

Mech Touch 6781

Chapter 6781: Victory Conditions

The battle continued to inflict great destruction on both sides.

The humans were losing orbital defense platforms, orbital fortresses and mechs at a prodigious rate. The firepower of the enemy fleets was too great to prevent widespread losses.

However, invaders could not accomplish all of this destruction without paying a heavy price themselves. Their phasefighters and warships succumbed to the massed attacks of the well-prepared defenders.

The debris fields generated from this battle started to grow exponentially!

Many pieces became affected by the complicated gravitic forces and started to spin in every direction. Some chunks even went on to collide against intact assets, causing their azure energy shields to take a pounding if they were still intact.

The widespread destruction only raised the stakes of the battle.

Both sides knew that the winner of this bout would be granted a golden opportunity to pick up a lot of high-value salvage.

From expensive transphasic alloys to intact examples of high technology, the amount of profit the winner could harvest from the debris field was immense!

As wealthy as the Rubarthan Pact may be, its resources were not unlimited. Being able to mitigate its own losses by reclaiming their wrecks would do much to ease its resource constraints.

Being able to harvest all of those huge kilometer-long alien battleship wrecks would be even better!

Ironically, the use of superior human-developed alloys made the modernized alien hulls even more valuable than before.

Every battlefield victory represented a golden opportunity to salvage the lucrative wreckage and haul them to the rear where they could quickly be broken down into readily usable alloys.

Even if their quality was mostly not enough to be used for the construction of medium or high-tier first-class multipurpose mechs, they were more than sufficient to build lots of Yellow Jackets or other cheaper machines.

The transphasic metals recycled from alien warships could also be used to construct a lot of human warships after undergoing reprocessing!

This gave the defenders a powerful reason why they needed to win this battle. Even if they had no understanding of economics or industrial policy, they could still understand the logic that having more high-quality metals resulted in more powerful stuff being built.

The importance of maintaining control over the battlefield was also why so many people reacted with dismay when the greater phase whale made an appearance.

If nobody was able to block the passage of the Divine Maw, the greater phase whale would be free to wreck the orbital defense network with his prodigious powers and force the Obsidian Orb to teleport away in a hurry!

Right now, the masterwork superweapon lived up to its promise by severely constraining the options of the Divine Maw.

Now that he had taken the initiative to shrink his true body, he no longer maintained an oppressive presence as before. He also wouldn't be able to take full advantage of his immense physicality to batter the enemies in front of him in the simplest possible method.

The Divine Suppliant currently served as his shield. The jureg greater phase lord had already taken the initiative to withdraw much of his spatial barrier and allow his vastly superior superdimensional shield to absorb most of the blows coming from the front.

All of the attacks launched by orbital defenses, warships and mechs bounced away from the surface of the extraordinarily valuable shield as if it was a solid wall of reality.

It looked so pristine and spotless that it gave the illusion that it could block damn near anything except for a blade that could cut straight through dimensions like the Heavensword!

Although the outcome would likely be a waste, the red humans needed to know how much damage the superdimensional shield could take.

A failure to break it or remove it from the Divine Supplicant's possession would leave the Divine Maw free to rampage across the battlefield!

Already, the greater phase whale had begun to interfere in the nearby duels by generating spatial storms and growing tentacles out of his weird and sickening organic raiment!

"Stark." Saint Alo spoke up. "Launch your strongest attack onto the superdimensional shield. We need to gather more data, and your attack will reveal much about its defensive properties."

"Understood."

Saint Stark did not question her orders, knowing that it would not be welcome.

She had previously been taking down warships, so much so that her intuition told her that the native aliens were paying a lot more attention to her Amaranto Mark III than before.

The guest pilot did not let the possibility of retaliation interrupt her current assignment. It was easy for her to direct the Amaranto Mark III to continue to charge the Instrument of Vengeance but switch targets to the Divine Supplicant.

The fanatically loyal jureg phase lord did not bother to move all that much. Even if his position made him vulnerable to flanking attacks from the side, he understood his role quite well.

His only job was to stop the attacks launched by the Obsidian Orb from reaching the Divine Maw.

He would rather allow his body to get burned rather than fail his mission!

Given this information, it should not be too difficult for the Amaranto Mark III to inflict harm onto the Divine Suppliant.

The ace marksman mech merely had to fly further away from the Obsidian Orb. The two then needed to coordinate their firepower so that their attacks struck the Divine Suppliant at the same time.

While these phase lords possessed mysterious powers, Stark doubted that they could use the superdimensional shield to block attacks coming from two different directions.

However, Saint Stark saw the futility in this action.

Her resonance strength was still too low to pose a serious threat against a greater phase lord.

While her Instrument of Vengeance was powerful enough to help with eroding the Divine Suppliant's spatial barrier, if she wanted to make faster progress, she would have to work in cooperation with multiple ace mechs and other forms of support.

This was too much of an investment!

Besides, Saint Stark did not want to move too far away from the Obsidian Orb at the moment.

She wanted to be close enough to provide support and take shelter from its formidable defenses when necessary.

Staying close also enabled her to take advantage of its protection.

As her Instrument of Vengeance finally reached full charge, she pulled the trigger as always.

A blindingly white energy beam filled with resonance-empowered light surged from the muzzle and struck the superdimensional shield in an instant!

By now, both allies and enemies had gotten used to the brightness of the Instrument of Vengeance's shots. Their sensor systems had already adjusted to the glare so that they no longer generated a strong blinding effect.

Even so, the Divine Supplicant still flinched when his superdimensional shield got struck by the Amaranto Mark III's shot!

Many sensors and scanners tried to observe what had changed.

Compared to before, the exterior of the superdimensional shield showed off a shallow scorch mark.

It appeared the reality-defying capabilities of true resonance was somewhat effective at damaging superdimensional matter, but not as much as everyone hoped.

Saint Stark grew disappointed, but she quickly adjusted her mood. This was an expected outcome.

Many analysts had already begun to form their initial conclusions.

"The superdimensional shield is not showing any notable sign of change! It is not heating up due to accumulating thermal energy, and neither has it acquired any dents or cuts. It is as if the superdimensional shield is so much more massive than its presence in the material realm."

"What are you saying!?"

"The shield is much bigger than it looks! Imagine yourself attacking a solid piece of high-grade alloy that is as thick as one of our orbital fortresses. If you don't have a weapon that can pierce through so much solid matter, then you have no chance of inflicting significant damage to it. It can deflect nearly every physical attack and absorb an enormous amount of thermal energy."

"We can still break it down, right?"

"Yes, but the Obsidian Orb will need to launch far too many shots at it to cause it to melt."

The Stewards Siamesia made an immediate judgment based on the data.

"I see two ways to deal with this problem. The riskier but more rewarding plan would be to focus on killing the lesser phase lords first. Eliminating three or four of them will free up more ace mechs, allowing them to attack the The Descent of Hushae'Rhua. With the help of Saint Davia Stark, it is possible for us to kill the greater phase lord and take possession of his Saint Piercer. One of our senior ace mechs should wield this superdimensional weapon and use it to wear down the superdimensional shield carried by the Divine Supplicant. If we are able to remove these obstacles, the Divine Maw will become vulnerable to the Obsidian Orb's Star Caster. Killing him is a possibility so long as there are no unexpected variables on the battlefield."

What a daring plan!

Killing the enemy phase lords would do much to relieve the pressure in the Kayana System.

Even if the Red Cabal was able to send more reinforcements, it shouldn't be so easy to make up for the elimination of so many native gods in a short amount of time.

Killing a greater phase lord armed with a Saint Piercer was much more meaningful. Everyone already figured out that the most efficient way to remove the superdimensional shield was to employ a superdimensional weapon themselves.

Unfortunately, the Rubarthan Pact hardly managed to get their hands on superdimensional matter harvested from the Blue Dimension. Even if the Rubarthans paid a fortune to obtain limited samples of high-grade superdimensional matter, anything built from these precious materials would definitely be handed over to the god pilots and other bigshots.

"The success of this plan hinges on our ability to kill the enemy phase lords quickly enough." One of the Rubarthan ace pilots judged. "This is unlikely to happen unless both the Obsidian Orb and the Amaranto go all-out in directing their firepower against them. We will need to go all-out in cooperating with each other."

That placed a lot of responsibility on the Amaranto and other ace mechs with powerful offensive capabilities.

"What is the second plan?" Saint Stark asked.

"The alternative is to focus on containment when it comes to the enemy phase whale and phase lords. We try to make use of the least amount of ace mechs to hold the enemy champions back for a time. The Obsidian Orb, the Amaranto and any other assets we can spare should focus on the rapid elimination of the enemy armada. The phase lords are confident in assaulting our position because of the support of many warships. If we reduce their numbers rapidly enough, we will not only shake their morale, but also make them unable to push their offensive further. Our orbital defenses can redirect their firepower to bombard the phase lords, thereby forcing them to withdraw lest they want to see their spatial barriers disappear."

This was the more cautious strategy of repelling an alien assault. The enemy warships were much easier to eliminate than the phase lords, but they were also much more numerous.

