

Mech Touch 6191

Chapter 6191 3 vs 1,000,000 MTA credits

Since Josh and Franklin received their new mission, their mechs flew towards the center of the battle between small craft.

The battlefield had already become littered with debris. Broken mechs and fighter craft continually soared away in every direction. Broken and shattered pieces of metal collided against the frames of machines that were too busy fighting against each other to bother with the impacts.

Further away, many orven warships continued to launch transphasic energy beams, kinetic rounds and missiles at the faltering defensive fortifications surrounding the planet.

Both sides had already incurred serious damage, but it was clear that the human defenders were at a clear disadvantage in this fight!

As many elite mechs disengaged from the main confrontation against the orven phasefighters and headed over to the much more intense part of the battlefield, Josh Ketter and his fellow pilots grew tenser and more apprehensive at what they were about to fight against.

The elite phasefighters fielded by the orvens clearly stood above the light and heavy phasefighters that they fought against just earlier.

The models of the elite phasefighters varied considerably from each other, but the mech pilots already guessed that even the worst of these craft had reached quasi-first-class standards!

The more modern and advanced alien craft might not be able to defeat a first-class multipurpose mech by itself, but the fighter can still inflict enough damage against the human machine, and that was enough!

When Josh observed the ongoing battle between the top small craft of both sides, he understood why the higher ups wanted to divert additional mechs to this engagement.

The elite phasefighters abused their numbers advantage to the fullest!

Although the craft did not possess powerful defenses, they were able to rely on a combination of numbers and fairly potent firepower to completely suppress the first-class multipurpose mechs!

Although the first-class mechs did the best they could to rely on their superior all-round performance to evade many attacks and eliminate as many elite phasefighters as possible, there was a limit to the amount of damage they could withstand.

The first-class multipurpose mechs were badly outnumbered. The elite phasefighters eagerly ganged up on specific human machines in order to quickly tear them apart and increase the numbers disparity even more!

Josh, Franklin and the other reinforcing pilots all knew what they had to do without requiring any additional clarification.

"Those elite phasefighters are too strong compared to our mechs." Franklin grumbled. "Their defenses might not be as good as their current opponents, but they are still better than the defenses of our mechs. As for their weapons... they are an entire class above our own. Our hyper energy shields won't last long, and even their lightest transphasic attacks can shred our armor plating."

"Are you chickening out, Franklin?"

"Hell no! I don't think I will be able to make it out of this battlefield alive. I just want to last long enough to take out more enemies before I go. The more elite phasefighters I defeat, the better off my kids will be. Let's make sure we don't die too soon!"

"Your thoughts are the same as mine." Josh savagely grinned.

Now that he had liberated his fear towards death, his drive became stronger than ever!

All he thought about was killing more of these threatening elite phasefighters before his Fey Fianna crumbled apart.

He knew that it wouldn't be easy. The Fey Fianna had a lot of excellent defensive options at its disposal, but there was only so much that second-class solutions could accomplish.

Josh needed to approach this fight with care. His Fey Fianna needed to avoid attracting too much attention. It may be better to slow down its traversal speed and let the other mechs attract the attention of the aliens first.

He shook his head. He rejected this cowardly course of action.

Honor demanded that he followed his comrades into the fray no matter how much they imperiled themselves!

Besides, nothing escaped the monitoring of the Red Association. The mecher liaison already made it clear that under their watchful eyes, every action would be tracked and evaluated in order to make certain that nobody tried to cheat or game the system.

Only honorable combat allowed pilots such as Josh to make a meaningful contribution to the war effort.

The reinforcing mech pilots received more precise orders. They needed to relieve the first-class multipurpose mechs as much as possible by distracting their attackers as best as possible.

One way that could truly force the orven phasefighters to divert their attention was to reduce their numbers as quickly as possible!

"We need to team up with other pairs." Josh said. "It will take at least four or five melee mechs equipped with space suppressors to quickly breach their transphasic energy shields."

The mechs all formed into squads based on the assignments transmitted by their motherships.

Josh's Fey Fianna grouped up with three more swordsman mechs and one light skirmisher.

With the light mech flying ahead, the mech pilots of the other three melee mechs expressed clear interest in the Fey Fianna.

"That is not a machine you see here every day. How is the piloting experience?"

"Sublime. Completely different. It has helped me out more times than I can count. It is as if I have a permanent co-pilot by my side."

"That sounds great. I am jealous of you. If I did not sign up for this duty, I might have been able to pilot one of those new living mechs one day."

"Maybe you will have a chance one day." Josh quipped.

"Hah! Dream on! Let's focus on our mission. Target that black fighter with red stripes first. The craft's transphasic energy shield is already half-depleted. We should complete what the first-class mechs have started."

"Agreed."

The elite phasefighters that had previously been using their numbers advantage to bully the first-class multipurpose mechs suddenly began to experience greater pressure.

The rifleman mechs fired first. Their energy beams and gauss rounds failed to penetrate the transphasic energy shields of the elite phasefighters, but still managed to drain them a little further.

However, the lack of transphasic arms meant that the ranged mechs hardly posed much of a threat.

The tech and material disparities were simply too large.

The second-class mechs only cost a handful of MTA credits to produce.

It was difficult to estimate the production cost of the various models of elite phasefighters that could actually threaten genuine first-class multipurpose mechs. However, any decent mech designer could roughly estimate that their cost in human currency may start at a million MTA credits.

Even if phasewater made up for a hefty chunk of this cost, this huge price gap still illustrated how ridiculous it was for second-class mechs to intervene in this fight!

Yet the second-class mechs still took on this fight because they could still make a difference!

"Careful! The red-striped fighter is turning towards us! It is about to fire its energy cannons!"

The enemy craft ignored the approaching light skirmisher and tried to take down one of the three swordsman mechs.

The pilot of the targeted mech already anticipated this move and began to make desperate evasive maneuvers.

Most laser beams ended up missing the mech, but the few that managed to land a hit quickly broke apart the weak hyper energy shield and burned deep holes through the armor plating!

If not for the fact that the mech pilot made his machine spin in an attempt to spread out the energy damage across a wider surface area, the swordsman mech would have suffered severe internal damage by this time!

"Ahhh! One of the power lines got burned! My mech has lost 20 percent of its power already. Its armor plating is as thin as a leaf against this level of firepower!"

The elite phasefighter did not cease firing. Even though there were multiple ranged mechs trying to sap its transphasic energy shield, the orven fighter pilot clearly understood which targets to prioritize.

It only took a few seconds for the alien to accomplish his goal.

"It looks like I am going out first. Kill this orven bastard for me. Don't let my sacrifice be in vain!"

Josh's eyes grew a little strained when the swordsman mech succumbed from the transphasic attacks.

The damage inflicted by this small machine was not great, but the story was different for the other melee mechs.

Fortunately, the elite phasefighter did not have enough time to mop up the other mechs before it became assailed by the remaining human machines!

The light skirmisher arrived first and continually pummeled the transphasic energy shield with its daggers.

The damage inflicted by this small machine was not great, but the story was different for the other melee mechs.

The two surviving swordsman mechs tried to box in the phasefighter and utilized power moves to quickly deplete the fighter craft's transphasic energy shield.

The Fey Fianna joined in as well and thrust its spear at the energy barrier on a repeated basis.

The melee mechs also tried their best not to put themselves in the crosshairs of the ranged mechs.

The attacks of so many mechs began to take a toll on the half-depleted transphasic energy shield.

Not only that, but the space suppressors from the light skirmisher, the two swordsman mechs, the Fey Fianna and two additional supporting fey all produced a stacking effect that successfully negated the powerful phasewater reinforcement of the affected phasefighter!

The elite alien fight craft's energy shield became a lot more fragile, allowing the attackers to deplete it much faster than before!

What was also important was that the attacks launched by the phasefighter also became weaker.

Even though the elite phasefighter tried to resist as much as possible by launching attacks at the more distant ranged mechs, Franklin's machine only received light to moderate damage up to this point.

"We're through!"

As soon as the suppressed energy shield shattered apart, the light skirmisher zipped forward faster than the other mechs and instantly shoved its knives through the surprisingly fragile exterior and demolished the cockpit.

The alien pilot died instantly!

The fighter craft lost all activity and began to drift aimlessly through space. Though it still retained a bit of functionality, there was no point in attacking it further as the orvens weren't stupid enough to automate their phasefighters.

"Again!"

The four melee mechs and five ranged mechs did not rest and decided to gang up on another phasefighter.

At this time, their group was hardly the only one to achieve a result. Many other veteran mech pilots had successfully teamed up to eliminate one elite phasefighter after another.

The orven fighter pilots could no longer afford to ignore the threat posed by human reinforcements than before!

The angry orvens turned away from the first-class multipurpose mechs and began to turn their guns against the much weaker second-class mechs!

As the Fey Fianna and the other mechs approached another elite phasefighter, two more phasefighters came to the rescue and started to launch a counterattack!

"We are being targeted!"

The incoming damage was terrible!

One swordsman mech got ripped to shreds within seconds as energy weapons designed to take down first-class multipurpose mechs were no joke!

The sole remaining swordsman mech broke away and invested its full power into evasive maneuvers.

The mech pilot of this machine had made the right decision. By no longer flying forward, the mech gained a lot more freedom of movement!

Alas, the three phasefighters were too powerful. They ignored the ranged attacks splashing against their transphasic energy shields in order to finish off the remaining swordsman mech as possible!

Josh grew dismayed. Only the light skirmisher and his Fey Fianna were left. The loss of several mechs equipped with space suppressors increased the burden of the survivors.

The pilot of the Fey Fianna suddenly felt a lot threatened. He could guess that the three phasefighters had set their sights on his Fey Fianna next!

Multiple powerful transphasic energy beams ripped the Fey Fianna's hyper energy shield and began to burn out dozens of modular armor plating!

As the second volley arrived, Josh desperately put the two shield generator fey in the way in order to prevent an early collapse!

Even so, the fey got so badly beaten that they had become littered by holes!

"No!"

Chapter 6192 Outclassed

Most orven phasefighters were too strong!

Their defenses were already fairly tough, but their offensive power was too high due to increased power levels and the use of phasefighter.

So long as the fighter craft were not affected by a space suppressor field, their lethality was too high towards second-class mechs!

Even a popular and well-regarded second-class drone mech like the Fey Fianna was little different in this regard!

As Josh witnessed the two hyper energy shield fey getting destroyed within a few seconds, his mind worked faster than ever as he and his living mech tried to fight for their survival as much as possible.

"Armor!"

The Fey Fianna had already begun to form the best possible response aside from engaging in evasive maneuvers.

One of the handy features of the Fey Fianna was its modular armor system. Developed by Beatrice Hendrix, the modular armor plating had the potential to increase the mech's ability to resist damage by as much as five times!

Of course, this was just a theoretical claim. Whether it was possible to do this in practice was questionable, but Josh did not want his fragile mech to fall into pieces too soon!

A lot of modular plating had already left their original places.

The intact modular plates from the fallen energy shield fey as well as the ones located to the rear of the base mech all moved to the front of the machine!

The modular plating quickly formed into makeshift physical barriers that were several layers deep. Only the torso received their protection as there simply weren't enough plates to cover the rest.

It was enough, if only for half-a-dozen seconds.

The firepower of the elite phasefighters was immensely powerful, so much so that one of the Fey Fianna's legs already lost most of its functionality!

However, the desperate move to prolong the survival of the mech worked, if only for a very short period of time. A lot of modular armor plating got burned or vaporized. The penetrating energy attacks easily damaged multiple layers of armor at the same time!

If Josh and his living mech did not work together to reposition more modular armor plating in order to maintain a sufficient degree of thickness, the torso of the Fey Fianna would have gotten blasted by now!

Even so, there was no way the Fey Fianna could resist the attacks for long!

Josh already understood that his desperate actions may have only prolonged his death by a dozen seconds at most, but what else could he do? His Fey Fianna was far too weak compared to these elite phasefighters. He just hoped he could be a little more useful than the swordsman mechs that got shredded to pieces a lot faster than his own machine.

