larkinson Clan already planned to ship over a lot of supplies once the gate fort came online.

"Hahahaha! Kill these fish! We're all eating grilled fish tonight!"

Compared to the crazy attacks of the B-Man, the Quint fought at a much more measured pace.

Although the Quint was arguably the most impressive standard mech in the Larkinson Army's mech roster, it was not exactly up to date anymore despite its numerous upgrades and modifications.

The B-Man was not only newer, but was also much more suited to fight the weird fish-whales.

Fortunately, Isobel did not let herself get bothered by that. She was not interested in competing against her fellow expert candidate.

"Good work on holding back the fish swarm!" Commander Melkor called as the first phase of the invasion was complete. "Make way for the second wave! The Living Sentinels are coming!"

The tide of the battle turned once the second wave arrived.

Before this point, the Sentinels and other defenders had to stay back in order to eliminate all of the fish-whales that had already entered the main reality.

Evidently, the defenders killed enough of the invading enemies that it was finally safe to deploy them on this side of the portal!

The defensive mechs of the Living Sentinels began to form their sturdy shield walls. This not only made it a lot more difficult for the fish-whales to press the invading mech forces back, but also provided valuable defensive cover for the vanguard mechs!

Still, a defensive posture was far from enough to eliminate thousands of fish-whales and turn this area into an oasis of calm.

The Golden Skull Alliance had to go on the attack!

Commander Casella did not hesitate to activate her Command Field and infuse hundreds of mechs with her willpower!

"Eliminate the immediate threat and clear this space of hostiles!"

"Yes, Commander!"

The Larkinson mechs burst out with greater power than ever!

Chapter 3827 Beaten Back

The battle to secure a stable beachhead inside the mysterious phase whale enclave turned into a grueling and grinding affair.

Though it did not drag on for hours, the battle nonetheless tested many mech pilots as they constantly had to stay on their toes while fighting a high-intensity battle against fearless and relentless biomonsters.

Thousands of fish-whales were already in the area when the Bolvos Rage initially arrived in the unknown phase whale enclave.

Many more poured in from the surroundings as they became attracted by the expanding violence.

In the end, over 13,000 fish-whales swarmed towards the portal site in order to slaughter the foreign intruders!

The battle turned into a hard-fought affair. Though the human mech forces were no longer constrained in numbers due to fighting in a cramped mining tunnel, the downside of fighting in an open environment was that they had to defend against attacks from multiple directions.

The fish-whales arrived from every direction except below!

This meant that the Larkinson mechs had to form an all-around defensive perimeter that limited how much the mechs could cover for each other.

Ranged mechs that were providing firing support towards the front were unable to lend the same assistance to the sides or rear!

The only solution to this problem was to deploy more and more mechs until there were enough to suppress all of the converging fish-whales!

"Snipe the assassin fishes! Do not let them get close enough to perform their teleportation strikes!"

"Our tower shields are getting battered to pieces! Where are the replacements?!"

"The sergeant fishes are charging from three directions! We can't eliminate all of them before they pull off their attack runs!"

The expeditionary forces eventually succeeded in establishing a beachhead, but not without paying a considerable price. Hundreds of mechs had fallen and plenty of their pilots had fallen as well.

The human and material cost of this hastily-planned offensive was considerable, but none of the soldiers thought about that for the moment.

Even after the invaders had apparently wiped out all of the fish-whales in the immediate area, there were probably many more in the mysterious phase enclave.

"This pocket space is huge! It's a lot larger than the so-called Royal Tomb! Our preliminary estimates suggest that it is as large as a modest-sized moon!"

With this much space, the fish-whales occupying the area surrounding the spatial portal probably amounted to a miniscule proportion of the total population of native inhabitants in this isolated habitat!

"Don't get cocky, kids! These bastards may have been much, but do you really think this is their home? Do you see any places where they nest or where they rear their kids? I bet you haven't! The real core territory of the fish-whales must be somewhere deeper inside this pocket space. Until we get a good idea of how many enemies are residing in this place, we should stay put and make sure we can repel any subsequent fish-whale attacks."

Fortunately for the exhausted mech pilots, no large-scale attacks ensued. The mech units that had arrived in the pocket space did not dare to move too far away from their hard-earned beachhead and expose their existence to other fish-whales.

More and more sensor data poured in from the Light Hunters that discreetly scouted the surrounding terrain from a distance. Though they were not true stealth mechs, their low profile and minimal emissions still allowed them to get a good peek at the ignorant fish-whales in the distance.

It had already become apparent that the fish-whales weren't the most united or sophisticated of races. The ones in the surrounding areas all looked feral as their behavior was solely dictated by their instincts.

The analysts guessed that the fish-whales relaxing in the distance never got involved because they were too far away to notice all of the commotion at the portal site!

"The fish-monsters are truly feral and stupid. While they are aggressive to a fault, they lack a guiding intelligence. They could have reinforced their attacking brethren but didn't because they don't know any better!"