This plan hinged on the successful containment of the Divine Maw and the other phase lords. That was difficult to accomplish with the amount of phase lords currently on hand.

The firepower of the Obsidian Orb was also incredibly important in suppressing the alien champions. If it started to spit out plasma at enemy warships, the phase lords might be able to gain an advantage and inflict serious damage to an ace mech!

The Rubarthan heroes rapidly discussed the plans. Time was of the essence, so they did not waste any words.

Given the lack of confidence in their ability to deal with the Divine Maw in this first confrontation, the Stewards Siamesia made the more sensible decision.

"Very well. We shall proceed according to the second plan." Saint Jeri Chevor stated. "Contain the phase leaders as much as possible. Do not take any unnecessary risks. Preserving Kayana VIII-E is more important. As long as we destroy enough of their warships, the aliens should retreat. This will buy us time to salvage the battlefield and make better preparations against the Divine Maw."

Chapter 6782: The Star Lancers

The enemy warships were getting felled in greater numbers.

After the Rubarthan commanders and champions chose to go for the second plan, they shifted their emphasis to destroying the warships, which served as the foundation of the enemy force composition.

The native aliens could not rely on phasefighters alone to win any battles. The alien strike craft simply did not play an important enough role to merit greater expectations.

The alien phase whale and phase lords may have been able to press the assault and dismantle the entire orbital defense network by themselves.

However, they could only accomplish this goal by disregarding their own health and safety. If they valued duty above their own selfish interests, then they might be able to brave death and allow for at least three-quarters of their numbers or more to lay down their lives to conquer Kayana VIII-E.

As if.

Aside from rare exceptions such as the Divine Suppliant of the Great Ones, most phase lords were too arrogant and too full of themselves to think about sacrificing their lives to conquer just one of three fortified planets in the Kayana System.

The phase lords were much likely to attempt a withdrawal as soon as their spatial barriers and raiments no longer offered enough protection.

That made it a lot more difficult to kill the alien champions, but the Rubarthans already decided that killing them was not a priority.

While there were numerous ace pilots that were secretly disappointed that they wouldn't be able to earn glory on the battlefield by killing the alien phase lords, the defense of the Kayan System superseded all other concerns.

"Attack!"

"Kill the warships!"

Since the ace pilots and expert pilots already had their hands full with holding back the alien phase leaders, the Rubathan commanders decided to make the costly decision to command an elite mech corps to bypass the alien small craft and assault the enemy warships directly.

This was difficult to accomplish. The enemy phasefighters were completely dedicated towards entangling as many human mechs as possible. They were extremely stubborn and kept chasing after mechs that tried to bypass them and move close to the alien warships.

The fighting so far had caused the downfall of many phasefighters, but the latter still outnumbered human mechs by a significant margin!

The only way to make this work was for the remaining mechs to work harder to keep the phasefighters occupied.

Human mechs pulled out all of the stops in order to kill more phasefighters and threaten the remaining ones into fighting the more immediate threats.

There were machines that allowed their azure energy shields to get shredded and their mech frames to get filled with holes just to be able to chase after a pair of phasefighters and attack them in the rear until they finally changed course!

It was through these efforts that roughly half of the mech corps was able to distance themselves from most of the phasefighters.

Several thousands of first-class multipurpose mechs found themselves ordered to turn around and entangle the elite phasefighters that were still on the chase.

Only after that were the remaining first-class multipurpose mechs able to approach the nearest alien warship formation.

The enemy was not stupid. Despite the rapidly rising interference and other disruptions, the warships were able to see the mechs coming and made the appropriate adjustments.

Their formations changed so that they could better cover each other. The alien crew transferred more energy, processing power and alien hands to the tertiary gun batteries. They also loaded any available missile launchers with more potent anti-small craft munitions.

When the tens of thousands of mechs began to swarm the entire enemy naval squadron, a huge amount of explosions and rapid-fire kinetic and energy beam fire surrounded the warships in question!

Many mechs began to falter as the high-intensity barrage of firepower rapidly dismantled their azure energy shields and tore their mech frames apart.

With at least three separate multi-barrelled gun turrets focusing on one mech at a time, the targeted machines could do little to defend against all of the focused firepower aside from circling around the warships.

That did not help too much as the partially automated gun turrets tracked the battle damage incurred by every human mech and prioritized the targeting of damaged machines!

Many first-class multipurpose mechs therefore found themselves getting struck with a relentless amount of attacks no matter where they moved!

Even if they circled on the other side of the hull, the gun turrets over there would gleefully continue to destroy the damaged machines!

If the first-class multipurpose mechs under threat were able to back off, they were liable to get targeted by other enemy warships that happened to be closer!

The casualties were horrendous. The modernized enemy warships were far too well-equipped and prepared to tear down entire regiments of human mechs.

The vaunted first-class technologies and materials that elevated the performance of these powerful machines did not avail the Rubarthans all that much today.

The aliens had made sure to allocate their best and most advanced warships to the Upper Zones.

The warships even began to engage in electronic warfare, but despite the upgrades provided by the cosmopolitans, the Rubarthan mechs were too hardened to get seriously affected by the interference.

While the expensive Rubarthan mechs were getting blasted so heavily that many of their mech pilots weren't able to eject or make it out of this killing frenzy alive, their sacrifice bought valuable opportunities for themselves and other defenders.

Their high-quality space suppressors worked extremely well in weakening the azure energy shields employed by all of the warships.

Their segmented energy shields were getting stripped at record speed. The first-class multipurpose mechs did not dare to slow down so that they could strike at the energy shields with their melee armaments.

Their formidable collection of ranged armaments were already enough to deplete the suppressed energy shields!

"Your blood shall not be spilled in vain!"

Seeing the proud and earnest Rubarthan mech pilots lay down their lives for the defense of their superstate and red humanity made Saint Stark incensed!

She hated the necessity of these suicidal gambits. Ordinary soldiers shouldn't be asked to sacrifice their lives. It was a sign of weakness on their part that they had to employ desperate measures to win the battle.

Saint Stark did not allow her fury to overtake her common sense. Instead, she tried to channel it through her Instrument of Vengeance.

While she found herself unable to convert her mounting fury into a more productive means of attacking, she still found it easier to resonate with her firearm.

The Instrument of Vengeance not only glowed brighter, but each resonance-empowered light beam unleashed by the weapon easily punched through the defenses of the weakened enemy vessels!

Whereas before the Amaranto had no choice but to wait precious seconds in order to fell an enemy ship, this time she was able to achieve the same results while doubling or tripling her firing rate!

The mass space suppression played a huge role in softening up the defenses of the enemy warships. This was especially the case when the Rubarthan mech pilots went out of their way to weaken the sections of the azure energy shields that directly face the Amaranto!

While the Amaranto Mark III's cooperation with the first-class mech corps produced impressive results, the Obsidian Orb did not let the ace mech steal the show.

Much to the surprise of the native aliens, the black and reflective superweapon underwent a transformation that caused the mighty Star Caster to disappear from sight.

It instead began to expose 24 smaller but still very potent 'Star Lancer' Hyper Plasma Cannons!

Each Star Lancer was roughly the size of the primary gun battery of a sizable battleship.

However, once they began to accumulate power, it was clear that their firepower surpassed that of their ship-based counterparts!

Every masterwork Star Lancer absorbed a huge amount of E energy from the environment.

High concentrations of stellar energy, fire energy and so on began to power up and enhance the properties of every accumulating concentration of plasma.

The weapon mounts impressively remained fairly cool even as the buildup of plasma reached critical levels.

"FIRE!"

A huge chunk of the battlefield briefly became overwhelmed by the 24 bolts of plasma that streaked out of all of the Star Lancers!

The bolts converged on 6 enemy battleships in total.

All of them had incurred light damage and maintained close to intact defenses.

Yet when each of them got struck by the first plasma bolts that arrived with pinpoint precision, multiple layers of azure energy shields succumbed to the explosive discharge of heat and plasma!

Successive plasma bolts arrived in quick succession. They further peeled away the segmented energy shields and immediately exposed the hull of the warships for a brief amount of time.

The subsequent plasma bolts were delayed just long enough to pass through this gap without any hindrances and strike straight at the hulls!

Each contact between plasma and transphasic hyper alloys did not end well for the latter!

No matter how much damage they were designed to resist, none of them were equipped to resist what might as well be matter that was taken straight from an extremely hot star!

By the time the incredible discharge of thermal energy had overwhelmed the hull plating, the entire sides of the targeted hulls had vaporized or melted away!

Naturally, the Obsidian Orb had targeted the trajectories of their Star Lancers in such a way that they always ensured the destruction of the main thrusters and many of the power generators of the alien vessels.

Even if the enemy battleships were technically operational due to the protection offered by their immense size, they had lost much of their defenses and mobility, making them easy targets for demolition by other forces!

There was no need for the Obsidian Orb to waste its precious firepower to finish off these targets.

Instead, its 24 Star Lancers were already charging up at a surprisingly fast rate in preparation to fell 6 more battleships!