Just as Josh was resigned to die without being able to kill another highly threatening elite phasefighter, the engagement suddenly took a radical turn as a series of plasma bolts, micromissiles and transphasic hyper positron beams struck one of the elite phasefighters!

Since the fighter craft had turned their attention towards the reinforcing mechs, they had neglected to pay enough attention to the first-class multipurpose mechs they had previously tried to contain.

Now that the first-class mechs endured a lot less pressure, they gained more room to launch counterattacks!

One of them just so happened to turn its formidable arsenal against the fighter craft that threatened the Fey Fianna.

Even if the first-class multipurpose mech was no longer in a good condition, it still possessed more than enough firepower to blast part one of the elite phasefighters with ease!

The orven pilots of the other two elite phasefighters completely lost their rhythm to the point where their attacks had stalled.

While it was important to get rid of the annoying human reinforcements, there was no way they could ignore the hostility of a powerful first-class multipurpose mech!

The alien pilots clearly dismissed the existence of the Fey Fianna and split away from each other in an attempt to evade the attacks launched by the first-class multipurpose mechs.

It didn't work. Although the first-class mech soon began to get attacked by other opportunistic small craft, the aggrieved mech pilot became determined to wipe out the two phasefighters.

Despite flying in opposite directions, the first-class multipurpose mech targeted both machines at the same time!

One of the craft got overwhelmed by a deluge of plasma bolts.

The other fighter craft crumbled apart after getting struck by potent positron beams!

It didn't matter that the two phasefighters were not weakened by any nearby space suppressor fields.

In the face of an RA mech whose firepower was on a completely higher level, any additional measures became optional.

Josh and the remaining mechs in his impromptu squad all became impressed at what just happened.

The main reason why the first-class multipurpose mechs hadn't been able to eliminate as many elite phasefighters with such ease was because they faced too many enemies at once.

The arrival of reinforcements had changed this equation!

The RA mechs took advantage of the reduced pressure to attack the elite phasefighters, managing to eliminate many of them in a much shorter span of time!

The pilot of the RA mech soon transmitted a direct short-ranged message to the Fey Fianna and other nearby machines.

"Follow my lead!"

"Yes, sir!"

Josh felt grateful for the RA mech's intervention. He also recognized that it was better to cooperate more closely with such a powerful machine.

More melee mechs joined his squad. They soon began to act in coordination with the RA mech by attacking the elite phasefighters that sought to eliminate the powerful machine.

It was hard work. The elite phasefighters were still too numerous, and many of them did not have much qualms about turning their energy cannons at the second-class mechs.

Josh felt as if he was a few steps away from death the longer he took part in this struggle. Numerous mechs fell apart as they got targeted by the powerful alien craft every 30 seconds.

Though Josh's Fey Fianna managed to escape this fate for the time being, the pilot knew that it would not take much to collapse his machine defenses entirely!

Teaming up with an RA mech still yielded a lot of results, though. The second-class mechs were not really able to take down the elite phasefighters by themselves, but so long as they attracted the attention and hostility of the alien pilots, they had already done their jobs!

The Fey Fianna and the other second-class mechs literally and figuratively served as shields for the first-class multipurpose mech.

The powerful machine hailing from the Red Ocean possessed a seemingly endless amount of firepower. The pilot of this powerful machine did his best not to squander the sacrifices made by the reinforcements and managed to take down over 10 enemy fighter craft at a much faster pace than before.

Alas, it still wasn't enough!

The elite phasefighters were still very numerous, and many second-class mechs could not withstand their attention.

Even if the first-class multipurpose mechs managed to thin the herd of enemy small craft by over 15 percent since the arrival of human reinforcements, that still left a lot of phasefighters that had already succeeded in reducing the number of first-class multipurpose mechs.

Both sides suffered greater losses, but the reinforcements suffered the greatest losses by far!

It couldn't be helped. A large number of second-class mechs got thinned out due to their vulnerability against the more powerful alien small craft. This was the price they paid for intervening in a fight above their class.

Just as it seemed that the disproportionate losses to the second-class mechs would ultimately cause them to fail in their mission, miracles started to occur.

When an elite phasefighter swept past the damaged Fey Fianna and went on to damage the ranged mechs following in the rear, Josh immediately grew alarmed.

"Franklin!"

His friend's rifleman mech was not the first machine to get targeted, but the fragility of the adjacent ranged mech meant that his machine soon came under imminent threat!

Yet just before the elite phasefighter could switch to its other target, an explosion of power erupted from another nearby rifleman mech!

"A breakthrough!"

Even though the lucky pilot only became an expert candidate, his age and experience caused him to build up a lot of accumulation.

The more powerful breakthrough energies as well as the ability to surpass his human limits to a modest degree caused the new expert candidate to enter his best state in his entire career!

"DIE!"

The resonance-empowered positron beams fired by his mech exhausted the transphasic energy shield much more quickly than normal. Without its energy barrier, the elite phasefighter quickly succumbed to the firepower!

Though Josh felt a little disappointed that neither him nor Franklin managed to break through, they were genuinely happy that one of their colleagues managed to take the first step.

"I have received new orders." The happy and jubilant-sounding expert candidate said. "There is no obligation for me to fight anymore. I can go back and wait for evacuation. It is just..."

"Go." Josh earnestly said. "You deserve this chance. Red humanity can get much more out of you if you live long enough to break through again. You should not be buried in this miserable grave."

Franklin concurred. "Any of us would make the same decision as you if we were in your position. You are not a coward. You are being prepared for more important battles. Go and fight on our behalf. Kill every alien until you have avenged us all! We are counting on you heroes!"

The expert candidate did not hesitate any further and disengaged from the fight without feeling any guilt.

He was not the only pilot who managed to break through. Over a dozen other pilots across the entire battlefield successfully broke through as well!

Many of them received immediate instructions to focus on preserving their lives while they retreated from the enemy.

The Red Association dispatched several first-class mechs to provide additional cover and support in order to ensure the expert candidates made it back safely!

This was a special treatment that the other mech pilots could never dream of receiving!

They all knew their own places in this battle. So long as they remained mortal, they could forget about getting pampered.

The breakthrough of these lucky pilots stimulated the others into fighting harder. Josh, Franklin and many others who witnessed the emergence of an expert candidate began to feel greater hope.

As long as they managed to break through, they would also be able to gain a new lease on their lives!

Unfortunately, the breakthroughs happened too infrequently. The battle against the elite phasefighters was also steadily getting worse for the human mech pilots as the immediate removal of every expert candidate deprived them of a lot of momentum!

As the losses among the second-class mechs started to reach an unsustainable level, everyone received a new but heavy instruction.

"Are you hearing this, Josh?" Franklin asked. "We have received orders to drag down the remaining elite phasefighters as much as possible."

Josh and Franklin soon understood the intention of the higher ups when a sudden but crucial change occurred.

Every first-class multipurpose mech that had previously mowed down plenty of elite phasefighters with the help of reinforcements turned around and flew away at full power!

The RA mechs completely disregarded the second-class mechs they cooperated with as well as the surviving elite phasefighters that still posed a certain threat!

Although the orven enemies immediately started their pursuit, the second-class mechs did their best to distract them and pull them away from their chase!

The reason why the first-class multipurpose mechs chose to turn tail now was because the situation had so much that they could finally resume their mission!

They no longer feared the elite phasefighters anymore because they no longer had the numbers to keep the first-class multipurpose mechs in place anymore.

This was especially the case when the remaining reinforcements were just strong enough to hold back the most powerful alien fighter craft!

Once the orven pilots realized they could no longer stop the first-class multipurpose mechs from attacking their siege vessel, they grew angry and stured all of their ire towards the second-class mechs that dared to slow down their fighter craft!

The mechs that stayed behind started to suffer enormous losses!

Chapter 6193 Driven to Exhaustion

The battle was starting to reach its climax.

Both sides suffered greater and greater losses as they fought for dominance over a star system located in the vulnerable 1st defensive band.

Every human fighting in this strategic location knew that they would likely never be able to get away alive, let alone see another tomorrow.

Yet the volunteer linefighters all did their duty without giving in to panic or despair.

They signed up for this mission. They fought not for themselves, but for the future of their next of kin and as well as red humanity as a whole.

This sense of duty and sacrifice fortified their spirits and allowed them to face certain death with a brave face!

"Hahaha! Five elite phasefighters already fell at my hand! I'm rich! My sons will definitely be able to squeeze into the Red Association after this! Help me kill more of them so that I can get my cousins in as well!"

"My flight system is toast. Leave me behind. I can't move, but I can still serve as a distraction. I'll even eject my cockpit so that the aliens have two targets to fight against!"

"For humanity! Death to the aliens!"

The greater the threat of death, the more fearless the mech pilots became!

As for the elite orven fighter pilots, they had all grown furious at their inability to keep the first-class multipurpose mechs contained. If not for the human reinforcements running interference, the aliens would have been able to hold back or even destroy the powerful RA mechs!

It was for this reason that the elite phasefighters no longer became distracted by other priorities and focused their full efforts on annihilating the elite mech units!

Transphasic missiles exploded against mechs, causing the latter to either get crippled or blown apart without any other exception.

Multiple phasefighters formed into a wing and kept strafing multiple mechs at once. The firepower of their transphasic energy cannons was too strong for their targets to resist.

Many alien fighter craft endured a lot of attacks, especially from the ranged mechs that were able to strike at any distance in this open environment. However, their powerful transphasic energy shields easily withstood a lot of blows, thereby making it so that very few phasefighters succumbed from ranged attacks.

The only effective way for the second-class mechs to take down the phasefighters was for multiple melee mechs to get close to them. The Red Two heralded space suppressors as game changers, and they proved their value many times over in this battle as well as many others.

Not only were the melee mechs able to shatter the transphasic energy shields multiple times easier, their intervention also increased the effectiveness of ranged mechs targeting the same enemies.

Although the original squad assignments had already turned useless due to all of the deaths, the veteran mech pilot did not require any formal assignments in order to work with each other.

Informal teams formed and broke apart with every passing minute. The mech pilots utilized their own judgment to decide whether to group up with other machines or go their separate ways.

As the amount of second-class mechs and elite phasefighters began to drop at a rapid rate, it became clear that the latter steadily gained more ground.

It couldn't be helped!

The elite phasefighters may have suffered heavy losses after tangling with the first-class multipurpose mechs they were supposed to stall, but their remaining numbers was still more than enough to grind down the much weaker second-class mechs!

This confrontation was turning into a grave for an increasing number of mech pilots. Their courage and optimism were admirable, but high morale alone could not save them from near-certain death!

The only way for these imperiled and dying mech pilots to reach the light at the end of a very dark tunnel was to break through.

Under the insane pressure exerted by the powerful fighter craft that they had been struggling against, more and more mech pilots managed to exceed their limits and break through!

"I WILL NOT ALLOW MYSELF TO BE DEFEATED BY THESE PATHETIC FIGHTERS!"

"MY STORY DOES NOT END TODAY!"

"I AM THE SAVIOR OF RED HUMANITY!"

Their strong emotions propelled their willpower to unprecedented heights! Not only did they gain strong convictions, but their forced resonance directly amplified the combat power of their machines by around an order of magnitude, enabling them to kill elite phasefighters with greater ease!

If these brand-new expert candidates all committed to the fight and directed their temporary boost in power to eliminating the elite phasefighters, then the second-class mechs might have a chance of winning this confrontation.

However, this did not make sense from a strategic perspective!

The higher ups valued the lives of all of the newly ascended expert candidates far greater than the 'ordinary' mechs and mech pilots that had yet to display any extraordinary strength.

The only known evacuation ship could accommodate a large number of passengers on an emergency basis, but it could not accept any people that held no greater value.

Only the expert candidates were entitled to receive a ticket on this ride!

As soon as they broke through, the expert candidates only fought for a short amount of time before they resolutely retreated from the front.

The elite phasefighters didn't want to let them go. It became clear that the orvens all received orders to shoot down as many mechs piloted by expert candidates as possible, so a frenzy occurred after every breakthrough!

The few RA mechs assigned to escort these expert candidates back to the rear provided a lot of cover to guarantee the survival of these future human heroes, but it was not enough!

The other second-class mechs had to come to the aid of their luckier comrades and do their part to reduce the pressure.