"Don't make the mistake of underestimating these fish-whales. They might be the local version of peasants or vermin. This place is definitely bigger than we think."

Many mech pilots began to unwind and speculate about the depth of this new pocket space.

In the meantime, the construction teams arrived with resources and prefab structures in tow.

Due to the hostile and dangerous conditions on this side of the portal, the main construction units consisted of Worker Bee mechs that had been repurposed into industrial mechs.

It wasn't that difficult for them to put down their mining tools and pick up their construction equipment.

With the help of shuttles, small cargo transports and other help, they quickly pieced together a star-shaped wall around the gate.

The lower-than-normal gravity on the barren rock surface made it easy for the Worker Bees to put everything into place.

Once the basic walls were set up, numerous turrets appeared as well. These compact but efficient laser turrets provided additional ranged support at cheap and affordable prices.

Though their effectiveness against the fish-whales was not that good, they were better than nothing.

Other structures emerged as well. The construction teams erected bunkers for the Transcendent Punishers, underground warehouses to store supplies, sensor arrays to observe the surrounding areas and mech workshops to service damaged machines.

The invaders became a lot more confident in their ability to defend the beachhead. Though certain threats such as the assassin fish could still inflict a lot of damage if they teleported straight past the walls, the new garrison troops were more than capable of sniping them before they got into range.

With no apparent response from the fish-whales, the expeditionary forces slowly wound down. The mech pilots that took part in the initial invasion all received a much-needed opportunity to rest while their mechs were being checked.

Those with light damage were repaired on the spot while those with heavier damage were sent back through the portal.

Still, despite the temporary break, the arriving humans did not intend to stop and take it slow.

None of them forgot that they were the intruders here! If the native alien groups eventually caught on to the invasion, they would definitely try to push the human forces back!

This was why the Golden Skull Alliance had to be proactive in this operation. Now that the construction work was done, the leaders of the invasion force had to plan their next steps.

Few leaders were present on this side of the portal. This was still a hostile location and no one knew whether the spatial portal would go out all of a sudden.

People like Ves, General Verle, Marshal Ariadne Wodin and many more remained behind for safety considerations.

They had already agreed to allow the leaders on the field to take charge of the ongoing operation.

Right now, most of them happened to be mech pilots, so each of their mechs gathered together in order to formulate their next steps now that they secured their crucial beachhead.

"According to Director Ranya, most of these fish-whales are worthless." Commander Casella Ingvar began. "The exobiologists have studied the grunt fish carcasses and found nothing of value. Their bodies only consist of cheap and abundant bulk materials. Killing them won't give us any returns, so we shouldn't try to provoke them except if we wish to raise our security."

Her message was clear. Though there were still a lot of white fish-whales in their surroundings, killing them was a thankless job, so they might as well leave the ignorant monsters alone.

"What of the elite fish-whales?" Patriarch Reginald asked. "They're stronger and their bodies are obviously reinforced."

"The sergeant fishes are a bit more interesting because their bodies are reinforced by stronger and more valuable exotics. However, the sergeant fishes are only a step up from cannon fodder. Their total value still doesn't make it worthwhile to hunt them down. As for the red fish-whales..."

"The assassin fish bodies definitely contain phasewater, right?"

Commander Casella slowly nodded. "They do, but the quantity is small. We need to kill hundreds of them in order to obtain a few grams. It is unrealistic for us to hunt them all down so that we can return with a bit more phasewater in our pockets. This is a large pocket space and they can be anywhere. What we need to do instead is to find the source and plunder as much phasewater as we can before we leave. We are not here

to occupy this strange territory. We are not here to commit genocide either. If the analysts are right that there may be millions of fish-whales living in this pocket space, it would take forever for us to kill them all. We simply don't have the numbers to take care of them quickly."

"That is a shame." Patriarch Reginald frowned. "Are you certain you want to leave this place after we fought so hard to get in? Just look at the device responsible for bringing us here! If we can master its functioning and controls, won't we be able to open a portal from here to Violet Ridge whenever we wish? This is an excellent opportunity to build a secret base!"

"I would advise against that, patriarch." Melkor said. "As my fellow legion commander has said, we have probably done the equivalent of raiding one of the interior provinces of a powerful state. If the occupants of this pocket space truly pays attention to us, we will not be able to hold our ground. It is better to be psychologically prepared to cut our losses and run."

Commander Casella shook her head. "We cannot make any far-reaching decisions before we can scout this unfamiliar space. Our first task after fortifying our beachhead is to scout our neighbors and find out more about the native organisms and the power structure in this pocket space. There may be multiple species of hybridized aliens in this pocket space. We need to take a look at every corner of this abnormal space before we can be assured our plans will work."

Any anomalies and unexpected occurrences could disrupt their entire arrangements. Casella also had a feeling she hadn't seen a fraction of the diversity of fish-whales. The scouting mission therefore served a crucial purpose to the invasion force!