Again and again the battlefield lit up as both the Amaranto and the Obsidian Orb did all they could to fell as many battleships as possible.

Saint Stark found it extremely impressive that a superweapon created by a Star Designer was able to exceed the raw firepower of the Amaranto Mark III without needing to rely on the help of an ace pilot.

More importantly, the Obsidian Orb did not need to rely on the sacrifices of thousands of first-class mechs and mech pilots in order to soften up the enemy defenses.

Its Plasma Lancers were able to demolish all alien warships while their defenses were running at full strength!

The degree of optimization, precision and timing was impeccable.

Saint Stark had already sensed that the crew operating the Obsidian Orb were mortals.

At best, they had all become qi cultivators in order to make them better at their jobs, but that was of little consequence to the functioning of the super fortress.

In fact, a lot of people fighting or observing this battle had become impressed at Saint STark and the Amaranto.

They were amazed that this junior ace mech was able to repeatedly take down so many battleships by relying on the firepower of a single mech rifle.

Not everyone figured out that the mech frame itself played a huge role in amplifying the firepower of the Instrument of Vengeance.

The Amaranto and the mech rifle glowed brighter than ever before as Saint Stark had completely found her element.

Every shot became a little brighter and more powerful. Stark became driven by the incessant need to take down the alien warships. Each of them represented a harbinger of death and ruination to human civilians!

Just as Saint Stark was about to unleash her next potent shot, her Amaranto suddenly detected extremely strong spatial activity!

"Watch out, Saint Stark! We are detecting a forceful teleportation attempt! Our warp interdiction fields are being overpowered!"

Seconds later, thousands of first-class mechs appeared between the Amaranto and the Obsidian Orb!

Their arrival may have been reassuring if not for the fact that they openly bore cosmopolitan colors and markings!

Chapter 6783: Weaponized Domain

The Rubarthans had already predicted that the enemy would make a teleportation strike.

They had the technology to accomplish it. They also pulled it off in the past.

The price was great. Not anyone could teleport past so much interference. The warp interdiction fields generated by the Obsidian Orb and many nearby supporting structures made it as difficult as possible for anything to teleport in the vicinity.

While these measures proved effective at repelling anything that was too big and massive like the alien phase lords, smaller objects could still make it through so long as they were equipped with the right technologies!

The Rubarthans only discovered up to now that many of the first-class multipurpose mechs fielded by the cosmopolitans were all equipped with strange technologies that enabled them to jump forward in space!

It may be the main reason why they had been added to the enemy lineup. Their advanced human and alien tech granted them capabilities that the aliens could not match at this time.

Scans and other observation methods had already confirmed that the cosmopolitan mechs were all highly saturated with phasewater.

While they may lack the obvious empowerment of design philosophies, their utilization of standard human as well as alien technologies allowed them to bring out the most of phasewater technology!

Right now, these mechs had just managed to teleport at a fairly close range from both the Amaranto and the Obsidian Orb.

The swarm of traitor mechs instantly split in half. Around 30 percent converged upon the Amaranto while the remaining 70 percent charged straight towards the super fortress!

The sudden teleport assault triggered an immediate response from the Obsidian Orb.

It immediately launched the plasma bolts building up in its 24 Star Lancers, causing them to strike numerous warships but failing to sink them outright due to their underpowered charges.

The super fortress then proceeded to channel a lot of power to its plasma shield, enabling it to withstand the first barrage of ranged attacks launched by the cosmopolitan mechs.

Underneath its bright blue glowing plasma shield, the Obsidian Orb was steadily changing its configuration. Its Star Lancers moved away from sight while many smaller weapon turrets came into view.

The Obsidian Orb was bringing out thousands of smaller but still extremely potent Star Webber Hyper Plasma Cannons!

Before the super fortress completed its transformation, the cosmopolitan mechs all launched a huge amount of miniature but still very deadly salvo of transphasic hyper missiles!

Tens of thousands of small explosions battered the plasma shield at a handful of concentrated points. The cosmopolitan mechs clearly sought to create a breakthrough by force through the application of a huge amount of transphasic explosions!

Yet as the missiles had done their jobs, the powerful plasma shield practically looked as pristine as before!

That did not deter the cosmopolitan mechs from launching their other armaments at the plasma shield!

They even moved close in an attempt to dampen any transphasic energy shielding, but their measures did practically nothing!

The technological principles of the Obsidian Orb's plasma shield had nothing to do with phasewater technology.

The Plasma Shaper had recognized the Obsidian Orb's strength against the native aliens, and had upgraded it with this kind of scenario in mind.

The powerful plasma shield that was empowered by stellar energy continued to provide supreme protection to the Obsidian Orb despite the huge amount of cosmopolitan mechs trying to tear it down.

While the plasma shield was slowly beginning to diminish, the firepower of the cosmopolitan mechs were less impactful than the cannon fire from distant alien warships!

The Obsidian Orb soon completed its transformation.

Once its Star Webbers were in place, they began to launch thousands of weaker stellar plasma bolts in every direction!

These bolts did not maintain cohesion nearly as well as the much larger plasma bolts launched by the Star Caster or the Star Lancers.

What made the output of the Star Webbers so unique was that the bolts rapidly dispersed.

The bolts were falling apart and spreading plasma in an expanding cone!

While they did not really look like webs, the diverging plasma still grew wide enough to catch multiple circling mechs at a time!

The azure energy shields of the traitor mechs flared brightly as they tried their best to resist the attacks.

Unfortunately, even when they were struck by only a fraction of the plasma bolt, the immense heat and power still strained their energy defenses!

While the mechs could survive getting hit once or twice, the problem was that the Star Webbers possessed a much higher firing rate!

The small multi barreled turrets kept spitting out dispersing plasma bolts at a fast staccato pattern. The bolts weren't too effective against hostiles maintaining their distance, but they were very effective at catching fast-moving mechs and groups of mechs circling just outside of the plasma shield!

The repeated hits quickly burned away the azure energy shields despite all of the phasewater integrated in the shield generators.

The plasma bolts then went on to burn and melt the highly saturated transphasic armor plating.

The first cosmopolitan mechs soon began to break as the plasma burned their way through vital components.

The most gruesome outcomes occurred when the cockpits became engulfed by superhot plasma!

The Obsidian Orb did not know any rest. Its stellar plasma bolts kept damaging and wiping out so many mechs that the amount of molten wreckage surrounding it was growing at a prodigious rate.

None of the weapons employed by the cosmopolitan mechs could get through the plasma shield!

They severely underestimated the defenses of the Rubarthan superweapon. Without a lot of reinforcements or fire support, it seemed unlikely for any of the traitor mechs to get past the plasma shield!

There was no point in retreating. The cosmopolitan mechs had paid a heavy price to teleport so far forward, but they were unable to make their way out now that they had plunged deep into multiple warp interdiction fields.

Many human mechs had also begun to converge at their location. Thousands of them had already begun to open fire from a distance!

While the Obsidian Orb was rapidly burning away the enemies that utterly failed to compromise its impressive defenses, the Amaranto Mark III endured a lot more pressure!

Thousands of first-class multipurpose mechs of the Cosmopolitan Movement had turned towards the ace marksman mech for the sole purpose of taking her out of action by any means necessary!

What first greeted the Amaranto Mark III was a huge torrent of miniature transphasic missiles!

There was no way in hell that the Amaranto could shoot them all down. The instrument of Vengeance was not supposed to function as a point defense turret.

Saint Stark instead relied on her other advantages. She first commanded the Amaranto move away. Her mobility might not be the best among ace mechs, but her cutting-edge tech and resonance empowerment enabled her to move significantly faster than any standard mechs.

This included first-class multipurpose mechs!

While that was enough for the Amaranto to outpace the cosmopolitan mechs, it did not help her maintain her distance from the much faster transphasic missiles!

However, it was already enough for her to delay the moment of impact.

As the missiles crossed into the range of her Saint Kingdom, Saint Stark immediately employed a rudimentary measure that she had developed in her training a few days prior.

The Stewards Siamesia had already anticipated a scenario like this. They insisted that Saint Stark develop a way to defend herself against missile overloads.

It was not difficult for most ace pilots to neutralize such attacks.

Missiles were material objects that did not possess a lot of extraordinary traits.

This made them exceptionally vulnerable to subversion, suppression or even subordination!

As long as the missiles were not launched by high-ranking mechs that were able to impart true resonance onto them, the missiles were pretty much ownerless from the moment they left their mechs!

Saint Stark concentrated hard and imagined spears of light emerging in her Saint Kingdom.

Thousands of tiny white light blades manifested as she commanded!

She then proceeded to compel these light needles to fly and bounce around his Saint Kingdom at high speeds.

The Amaranto Mark III's Saint Kingdom turned into a hazardous region.

Every place within her Saint Kingdom became bombarded by random light needles that could come from every direction!

This flood of light needles mostly struck empty vacuum, but they were quickly begging to strike at the transphasic missiles.

It usually took a few hits for the explosive warheads to detonate, causing them to unleash their destructive power without ever getting close to the Amaranto Mark III!