All of the hectic struggles caused people's emotions to surge even higher, thereby triggering further breakthroughs!

These were remarkable phenomena as many of the pilots here were older veterans who had previously given up any hope of treading onto the path of godhood.

It was only now that they were literally in the fight of their lives that these old dogs seemed to experience a renaissance.

All of their training, experience and skill seemed to come together and sublimate into willpower that became strong enough to impose their ideas on reality, if only momentarily!

Josh Ketter became incredibly inspired by all of these breakthroughs. He had interacted with a few of them in the past few months. They were similar to him in terms of age, growth trajectory and more.

To see these brave men and women defeat the odds as well as their own estimations gave everyone else hope that they may be able to replicate this feat!

"Press the advantage! The elite phasefighters are already beginning to flag. Those orven fighter pilots are too inexperienced!"

The tech utilized by the orvens may be a lot more superior than the tech utilized by the second-class mechs, but the individuals controlling them also mattered!

Compared to the veteran mech pilots, their much younger and less trained orven counterparts began to show their faults.

Even if the alien fighter pilots did not have to control as many variables, their hasty training and their lack of tempering obviously left their mentalities rather weak.

Their ferocity could not match that of their human foes. Their motivations were also fairly weaker as they were mainly fighting on behalf of their 'gods' and their higher caste superiors.

This caused the alien phasefighters to fight less fluidly than before. As the orvens became susceptible to fear and doubt, they began to forget parts of their training.

This made the fight a bit more bearable for mech pilots such as Josh Ketter, but only to a modest extent.

The huge gap in tech level was still too difficult to overcome!

"Die!"

A battered and partially crippled Fey Fianna utilized its only intact arm to stab its spear against an elite phasefighter.

The enemy craft had clearly lost its transphasic energy shield at least once before. Its fuselage exhibited clear signs of damage and burn marks caused by laser beams.

However, the craft somehow managed to pull back and rest long enough for its transphasic energy shield generator to restore its function.

It was difficult for the Fey Fianna to inflict effective damage to the craft at its current state. The loss of an arm due to getting shredded by enemy fire had made it a lot more difficult for the machine to wield its spear.

What made the Fey Fianna's situation even worse was that it had almost run out of modular armor plating. The machine had stripped every piece of plating from the head, the limbs, the space suppressor fey in order to protect its most essential internal components against damage.

The Fey Fianna would have definitely fallen if not for the ability to rearrange its armor plating!

Even so, Josh Ketter knew that he had exhausted his allowance. He fought with the constant fear that his mech would get torn to pieces as long as it attracted the attention of a determined enemy fighter pilot.

In order to reduce the chance that his mech would get singled out, Josh purposefully fought alongside other melee mechs in order to give the orvens other targets to focus their fire.

It worked so far. The swordsman mechs and other melee mechs all looked deadlier and more threatening than Josh's beat up Fey Fianna.

Even as the axeman mech that Josh had been fighting alongside began to shut down as another enemy craft blew a hole through the cockpit, his Fey Fianna along with other supporting mechs finally breached the defenses of their target and made short work of the damaged fighter craft!

"Another one down."

Less than 200 elite phasefighters were left at this time, but these craft were predominantly piloted by the most skilled and resilient alien fighter pilots.

The cowards who had begun to flag as the fighting dragged on had already been eliminated for the most part.

The ones that remained were undoubtedly the more promising fighter pilots that had become baptized and tempered in battle!

As the weary and increasingly faltering second-class mechs tried to finish off the remaining elite phasefighters, Josh suddenly felt threatened as an elite phasefighter finally targeted his partially crippled mech out of all of the other nearby mechs.

"JOSH!" Franklin roared even as his hot energy rifle spat out hyper positron beams at the strafing phasefighter. "GET OUT OF THERE!"

As the jaws of death began to descend upon him, Josh became more and more focused. His Fey Fianna abused its strained flight system past its limits and forcibly juked around in space, thereby managing to evade the majority of incoming shots fired by the enemy craft.

The inexperienced orven pilot became frustrated by the continuous evasions and tried to compensate for his aim as best as possible.

However, the alien's frustrations only caused his aim to worsen, thereby allowing the Fey Fianna to get away with only minor damage!

Much of the shots that would have otherwise struck the torso of the machine had been resisted or softened up by the space suppressor fey.

Both modules that had served the Fey Fianna extremely well during the previous fighting finally reached the end of their journeys. Their fall was swift as the Fey Fianna had already cannibalized all of their modular armor plating!

Though the mech no longer possessed any obstacles that could shield its internals from damage, the alien phasefighter had already come too close to launch any further attacks!

Unlike mechs, fighter craft were not meant to remain stationary in combat. The enemy phasefighter had little choice but to swoop past the Fey Fianna without gaining the satisfaction of downing another human mech.

The orven mech pilot focused the formidable firepower of his fighter onto another mech.

Josh briefly relaxed now that he confirmed that he had managed to prolong his life a little more, but he soon began to panic when he noticed that the enemy craft was firing its energy cannons at the supporting ranged mechs!

"Franklin! Disengage right now!"

"I can't, Josh! The enemy fighter has it out for me! I can't shake its fire!"

"Then eject!"

"It's pointless. My time is up. I will leave the rest to you, Josh. For a human galaxy!"

The elite phasefighter managed to land enough shots on the evading ranged mech to destroy the latter's flight system.

Once Franklin's rifleman mech lost its ability to move, it became an easy target. The orven phasefighter took advantage of this condition and easily demolished the mech's exposed torso!

Seeing his war buddy and genuine friend of the past few months die without being able to do anything to avert this outcome finally caused Josh to go over the edge!

Red filled his vision as his helplessness and repressed fury boiled over!

He broke through!

"YOU FILTHY ALIENS!"

The Fey Fianna exploded with energies as forced resonance spontaneously repaired and fortified a lot of parts!

The mech had gone from a near wreck into a formidable threat!

Even as Josh became an expert candidate and earned a ticket from this battlefield, he refused to obey the orders to retreat and ready himself for evacuation.

All thoughts about returning to his daughter disappeared from his mind as only vengeance dominated his irrational mind!

Chapter 6194 The Drive of Vengeance

The breakthrough of an expert candidate was not as exaggerated as that of an expert pilot.

It should not be underestimated, though!

Expert candidates had taken their first step in transcending their mortal limitations.

To younger and less experienced mech pilots, this transition was 'relatively' mild and short-lasting.

The story was different for an older and more experienced mech pilot like Josh Ketter.

His accumulation was far greater. His failure to break through during the prior decades did not diminish this in the slightest.

If he was just a normal mech pilot who followed a normal career trajectory, then all of this accumulation would slowly atrophy as he fell victim to long-term stagnation and regression as he aged.

Yet because he somehow managed to break through while he had just moved past his prime, Josh still managed to benefit from all of the hidden energies that he had built up over the course of piloting mechs on a near-daily basis for so many years.

The Fey Fianna that had previously lost both of its and an arm began to look a lot better than before!

The forced resonance phenomenon could not replace all of the missing modular armor plating, but it strengthened the machine just enough to serve Josh's purpose!

The death of Franklin shouldn't have affected him to this extent. Sure, the two had become as thick as thieves ever since they met each other after transferring to this star system. Yet that did not mean they became family all of a sudden.

Josh's emotions refused to listen to his rationality. To him, Franklin had become far more than a friend to him. The two shared similar experiences and volunteered for this duty for the same reasons.

He was like a brother that Josh had never met. The two could have accomplished a lot more if they met each other sooner. It was through pure luck and coincidence that the two mech pilots converged on this star system out of all of the other places in the old galaxy and the new frontier.

Now, Josh had lost his friend and brother that he had met too late. He only carried a few months worth of memories of Franklin. This was far from enough to keep him satisfied!

As the latest expert candidate to break through on this battlefield came into his power, he no longer became distracted by as many considerations as before.

In order to avenge Franklin's death and satisfy his own desire for spilling alien blood, Josh rejected the repeated calls to disengage and went on the offensive!

With the power of forced resonance, the Fey Fianna not only flew faster, but also maneuvered more agilely in space.

This enabled the machine to continually evade the attacks launched by other elite phasefighters.

Josh together with his living mech did their utmost to squeeze the potential of the Fey Fianna beyond its potential!

Even though the mech had lost all of its fey, that did not bother the expert candidate all that much.

As more and more orven fighter pilots sought to take down the latest human hero to rise up, the other second-class mechs did not remain idle!

They increased their aggression towards the alien fighter craft and tried to force them to divert their attention by any means possible!

"Go ahead and kill to your heart's content!"

"We will shield you from every enemy that seeks to cut short your killing spree."

"It is high time we annihilate these elite phasefighters. Too many of our brothers and sisters have fallen to their energy cannons. Fight until there is nothing left!"

As the Fey Fianna closed in on the elite phasefighter that had been responsible for ending Franklin's life, the orven pilot knew he was in serious danger.

The alien combatant already possessed a powerful impression of expert candidates and had no intention of fighting back!

The pilot instead steered his craft away in order to avoid falling prey to the vengeful enemy.

"COWARD!"

Josh grew angrier as the enemy avoided any form of confrontation. The Fey Fianna began to accelerate a little faster as the pilot did not hesitate to exceed the safe limitations of the flight system.

The Fey Fianna's flight system and other components would likely collapse after the forced resonance state had come to an end, but neither Josh nor his living mech cared about this consequence!

"WE ARE GAINING ON HIM, JOSH. LET US DRENCH THE TIP OF OUR SPEAR WITH THE BLOOD OF FRANKLIN'S KILLER."

The Fey Fianna had already developed an intimate bond with Josh, and cared about Franklin almost just as much!

The close alignments of their thoughts and motivations strengthened their forced resonance and allowed the mech to gain the boost it needed to get a little closer!

Unfortunately, it was not enough!

The orven fighter pilot somehow figured out a way to squeeze additional speed from his phasefighter.

The craft began to purge unnecessary components. Various parts began to fall away from the frame, allowing the phasefighter to reduce its mass by a small margin.

At the same time, the phasefighter's thrust power also began to increase as the pilot managed to override the safety limitations of his own craft.

Even as the heat levels of the engine and thrusters rose to a dangerous level, the orven pilot ignored the warnings given by his craft and tried to delay a 'reunion' as much as possible.

"I need more speed!" Josh urged his living machine.

"THERE IS NOTHING MORE LEFT TO GIVE. MY FLIGHT SYSTEM IS ALREADY STRETCHED BEYOND ITS LIMIT. THERE IS NO WAY WE CAN ACCELERATE ANY HARDER."

"If that is the case..."

Josh refused to let his enemy get away!

Other ranged mechs helped out by shooting their rifles at the fleeing fighter craft. The attacks strained the alien phasefighter's transphasic energy shield, but not enough to collapse it quickly enough.

"ENOUGH!"

Josh made a spontaneous action. He commanded his Fey Fianna to hold its spear in an overhand grip before launching it forward as if it was throwing a javelin!

Empowered by all of the forced resonance that Josh was able to concentrate into the weapon, the glowing polearm soared through space and accurately nailed the elite phasefighter despite the pilot's hasty attempt to make a barrel roll to the side!

The strained transphasic energy barrier shattered as the spear enhanced by Josh's desire for vengeance pushed through and struck the thrusters of the fighter craft!

Although the spear had lost so much power that it was unable to pierce too deep into the fuselage, the weapon had nonetheless done its job.

The elite phasefighter had lost its main source of propulsion!

The small craft tumbled into space as it had lost control over its movements. With a speartip embedded into the rear of the orven phasefighter, the alien pilot lost his chance to escape the reach of a vengeful expert candidate!

A glowing Fey Fianna stopped by the side of the tumbling machine and yanked back the spear.

Though Josh wanted to take a moment and savor the satisfaction of driving his target to a dead end, the battlefield was still dangerous to him and his living mech.

With multiple elite phasefighters trying to take down the Fey Fianna and kill the promising expert candidate, the living mech constantly had to stay in motion in order to prevent its damaged and overstrained frame from collapsing.

Josh decided to keep it short and simple.

"This is for you, Franklin!"