"Tusa." The Sentinel Commander contacted the expert pilot. "You already know what to do. We need your Dark Zephyr to survey the environment and record all of the fish-whales in sight. Information is power and you are the only one that can make us stronger at this time."

The light mech specialist smiled in his cockpit. "Got it. I have been waiting to hear this. I will be setting off, then. I will maintain radio silence in order to remain as undetected as possible. The fish-whales don't seem to react as long as they cannot spot my Dark Zephyr."

The Dark Zephyr soon set off at a subtle pace. Due to the nature of its opponents, it was quite hard for the expert mech's twin knives to deal massive damage to the fish-whales.

That didn't mean the Dark Zephyr was weak, though. The expert mech was much faster than the average fish-whale and could easily outrun the creature.

With its excellent mobility and evasion characteristics, the Larkinsons were confident that the Dark Zephyr would not get hit by an enemy attack during this scouting mission!

With that taken care of, Commander Casella took another look at the massive portal device that had apparently stabilized the spatial phenomenon generated by the Larkinsons.

It was a scratched and organic bronze-like construction that looked like a miniaturized beyonder gate!

Although the scale, the design style, the tech base and many other parameters were different, Commander Casella had to admit that the impressive device indeed looked like a small, landbound beyonder gate!

The value of such an alien relic could not be overstated. This was an impressive piece of alien biotech that still held up after many years had passed!

Chapter 3828 Small Universe

Several hours went by after the Dark Zephyr set off on its scouting mission.

The light mech had flown far out of sight and possibly out of contact as it fearfully flew past hordes of fish-whales.

Even if the feral fishes were alarmed, they only chased for a certain amount of time before they stopped their pursuit.

The fish-whales simply couldn't catch up with the light and fast expert mech! As long as the Dark Zephyr moved out of sight, the aliens simply lost track of the machine and returned to their docile routines.

Venerable Tusa grinned with excitement as he surveyed the distant terrain.

The space inside this phase whale enclave was quite odd. As his Dark Zephyr flew up and left the surface, he could see that the gate was essentially built on a large asteroid.

Much of it was barren but the Dark Zephyr detected various diverse terrain features in the distance.

His goal was not to scout the areas that were fairly close. It would be a waste to send a mech as powerful as the Dark Zephyr on a short excursion. The other scout mechs of the expeditionary forces could take care of that chore.

What Tusa really aimed to explore was the other 'asteroids' floating in every direction!

As the Dark Zephyr gained a greater overview of the expansive pocket space, its sensors detected more than twenty different floating land masses of varying shapes and sizes!

How many of them were populated by fish-whales?

How many of them were occupied by other races?

What kind of resources could be found in those places?

What did the original creator of this phase whale enclave leave behind on these landmasses?

All of these questions and more needed to be answered to give the expeditionary forces a good idea on what they should do next!

Above all else, Venerable Tusa had to answer a crucial question.

"Where is the phasewater?"

As the Dark Zephyr left the original landmass and flew towards another floating 'asteroid', the people back in the initial beachhead formulated other plans.

Additional resources and workers arrived from the portal. Their presence strengthened the stronghold that slowly became known as Fort Fishblood.

"Why Fishblood?" Commander Casella Ingvar asked.

"Because the soil here is stained with the blood of thousands of fish-whales, commander. If this place had air, our noses and air filters would have been flooded by the stench."

Dealing with all of the carcasses was a troublesome affair. The Larkinsons and their allies did not want to leave them whole. The fish-whale race apparently had no taboos about cannibalism and would probably get drawn by the availability of so many free meals.

The Larkinsons took out the bodies of the elite fish-whales but did their best to get rid of the remainder.

Though burning them was the most complete solution, it was too costly to waste all of the propellant on burning them all down.

In the end, a hundred Worker Bees picked up their mining tools and dug several deep mass graves so that they could dump all of the dead and blood-soaked bodies.

It was a gruesome job, but the removal of all of the ugly corpses was worth it. The environment no longer resembled a charnel house.

As the expeditionary forces learned more and more about the environment they had entered, Commander Casella wanted to discuss their goals for this haphazard invasion.

"Before we started this day, we did not set out to invade a large and unfamiliar pocket space." She began. "We were forced to enter this pocket space without making any specific preparations. While we have managed to beat back the fish-whales and secure this location, we need to agree on a set of goals. I have already corresponded with Patriarch Ves and General Verle about this. They both agree we need to focus on profiting as much from this accidental find as possible."

"And what does your patriarch have in mind?" Mech Commander Serena Valeis of the Glory Seekers inquired. "As you have said, we do not know much about this pocket space, only that it is related to the phase whales and possibly the monstrous skeleton that we have initially found. If this pocket space turns out to be the playground of that dead tyrant whale, the horrors we might find in this forgotten place might exceed our imagination!"