Saint Stark began to grin when she looked at the advancing cosmopolitan mechs.

She could feel the fanaticism shining from their minds. Though the mech pilots were utterly misguided, they fought with clear minds and genuine skill.

However, they were only mortals!

"Traitors! You dare conspire with the aliens! You shall have no mercy, because the innocents who have died from the tech that you have supplied to our inhuman foes has stained your souls with sin! Let my light cleanse you of your misbegotten lives!"

A thousand or so cosmopolitan mechs charged close. Many of them maintained a respectful distance and solely sought to wear down the Amaranto's defenses from afar.

The rest charged forward even if their pilots knew how dangerous it was to enter an ace pilot's Saint Kingdom.

The approaching mechs continued to fire with their ranged weapons. Their combined damage output could shred any mech, but the Saint Kingdom was able to suppress and reduce the power of all of these attacks at once that they only inflicted minor to moderate damage onto the Amaranto.

Not that it was easy for the weapons to hit the ace mech.

The ace marksman mech was far from matching the speed and agility of the Dark Zephyr Mark III, but she was still able to evade more than half of the attacks!

The fact that so many attacks managed to hit the ace mech anyway was a testament of the skill of the traitor pilots and the tech of the cosmopolitan mechs.

The Amaranto Mark III began to suffer real damage to her mech frame.

It couldn't be helped. Too many transphasic hyper attacks struck the exterior of the mech to allow the Amaranto to make it out unscathed. There was only so much her Saint Kingdom could help.

Fortunately, the power of a hyper material known as Solarium showed its value. Its defensive properties could increase by up to 300 percent when it was affected by bright lumination.

Right now, the Amaranto was shining like a lighthouse in the dark. This had massively amplified the toughness of the Solarium that was applied to the outer sections of the archemch.

Many attacks that should have created holes in the armor instead generated shallow depressions.

With the Amaranto's Saint Kingdom constantly weakening every incoming attack, the ace mech was comfortably able to hold.

The Amaranto even began to launch a counterattack!

When the cosmopolitan mechs ceased to launch any further missiles, the ace mech dove in the direction of the traitor mechs and engulfed hundreds of them in her Saint Kingdom!

Many mechs were not only being subjected to light needle attacks, but also found their mechs weakening to a certain extent!

"This is my Kingdom! Trespassers shall suffer!"

The defenses of the cosmopolitan mechs within the range of the Saint Kingdom received a battering from all sides.

Their azure energy shields were not able to withstand repeated hits from resonance-empowered light attacks.

Soon enough, the cosmopolitan mechs that were unable to escape turned into pincushions. So many of them had begun to falter that the remaining traitor mechs wisely chose to distance themselves from the Saint Kingdom and attack the Amaranto from a healthy distance.

None of it was effective!

As more traitor mechs and traitor mech pilots succumbed to the light needles, Saint Stark felt more and more satisfied with the results!

"The sinful must be punished!"

The Amaranto Mark III did not fight like an ace marksman mech at all, but that was okay!

Saint Stark had received more than enough training for the Amaranto Mark III to be able to hold her own against enemies at closer ranges.

Chapter 6784: The Executioner of Light

The sight of the Amaranto Mark III impaling hundreds of cosmopolitan mechs with light needles was a glorious sight.

The display of martial superiority was practically sacred as the righteous ace mech smote down the wicked cosmopolitan mechs.

It was moments like these that showed why saints deserved to be called this way.

Their willpower transcended the physical barriers. Their ability to resonate with their well-designed mechs was unparalleled. Few mortal enemies and weapons could withstand the might of a saint who channeled her power and skills in combat.

The dramatic sight of the Amaranto Mark III wiping out traitor mechs like they were flies inspired many soldiers.

While the Amaranto was hardly the only ace mech that performed well on the battlefield, few people expected the living mech to endure her current difficulties so well.

Even saints could be felled by mortals so long as the latter were numerous enough!

Such incidents were rare, but it had happened in the past. First-class multipurpose mechs possessed a lot of firepower, and so long as they were able to repeatedly land hits on an ace mech, the damage would eventually accumulate. This was the key to destroying these powerful machines.

The huge number of cosmopolitan mechs were producing results. Even as their mechs struggled to withstand the zipping light needles, their firepower was prodigious enough to cause the Amaranto to get struck from all sides.

The well-trained and fanatical mech pilots did not allow the damage inflicted by the Saint Kingdom distract them from their mission.

The weapon modules of their mechs specifically targeted the rear, front or sides of the lower torso whenever possible. The cosmopolitans deemed this to be the most vulnerable section of the mech that still played an essential role.

While the exterior plating did indeed suffer a great amount of damage, the Solarium hyper material was incredibly effective at resisting the massed firepower. True resonance only further enhanced its already exaggerated performance, enabling the exterior plating to hold up under far greater pressure than they should.

The rare Solarium finally vindicated all of the cost and effort that the Larkinson Clan had put into procuring it. The hyper material performed at its best in the situation where the Amaranto needed to rely on its protection the most.

The Amaranto Mark III was also able to keep fighting due to the use of archetech. Her archemetal frame was able to prevent exterior impacts and shocks from damaging the more vulnerable internals. The seemingly organic maze of components and structural elements blended together in such a way that eliminated many weak points!

This massively increased the reliability of the ace mech and was a large contributor to allowing it to withstand the current storm!

Combined with the Amaranto Mark III's relatively fast and instinct-driven maneuvers, the cosmopolitan mechs barely produced any results aside from drilling a few shallow holes into the Solarium armor plating.

While the traitor mechs tried their best to capitalize on these small holes, Saint Stark did not let them get their way as her Saint Kingdom continued to pepper the remaining mechs with light needles!

As for the hostile mechs that were hovering outside of the range of her Saint Kingdom, the Amaranto continually shot them with the Instrument of Vengeance.

While the firing rate of this oversized luminar crystal rifle was anything but impressive, Saint Stark already figured out the exact amount charge needed to pierce the azure energy shields and transphasic hyper armor plating of every enemy mech.

At first, Saint Stark simply tried to shoot them down one at a time. The rate of kills was slow, but her accuracy was so impeccable that the targeted cosmopolitan mechs could do nothing but accept their fate.

As Stark began to get used to the pressure and the multitasking, she figured out a way to increase her killing efficiency.

She began to line up her targets.

By maneuvering her Amaranto Mark III in specific ways and charging her Instrument of Vengeance a bit more, she could launch powerful light beams that not only pierced straight through one enemy mech, but impaled another that just happened to be straight in its path!

Two cosmopolitan mechs started to blow up in exchange for slightly lowering the firing rate.

The process of charging up the luminar crystal rifle from zero always came with a delay. This meant that it was more efficient to allow the weapon to build up its charge rather than firing it more frequently.

As Saint Stark became more adept at lining up her targets, she began to challenge herself further by trying to find angles where she was able to eliminate three hostile mechs at a time!

This was exponentially more difficult to accomplish. She had to track and predict the movements of three mechs at once. Her Amaranto also had to maneuver her mech in the right place at the right time. Then she had to pull the trigger during an exceedingly small window of opportunity.

She failed more than she succeeded. It was a bit difficult for her to keep track of everything while also trying to line up three targets that were moving wildly in different directions.

Many times, her timing was just a bit off. Other times, her predictions were wrong.

Just one misjudgement was enough to cause a targeted mech to be in a completely different location than what she had anticipated!

Saint Stark did not let that ruin her enjoyment of this challenge. The volume of firepower striking her ace mech had distinctly decreased now that she had eliminated so many hostile mechs.

She was rather surprised that the cosmopolitan mechs hadn't broken yet despite their apparent futility in their mission.

However, the traitor mech pilots were all fanatical to the point where they greatly valued their cause over their lives.

The cosmopolitan mech pilots also understood that they would just get intercepted and torn to pieces by Rubarthan mechs if they attempted to withdraw.

Since that was the case, the traitors tried their best to produce as much results as possible before they inevitably went down!

"MY DEMISE SHALL BE THE TINDER THAT SHALL TURN HUMAN SUPREMACY ABLAZE!"

"OUR PLURALISTIC AGE SHALL COME!"

"PEACE BETWEEN OUR RACES IS INEVITABLE!"

Saint Stark ignored the garbled open transmissions that recorded the last words of all of the brainwashed mech pilots. She culled their mechs and harvest their lives without any measure of sympathy and compassion.

By the time she had eliminated all but a few stragglers, the wreckage floating away from her brightly glowing ace mech showed the aftermath of her fury-fuelled frenzy.

The ace pilot let out a deep breath as she made an effort to regain her composure. She studied the battlefield and tried to see whether anyone or anything important needed to be saved.

The battle in orbit of Kayana VIII-E had reached a late stage.

The large amounts of mechs and phasefighters had whittled each other down by a huge extent. Pilots from both sides had died in droves.

The alien phasefighters had suffered many more losses, but the mechs had expended a lot of energy and ammunition to hold their own on the battlefield. The human machines were not able to capitalize on its advantages and had little choice but to allow the surviving phasefighters to back off and withdraw in good order.