One firm spear thrust was enough to breach the cockpit and squash the body of the orven fighter pilot!

Dead!

Josh gained an indescribable sense of fulfillment for killing the alien fighter pilot that had been responsible for killing his friend.

The fight was not over, though.

The number of elite phasefighters had dwindled by a lot since he last paid attention to their quantity, but a lot of second-class mechs had perished as well!

Instead of making the sensible decision to retreat and board his ride out of this doomed star system, Josh wanted to eliminate all of the remaining elite phasefighters before he left!

The glowing Fey Fianna valiantly raised its spear!

"KILL THE REST!"

As the Fey Fianna began to fly towards another elite phasefighter, the remaining elite mech pilots cheered and fought a little harder.

Both sides had pretty much fought each other to a state of depletion, so this was a time where both mechs and phasefighters were prone to glitches, malfunctions and other sudden mishaps.

Many craft became vulnerable and got destroyed in an instant. If not for the latest expert candidate intervening in the fight, the second-class mechs would have collapsed a bit sooner!

As the dwindling amount of elite phasefighters were being driven to desperation, they no longer attempted to wipe out all of the surviving elite mech units, but instead sought to take down their 'leader' and symbol of resistance!

The Fey Fianna began to attract a lot of unwelcome attention. The mech had been forced to pick up large pieces of metal debris from the battlefield in order to make up for its inadequate protection.

The Fey Fianna had tossed aside its spear so that its remaining hand could grip chunks of metal that originated from broken mechs and phasefighters.

Josh and his living mech soon learned that the thickest pieces of metal tended to last longer regardless of where they originally came from. The strongest alloys came from the first-class multipurpose mechs, but it was a pity that not a lot of debris from these powerful machines had spread to this side of the battlefield.

The expert candidate found it hard to shield his mech from attacks coming from multiple directions. Josh did his utmost to maneuver and shield his machine so that its torso received as little damage as possible.

By serving as the main target of the remaining elite phasefighters, the other surviving second-class mechs readily took advantage of the situation. They attacked their obsessed enemies and wore down their defenses at a brisk pace.

Eventually, the elite mechs, what little of them were left, had no more elite phasefighters left to kill.

Each of them had been destroyed!

The Fey Fianna that looked to be in a much worse shape than before amazingly managed to last long enough to witness the annihilation of the elite phasefighters!

As Josh registered what had happened, his breakthrough had finally run its course.

The Fey Fianna no longer glowed with power, but instead began to dim until its strained parts all began to shatter and spread apart.

The living mech knew that its time was up. It held no regrets about its imminent demise.

"DO NOT MOURN FOR MY DEATH. REMEMBER ME, AND FIGHT FOR ME. PLEASE GIVE MY REGARDS... TO YOUR DAUGHTER. MY ONLY REGRET... IS THAT I HAVE NEVER MET HER MYSELF..."

"I... will do as you say. Please go with peace. You have done your job. No other living mech will replace your place in my heart. That is my promise."

Josh closed his eyes as the man-machine connection got cut off due to the total breakdown of his machine. Only the cockpit remained intact.

It was only now that Josh regained his wits. He realized that he still remained in a very dangerous part of the battlefield. Now that he had successfully realized one of his dreams, his greatest priority was to retreat and make his way out of this star system alive!

"Aandie." Josh called out his daughter's name. "It looks like I am coming home after all. I am so happy that I can watch you grow up. With my new strength, I can—"

"\$#@\$\$&\$@\$."

The jubilant expert candidate's words suddenly cut off as a powerful spatial vibration spread across the center of the battlefield and shattered many mechs and phasefighters alike!

The orven fighter craft managed to resist this unannounced spatial attack to an extent, but the same could not be said for the mechs that overwhelmingly lacked transphasic defenses!

The cockpit of the broken Fey Fianna had no chance to survive this devastating strike. The metal cage shattered apart while the body inside had already shook into a bloody mush!

The expert candidate had fallen upon the moment of his triumph!

His bright and promising career as a hero had been cut off before it could get off to a proper start!

The culprit behind Josh Ketter's death never spared a thought to the deceased expert candidate. All of the puny humans and orvens were little more than insects to the arriving phase lord.

As the Trampler of Stars beheld the siege that had faltered due to the mech's successfully pulling off a decapitation strike on the orven siege vessel, the quadruped alien sneered.

The powerful phase lord raised its forelimbs before slamming them down onto an invisible floor!

The fabric of space around the Trampler of Stars shook and began to spread a second spatial eruption!

Chapter 6195 Tricky Isolation

In the first 24 hours after the start of the Red Tide Offensive, both sides suffered enormous losses!

The humans found themselves unable to preserve orbital supremacy over the fortified planets located in the 1st defensive band.

This did not immediately spell the fall of the human-controlled fortifications built on the planet.

Depending on how extensively the humans had dug in and how many forces the native aliens were willing to commit to planetary cleansing, it could take weeks if not months to effectively root out all human presence!

One of the advantages of the total state of war between red humanity and the native aliens was that neither side sought to subjugate each other's populations.

Pesky affairs such as trying to pacify a population comprised of hostile aliens did not bother the conquerors at all. They simply had to engage in extensive bombardment and deploy as many armies as needed to 'solve' the presence of enemies on the planet within a given deadline.

The Red War was a conflict with very high stakes. As long as one side gained absolute dominance over their adversaries, they stood to gain complete and unchallenged control over the vast dwarf galaxy and all of its riches!

With the continued existence of two completely different civilization groups in contention, neither side dared to show any mercy towards their opponents.

Perhaps a handful of fringe groups like the infamous cosmopolitans and more sensible pragmatists still thought there was a way to turn enemies into allies, but the drive towards conflict was too strong on both sides!

For this reason and more, the native aliens expended considerably greater effort and resources in the opening of their offensive than the red humans expected.

Instead of trying to pace their offensive advances and spend more time on testing the human defenses, the Red Cabal daringly chose to throw all caution to the wind and commit almost all of their readily available forces to the front.

This was a daring gamble. Many assault fleets ended up diving straight into various traps or encountered far greater resistance than expected.

No phase whale or particularly prestigious phase lord had yet to show up anywhere at the front.

Then there were all of the god mechs and dreadnoughts that were working overtime to annihilate as many expensive alien fleets as possible!

Perhaps the most sensible decision that the alien strategists had made was to hold back much of their phase leaders for the time being.

No phase whale or particularly prestigious phase lord had yet to show up anywhere at the front.

The only alien champions that had a chance of fighting human ace mechs to a standstill were the phase lords dispatched by numerous alien races.

Known alien warlords such as the Trampler of Stars appeared in contested star systems and utilized their considerable might to provide support to the alien fleets.

The phase lords weren't exactly eager to put their necks on the line in a front where any god pilot could drop by and harvest their lives in all sorts of gruesome ways, but the native aliens needed their strength in order to topple the border regions!

The Red Cabal resorted to a combination of threats and incentives to encourage the phase lords to set an example and lead from the front.

As the Trampler of Stars utilized his powerful ability to shake the fabric of space across a wide area of space, the stubborn but overmatched defenders of the second-class star system failed to hold out for long.

Most of their mechs shattered into pieces as they had no effective defense against the tyrannical power of the Trampler of Stars.

Tens of thousands of machines that previously fought hard against the alien phasefighters collapsed after being affected by just one of two terrible spatial waves!

If the star system enjoyed the protection of several ace mechs, then perhaps the nunser phase lord wouldn't have been able to wipe out so many mechs with impunity, but the leaders of red humanity had been unwilling to put their most precious heroes in such dangerous positions!

Only a few fortified star systems in the 2nd defensive band and most of the strategic locations in the other remaining defensive bands enjoyed the protection of at least one Saint.

The ace pilots stationed further in the rear were all eager to move forward and lift the siege on the star systems that were in the process of falling, but the Red Two and the first-rate colonial superstates refused to take action before they completely figured out the enemy's troop disposition.

Back at New Constantinople VIII, the Devos Ancient Clan had imposed a heightened state of alertness.

The New Constantinople System was located in the Agamemnon Upper Zone, which was located close to the center of the Terran Alliance.

The Terran star system was therefore not in an acute risk of welcoming alien visitors anytime soon, though the story might be different once the border regions fell.

In any case, the local defense forces had partially mobilized and began to engage in much more active patrols as a precaution.

Although the safety factor increased due to this response, many Terrans felt more and more oppressed by the worsening atmosphere. The war did not leave the peaceful star system untouched.

Up in high orbit, the Tarrasque received a familiar visitor.

After Ves had dealt with the various emergencies that erupted in the last day, he had enough time to allow himself to get teleported to the flagship of the Bluejay Fleet so that he could receive a classified briefing.

One of the perks of being a tier 3 galactic citizen was that Ves was entitled to a lot of insider knowledge!

Only by being well-informed about the naked truth of the Red War would he be able to make the most appropriate response. The information spread over the galactic net was so messy and opinionated that it was difficult to lend credence to every claim.

"Hello, Ves."

"Hello, Jovy. Hello, Vector. I see that the two of you have a lot to share with me today." Ves spoke as he sat down in the conference room.

Nobody was in the mood for small chat this time. The intensifying war and the mounting deaths made everyone clear that there was a serious chance that the aliens might actually overrun the border regions in a single sustained push.

How could anyone joke around when the survival of the human race in the Red Ocean started to come into question?

Survivalists such as Jovy Armalon were especially concerned about the deteriorating border regions!

"Many developments have occurred that you should be aware of." Jovy said to Ves. "Let us address the elephant in the room right away. Bridgehead One is unavailable to us since the start of the Red Tide Offensive."

"What's going on with that place anyway? Shouldn't you have fortified it even further based on suspicions that the Red Cabal wish to sabotage the greater beyonder gate?"

It might be difficult to believe in the prophetic visions painted on the Zeal, but Ves had reasons to take them seriously. The mechers would be fools not to take additional precautions just in case Ylvaine's prophecies turned out to be closer to the truth.

Jovy sighed. "I do not have access to the full details, but Master Vayro Goldstein assured me that the Red Two have indeed increased the defenses of Bridgehead One in total secrecy. What none of us expected was that the Red Cabal utilized one of their masterful manipulations of space and time to turn our most important star system into an isolated region of space."

A projection became active that displayed a visual image of a boundary in space. It looked as if a shimmering bubble had formed around a coordinate that completely prevented stuff from passing through!

"Shortly after Bridgehead One fell silent, our closest fleets attempted to enter the star system, only to get stopped in front of this... enormous spatial barrier. From what our scans and observations have revealed, Bridgehead One has become enveloped by an artificial hazardous region. We have attempted to launch many attacks at the spatial barrier in conjunction with the warships of the fleeters, only to accomplish nothing at all. This barrier is impenetrable."

Ves widened his eyes at the sight. "How? The energy and effort required to conjure up such a massive spatial barrier is astronomical!"

"We think so as well, so our adversaries employed exceptional means in order to make this possible." Jovy explained. "When we studied the data logs transmitted from Bridgehead One just before it was isolated, we found clues that numerous sensors detected the appearance of at least 6 ancient phase whales."

"Six?! How the hell did they manage to slip to Bridgehead One without getting intercepted?!"

"Our guess is that the ancient phase whales utilized a special long-range displacement technique to secretly emerge inside an undiscovered pocket space located in the vicinity of our most important star system. What matters is that once the ancient phase whales surrounded Bridgehead One from each cardinal direction, they performed a grand spatial technique that is still preventing us from sending urgent reinforcements to relieve the crisis in this key location. What is strange that it is not only space that is being disturbed. Time is being altered as well."

"What?!" Ves almost shot out of his conference seat! "The phase whales managed to manipulate time!?"

As someone who had taken a few jaunts back into the past, Ves understood the horror of being able to manipulate time more than most people!

"It is not as bad as you think, Ves." Jovy reassured. "The manipulation of time within this isolation bubble is relatively crude and simple according to our physicists. As far as we can tell, six ancient phase whales with the assistance of unknown but extremely powerful materials or devices have formed a temporary hazardous region that not only isolates space, but also the progression of time to slow down by as much as 100,00 percent. This effectively means that if 100 days have passed in the universe, only a single day has passed inside this isolated bubble."