The Glory Seekers were clearly reluctant to muck around in this place for too long. They had the least amount of mechs at their disposal so the losses they suffered so far were not light.

Patriarch Reginald scoffed. "If you women want to take a backseat, then by all means go ahead. Though I am not an adventurous sort, I can recognize an opportunity when I see it. These fish-whales have numbers on their side but not the brains to leverage their strength. They aren't even smart enough to take advantage of their home ground or they would have built a kill zone around this portal site. If the remaining enemies in this pocket space are as feral as the ones we've encountered, then the treasures of this pocket space are for taking!"

Commander Casella and the others listening in clearly understood the Cross Patriarch's uncommonly high motivation for this risky venture.

The first reason was that the expert pilot was seeking new challenges. The tougher and more overwhelming his opponents, the more he stimulated his own growth. This was a well-known process among expert pilots and Reginald definitely did not want to miss this opportunity to increase his chances to advance to ace pilot.

The fish-whales that they fought so far happened to be extremely suitable opponents for him. They were numerous, tricky and fairly threatening. Their huge numbers meant that Reginald definitely did not lack targets for him to exercise his strength.

The second reason was that Reginald heavily valued any opportunity to obtain powerful resources that could strengthen his Mars Project.

He had become much more sensitive towards the conditions of the design project for his future expert mechs. Strong materials was one of the easiest and most straightforward methods to strengthen a mech, and Reginald wanted to close the gap between his upcoming Mars Project and an authentic ace mech as much as possible!

Though there were no guarantees that this mysterious space whale enclave contained any high-grade materials, the Cross Patriarch was willing to take a risk in order to satisfy his needs!

As far as the Larkinsons went, their goals were similar. They were keen to plunder whatever phasewater and other valuable materials that they could find, but after a brief talk with the leaders of the clan, Commander Casella had to prioritize another goal!

Her Minerva turned and pointed to the strange biometal gate that was constantly shimmering while maintaining an active portal.

"This gate structure is a crucial piece of alien biotechnology that is valuable in itself. Our clan has already dispatched many different scientists and specialists to study its mechanisms and understand its functioning. If we can take control over it, we might be able to take it over or connect to other gates. At the very least, we cannot allow the gate to function outside of our control. It can shut off and cut us off from our main reality at any time."

Many people connected to the communication channel grew grim at the thought. None of them wanted to remain trapped in this alien space without any way to get home.

"You Larkinsons are welcome to study the gate as long as you share the research." Commander Valeis spoke. "It looks too advanced, though. This is ancient phase whale technology."

"We can always try."

None of them knew much about the alien gate structure, which was exactly why they needed to examine it in detail. Once the Larkinsons had made that clear, the discussion moved on to the nature of the space they had entered.

Commander Casella began to share what she learned. "Our initial scouting attempts along with the preliminary conclusions from our scientist teams have given us a basic idea on where we are. We are certain that we have entered a phase whale enclave that is situated in the Garimel System. The interesting part is that this pocket of space is not anchored underneath Iron Crusher. A phase whale has likely separated it from our main reality at an orbit that is much closer to the blue supergiant star than the so-called Royal Tomb."

"Wait a minute, commander. Doesn't that mean that we should be cooking right now? As far as the sensors of my mechs can register, it is only slightly warmer in this place."

"Our scientists tell us that this pocket space is closer to the sun, but that the creator of this place has established strong filters that block out most of the heat and radiation generated by the blue supergiant. For what reason, we cannot say, but it is important to state that we are no longer on Iron Crusher!"

This was quite a revelation to the rest. What Casella meant was that they had probably teleported at least several light-hours away from the moon orbiting the second planet in the Garimel System! This was a substantial leap, especially when they were able to cross over instantly.

Everyone began to look around. Though the ground level was boring, the sight above their heads was more spectacular.

Although the background largely consisted of grayish fog that made it seem as if they were stuck in a strange dimension, the asteroids floating above their heads made it clear that there was more to this place than they could see from their limited perspectives!

"We need to name this strange, isolated vacuum environment. I propose to call it Purgatory. Any objections?"

No one objected. The place did look dreary enough to be called this way. There were no plants, no wildlife, no guideposts and few signs of civilization.

"How big is Purgatory, exactly?"

"We cannot say for certain as the gray fog in the distance makes it difficult for us to define the borders of this pocket space." Casella answered. "However, we can state that at least half of Iron Crusher can fit in this space."

"That's quite a lot of volume, especially when little of it is actually occupied by soil."

In other words, much of Purgatory consisted of emptiness. There were planetoids or asteroids taking up the majority of the available space.

This made it easier to scout and explore the different locations. There were only a limited number of asteroids where they could find what they sought.