The alien assault fleets sustained heavy damage.

Even if the cosmopolitan mechs had generated enough of a distraction to force the Obsidian Orb and the Amaranto from firing at them, the losses previously incurred by the enemy fleets significantly reduced their firepower and ability to withstand attacks.

The orbital defense network eagerly took advantage of this weakness. A large amount of guns brutalized the surviving enemy warships within their range, causing them to break up and reduce the enemy's advantages even further!

As for the enemy phase whale and phase lords, they had failed to overcome the resistance generated by the high-ranking mechs fighting on the side of the Rubarthans.

Stalling a phase lord was different from killing one. The latter demanded a lot of risk taking that could easily backfire if anything went wrong. The right move could cause a phase lord to lose his life, but the wrong move could easily cause an ace mech to get crippled or destroyed!

All of the ace pilots fighting on the battlefield possessed the resolve to die if that was what it took to kill the enemy champions.

However, this was no time for them to make the ultimate sacrifice. The orbit of Kayana VIII-E was just one of several battlefields where the native aliens had to be stopped.

Since the Rubarthan commanders and the renowned Stewards Siamesia chose to prioritize holding Kayana VIII-E over permanently retiring the enemy phase lords, the ace mechs all fought in the most annoying way possible.

They engaged in hit-and-run tactics. They never allowed themselves to get close enough for the phase lords to land their attacks. They concentrated on breaking the spatial barriers of the weakest phase lords, but left them alone as long as they chose to back away.

Seeing as the ace mechs started to fight a lot more aggressively if a phase lord chose to persist and continue to fight, the native gods were eventually conditioned to withdraw whenever they lost their spatial barriers!

There were many times that ace pilots spotted many opportunities to close in and land a killing blow.

They refrained from taking the bait. The phase lords should be as vulnerable as they appeared.

It also took a lot of effort to be able to secure a kill against these enemies, especially when other phase lords made an effort to cover for their vulnerable peer.

Therefore, nothing much of consequence had occurred. The phase lords had gotten battered despite outnumbering the enemy ace mechs, but the latter also expended a lot of energy and effort to blockade their enemies.

The Lamia Kailamassu and its main adversaries appeared to be the exception.

The peak ace mech looked as if it could still keep going for many hours. It had fought at high intensity. Its twin Saint Kingdoms had worked miracles in order to keep itself intact while enduring the attacks launched by the Divine Maw and the Descent of Hushae'Rhua.

The latter no longer tried to duel against his enemies on his own, but wisely teamed up with the Divine Maw and the Divine Suppliant to face the enemy ace mechs together and attempt to cripple one of the annoying machines.

They failed. The Divine Maw's massive prowess, the Divine Suppliant's superdimensional shield and the Descent's Saint Piercer all failed to produce a satisfying result!

While the greater phase whale and the greater phase lord did not wish to back off from the battlefield without making at least a few achievements, the changes that took place around them made their situation more precarious.

The gradual withdrawal of alien phasefighters and warships caused many guns to turn against the enemy phase leaders!

Their spatial barriers had already endured enough attacks to reach their breaking points if that hadn't happened already.

Now, the added firepower caused their defenses to deplete increasingly faster than usual!

This was already bad enough, but when the Obsidian Orb was changing its configuration to expose the massive Star Caster Siege Hyper Plasma Cannon that was installed in its center, the phase lords would clearly come under much greater threat very soon!

Seeing that their own offensive maneuvers completely failed to shake the defenses of the Lamia Kailamassu and the senior ace mechs under its protection, the Divine Maw did not choose to be stubborn.

The Divine Maw ordered a retreat. The phase lords all disengaged in unison. They withdrew without covering each other's backs. Instead, they all behaved as if they had been given a lifeline and sought to retreat as fast as their phasewater organs could accomplish!

"We... we won...!"

The Rubarthan defenders successfully protected Kayana VIII-E and secured their possession of the enormous debris field.

Unfortunately, this was just the first of several fights in the Kayana System.

The native aliens would be back as soon as they replenished their losses. They may have lost a lot of expensive phasefighters and warships, but they could easily replenish them over time.

The struggle of the defenders was far from over, but the heroism demonstrated on the battlefield inspired them to fight harder next time!

Among the ace pilots that performed well this time, Saint Stark had made an incredible impression to them all. Even if she failed to repeat her feat of killing a lesser phase lord, she still managed to cull so many enemy warships with her energy rifle that she had become famous for this feat!

"Saint Davia Stark, the Executioner of Light!"

The proposed title instantly caught on. The Rubarthan soldiers adopted it with gusto!

"Executioner of Light!"

"Executioner of Light!"

"Executioner of Light!"

Chapter 6785: Objection by Principle

As the final and most critical phase of the Red Tide Offensive took place, every red human became affected by this final push.

The temporary isolation of Yernstall Central Star Node generated a considerable amount of panic among the citizens.

The authorities had been quick to publish statements that emphasized red humanity's reduced dependence on single star systems. They also made it clear that the defenders

of Yernstall were well-prepared enough for this possible event that they were already working to free themselves from the greater spacetime bubble.

The mood among the people lifted up a little bit, but the bad news from the front quickly caused it to drop again.

Many star systems struggled to withstand the native aliens as they did their utmost to topple the fifth defensive band.

While the final line of fortified star systems was much better defended than the previous ones, the numerical advantage enjoyed by the native aliens was difficult to overcome.

Both sides suffered severe losses in the initial battles. The red humans lost a lot of fortifications and a large amount of mechs.

The native aliens in turn had to sacrifice a lot of phasefighters and warships to make actual progress.

In places such as Kayana, the native alien attackers failed to take over a planet or moon. They had suffered too many losses and could not afford to persist in their attacks anymore.

In other places, the native aliens produced significantly better results.

Right now, many Middle Zones were at risk of falling. The alien assault fleets under the leadership of many different phase lords successfully gained the advantage on many battlefields.

The Torald Middle Zone in particular was already at risk of falling due to losing several key star systems at the same time!

Multiple powers immediately enacted plans to launch counterattacks in order to take them back, but there were many people who were skeptical whether this would happen.

Too many star systems had fallen to make a concentrated counterattack viable. There weren't many reinforcements or reserves left at this point.

At this time, red humanity greatly suffered from the bottlenecks that hindered its military expansion.

The production of mechs still remained fairly strong. The mech industry had not shown too many constraints when it came to producing more mechs.

What red humanity truly struggled with was finding people to pilot these machines.

Trained and skilled manpower became increasingly more scarce. Years of calling up reserves had drained the amount of mech pilots that were capable of fighting as part of a military unit.

The only way to call up more manpower was to resort to desperate measures. The one that was currently hotly debated was the decision to conscript mech cadets that were in their last 2 or 3 years of study!

Their theoretical understanding might not be complete and their skills may still be raw, but as long as they could fight with fairly simple melee or ranged mechs, they should still be useful on the battlefield!

Carmine mech pilots also became a lot more popular than before. The production of Yellow Jackets ramped up as more and more leaders were willing to employ them on the battlefield in the near term despite the lack of training!

Unfortunately, there was not much use producing too many Yellow Jackets.

Training was a big issue. The Yellow Jacket line lacked the autonomy of the Auto Heretic line designed for the Milky Way Galaxy.

The critical lack of HALM meant that most Carmine mech pilots could do little more than make the Yellow Jacket hover while pointing a single modular weapon mount in different directions.

There were times when Ves thought about making this difference disappear.

What was the harm in letting the Yellow Jackets take control over their own actions? As living mechs, they should be trustworthy enough to gain control over dangerous systems.

When he cautiously brought this subject up with Jovy Armalon, the RA Senior Mech Designer furrowed his brows.

"You are asking a troubling question, Ves." He said. "To be honest, we are ahead of you. Our faction and Association has been discussing the merits of allowing Carmine mech pilots to rely on higher degrees of automation in order to turn their machines more effective in combat. It would fundamentally change the relationship between mech and mech pilot. Your proposal will reduce the mech pilot to a supervisor to his own machine. This is... problematic. We do not want to make it a habit for human mech pilots to make use of their mechs this way. It will only make them all more dependent on automation."

Ves scowled and pressed his fingers against his temple. "So that is a 'no'?"

"There are many mechers who are utterly convinced that if we want to prove our right to survive, we must do so by showing strength instead of weakness. This is a difficult philosophical debate, and you may think it is silly for us to place so much importance on values and ideology. However, the Red Association is also a reflection of its top leaders. The Fist of Defiance and the Evolution Witch are both forcing their respective factions to block any attempts to automate mechs. There are also other leaders that would rather die than allow AIs to win their wars."

Ves didn't know how he felt about this. As a mech designer himself, he strongly agreed with this view.

On the other hand, the pragmatist within him strongly objected to the decision to avoid specific categories of technology just because they did not conform to the ideologies of numerous god pilots.

It was easy for these transcendent beings to tell Carmine mech pilots who had zero effective training to suck it up and train for a few years.