"Huh?" Ves looked confused. "What is the point of doing this? Is it really worthwhile for the native aliens to spend so much extra effort on slowing down the passage of time inside Bridgehead One?"

Vector Loban spoke up for the first time during this briefing. "Not exactly. The Red Cabal are hedging their bets. If their six ancient phase whales along with their forces have succeeded in destroying our greater beyonder gate, then they have completed their primary mission without any complications. If they are somehow stopped by the defenses that we have put in place, then the Red Cabal has still won in a sense. According to our scientists, the spacetime bubble can be sustained for at least 1,5 years. Do you understand what that means? If the bubble expires naturally, any work on the greater beyonder gate if it has managed to survive has only progressed by 5 days!"

That was a huge setback to red humanity's strategic outlook!

The Deep Strike Plan hinged on the successful and timely transformation of the greater beyonder gate. If its conversion had been delayed by 1,5 years, then that would give the native aliens much more time to raid humanity's borders without worrying about getting attacked in the rear!

"So that is why the Red Cabal went through so much effort." Ves frowned deeper. "Are there any solutions? The Spacelock should be able to break down this spacetime bubble."

Jovy tentatively nodded. "We do not dare to get our hopes up, but we agree that he is our best candidate to solve this problem. If he does not have the power to dispel the spacetime bubble alone, then several Star Designers have pledged to cooperate and construct a specialized counter device that should assist the Spacelock in liberating Bridgehead One."

"I don't think it will be easy for the Spacelock to dissolve this spacetime bubble alone." Ves judged. "The Red Cabal don't want to make it easy for us. They pretty much threw at least six ancient phase whales to this objective alone."

Ves had no idea how many ancient phase whales existed in the Red Ocean, but losing six of them at once was doubtlessly a heavy blow to the native aliens!

Chapter 6196 Strategic Pains

The Red Cabal's counterattack was more sophisticated and difficult to deal with than the leaders of red humanity anticipated!

In the initial years of the Age of Dawn, it seemed that the ability for the native aliens to adapt to the new environment was worse than their enemies.

Humans had experienced multiple periods of rapid growth and explosive technological progression. They were accustomed to producing a lot of new technological innovations in a short amount of time. They also possessed a secret cultivation heritage that gave them a head start in leveraging the greater potential of exotic radiation.

This gave humans the conceit that time was on their side. As long as they managed to hold their defenses against the aliens long enough, they would be able to turn the tables one day.

That assumption came under serious question after Ves learned what happened to Bridgehead One.

It was not just the greater beyonder gate that had entered into a bubble of near-frozen spacetime.

As the very first star system that the Red Two colonized after they secretly crossed the void between galaxies and reached the Red Ocean a number of decades ago, Bridgehead One served as the focal point of all human activity in the new frontier.

Bridgehead One was the base of the tree that represented human-occupied space!

The population density in this heavily transformed and fortified star system was immensely high.

Many of the brightest scientists, engineers, naval engineers and mech designers of the Red Association and to a lesser extent the Red Fleet resided in this crucial star system!

It also held a lot of administrative offices and other important institutions that kept human society running.

The sudden removal of Bridgehead One instantly caused a lot of plans and arrangements to hit a wall!

People were scrambling to adjust their processes and operations in order to make up for the unexpected communications blackout to this critical strategic star system.

Most people pretty much regarded Bridgehead One as the unofficial capital of human-occupied space, or at least the Red Ocean Union portion of it. Any star nation would become severely hampered if they suddenly lost their capital out of the blue.

"I cannot overstate how bad it is that we have lost access to Bridgehead One, if only temporarily." Jovy Armalon said as he leaned over the conference table while staring at the projection of the timespace bubble. "Losing access to all of the headquarters, research institutions and high-tech production facilities that we have built over there is a huge setback, especially now that the Red Tide Offensive has just begun. The lack of progress due to the extreme deceleration of time progression inside the bubble will slow down our technological progression and allow the native aliens to maintain the upper hand for a longer period of time."

"That is especially the case when the Polymath and possibly other Star Designers have been marooned in the spacetime bubble as well." Professor Vector Loban added. "I do not think I need to emphasize how much damage our society incurs when these Star Designers are effectively unable to contribute to the advancement of human science and technology."

Oh yeah. That was the case as well. Ves grew even more pessimistic about red humanity's future in the new frontier. Each and every Star Designer was a productive powerhouse of the highest level.

Just the Polymath alone was responsible for continuing the development of many existing high technologies whose chief developers had all remained behind in the Milky Way Galaxy!

While there were other Star Designers that could compensate for the Polymath's absence, there were many good reasons why the Survivalist Faction only put the failed coup artist under 'house arrest' instead of killing her off entirely.

Red humanity couldn't afford to lose her services!

The mere idea that the Polymath and potentially other Star Designers found themselves cut off and isolated in a bubble where the passage of time had been slowed down to an enormous degree was a nightmare to Ves and every other red human!freewebnovel.com

"Which god pilot is stationed at Bridgehead One?" Ves asked.

Jovy exchanged glances with Vector before he answered the question.

"This information is classified, but you have a right to know. It is not as if we can keep it secret for long. The god pilot who is assigned to defend the greater beyonder gate as well as keep the Star Designers safe is... the First Flame."

"..."

That was not a name that Ves wanted to hear!

"Why the First Flame of all choices?!"

Jovy gave him a rueful smile. "It is not that complicated to find out, Ves. We knew that the aliens were about to launch a massive offensive, so we needed to station as many god pilots to the front and other key star systems as possible. We also have indications that Bridgehead One may be targeted in a bold deep strike operation meant to destroy the greater beyonder gate. Since the Red Cabal is already aware that we always station one god pilot in this key star system at all times, the alien strategists will certainly formulate a plan based on this fact. It is therefore safer to station two god pilots in Bridgehead One, but the painful reality is that we cannot have it both ways."

"So you tried to have your cake and eat it too by assigning this crucial post to the oldest and arguably strongest god pilot in the Red Ocean." Ves flatly said.

"It makes sense." Vector Loban commented. "It is difficult for people at our level to gain more detailed information on how strong the First Flame may be, but you have witnessed his performance during Operation Night Jazz. He possesses ample power to destroy multiple ancient phase whales in quick succession if he goes full Phoenix. Even if he cannot eliminate all 6 of them, the defenses in Bridgehead One are not trivial. It is the most fortified star system

in human-occupied space. We have made concerted efforts to make our main fortifications as phase whale-proof as possible."

Jovy formed a confident expression. "The Polymath and other Star Designer can contribute to the fight in ways that you cannot imagine, Ves. There are multiple superweapons in the star systems that have reached masterwork or even grand work levels of quality. Then there are the first-class mech corps and warfleets of the highest standard. If the ancient phase whales are leading an armada of alien fleets, then the forces stationed in Bridgehead One can halt the enemies in their tracks. I do not see a way for the 6 ancient phase whales to survive our combined forces."

"Can't they just... run away when they realize that they are outmatched?" Ves questioned.

"Our current theory is that escape is not possible. The spacetime bubble has to be strong enough that god pilots and Star Designers cannot breach them with their vast might and technological options. In order to pass this test, the ancient phase whales that have set it up must also resign themselves to the fact that they are subject to the same restrictions."

"I see. So the aliens essentially turned Bridgehead One into a slow-motion death match. Neither the humans nor the aliens can run away. They have no choice but to fight to the death... while the rest of the universe zips through time."

"That is a decent description of what will likely unfold inside the spacetime bubble." Jovy admitted. "Personally, I have great confidence that the First Flame and the rest of the human forces trapped inside the star system will be able to crush the alien invaders. The real issue is the spacetime bubble. Breaching it is not so simple. Trying to destroy it by force may produce dangerous outcomes. At worst, a spatial storm of an apocalyptic scale may erupt that will annihilate almost everything inside the star system. This is why we have concluded that it is better to unravel it with as much finesse as possible."

Ves looked thoughtful.

"Hence why you want the Spacelock over there. He possesses the greatest command of space outside of the ancient phase whales. If anyone can unravel the spacetime bubble, he stands the greatest chance. Maybe the people trapped inside may be able to do the same, but... the passage of time inside the bubble has slowed down to such a massive extent that it may take hundreds of days in realspace before the First Flame and the Polymath manage to cook up a brilliant response."

The failsafe employed by the Red Cabal was simply too diabolical!

The native aliens truly managed to inflict a blow that severely inconvenienced red humanity to the point where it may fall behind due to the absence of several critical True Gods and powerful institutions!

If the native aliens had any sense, they would definitely press their advantage and strengthen their offensive in an attempt to make as many gains as possible without encountering as much resistance.

It was no wonder that the Red Tide Offensive started off with such an overwhelming opening push!

The native aliens were racing against time. They made a big bet that they could break through red humanity's defensive lines and collapse the defenders before Bridgehead One rejoined the rest of the cosmos again.

If this was the case, then Ves had less confidence in the Spacelock's ability to unravel the spacetime bubble. The Red Cabal and their cosmopolitan lackeys could not possibly overlook the interference from the Rubarthan god pilot.

As Jovy and Vector continued to supply additional information about the enormous implications of Bridgehead One's continued isolation from the rest of human society, Ves understood that they were all in deep trouble.

"Assuming that the spacetime bubble cannot be solved from the inside or outside in a short amount of time, what the hell do we do? Tell me you guys have a plan."

The two mechers exchanged glances yet again. That was not a good sign.

"The Survivalist Faction always has contingency plans on hand." Jovy said with a touch of confidence, though he sounded a lot less certain than before. "One of our rules is that how unlikely it may sound in many cases, we must always plan for failure. We are already adjusting to the fact that Bridgehead One has become unavailable to us. The good news is that we have not placed all of our eggs in a single basket. We have invested in the development of multiple central star nodes that can partially cover the responsibilities that Bridgehead One used to fulfill."

"What about the war effort?"

"We have plans for that as well, Ves." Vector Loban answered. "Do not expect any drastic turnarounds, though. Our best hope is to dispatch our peak ace pilots to the front and wait for one of them to successfully break through. War is the ultimate crucible of gods and heroes."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

The Transhumanist grinned. "That makes this even better. It doesn't matter if 10, 20 or 30 peak ace pilots step onto the road to no return and ultimately fail to reach their destinations. As long as just 1 of them have managed to break through, then our chances of withstanding the Red Tide Offensive grows that much stronger. Only by producing enough god pilots will we be able to take the first step in stabilizing our borders and stop the native aliens from making any further territorial gains. With an impenetrable defense, we can proceed with the next step, which is to use the greater beyonder gate to conduct many deep strike operations at once."

This layout only comprised of two steps so far, but neither of them were easy to realize!

Several years had gone by, but none of the known peak ace pilots such as the Mace of Retaliation had shown any signs of breaking through.

Perhaps one might emerge in the coming months, but Ves did not get his hopes up. The ascension of a god pilot was such an unlikely event that it was little different from winning the lottery!

As for starting red humanity's counterattack, the spacetime bubble clearly stood in the way of taking the next step!

"It seems that the Red Cabal are truly determined to deny us every possible advantage." Ves grumbled.

Chapter 6197 Reevaluating Priorities

The classified briefing provided by Jovy and Vector truly underscored the dire state of red humanity.

The costly alien gambit to isolate Bridgehead One from the rest of human society was bound to deprive the Red Cabal of 6 powerful ancient phase whales.

However, this painful sacrifice may be worth it in the end if the native aliens manage to smash through all 5 defensive bands and take over the border regions in the next half year!

"We truly cannot afford to let the native aliens break past the defensive bands that we have built up over the years." Jovy stated in a serious tone. "There are still many fortified star systems in the zones behind the crucial border regions, but they are too scattered and not cohesive enough to form a solid defensive line. It will be too easy for the alien fleets to bypass the fortified star systems and raid the less well-defended colonies without needing to worry too much about getting flanked by human forces. We need much more time to work on our supply lines, war preparation, defensive buildup and troop mobilization outside of the border regions. If the aliens do not give us that time..."