"This pocket space is like a small universe." Commander Casella continued. "Although it is dependent on siphoning the heat and energy radiated by the blue supergiant star to prevent this location from becoming a cold and lifeless place, Purgatory is large enough to maintain a somewhat complete ecosystem or society. Before we understand these details, we should act cautiously and stay on this asteroid. For now, we have identified several possible targets that we might consider attacking in order to gain access to greater resources."

She transmitted an image to the others that displayed a rudimentary map of the environment.

According to the map, there was a distant concentration of life, heat and other emissions. A lot more fish-whales had gathered at this location. This meant that this place was of considerable interest or importance to the species.

"Are you suggesting that we should attack this 'city'?"

"No." Casella shook her head. "The number of fish-whales is still more than we can handle if we provoke them at the same time. That doesn't mean we can make other moves. Whether we attack it or not, we must gather more intelligence and explore the barren terrain between Fort Fishblood and this possible alien city."

Right now, this was the greatest threat the expeditionary forces were facing. The distance was not too great, so the swarm of fish-whales in the distance could always decide to go on the attack at any time!

Chapter 3829 Poorly Understood

The newly-discovered pocket space that the Golden Skull Alliance had accidentally uncovered was larger and more diverse than the recent arrivals thought.

It was large. Whereas the Royal Tomb could fit a large city or a decent metropolis, the pocket space that everyone called Purgatory could fit hundreds or thousands of cities!

The internal volume of this space was remarkable. It was truly a space that was largely isolated from the base level of reality. Aside from getting affected by a minute amount of gravity, light, heat and cosmic radiation, the area inside Purgatory was pretty much disconnected from the rest of normal space.

In fact, the scientists studying the intricate phase whale enclave were still deciphering its coordinates. All they figured out was that it was located a lot closer towards the blue supergiant star that dominated the Garimel System.

"Let me put it this way, commander." One of the astrophysicists said to the Sentinel Commander. "If this pocket space is no longer displaced from reality and returns to normal space all of a sudden, we would all get cooked in a matter of minutes. Those who are able to head inside mechs or starships will be able to last longer, but if they can't make it out of the hot zone in time, eventually those metal shells will overheat to the point where all of their systems fail."

Commander Casella's suited figure briefly turned upwards. She stared out at the strange gray fog that obscured whatever lay at the edge of the pocket space.

She found it difficult to imagine that they were so close to the hot and powerful supergiant. The temperature in the pocket space was actually quite reasonable at 5 to 70 degrees Celcius depending on the location.

This was a decent temperature range for keeping phasewater in liquid form, which also happened to be its most usable state. The fish-whale race that occupied at least one of the asteroids also thrived under these conditions.

The powerful creature that created Purgatory definitely arranged the environment this way for a reason. Casella just wondered where the fish-whales fit in. Were they always meant to balloon their numbers and mutate in such an aggressive, mindless species?

She and everyone else in the Golden Skull Alliance still had a lot of questions about these new discoveries. There were so much that they did not know and the only clues they could derive anything solid from was the mysterious alien gate that was still anchoring the same spatial portal that was still active.

When Casella looked at the gate in the distance, she grew slightly more concerned.

"I am not a physicist, but even I know that portals that connect two distant spaces together consume a lot of energy. Where is the device getting its power from? How long can it remain active? How is it being controlled?"

Though she maintained a calm and commanding facade, the direction of her questioning betrayed her concerns.

No one wanted to get stranded in this fish-whale paradise if the portal suddenly shut down!

Although Patriarch Ves had promised to all of the forces sent through the portal that he and his clan would do anything to open it up again if it shut down for some reason, who knew whether he could deliver on his promises.

Just in case, the expeditionary fleet shipped over an abundant amount of food, energy cells and other basic resources.

The supplies weren't enough to keep the mech forces in excellent condition for years on end, but it was no problem for them to subsist for this period of time.

In any case, nutrient pack crates took up little space while providing a lot of nutrition at stupendously low prices. The fleet probably stored over a hundred years of compressed and dehydrated food products!

"We cannot answer your questions at the moment. We are barely making a start with understanding how this alien device works." The physicist replied in a tired tone. "We

are dealing with a relic alien technological device that may have decayed over time to the point where it is no longer functioning as intended anymore."

Casella grew sharper. "Is the device showing signs of faltering?"

"Ah, not exactly, commander. It is showing numerous anomalous signs that we do not think are intentional, but we still know far too little about how it is actually supposed to function. While we can presume the gate originated from the phase whales, the problem is that we do not understand much about this race considering we have only recently come into contact with them. The databases we have access to contain only vague descriptions and indirect references to portal gates like these. Since we cannot rely on a large body of existing studies in alien technology, we have to perform much of the original research ourselves."

The Sentinel Commander vaguely understood how impossible that was for the research teams in the employ of the Larkinson Clan. The researchers all graduated from notable or prestigious second-class universities and possessed decent qualifications in their respective fields. The older and more senior scientists were particularly competent in their specialties.