Their civilization might not exist anymore by the time the Carmine mech pilots completed their most basic training!

Therefore, support for greater mech automation never ceased. The strong opposition from several god pilots, Star Designers and other members of the cadre could not strangle the talk.

Desperation could make many people turn a blind eye towards their principles.

God pilots could never bring themselves to break their promises, but there were still other ways they could assist with repelling the native aliens.

The cautious leaders were still reluctant to open the floodgates of mech automation.

"It is... regrettable that the Red Association has failed to be decisive on this matter." Ves commented. "I kind of see where the opposing god pilots are coming from, but this is a typical example of why it is a bad idea to put god pilots in charge of anything. They are holding all red humans to the same impossible standards as them. AIs are tools, just as any other piece of tech. They have great capacity to do harm, but they can also solve a lot of acute problems."

Jovy sighed and leaned in to place his hand on Ves' shoulder. "Your words will not have much weight on this matter. We all understand the logic that your Yellow Jackets can fight the aliens more effectively, but there are justified fears that we will only be giving our enemies a chance to exploit a backdoor in the programming that causes all of our Carmine mechs to go berserk. I can only promise that we will make sure to relay your words to the opposing leaders. Whether they will listen is another matter."

Well, at least Ves tried.

He personally disagreed with this direction, but his clout was not enough to sway the minds of stubborn god pilots.

"So how is the war effort going?" He asked. "Give me the truth, not the rosy picture that you feed to the public in order to keep their spirits high."

"You are a sharp and perceptive individual, Ves. I think that you have enough information channels to possess a good grasp of how the Red Tide Offensive is actually unfolding. It is largely going as predicted. The Lower Zones are losing ground at a steady rate. The minor races are just throwing as many cheap warships into them as possible. This is good as the lack of phase lords means that it is easy to foresee how every battle will progress. The lack of strong champions prove that neither side of the war cares too much about the most barren regions of this dwarf galaxy."

"The Upper Zones are holding up for now, I guess." Ves said. "From what I have read on the galactic net as well as the intelligence briefings from the Red Collective, the decision to shift a lot of second-class ace pilots to the Upper Zones have paid off. Many star systems still retain their strongholds because of their help."

"We truly cannot afford to lose the Upper Zones that are closest to the border." Jovy solemnly said. "If one of them falls, other Upper Zones in the vicinity will come under threat. That will massively diminish their industrial output, which is catastrophic for us in the long run. The longer we keep the Upper Zones secure, the longer we can produce units that can fight against the best of what the aliens are throwing at us. I have heard that Saint Davia Stark has made a good contribution to our cause. She has distinguished herself in the Rubarthan Pact in such a dramatic manner that the Rubarthans have already crowned her with her first title."

Ves smiled in a mixture of pride and amusement. "Yes. The Executioner of Light. It is not what I would think of when I come across her name, but it is as good of a title as any. I haven't received her opinion about it. She might pull another Tusa and reject the title proposed by her adoring fans."

From what Ves understood of Saint Stark's character, she probably did not care that much about what names other people placed on her shoulders.

So long as the title was decent and acceptable enough, there was a high likelihood that she would agree to the proposal.

"Many people are admiring her marksmanship skills, her willpower and her extraordinary abilities." The Survivalist mecher said. "What few individuals take notice of is the ace mech that enables her to output so much damage. She has single-handedly destroyed scores of enemy warships, many of which happen to be alien battleships. This is a feat that puts her well ahead of other ace mechs. I know numerous high-ranking mech pilots that would love to make use of a luminar crystal rifle similar to the Instrument of Vengeance."

Ves immediately waved his hand in rejection. "No way. There is little point to doing this. I don't have time to design such standalone weapons. The Instrument of Vengeance is so strong by itself. The weapon is strong due to the excellent synergies with the Amaranto's mech frame and Saint Stark's domain field. They all complement each other. This magic will be lost on other expert mechs and ace mechs unless they are massively overhauled."

It was Jovy's turn to become disappointed. He understood what Ves was talking about, so there was no easy way to persuade Ves to design high-end luminar crystal rifles for other powerhouse mechs.

"You can reconsider at any time, Ves. You do not have to design a customized weapon for any machine."

The two Senior Mech Designers went back to discussing the ongoing war. The Red Tide Offensive spooked a lot of people, and the people who should arguably fear for their lives the most were those living in the Middle Zones right next to the border regions!

"The Krakatoa Middle Zone is in trouble, am I right?"

Jovy ruefully smiled. "Its prognosis is not good. There are too many phase lords assaulting those star systems. Phase whales have already appeared in sporadic fashion. Too many star systems fell despite possessing stronger orbital defense networks around their populated planets. The Torald Middle Zone has turned into a sieve. I would not be surprised that alien raiding fleets have already begun to sneak into our hinterland to conduct raids on vulnerable industrial sites."

In other words, Krakatoa and all of the states that have taken root over there were in the fight of their lives!

Chapter 6786: Raising the Stakes

As Ves and Jovy continued to talk about how red humanity was actually faring in the war, they could not get around the most important subject.

"To be honest, our current projections for the war are not optimistic." Jovy admitted with a weary tone. "The reason why that is the case is that our win conditions are not

being met. If we want to turn this war around and gain the upper hand, we need to have the strength to back it up. We currently do not have enough advantages to beat back the alien offensive."

"What are our win conditions?" Ves asked the obvious question.

Jovy's expression grew more severe. His physical projection crossed his arms and walked back and forth as if he was contemplating a heavy subject.

"Breakthroughs."

"Ah."

"Despite the fall of numerous crucial star systems, none of the peak ace pilots we have kept an eye upon have yet to break through." Jovy said. "We have tried to raise the stakes for them as much as possible. We have offered advanced materials and technical support to upgrade their mechs further if they chose to accept our aid. Our god pilots have also given them private advice that is tailored to their own conditions. However, it is ultimately up to the peak ace pilots themselves to decide when to step on the road to no return."

This was by far the most consequential and challenging decision a god pilot candidate could make.

A candidate would always remain a candidate. He or she was in no way as genuine as the real thing.

In order to transcend the candidate status, the peak ace pilot needed to stake his very life to an impossible transformation process that could only be realized through the inhumanly strong application of willpower.

Every scrap of information that Ves learned about the mysterious Mech Body Merger Process sounded crazy even to him. To force a perfect merger between a mech pilot and a mech by relying on strength of willpower alone sounded incredibly outlandish.

Yet saints were somehow expected to accomplish this god-like feat.

It sounded extremely unfair.

It was like asking a regular mech pilot to replicate the power of an expert pilot.

The gap was too big. A mundane human could never fight like an expert pilot under normal and most abnormal circumstances. It took a huge amount of effort for such an individual to bridge such an enormous gap.

The divide between an ace pilot and a god pilot was even bigger as far as everyone was concerned.

Partial gods were still mortals as far as cultivation science was concerned. A true god pilot was a fundamentally different existence. Transcendence was more than just a straightforward power-up. It represented a fundamental transformation in life essence and a leap in life level.

All of the mysticism and uncertainty surrounding god pilots underscored how difficult it was to attain this awe-inspiring rank.

There were quite a number of peak ace pilots in the Red Ocean. Each of them were lucky, hard-working, gifted and courageous.

Perhaps their brilliance did not manifest in their early careers, but through overcoming repeated challenges that genuinely pushed them to the brink of death or failure, they had proven themselves superior to almost all of their peers.

They were the outliers of the mech piloting profession.

They were the living legends whose careers were filled with accomplishments.

They were the revolutionaries that made their convictions the center of their lives.

Every peak ace pilot was an exemplar in many ways. They were more than human. Each of them embodied an ideal that many other heroes tried to emulate.

Yet despite their impressive qualifications, most of them would die if they tried to step on the road to no return.

They all sought to maximize their success rate by waiting for the right timing or the right combat scenario.

A thought came to mind.

"Mech pilots tend to break through as they experience more urgency." Ves said. "If a loss causes them to suffer greatly, then they will feel more desperate to acquire great power. This is why many peak ace pilots are waiting for the fifth defensive band to break entirely, right? This is why Human High Command deliberately allocated a lot of resources to buildup this defensive line to the exclusion of all else. By constantly telling these peak ace pilots that the downfall of the fifth defensive band will cause the rest of human space to become open to the aliens, you are deliberately raising the stakes."

Jovy slowly nodded. "It took you a while to deduce that reasoning. You are correct, more or less. Our resources are limited, so it is not as if we can build a sixth defensive band without heavily compromising in other areas. However, it is not a mischaracterization to say that our entire defensive strategy is primarily set up to encourage successful breakthroughs at the highest level. We have manipulated our battlefields in a way that makes it very easy and straightforward for peak ace pilots to understand the stakes."

That sounded incredibly dark, but that is exactly why Ves understood and approved of the strategy.

It was a massive gamble to bet on any peak ace pilot breaking through the following months, but the probability that at least one of them would succeed should not be too low!