"We collapse." Vector succinctly stated. "The aliens will be able to invade our interior with impunity, putting star systems such as New Constantinople in great peril. Our divided forces cannot effectively stop the alien fleets from advancing deeper into our space in the absence of enough fortified star systems that can act as anchor locations."

The intricacies of waging war in a completely open space environment eluded Ves. There were all kinds of complicated strategic and logistical considerations that limited how far the humans and aliens were able to push into enemy territory.

The cold hard truth was that red humanity's war preparation had ultimately been inadequate. The pressure of war was almost entirely absent in places like New Constantinople and Davute.

Many people were well aware that a war for the survival of their race was being waged, but they always assumed that they would have plenty of time to respond to the intensifying war.

The increasing likelihood that the 5 defensive bands may fall prematurely completely shattered their illusions!

This was probably why the major powers all instituted at least some form of martial law or another. It took a crisis like this to truly wake up all of the pampered people who thought that the Red War was a distant show.

"The Survivalist Faction is in the process of activating plans that are meant to accelerate the transformation of our society." Jovy continued to explain. "In the Age of Mechs, we sought to establish stability and sustainable growth most of all. The Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance worked in conjunction to lower the temperature and foster greater peace among the states. Even when states are beset by war, the vast majority of the civilian population will only lose their rights and property at most. They will still be able to survive one way or another. This is not the case in the Red War. When extinction is the price of losing, we cannot afford to be as lackadaisical about not doing our best anymore."

"So you want human civilization in the Red Ocean to transform from a civilian to a martial society... in a hurry." Ves stated.

"That is about right. It is anything but perfect, but what choice do we have? We would rather prefer to adopt the gradual approach, but the native aliens are adamant about not giving us time for our society to enter into a proper war footing. We have little choice but to ram all of the necessary legislation through and hope we do not stretch our social contract to a breaking point."

This sounded really serious. If the Survivalists weren't careful enough about this and failed to gather enough support, the Red Association may end up losing its grip on the states!

If the reforms proved to be wildly unpopular, then the mechers would go from being revered to becoming hated figures in society!

Ves didn't think it would come to that, though. The mechers have plenty of smart heads among them that could predict such an outcome. They would definitely take steps to ensure their hegemony remained intact during this hectic transition period.

"I see. I don't think the sales of my products will take a nosedive. They are still very strong products without factoring the benefits of growth. I have always tried to make their value propositions attractive right after my customers get their hands on their products."

"So how do these societal changes affect me directly, Jovy?" Ves curiously asked. "Much of this stuff is too big for me. I am not a politician. I am a mech designer. I am most curious how the transition to a martial society will affect my work."

"There are many changes. Even we cannot fully predict how you will become affected due to the sheer amount of variables that are in flux. We can broadly predict that the mech industry will become more competitive. There will be less tolerance for errors and fatal defects."

Immediate performance will take precedence over long-term growth potential. The war has reached a phase where many mech pilots and commanders can only afford to think about winning the battles of today rather than fantasize about piloting living mechs that have grown powerful many years later."

That... was not good news to Ves.

"I see. I don't think the sales of my products will take a nosedive. They are still very strong products without factoring the benefits of growth. I have always tried to make their value propositions attractive right after my customers get their hands on their products."

Jovy was anything but finished with his response.

"A graver consequence is that resources will be in short supply. Your Living Mech Corporation and large partners will likely not experience too many supply interruptions because of this, but smaller and less productive mech companies will be experiencing a much greater squeeze. There is less room for independent creators as both the supply and demand side demand greater efficiency and certainty. Your mech company will be able to recruit a large amount of promising talents over the next two years."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "We are already able to recruit promising talents before these latest changes. Will certain mech companies receive greater institutional support than others?"

"There will be." Jovy flatly admitted. "The Red Association normally advocates free and fair competition. However, now that we cannot rely on imperfect market behavior to always distinguish winners from losers, we may decide it is necessary to give a few nudges here and there. This will distort the market for mechs, but as long as more mech pilots are making use of more cost-effective products, the changes will lead to better results on the battlefield."

"Will the LMC benefit from the new policies?"

"Yes. Not only has your latest commercial mech designs proven their value many times over, your upcoming Carmine mechs are a priority to us." Vector Loban answered. "Due to the changes that have taken place recently, both the Survivalist Faction and the Transhumanist Faction are willing to relax the conditions that we have imposed upon you in the past. We lived in a different time back then. Even our Association has grown too conceited towards our enemies."

Ves perked up after hearing that. Relaxing conditions had a lot of different meanings. What did the Survivalists and the Transhumanists expect from him, exactly?

"You need to clarify what you just said."

Jovy sighed while Vector smirked.

"The Red Association is forced to reevaluate its priorities. We have put more emphasis on winning the war at the expense of many other considerations that we have deemed unnecessary. What I am trying to say is that we have become much more flexible about what it takes to produce superior results. We are willing to... overlook transgressions to a greater extent than before. We are also eager to speed up the introduction of revolutionary products without wasting too much time on mandatory safety inspections."

Ves raised his eyebrow. "That sounds like you are encouraging me to experiment more wildly than I have before. Do you want me to rush the introduction of Carmine mechs to the mech market?"

Surprisingly enough, both Jovy and Vector nodded. This was completely different from the restraint they expressed in the past!

"The old plan can go out of the airlock as far as we are concerned." Vector stated. "This is not the time for caution anymore. If the Red Tide Offensive unfolds as we anticipate, then our society will be met with a deluge of defeats and tragedies on a scale that our race has never endured since the Age of Conquest. We... need to create more sources of hope and optimism among the population. Anything that can invigorate the enthusiasm of the masses can do much to dispel the tide of negativity."

That sounded interesting. Ves could see how the announcement and the release of Carmine mechs could excite a lot of people despite all of the bad news circulating on the galactic net.

This was because mechs was everyone's romance!

The Age of Mechs may have come to an end in the Red Ocean, but the vast majority of people were still marked by that wonderful period. Mechs played such a dominant role in their lives that the return of warships did not significantly impact the prestige of humanity's exclusive war machines.

Compared to signing up to become a faceless spacer that practically possessed no agency on a massive warship, people would rather pilot a mech and become the hero of their own story!

Even if only a fraction of mech pilots ever manage to break through and start their near-impossible journey to become a god pilot, that did not depress the enthusiasm of a lot of dreamers.

The greatest regret of norms who grew up during the Age of Mechs was that they never had a serious chance to prove themselves in this way! Their unsuitable genetic aptitude disqualified them at a young and impressionable age, causing them to bear lifelong trauma and regret of their crushed dream.

This happened so often that society already had plenty of ways to encourage the disappointed teenagers to appreciate other vocations. There was more to life than piloting mechs.

While grown ups such as Ves successfully managed to close the chapter of their childhood fantasies and embraced a different life, there were many more norms who remained unresigned to this day.

It didn't matter whether they chose to become a mech designer, a doctor, an intelligence operative or a farmer.

They only took on these jobs because they needed to make a living. Their inability to move on from their most cherished dreams caused them to show little enthusiasm in their line of work.

They were less likely to achieve success as a result. The dreamers didn't care too much about that because they all yearned to attain greatness while piloting mechs on the battlefield.

Alas, the only way these regretful norms could gain a small measure of satisfaction was to pilot virtual mechs in various simulation games.

The community for virtual mech games was enormous. It was by far the most popular game mode on the galactic net. Ves had heard about how these virtual mech enthusiasts even played pilot characters in an entire simulation of the old galaxy and more recently the new frontier!

In reality, their unqualified genetic aptitude and their lack of professional training forced them to pursue other careers.

In the virtual reality game of their choice, they could freely indulge in their desires to become a heroic mech pilot, one who skillfully outfought other rivals and proved their valor on the virtual battlefield!

How would these virtual mech fanatics react when they finally had a chance to pilot a mech for real?

What if the gaming skills they honed over decades of dedicated training in order to excel on the virtual battlefield could be directly translated to piloting an actual mech, if only one equipped with a Carmine System?

If Ves unveiled his Carmine mechs to the public, he would instantly rouse a sleeping dragon that had been lying dormant in human society in the past four centuries!

Chapter 6198 Damn the Consequences

Ves had not spent too much thought on the consequences of making his Carmine mechs available to the public.

His primary target audience had always been professional mech pilots. He knew that Carmine mechs would fulfill the long-held dreams of many norms with regrets about their awful genetic aptitudes, but that did not change the fact that they were amateurs.

Even if they could pilot a Carmine mech tomorrow, how could they possibly match up against alien phasefighters, let alone conventional mechs piloted by actual professionals?

It was unlikely that these Carmine mech pilots could match the performance of potentates who trained and studied in the mech academies for 10 to 15 years!

Sure, virtual reality games did a pretty good job at simulating the experience of piloting a mech, but the degree of realism was terrible.

The games targeting the mass market had to simplify and outright remove a lot of variables in order to make the experience more enjoyable. They also had to work around the very obvious limitation that norms couldn't form an effective man-machine connection.

Ves had played those games in the past, so he knew that the virtual mechs relied extensively on extreme automation to make up for the lack of deep pilot control.

That may be acceptable in a virtual battle where the stakes were trivial, but it was not a wise idea to surrender so much control to AIs and algorithms on a real battlefield!

Even so, that should depress the fanaticism of norms who always wanted to become a mech pilot even after they had grown into adults!

Out of all of the people who would be willing to embrace Carmine mechs and put in the work required to become a useful presence on the battlefield, these die-hard mech enthusiasts would definitely go all-out in order to fulfill their greatest dreams!

Once Carmine mechs exploded a bomb in human society and completely ignited the passion of so many people, the ripple effects may actually be able to change the narrative of the Red War for the better!

No wonder the Survivalists and the Transhumanists decisively changed their minds. They had become desperate. When the mechers started to get desperate, they were much more willing to resort to extreme measures!

"What do the Fist of Defiance and the Evolution Witch think on this matter?" Ves bravely asked.

"Neither god pilots have made any specific comments as far as we know. They are rather busy with beating back the alien offensive." Jovy said. "Their adjutants are able to make decisions on their behalf. Trusted leaders such as Master Goldstein are permitted to utilize their own judgment to activate the most appropriate contingency plans and make other decisions in response to unforeseen situations. If the leaders of our factions do not bother to countermand the decisions made by their subordinates, then we will all assume that their will is being carried out. This is the case with your Carmine mechs."

That sounded reassuring to Ves. He was afraid that the true leaders of the Survivalists and Transhumanists would get angry because the initiative shown by their subordinates had ruined their master plans.

"How soon do you want Carmine mechs to show up? Should I work on them at my usual pace, or should I attempt to rush them into completion in order to give the public something to chew on as quickly as possible?"

Jovy paused for a few seconds before offering a response.

"We would rather have you introduce them sooner rather than later. Safety is still important, but... we are willing to tolerate certain risks as long as they are not too severe. Our Association have never ceased to conduct tests on the prototype Carmine mechs that you have supplied to us in the past. To be absolutely honest, these tests are far from sufficient. We have yet to conduct proper longitudinal studies over several years or decades that can definitely prove that piloting Carmine mechs will not lead to long-term harm to the physical and mental health of their users."

That was a fair and valid concern. A lot of products that provided a lot of benefits in the short term only started to inflict serious harm onto people a decade or several decades later.

Instances like this happened so many times throughout human history that inventions as radical as Carmine mechs needed to undergo extremely rigorous studies in order to rule out these awful possibilities.

Perhaps the Carmine pilot became so accustomed to hooking up his body to the Carmine System that it lost the ability to sustain itself outside of the cockpit. Only by permanently circulating the blood produced by a Carmine mech would the pilot be able to sustain his body.

However, the decision to skip all but the most shallow examinations in order to bring the release date forward came with a hidden implication that disturbed Ves.

If he was reading this strategic shift correctly, then the unspoken message was that the mechers didn't care about the long-term dangers of making use of Carmine mechs anymore!

It may very well be the case that after piloting a Carmine mech for one or two decades, the Carmine pilot would begin to suffer a range of health problems and psychological disorders!

Perhaps the Carmine pilot became so accustomed to hooking up his body to the Carmine System that it lost the ability to sustain itself outside of the cockpit. Only by permanently circulating the blood produced by a Carmine mech would the pilot be able to sustain his body.