However, they fell far short of the actual talents at the upper range of their professions. Any good first-class scientist could easily crush the research capabilities of all of the Larkinson research teams put together!

This was a gap that could not be overcome with quantity. The quality of education, the degree of access to high-end knowledge and the power of excellent augments were all essential to nurturing a top scientist.

The Life Research Association existed as a specialized research and development state for hundreds of years, but despite all of the enthusiasm towards biotechnology, only the Supreme Sage ever attained the qualifications of a top scientist that was brilliant enough to affect human society as a whole!

This example illustrated the immense difficulty of producing or obtaining such an excellent researcher. The man standing before Casella and the rest of the scientists studying the alien gate were far from reaching this level!

"Do the best you can." Casella helplessly said. "I do not demand that you give me an explanation on how it works. What I need is more critical information such as whether we need to perform repairs on its systems or whether we need to feed it with power in order to keep the spatial portal active."

The helmeted man smiled back. "We are a little more confident we can give you a satisfactory response within a week."

"A week?"

"Yes... a week. I cannot understate the difficulty of studying a highly-advanced technological device while it is still active, ma'am. The fact that it is a biotech product makes our studies even more difficult. We have physicists who have studied fields such as spatial warping and extradimensional spaces. We also have biotech experts who are proficient in bioproducts and biometals. What we do not have are people who have mastered both groups of disciplines! As a result, different research teams with vastly different languages and understanding of the sciences are forced to help each other non-stop in order to make any progress."

This led to a huge drop in research speed and efficiency that the physicist's estimate of a week was a bit too optimistic!

He did not know what he could tell his superiors after the research teams spent most of their time teaching the fundamentals of their respective fields to each other!

The physicist wasn't done with dashing the Sentinel Commander's expectations.

"This is just one of the research projects that we are having difficulty with, Commander. Studying the fish-whales and understanding the nature of this pocket space are also challenging research projects."

Casella frowned when she heard that. "It sounds to me that our research capabilities are wholly inadequate to the task at hand. Have you tried to connect with the fleet and have them consult external scientists? I have heard that we have done that rather frequently as of late in order to understand the initial portal that we have opened."

The scientist shook his helmeted head. "There is a limit to how much we can rely on calling for help over the galactic net, ma'am. The discoveries we have made are valuable and potentially useful to us. Sharing it with one scientist means that it is pretty much guaranteed that the secret will spread regardless of how many confidentiality agreements we impose on our foreign help. Patriarch Ves has instructed us to treat anything on this side of the portal but especially this space gate as secret material. We are on our own in this regard."

Commander Casella frowned. What was the patriarch up to? Did he plan to claim the space gate and take control of this pocket space? How could he possibly accomplish this when all of their scientists still didn't understand anything about the alien gate device!?

To her and many people who have entered Purgatory, their highest priority was to make sure their escape hatch remained intact and in working condition.

Casella didn't care too much about keeping the ancient alien gate a secret. She would gladly transmit all of the details to any interested research institution that were willing to cooperate with the expeditionary forces. She bet that all of the foreign scientists working

together over the galactic net would be able to deliver excellent results in a matter of days!

After the two talked a bit more about the alien gate, Casella understood that there was little point in asking more. The researchers who have already studied it for half a day had already run out of answers!

"Can you tell me anything that is actually useful for our situation?" She asked as she tried to suppress her frustration.

As a professional commander, she fully understood the truth that information was crucial for victory!

The expeditionary forces had entered Purgatory with no idea what was going on. Compared to the fish-whales who knew this territory like the back of their hand, the human invaders barely managed to scratch the surface of this mysterious and possibly ancient pocket space!

"I do have good news that I think you will be interested to hear." The man began to smile. "We have recently deployed powerful, stationary sensor and scanning arrays that have performed many high-powered distance scans on the floating asteroid land masses within sight. We have collected a lot of data which we have tried our best to interpret. We have not only detected signs that we may find certain resources such as phasewater deposits on some of the asteroids, we have also been able to map out the quantities of fish-whales or other large organisms."

The scientist projected a basic map of Purgatory that showed over 20 different asteroids floating in a vague spherical space.

Casella could immediately tell that nine continents were glowing in bright red. She didn't need to guess that these were the places that contained a lot of fish-whales!

Numerous other continents contained medium concentrations of large organisms while the rest were fairly barren of creatures for some reason.

About 5 of the asteroids also contained blue light spots. Some of these spots were larger and brighter than others. They likely indicated the presence of significant phasewater deposits!

What interested Casella the most was that one of the smaller asteroids contained the brightest blue spots!

It also didn't contain as much red light either. This looked rather strange to the Sentinel Commander. Shouldn't the fish-whales place more importance on such a valuable resource site?

Another asteroid that caught her attention was the most central one. It was the largest floating landmass in Purgatory and also happened to shine the brightest in red!