"Since that is the case, it is still early." Ves said. "Those peak ace pilots must be feeling that they still have a chance to weather the storm and plug the gaps. The fortifications in the Upper Zones are still mostly intact. You constantly tell everyone that the Upper Zones must be held. Once they begin to fall, that is when those peak ace pilots grow truly desperate."

"You make a good point. The stakes are not as high as they could be. That does not mean we are satisfied with the current situation. We do not want to rely on peak ace pilots handing over their homework a few seconds before the deadline has passed, yet that is what everyone appears to be working towards. It is... frustrating. We would rather see a peak ace pilot achieve a breakthrough much sooner. The hope that spreads from a successful breakthrough might reduce the urgency for other peak ace pilots, but that is a price that we can accept. Even one breakthrough can make an enormous difference in our strategic outlook."

The Red Association put so much thought into this breakthrough-dependent strategy that Ves had only scratched the surface of its masterplan.

It was not in Ves' place to comment on these considerations. Besides, none of the ace pilots of the Larkinson Clan was close to breaking through. This shouldn't be an issue that he should be worrying about for a long time.

There was just one matter that Ves wanted to know.

"Does exotic radiation help with peak ace pilots breaking through in any way?"

"It does help." Jovy answered more confidently. "Their Saint Kingdoms become more powerful due to access to an additional energy source. Their senior ace mechs are also considerably stronger after the inclusion of hyper technology. E energy radiation is making a positive difference in this regard."

"What about R particle radiation?"

"..."

"Hello, Jovy? I asked you a question."

"And I cannot answer it, Ves."

"Because you can't or won't?"

"I cannot." Jovy earnestly replied. "I have never been informed about R particle radiation. I have my own ideas, but there is no backing for any of them. All I know is that R particle radiation is a real phenomenon, but is very difficult to detect. It is likely relevant to god pilots, but I am not clear if it makes a difference for peak ace pilots. I do not even know what R particle radiation even does. If you have any answers, then I am more than willing to lend an ear."

"I know less about R particle radiation than you." Ves mildly stated. "Forget about it, then. It is not relevant to us if we can't interact with it in any way. I just want to know... what if the fifth defensive band falls, but all of those peak ace pilots still failed to successfully advance to the rank of god pilot? Are we supposed to roll over and let the aliens massacre the populations of our vulnerable and under-defended star systems with impunity."

"Yes."

"..."

Jovy carefully formulated his words. "It is all about the stakes, Ves. Peak ace pilots have the potential to perform truly godlike feats if they are motivated enough. If the fall of the fifth defensive band does not give them enough stimulation, then we must raise the stakes further. What better way than to make them extremely desperate by witnessing the ongoing genocides of red humanity? When billions or trillions of defenseless human beings die due to an ace pilot's hesitation or inability to step on the road to no return, then that is a much stronger reason for them to pursue the strength of a god."

The Survivalist Faction truly thought of everything.

The damned crazies even turned the unbridled slaughter of a huge amount of humans into a deliberate strategy to promote the breakthroughs of peak ace pilots!

Ves should have considered this plan to be detestable, but he did not. He would have devised the same strategy if he was in charge.

Everything clearly hinged on producing additional god pilots. They were the only ones that could truly turn this situation around. The Red Ocean was small enough that the rise of a handful of human deities could still reverse the tide of the war!

"If... if we are truly pushed this far... then even if we get the god pilots you asked for, very little civilization will be left intact." Ves mentioned. "We may not even maintain a sufficient population and infrastructure to persecute the war any further."

"That is the risk we have to take. This is also why we must discuss a new variable that can significantly improve their breakthrough chances. We need more superdimensional matter. We have already begun to develop customized arms and armor for a select amount of peak ace mechs. By granting them the power to challenge the most formidable of greater phase whales or phase lords, they will be able to fulfill many criteria when they successfully strike down these alien leaders in the most convincing fashion possible."

That... sounded quite plausible, especially with all of the knowledge that Ves had obtained.

The problem was that Jovy was talking to the wrong Larkinson about this subject.

"I would like to get my hands on lots of superdimensional matter as well, but Ketis is the one who has shown the capacity to form a dimension breach."

"We have already made repeated requests on this subject, but her responses are... vague and unsatisfactory. We would like you to contact her and see if you can obtain more precise answers. We are in dire need of more concrete information. Perhaps she is more willing to divulge information to a friendly face."

"It won't work." Ves shook his head. "The Heavensword is unfathomable. A Journeyman and Senior won't be able to figure out how it works or what it can do. In fact, maybe addressing this relic sword directly may yield more positive results."

"We burned that bridge many years ago..."

Everyone was hungry for superdimensional matter, but it gained a whole new level of importance when people made the assumption that it could directly improve the breakthrough chances of peak ace pilots.

Ves sighed. "I will speak to Ketis and do what I can. Still, I find it rather pathetic that we are dependent on an ancient relic weapon and a swordmaster to save our race and civilization. We are effectively hinging our survival on a gimmick."

"Superdimensional arms are more than gimmicks."

"You are right, but the point still stands. Maybe... we are not worthy to welcome a breakthrough."

"If we cannot earn a breakthrough, then we will steal it, one way or another." Jovy ominous said.

Chapter 6787: Knowing Too Much

Ves felt a bit depressed as he ended his call with Jovy.

He leaned back in his chair and looked around his private design lab.

The state of red humanity was deteriorating by the day. The native aliens had commenced their final push and seemed determined to break any semblance of organized resistance.

Now, Ves just learned that Human High Command might not go out of their way to stop the fifth defensive band from getting breached.

If Ves was reading in between the lines correctly, Jovy's answers came with the ominous implication that failed defensive battles and the mass slaughter of human civilians may be a deliberate part of HHC's strategy!

While the Red Three and all of the states publicly proclaimed their determination to defend humanity's borders and value the life of every human, their leaders had secretly come to a consensus to sacrifice entire zones filled with defenseless civilians in order to stimulate the birth of god pilots!

Ves suddenly shuddered as he suddenly made a very cynical realization!

If his latest train of thought was true, then HHC never seriously thought about defending all of human-occupied space from the start!

The strategists who shouldered the burden of finding a way to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat had made a cruel but arguably necessary calculation.

They effectively abandoned any serious attempt to defend the Lower Zones and the Middle Zones.

Transferring a lot of second-class ace pilots to the Upper Zones was just the most obvious manifestation of this strategic shift.

Ves feared that the major powers had already made other moves behind the scenes. None of it was obvious on the surface, so many second-raters and third-raters still believed that their protectors were doing the best they could to safeguard their lives and homes.

Few if any of them understood that they had already been condemned to die. This was particularly the case of the colonists who had settled in the Middle and Lower Zones adjacent to the border regions.

The Krakatoa Middle Zone was one of many future killing fields.

Ves had heard that a lot of Davutans and other colonists had made the determination to defend their homes to the utmost.

While a limited amount of evacuations had taken place, logistical constraints and many other hurdles had effectively minimized the scale of human movements.

On the one hand, public propaganda and the prevailing narrative among the commentators painted an overly optimistic outlook to their audience.

A lot of space peasants who did not have the exclusive information channels that Ves had at his disposal ignorantly believed in all of the hype. They still thought that the Red Three and the other powers would prevail and turn the tables against the alien aggressors.

Perhaps they even believed that they would be able to retain their peaceful lives on planets that would soon receive a lot of unpleasant visitors!

The fundamental truth that Ves only just figured out was that HHC had no incentive to evacuate the space peasants from their endangered home planets.

Instead, it was the opposite!

HHC had a compelling reason to keep the space peasants trapped on their death traps and turn them into unwitting sacrifices of a dark but ambitious gambit meant to promote the successful emergence of god pilots!

What a grand design!

Whoever came up with it was a cold-hearted bastard alright. Ves could respect the ability to cut through useless sentiments and formulate a completely rational plan that was fully tailored to red humanity's strengths as well as weaknesses.

The space peasants living in the Middle Zones and Lower Zones had relatively little value to begin with, so the higher ups might as well squeeze out the best possible value out of them by turning them into breakthrough fuel.

Second-raters and third-raters were so numerous that it should be easy to flood the galactic net with tragic scenes!

Once their mass deaths got broadcasted on the galactic net for everyone to see, many peak ace pilots would eventually grow angry and lose their patience to the point of staking their entire lives and careers on a single throw of a dice!

That was the outcome that HHC was trying to realize!

Ves shuddered again when he realized how lucky he was for making so much progress in the past few years that he had promoted himself to an indispensable tier 3 galactic citizen.

As the Father of Carmine Mechs, the Chief Councilor of the Upper Council of the Red Collective and inventor of all manner of useful stuff, he had firmly cemented his place in high society.

He saw his somewhat forced relocation to an Upper Zone in a new light.

The mechers compelled him to leave the expeditionary fleet behind and relocate to an Upper Zone because it was the only place where he could reasonably remain safe.

HHC understood the necessity of preserving the best of red humanity. The first-raters represented the core of their civilization. They would eventually be tasked with revitalizing human territories after the native aliens had ravaged so many previously settled planets.