Another potential long-term problem was the psychological distortion of maintaining strong intimate contact with a living mech. Unlike conventional mechs that could only be piloted by professionals that had completed rigorous studies and training on how to control them to the best of their ability, a lot of norms who rushed to acquire their own Carmine mechs lacked these qualifications!

Perhaps their lacking skills and knowledge could be compensated for in other ways.

The issue was that amateurs lacked the military-esque conditioning and tempering that orthodox mech pilots received during their education.

Ves possessed a decent understanding on how much of a shock it was for pure civilians to dive head-first into a bloody battlefield.

The shock and trauma of seeing thousands of humans die in an instant could break the mentalities of these poor mech enthusiasts who had never witnessed real death up close.

The extreme emotions that Carmine pilots would experience on the battlefield may become amplified or lead to other unintended consequences due to the presence of a Blood Pact.

Even though Ves invented the Blood Pact, he himself had no idea whether it would lead to any negative side effects in the long run!

Just because nothing happened so far did not mean that these health risks were absent.

For the mechers to outright disregard these risks this time indicated that they would not care if Carmine mechs ended up killing their bonded partners a few decades later.

This was because they predicted that the Red War would no longer be in such a dire state in the future. So long as red humanity managed to survive this difficult early period, its advantages would begin to accrue.

So what if Carmine mechs ended up killing a lot of people later on? What mattered now was to stop or slow down the decline in the short term as much as possible!

Though Ves recognized the benefit of this dangerous approach, he grew worried about what this would mean for himself.

After all, if he released a product that ended up causing a lot of misery, he would definitely be condemned by society!

How could he possibly maintain his reputation by then? Much of the reason why many of his initiatives proceeded smoothly was due to the respect and acceptance he gained on account of his good reputation!

All of these advantages could disappear in an instant if he became the subject of a huge scandal!

"There will be many consequences to this change of plans." Ves spoke. "I am sure that you guys have figured out these possibilities, but if anything serious happens in the future, I will get into big trouble."

"We know what you mean." Vector Loban said. "We cannot negate all of the consequences of serious errors, but I can promise you that we will take the corresponding actions to resolve any public outcry. Radical innovation can never be separated from controversy. The Evolution Witch understood this truth early on, and embraced her notoriety as a way to train the public into developing a tolerance for the occasional accidents."

"I see. I am no god pilot, though."

"It is an idea."

Although Ves did not put too much stock in this promise, he understood that so long as he remained useful enough to the Red Association, the mechers would continue to cover his back and shield him from most negative consequences.

Of course, Ves knew better than to take this protection for granted. The mechers sure hadn't been able to accomplish much when his critics compelled him to attend the public inquiry on living mechs.

It may be that all of his fears were overblown. The Carmine System did not produce all of the negative side effects that he imagined. If that was the case, then there was no need for him to trouble himself too much over these issues.

The three Senior Mech Designers continued to discuss the alterations to their original plan.

"If possible, The Transhumanist Faction would like you to postpone your non-essential design projects and work on designing Carmine mechs right away." Vector Loban explained. "We do not have the patience to address every class one at a time. We would like you to design a third-class mech, a second-class mech as well as a first-class mech on a concurrent basis in the next half year."

"Are you serious?"

"Are you unable to fulfill this request?"

"I can do it." Ves quickly responded. "Depending on the requirements, it would probably be really helpful if I can gain access to additional help. This is particularly the case with the first-class Carmine mech. I will have to suspend multiple ongoing design projects in order to clear up my schedule. To be fair, I do not begrudge the delays because it may be better for me to let my more ambitious projects remain dormant while I wait for technology to catch up to my needs."

Outside of the expert mech design projects helmed by Gloriana, Ves had been working on a range of interesting mech designs.

He had been puzzling with a light skirmisher in the style of the Dark Zephyr, a heavy support mech equipped with shield link technology that looked like an upright elephant, an ECM mech with special transphasic features and a missile interceptor mech.

All of these projects had a lot of value if he completed them to his satisfaction, but that was still too far away.

The high technological demands of most of them caused him to waste a considerable amount of time on scientific research and technological acquisitions.

While Ves most definitely believed that the impact of these mech designs would be as great as the Fey Fianna and the Ultimatum if he completed them one day, he could affect the balance of the Red War a lot more extensively if he shifted his attention to Carmine mechs instead!

He would be able to open up a brand new market with the release of numerous Carmine mechs!

Not only would he be able to fulfill the dreams of millions if not billions of mech enthusiasts, he could also invigorate lives of potentates whose genetic aptitudes were too low to get taken seriously!

Carmine mechs also promised to revive the careers of brain-damaged mech pilots like his grandfather. There were definitely a lot of injured veterans that would probably explode with potential now that they gained a second chance to become a hero again!

The Carmine System also offered benefits to existing mech pilots that could already make good use of the neural interface. The promise of increasing their effective genetic aptitude would definitely attract a lot of mech pilots, most particularly the first-class ones who had always been frustrated that their shortcoming in this aspect limited their futures!

As Ves grew more eager about how he could fulfill the needs of so many different people, he fully went onboard this new plan.

"Tell me what I should design."

Chapter 6199 Return of the Swarm Project

Jovy Armalon and Vector Loban feared that Ves might have cold feet about the plan to introduce Carmine mechs a lot sooner than originally planned.

Those fears turned out to be unfounded as Ves agreed to rush the development of Carmine mechs despite the obvious risks.

This was the courage that the mechers expected from a renowned and highly successful innovator like Ves. He would have never been able to make so many useful contributions to human civilization if he lacked the willingness to tackle dangerous challenges.

He was much like a mech pilot in this regard. Many people secretly wondered how great Ves could have become if he possessed the right genetic aptitude for mechs.

Of course, nobody wanted to trade away his abundant contributions as a mech designer. Human society was far better off if Ves remained a mech designer as opposed to a mech pilot.

In any case, now that they passed this hurdle, they soon began to discuss the specifics of the Carmine mechs.

"Speaking from my limited experience, first-class mechs, second-class mechs and third-class mechs are completely different products." Ves started. "If we want to complete a Carmine mech in each class as soon as possible, then it is best to start with a central and highly adaptable mech concept and divide it into three different subconcepts for every tech level. However, it is very difficult to keep all of the separate designs similar enough to each other while simultaneously making them efficient at their respective price levels."

Both Jovy and Vector were mech designers at the same level as Ves, so they understood the argument quite well.

"Does that mean that you prefer to design completely separate mechs for each of the three tech levels?"

"Not quite, Jovy. I am merely stating that if we go for this expedient approach, the results will be less than perfect. However, if your goal is not to release the most powerful and polished Carmine mech designs, but to release a bunch of highly accessible products in an accelerated time frame, then we can go for this approach depending on what else you require."

"The initial product must be simple and cost-effective, but also highly modular and adaptable." Vector stated. "We project that your first Carmine mech models will be met with great enthusiasm. Many people will seek to get their hands on an early model and form a Blood Pact with the machine straight away. If they are not patient enough to undergo extensive training to become a halfway decent auxiliary combatant, then they will inevitably blunder on the battlefield. If we want to prevent this disaster, then we must simplify the first available Carmine mechs to the point where it takes greater effort to make a mistake."

"So you want a frontline mech."

"Yes, but one that can be transformed and made more powerful later on, Ves. You can do this by not only making the base models highly upgradeable, but also implementing a high degree

of modularity. Your Carmine mechs must become an open platform that possesses a low barrier of entry to third party participation."

That sounded a bit familiar to Ves. "That sounds similar to what I have done with the Fey Fianna line. In order to make my drone mechs more useful, I have encouraged the rise of third-party developers who are incentivized to design all sorts of useful fey models for the Fey Fianna platform."

"We know. We want you to apply this approach to the entirety of your Carmine mechs as opposed to just a single core feature. You already have experience with designing modular and highly malleable mechs such as the Bright Warrior, so this should not be an insurmountable challenge to you. You can count on our assistance to solve any technical problems in this regard. The priority is to give early adopters an easy way forward once they survive the initial fighting and improve their skills."

That was understandable. A lot of mech enthusiasts who wanted to pilot a 'real' mech as soon as possible would eventually outgrow their initial Carmine mechs, especially if they were designed to function as frontline mechs with higher automation and simplified controls.

A lot of customers would grow terribly upset at Ves for permanently locking them to Carmine mechs that were very difficult and expensive to upgrade!

If Ves was able to lower the barrier to altering the configuration and upgrading the Carmine mech in advance, then that would save others a lot of trouble when they wanted to make any changes to their machines in the future.

"Ah. I see. You want to kill multiple birds with a single stone, right?" Ves began to smirk. "If my Carmine mech models turn into bestsellers, then that will produce a lot of Carmine pilots who will eventually grow dissatisfied with the limitations of their basic frontline mechs. They will demand lots of upgrades and customizations that can only be met by mech designers. This will create a groundswell of employment for grassroots mech designers and small boutiques. Most customers won't be able to afford the services of a high-ranking mech designer, so a lot of people will turn to Novice Mech Designers and Apprentice Mech Designers."

"Turning your Carmine mech models into open platforms will provide a range of benefits to you." Jovy shared his opinion with Ves. "It will reduce the pressure to design Carmine mechs based on different mech archetypes and concepts. It will also allow you to shift the responsibility of providing aftermarket services to third-party mech designers and mech companies as much as possible. If Carmine mechs truly become as wildly popular as we think,

then the demand for these custom services will explode accordingly. Your invention has the potential to create a thriving new subgroup within the mech industry."

That reminded Ves of another trend.

"Ah. I see. You want to kill multiple birds with a single stone, right?" Ves began to smirk. "If my Carmine mech models turn into bestsellers, then that will produce a lot of Carmine pilots who will eventually grow dissatisfied with the limitations of their basic frontline mechs. They will demand lots of upgrades and customizations that can only be met by mech designers. This will create a groundswell of employment for grassroots mech designers and small boutiques. Most customers won't be able to afford the services of a high-ranking mech designer, so a lot of people will turn to Novice Mech Designers and Apprentice Mech Designers."

Ves realized the potential of this future market. The difficult part was that outside of making use of official variants and modification kits by the LMC and other reputable mech companies, mech designers had to design upgraded Carmine mechs on an individual basis!

"You want my work to create new employment opportunities for low-ranking mech designers." Ves guessed. "Given what you told me earlier about the changes in both market and industry trends, a lot of smaller independents will be squeezed out of the business. It should be good for them to be able to practice their craft by designing customized variants of my early Carmine mechs."

The Survivalist did not deny this motivation. "The Age of Mechs was a golden age for mech designers, but particularly low-ranking mech designers. The stable market conditions created by the Mech Trade Association has created enough room for capable young mech designers to achieve success as independent entrepreneurs. You are the ultimate example of one. The mech community has long relied on these favorable conditions to maintain enough upward mobility within our profession."

"I suppose that has changed now that we have entered the Age of Dawn."

"We may very well return to the stability and prosperity that we enjoyed during the Age of Mechs, but... the current trend is leading us in a different direction. Since we are moving towards greater consolidation in our sector, we are working towards providing alternate business development opportunities to all of these low-ranking mech designers. We have confidence that your initial Carmine mechs can become a part of our solution."

Ves had no objections to this plan. He would benefit massively from it as the additional third party participation would increase the overall value and desirability of his Carmine mechs.

If people knew that they would not remain stuck with the base model but could easily approach one of many independent mech workshops in order to upgrade their machine to their liking, then that would remove a major impediment towards early adoption!

Of course, Ves did not intend to give up on designing more sophisticated Carmine mechs at a later date, but all of that took precious time that was in short supply.

The three mech designers moved on to thinking about what sort of Carmine mech concept they should use as the initial starting point.

"You look as if you already have a plan." Jovy guessed.

"I do. I already thought about what I wanted to design for the third-class market. Although it is expressly targeted towards third-raters, I think its advantages should also appeal to second-raters and even first-raters."

Ves began to pull a pair of draft designs that he had buried deep in the memory banks of his cranial implant.

It was a set of two mech designs, both of which were supposed to work in concert.