"We need to know more about this central asteroid and this phasewater-rich asteroid." She stated. "Please direct our long-ranged sensor and scanning arrays to these floating landmasses for a longer time so that we can understand them better. I have a hunch that both of them are crucial sites."

"Will do, commander. Just take into account that our scans might provoke a response from the fish-whales."

"That is just a risk that we will have to take."

Chapter 3830 Hybrid Mech Buddies

Vincent Ricklin still relieved the brief but glorious moment where he and his B-Man made a good showing in battle.

That was the first time since he received the B-Man that he truly felt he was living up to his potential in a fight.

"That battle against the Titania doesn't count."

His B-Man made a poor showing during that fight. To be fair, there was little that Vincent and his custom hybrid mech could do against such a large and meaty astral beast. The gauss rounds fired by his mech's integrated weapon systems were lighter than pinpricks when it came to attacking enemies of this scale!

Since that time, Vincent occasionally entertained doubts about his combat effectiveness. It wasn't until he fought against the horde of fish-whales that he fully regained his confidence.

Not only did he blast and kill a lot of fish-whales during that glorious if frantic engagement, he also got to witness a more impressive hybrid mech take action!

Vincent had always known that Patriarch Reginald Cross was a powerful force on the battlefield, but the battle against the fish-whales truly opened his eyes to what his own future might lead towards.

After all, both of them piloted the same mech type!

The Bolvos Rage's raw power had earned him admiration and more. To Vincent, the mech was thick and masculine in both its shape and its stupendous combat power.

Being able to cast off hundreds of attacks from the fish-whales while at the same time killing droves of the monsters with its abundant weapon systems was one of the most glorious sights he had witnessed up close!

"And to think that the Cross Clan are already moving to replace the Bolvos Rage."

It was such a shame. Though its aesthetics did not fully line up with Vincent's tastes, he still dreamt of taking it over and piloting it for himself.

Even if it wasn't a living mech and even if he wasn't fully proficient in all of its weapon systems, he still wanted to replicate the awesome might that Patriarch Reginald had effortlessly displayed!

It was a pity that it was not to be. Even if Vincent broke through on the spot, he still wouldn't be strong enough to pilot high-tier expert mech with any degree of control! His resonance strength wouldn't be strong enough to resonate with any essential part or system.

There was also the small detail that the Bolvos Rage was completely customized for Patriarch Reginald and no one else.

Even if Vincent reached the same level of strength as the Cross Patriarch, he would only be able to display 10 or 20 percent of the potential of the Bolvos Rage. His chances of being able to resonate with the key exotics of the high-tier expert mech was practically miniscule!

The Cross Clan would probably dismantle the Bolvos Rage and recycle its strongest and most precious materials for the successor machine.

"Such a shame!"

That did not stop Vincent from admiring the powerful expert hybrid mech to the point where he rewatched the footage of it in action dozens of times. The outburst of power and the complete dominance it displayed in battle was such an amazing moment that he wanted to dominate the battlefield in this manner as well!

"When will I have my chance, though?" He sighed.

Unlike his bosom buddy Imon Ingvar, Vincent had failed to achieve his breakthrough. There were few moments where he could pilot his B-Man and feel heated enough to loosen his bottleneck.

He thought that maybe the battle against the fish-whales might be big enough for him to achieve his wish, but even slaying scores of the rabid monsters hadn't been enough for him to reach the next level.

"These fish-whales are not challenging enough!"

Though their numbers made it troublesome to defeat them all, most of them consisted of stupid, feral beasts who only knew how to bite their nearest targets. There was no challenge in defeating any one of them in single combat.

The sergeant fishes and the assassin fishes were a lot more challenging to defeat, but the B-Man failed to attract any of their attention during the previous engagement.

Did Vincent have to seek them out in order to make actual progress? He was already beginning to think about applying for one of the reconnaissance missions that might lead to bumping into groups of fish-whales.

"I'll do that after my meeting."

Vincent strode down the hastily-paved road and entered the district of Fort Fishblood that was under the control of the Cross Clan.

The differences were great. The colors, the insignia and the attitudes of the soldiers were substantially different. The Crossers also didn't play around with glows, so Vincent did not sense the obvious presence of mechs such as the Bright Warrior and the Valkyrie Redeemer.

The Crosser mechs weren't weak, though. The older ones already deserved a reputation for solidness while the newer ones displayed significantly better performance.

It was too bad that the Crossers were having difficulty finding room for all of their new mechs like the Larkinson Clan. Only when the expeditionary forces suffered substantial losses like now would the factory ships be able to fill in the void with recently-designed machines.

After a few more turns, Vincent reached a guarded mech workshop where he submitted himself to a security check before being allowed inside.

The large prefab structure had only been built in less than a day but it was already being put to use. Multiple teams of mech technicians were working on the Bolvos Rage's numerous powerful integrated weapon systems.

In the previous battle, Patriarch Reginald had used them above their rated capacities because it had been crucially important for him to destroy as many fish-whales as possible. All of that added stress strained the integrated energy weapon systems and dealt permanent damage to their more vulnerable and worn subcomponents.

Normally, Patriarch Reginald would have been reluctant to engage in such reckless actions, but he had fewer scruples about wearing down his expert mech now that a replacement was on the way.

Since the Bolvos Rage would only stay in service for a year at most, he might as well squeeze everything he could out of it before the Cross Clan sent it to the recyclers.

"Mr. Ricklin." Patriarch Reginald turned and beckoned the younger pilot over. "You are here. Good. Come closer and take a look at my mech."

The man was in a decent mood at the moment. Just like Vincent, he wore a piloting suit with the helmet closed due to the unsafe environment.

Of course, the Cross Patriarch's piloting suit looked a lot more expensive and impressive. It could double as a ceremonial uniform if there was nothing better at hand.

To Vincent, Patriarch Reginald exemplified a sense of masculinity that completely came natural to the powerful man.

Despite the initial downfall of the Cross Clan, Reginald heavily leaned on his personal strength and his powerful personality to lead his people to a new future!

Such leadership and dominance during times of crisis drew a lot of admiration from Vincent.

The sole Larkinson in the workshop stepped forward and reached the clan leader's side.

Vincent could see the marks of age and battle on the mech. While the mech technicians did a good job of fixing up its appearance after every major fight, they still couldn't fully address the impression that this was a workhorse that had entered its sunset years.

To Vincent, these marks were one of the ultimate expressions of manliness!

"This is a mech that has earned a lot of stripes in battle, sir." He said without much reserve towards the powerful expert pilot. "I cannot imagine all of the struggles you have been through to win over so many enemies and lead your clan to victory over and over again."

Patriarch Reginald crossed his arms. "It is a good and dependable mech, but all things must come to an end. I have outgrown this mech for a time now. While I could have chosen to upgrade it so that it can accompany me further, I have a better opportunity now that we have allied with your clan."

"Our mechs are the best." Vincent shamelessly boasted.

"They are certainly unique." Reginald grinned. "I did not call you here to talk about my mech situation. I called you here to talk about your own condition."

"My own condition? What do you mean by that, sir?"

The Cross Patriarch turned to his guest and directed a focused stare at Vincent.

Immediately, a powerful and oppressive presence descended upon the expert candidate. The two were way too far apart in strength, so Vincent could not help but buckle under the pressure!

Reginald eventually eased up after he shook his head in disappointment.

"You are still short of what I expect from a strong mech pilot. Don't be offended. Weakness is weakness no matter how you try to dress it up. You are still in your prime and have plenty of years to figure yourself out. I was not that much stronger back when I was your age."

A part of Vincent felt a bit offended at being addressed in such a patronizing fashion, but the more sensible part of him fully recognized that Reginald was more than powerful enough to speak this way!

"I hope to do better during this campaign. The previous battle has already helped me figure stuff out and I hope that other battles will help me more."

"Be that as it may, I believe it wouldn't hurt if you accompany me on my sorties." Reginald responded. "As a fellow hybrid mech pilot, there is much I can teach you. I have already studied the footage of your previous battle performances and I have spotted many shortcomings and bad habits that will hinder your attempt to reach a higher level."

Vincent winced. He was not completely unaware of his sloppy piloting skills. Even advancing to expert candidate didn't help that much as he was too far behind in his practice.

"Are you offering to tutor me?" He hesitantly asked. "I would love to receive your help, but is it appropriate for you to do so when we belong to different clans?"

"It's okay. Don't worry about it. We are all part of the same fleet and alliance. Our clans will only collaborate further in the future. At most, your Larkinson Clan will owe a favor to me. With the credibility of your leader, I know that he will make it up to me in one way or another. I would be glad if he puts in extra effort whenever he is working on our upcoming Mars Project."

"I see. If everything is okay, then I would be glad to fight at your side! How will we do this, exactly?"

The Larkinsons might not have any experience with this, but Patriarch Reginald and the Cross Clan already utilized this method of nurturing mech pilots with potential many times. He explained the basics to Vincent so that the expert candidate could quickly understand how he would benefit from this arrangement.

"You mean you intend to bring me with you and have me fight the fish-whales of your choosing?"

"Correct, and I will be critiquing your performance while you display your skills." Reginald said in a gruff tone. "I expect you to take my advice seriously. You can stand up to me when you have become an expert pilot and are ready to develop your own piloting style, but until then you must do your best to correct your bad foundation. When you fight a battle of life and death, you cannot allow yourself to get defeated because you were too lazy in your practice!"

Vincent began to have an inkling that he might not enjoy his time under Patriarch Reginald's tutelage.

However, this might be the only opportunity he could get to catch up with his buddy Imon and restore his wounded pride!

"I'm in, goddamnit. Don't make me regret my choice!"