"I call it the Swarm Project. It is a concept I came up with some time ago, but placed it on hold because I intended to design my first Carmine mech later on. Now that our plans have changed, I might as well pull them out of the closet again. As you can see, it is based on the assumption that the majority of the people who will form a Blood Pact with the 'subordinate mech' are essentially incompetent in terms of piloting skill and battlefield awareness. Without lengthy training, it is reckless to the extreme to dump them onto the battlefield and expect them to know what to do. These amateurs need a guiding hand, hence why the subordinate mechs must be led by specialized command mechs that are expressly designed to coordinate the frontline mechs they are assigned to supervise."

The two mech designs couldn't look any more difficult.

The commander model looked like a proper command-oriented mech. It was capable of fighting like a rifleman mech, but the design placed a lot of emphasis on the command and control modules mounted on the back.

It did not take much guessing to assume that this model was not a Carmine mech and had to be piloted by a professional mech pilot.

An interesting quirk was that Ves had designed it with an alternating black and yellow-striped color scheme.

The true Carmine mech was the subordinate model. It was a frontline mech that shared the same color scheme, but possessed a much more simplified design. Its frame possessed an insectoid shape rather than humanoid shape. By imitating the appearance of a wasp but with optional hardpoints instead of 3 pairs of legs, the subordinate model could adopt a range of modular configurations, all based on what people wanted to slot into the limb sockets.

The default loadout that Ves had in mind was to slot a pair of ranged weapons into the forward modular arm sockets. There was no need to make use of articulating arms as that would increase the cost and piloting difficulty of the subordinate machine.

Sure, it was incredibly limiting for Carmine pilots to control a wasp mech that lacked actual limbs, but it didn't matter so long as it fought in aerial or space environments!

If anyone wanted to pilot the subordinate mech on land, then they could simply slot one but more preferably two modular leg parts into the bottom four sockets.

"I can recognize the inherent versatility of this Carmine mech." Jovy commented with interest." By using an insectile form as opposed to a humanoid form, it becomes much easier to treat the limbs as optional components. There is no mandatory requirement that the mech should come with a pair of arms and a pair of legs. There is also room for a third set of 'limbs', thereby opening up more room for easy customization."

As long as a large enough variety of socketable weapons and other gadgets became available, Carmine mech pilots would have the freedom to slot whatever they wanted into these modular sockets.

From physical shields to melee weapons, the modular mech platform could fulfill multiple different roles!

The only caveat was that it had to conform to the insectile shape of the subordinate mech model.

The insistence on sticking to an unorthodox insectile frame for the subordinate model would probably disgust a lot of potential customers, but Ves did not care.

He had great confidence in the potential of this product. If wannabe Carmine mech pilots desired to control a proper humanoid mech so badly, then they could wait until Ves designed such a mech at a later date.

Chapter 6200 The Expanded Swarm Project

"This is... an interesting interpretation of a Carmine mech." Professor Vector Loban uttered. "You have made numerous daring design choices. Can you clarify your reasoning for adopting an insectile shape for the subordinate model of your Swarm Project? I can recognize the obvious advantages in terms of modularity, but that alone is not enough to explain why you insist on making your first commercial Carmine mech resemble a wasp."

Ves smiled. "I have already shared the central premise of this mech concept to you earlier. All of the other mechs that I have designed as of late are targeted towards skilled and professional mech pilots. The Fey Fianna may be easier to pilot than a traditional drone mech, but it is not a machine that is suitable for beginners. The Ultimatum is a much more powerful and sophisticated heavy artillery mech than the norm. It can only reach its full potential when piloted by a highly skilled and experienced artillery mech specialist."

"What is your point?"

"I'm getting there, Vector. What I wanted to convey is that since I am targeting a completely different audience this time, I can't copy my old design approach and need to start from scratch by taking my new target audience into account. I truly do not expect to see a lot of competence from the first Carmine mech pilots to emerge. After all, we can't let them study in the mech academy for 10 years. If they have to be mobilized as soon as possible, then it is better to design the controls and limit the complexity of the subordinate mech to make them as dummy proof as possible."

"You are... expecting the worst from your customers."

"I do." Ves admitted. "Unless your Association is willing to heavily regulate who gets to pilot a Carmine mech, I think a lot of accidents will occur when Carmine pilots find out that

controlling a real machine is very different from piloting a virtual mech that is heavily simplified and automated."

He just happened to understand this difference a lot better than most people.

He had piloted virtual mechs before in various virtual reality games during his childhood.

He also completed multiple Mastery experiences where he was able to witness multiple different professional mech pilots control their respective machines with great skill and judgment.

Of course, Rion Aaden was the obvious exception here, but Ves managed to make a lot of gains as well by watching the amateur self-trained dwarf fumble with his stolen human mech. He at least managed to gain more insight on what sort of factors strained a mech pilot that attempted to control a machine that was slightly beyond his level of competence.

In short, Ves considered himself to be a small authority on the subject of piloting difficulty. After contemplating many different shapes for his initial Carmine mechs, he believed that no other mech shape could match his needs as best as this one.

Jovy recognized another angle to this approach. "I recognize three additional advantages to this wasp mech concept. The unconventional wasp shape makes a clear separation from the virtual mechs that many amateurs have piloted in their mech simulation games. The probability that any Carmine pilot has piloted an insectile mech of this type in the past is almost zero. This will allow the pilots to truly approach this duty with a fresh and less biased approach."

The Transhumanist mech designer looked skeptical. "Those diehard mech fans won't shake their bad habits that easily. Wasp mech or not, they will still fall back to the same acquired instincts that have earned them a measure of success in their virtual reality games."

"It is better than nothing," Jovy shrugged. "Another advantage to committing to the Swarm Project is that we can temper the demand for Carmine mechs in the beginning. While we want to reignite the optimism and enthusiasm of the general population, we do not want to cause major disruptions in our society by releasing a Carmine mech that is too popular. A versatile humanoid mech design may definitely cause more harm than good in the short term. By releasing the Swarm Project first, only the most desperate, fanatical and those who lack confidence in their own skills are prone to adopting this frontline mech first. The potential customers who desire to pilot a more advanced Carmine mech should be willing to wait for a couple of years until a more premium option has become available."

That happened to be an accurate description of Ves' product strategy for his Carmine mechs.

He wanted to start out by releasing a foolproof low-end budget module at the start.

After that, he intended to expand his catalog of Carmine mechs with mid-range and premium options over the next few years.freewebnovel.com

A lot of mech companies actually tended to do the reverse. They introduced a mech based on fancy new technologies by releasing an overpriced device so that they could earn insane profit margins by catering to the impulsive needs of wealthy idiots.

Only after the mech companies were done with fleecing the rich and gullible fools would they begin to release more sensibly priced products. The profit margins became smaller as the price got lower, but the expanding sales volume of more affordable products compensated for this dynamic.

Ves actually missed out on a fantastic opportunity to earn a huge amount of profits by releasing a low-end product first.

This was because he was not aiming to maximize his products.

He was aiming for mass adoption.

The original intention for the base version of the Carmine System was to make mech piloting more accessible to humans. Ves wanted to create a proper first impression for his Carmine mechs by making them cheap and accessible to the 'common folk'.

Of course, cheap was a relative term here. The price of a subordinate mech would still exceed that of a typical shuttle. It was only cheap for large organizations to buy the Carmine mechs in bulk.

"The third advantage of the Swarm Project is that it is quick in every way." Jovy continued. "I can already tell from the draft design that its complexity will remain low regardless of tech level. When you think about it, the subordinate mech shares more similarities with fighter craft than mechs. They just have the option of slotting in additional arms. The simplicity of this

design also makes it fast and easy to mass produce it under suboptimal conditions. Furthermore, the difficulty for Carmine pilots to gain enough proficiency in the most basic modular configurations is low. It should only take a couple of months for these soldiers to learn enough not to crash into each other or commit friendly fire by accident. Of course, that does not clear them for independent operation, but I suppose that is why the command mech exists."

Ves grinned. "You hit the nail on the head. The reason why I felt it was necessary to add in a command mech was because I knew that a lot of people simply don't have the patience to go through 5 years of accelerated training or 10 years of proper training. By letting a mech pilot that knows his business make all of the important decisions, the Carmine mech pilots don't have to worry about any of the big picture stuff. Their only job is to follow orders and fight on command, which is pretty easy because the subordinate model is expressly designed to possess the lowest possible skill ceiling in a flight-capable mech."

The less moving parts, the less could go wrong. The wasp form was ideal for finetuning the level of complexity that each individual mech pilot could handle.

The less skilled and experienced Carmine pilots could start by mounting just one weapon system in one of the 6 modular sockets.

In order to avoid wasting the 5 remaining sockets, the pilot or his superior could choose to fill them up with defensive or auxiliary modules such as energy shield generators, ECM systems, communication arrays, space suppressors and more.

Once the Carmine pilot mastered the art of piloting the wasp mech with just one weapon system, he could increase his agency on the battlefield by mounting a second weapon system in a socket.

This could continue onwards until he or she reached the desired proportion of offensive power.

There were also other ways to upgrade the subordinate mech as the Carmine mech pilot outgrew the old configuration.

The possible options ranged from increasing the thickness of the armor plating to adding living fey!

"This is a mech concept that is perfect for the third-class mech market." Vector Loban commented. "However, translating the same concept to the second-class mech market may not

work out as well. Second-raters are not as... humble as third-raters. They will look down on piloting a wasp-shaped frontline mech."

Ves crossed his arms. "Then that is their business. I can only work on so many projects at a time. They can wait until I release a humanoid Carmine mech like their third-class counterparts. Besides, if you are really concerned about this problem, then your Association can impose a demand that they acquire training certifications that proves they are competent enough to pilot anything more complex than a frontline mech."

"That is an interesting suggestion. We will take it under advisement. Our Association will have to draft an extensive set of legislation around Carmine mechs alone. First-raters will be especially difficult to please. The notion that they must condescend to piloting simplified versions of mechs is an insult to them. They will demand that we supply them with a Carmine version of a proper first-class multipurpose mech."

Ves rolled his eyes. "I am not ready to design a big mech like that. Also, first-class mech pilots have to meet a punishing amount of requirements in order to earn the qualifications to make use of those bad boys. Their genetic aptitudes have to be either A or B, and they need to cram a huge amount of knowledge in their heads. Then they also have to practice their skills until they have reached excellent proficiency in the use of at least two dozen weapon systems and a bunch of auxiliary modules. How can first-class norms possibly cram 15 years worth of high-intensity training in just a few months?"

"It's not possible." Jovy plainly stated. "The virtual mechs that first-raters have purportedly mastered through years of gaming are nothing compared to the real thing. The degree of automation and simplification of those advanced mechs are by far the highest. Even if you release a first-class multipurpose Carmine mech tomorrow, our Association will never permit amateurs to recklessly play around them. Their energy levels are too high. Their ordnance is too destructive. Professional training is mandatory in order to legally pilot any first-class mech. As far as we are concerned, this rule should be extended to first-class Carmine mechs as well."

If that was the case, then there was enough justification for a first-class variant of the subordinate mech to exist.

There were definitely a lot of busy and impatient mech fanatics among the first-raters. Ves was not afraid that no one would bite.

After a bit more discussion, the three mutually agreed to go ahead with the expanded version of the Swarm Project.

Ves had cleared out most of his design schedule in favor of spending most of his time on this expansive and ambitious rush job.

Aside from his existing commitments to the Amaranto Mark III Project, the Riot Mark III Project and a few other minor obligations, there were no other design projects that could distract him from designing his first proper set of Carmine mechs!

"I take it that the two of you intend to participate in the Swarm Project." Ves said.

"We would be happy to help if you are willing to have us." Jovy said with a smile. "It is a great honor to be able to work on the very first public Carmine mech. Our names will be in the history books. That said, if you prefer to work with Master Mech Designers, you can say so. I can check whether they are available and willing to collaborate with you on this unprecedented design project."

"That won't be necessary, Jovy. I want to retain as much control over this project as possible. I don't mind too much about letting other highly competent mech designers take the lead in subsequent Carmine mech designs, but the first one has to be a strong representation of my work and my design philosophy. It will serve as the base and the starting point for a brand new category of mechs."