As for the second-raters and third-raters? There were so many of them that even if the majority got culled, they would eventually breed and recover most of their population in one or two generations!

Wait.

Perhaps the bigshots already took the dramatic drop in human population into account. Ves was already aware that biotech experts had already begun to set up production facilities for the purpose of pumping out batch humans.

These artificially conceived and grown humans could grow from embryo into fully functional beings in just a handful of years!

The combination of accelerated human growth and EdNet-style accelerated learning could rapidly turn these test tube humans into productive members of society on an unprecedentedly huge scale!

No one had ever tried to expand their population through industrial means in the past.

There was no precedent for people to refer to. Everyone would be doing this for the first time, which meant that a lot of things could go wrong.

Natural born humans might look down on batch humans and treat the latter as incomplete or flawed humans.

Batch humans in turn may develop a lot of animosity towards their 'superiors' and try to rebel.

Ves could already see a potential 'dwarf scenario' on the horizon.

Even if other leaders could see it coming as well, they might not be able to stave off a violent schism.

However, what did it matter?

So long as natural humans and batch humans lived long enough to wage war on each other, at least red humanity managed to live long enough to engage in infighting again!

This outcome was vastly more preferable to letting the native aliens overrun human space and kill everyone aside from a few lucky survivors who had fled into the most remote corners of the Red Ocean.

As Ves was finally able to connect all of the dots and gain a clear understanding of what was truly going on, he felt more powerless than ever.

According to the latest developments, it sounded that the Middle Zones next to the border regions would be among the first regions to collapse.

The Davute Branch of the Larkinson Clan was right in the crosshairs of the ravenous and murderous native aliens.

The enemy would not hold back. Not after everything the humans had done during the last years of the Age of Mechs.

Humans had been anything but merciful when they launched a full invasion into the Red Ocean.

Many of the planets that hosted a lot of humans used to be occupied by a lot of aliens. Many of them failed to evacuate when the humans arrived and wiped them all out without mercy.

The hands of every human pioneer and colonist were stained with blood. It did not matter if they did the killing directly or just profited from the eradication of local aliens. They were all marked by the guilt of slaughtering alien lives and stealing their home planets.

Now, the relatives of those dead aliens were about to come back and exact retribution on the humans!

Ves let out a deep breath as he tried to think about his own stance on the matter.

"I can't do much."

His agency was distressingly little. He was a mech designer and an innovator, but he was not a miracle worker. He could not come up with any invention that could reverse the current trend and stop the Krakatoa Middle Zone from becoming a charnelhouse.

He had no way of persuading Human High Command to defend the vulnerable space peasants if he was unable to offer them a better plan.

During a time of crisis, the influence of the Survivalist Faction had reached its peak.

All of the extreme and radical solutions proposed by the Survivalists obtained the greatest amount of support!

Ves had no way of defeating such a strong power bloc.

Perhaps he might be able to design another fantastic mech that could help the second-raters and third-raters to stall the invasion and save more lives, but all of that took time that was in very short supply at the moment.

What frustrated Ves even more was that he obviously could not fight the aliens in person.

It was completely irrational for a mech designer to think about entering the battlefield and punching the aliens to death in person, but the phasewater-infused Larkinson blood that flowed through his veins kept urging him that he needed to stand up and use his strength to contribute more directly to the war effort!

He firmly shook his head.

"I have been watching too much battle footage as of late."

Ves was afraid that he had become contaminated by all of the duty and nobility demonstrated by the brave linefighters at the frontlines.

It frustrated him to see all of those good soldiers die while he remained stuck in the rear.

There was nothing he could do to increase their survival chances in the short term.

Perhaps he should look out for his Larkinsons instead.

The Larkinson Clan had expanded rapidly as of late. Many members had not joined the 'main branch' as it became a lot more difficult to directly join the main branch that was currently centered around the expeditionary fleet.

Instead, most recruits joined the nearest planetary branches and became Larkinsons that way.

So long as these side branch members proved their mettle and distinguished themselves in their jobs, they earned a chance to apply to the expeditionary fleet where much of the action took place.

Ves called up a lot of information.

He frowned when he saw that the majority of planetary branches did not own any starships of their own. They found it difficult to commission or purchase them because other parties had already claimed the ones that were even remotely available.

All of this meant that it would be difficult for the members of these side branches to evacuate from their home planets in time.

What was Ves supposed to do in this situation?

If he wanted to do what was best for his clansmen, then he should scrounge up as many starships he could spare and send them to every star system with a large presence of side branch members and insist on evacuating them in advance.

However, this was a very selfish decision in the eyes of the higher ups. In order for their strategy to have the best effect, the populations of all of the endangered planets had to stay in place.

Too many people paid attention to the Larkinson Clan. If it turned out that the Larkinsons were fleeing from the Middle Zones and Lower Zones without regard for anything else, then they would not only paint themselves as cowards, but also risk the chance of sparking mass panic and hysteria!

The best decision that Ves could make from the perspective of human leadership was to play dumb and do nothing to evacuate his own clansmen.

"Damn... what do I do?"

Sometimes, knowing too much was a detriment rather than an advantage.

Chapter 6788: Final Glory Project

It took Ves more hours than he would have liked to resolve his conflicting feelings.

He eventually concluded that he was no angel by any means. It was not his job to save every single human life, even if he or she was a member of the Larkinson Clan.

Ves could no longer afford to entertain childish and naive daydreams. He needed to work within the framework of reality and accept that he could not save everyone's lives.

As much as he felt guilty about it, he could not defy the strategic decisions made by Human High Command.

The inhabitants of the Middle Zones and the Lower Zones had to stay as much as possible.

On the one hand, they were needed to fight back against the alien invaders as much as possible.

Even if their defeat was already set in stone, a determined resistance could still inflict a lot of damage and delay the enemy's advance.

On the other hand, their deaths would ultimately contribute towards the most important 'win condition', which was to catalyze the breakthroughs of peak ace pilots!

Since many ordinary space peasants were designated as necessary sacrifices to produce this favorable outcome, the Larkinsons living among them could not avoid their own responsibilities.

Why should the Larkinsons be able to get away for free while many of their peers had no choice but to fight and die?

If the Larkinson Clan wanted to prove that it was dedicated towards the survival of the human race in the Red Ocean, it could not allow its own members to shirk their responsibilities and enjoy special treatment.

Ves felt rather bad about letting these side branch members stay on planets that would soon become vulnerable to alien invasions.

He decided that he would not stop his clan from rerouting ships to evacuate the clansmen that had the misfortune of living in the endangered zones.

This conformed to the normal behavior of people. The rest of the clan remained ignorant of the true high-level strategic outlook, so there was no reason for them to believe that the Middle Zones and Lower Zones had already been abandoned by their leaders.

Ves could only promise not to make use of his insider knowledge to organize a proper evacuation. This would probably lead to the deaths of a lot more clansmen than if he intervened more directly, but he was not stupid.

The disclosure of so many high-level secrets by Jovy and his contacts at the Red Collective mainly served to keep him informed.

The goal was to make him figure out better ways to contribute to red humanity's survival. It would be a breach of trust if he used this insider knowledge to promote his own selfish interests over the needs of the public as a whole.

There was no easy way to solve this dilemma. He could either choose to be a good 'public servant' or a good 'clan patriarch'. He could not be good at both at the same time.

Ves ultimately chose to put his trust in the HHC because the survival of human civilization ultimately trumped every other consideration.

His clan might suffer greater losses in the short term, but at least there would still be a society left for them to live in. They could always rebuild what they had lost.

In contrast, trying to save the lives of as many Larkinsons as possible without taking the greater strategic outlook into consideration may cause the current strategy to fail, and that would be the greatest sin that Ves could commit.

"Well, the clansmen have partially chosen this life for themselves."

There were many Larkinsons who possessed the foolish notion that it was better to live in a fixed location rather than take up the spaceborn life.

Ves could understand the value of living in a structured environment where people were free to walk outside and make a living in an expansive community.

However, he could personally never agree that this was worth sacrificing the safety granted by living on a mobile starship!

From the moment the Red War took a turn for the worse for red humanity, a lot of people should have looked into selling their homes and finding a way to gain employment on a starship.

If that was not possible, then they should at least find a way to emigrate to a planet that was located a lot further to the rear.

Even if the expenses rose by the day due to lack of space and the deliberate conspiracy to bottle up the space peasants in the endangered zones, it was better to become poor and alive rather than the opposite!

Sure, there was no need for them to relocate if the frontlines held, but who was willing to bet their lives and the lives of their family for a bet?

"All these people are too irresponsible." Ves grumbled.

He recognized that he was being too unfair to the space peasants.

His life experience was much different from the ignorant masses.

They had not suffered betrayal from the authorities who made vague and insincere promises to protect the people.

They had not witnessed the eradication of all humans that remained stuck on planets assailed by genocidal aliens.

The more he thought about it, the more he grew upset at this miserable situation.

He felt as if there was a very great need to publish a heavily automated Carmine mech like the Auto Heretic in the Red Ocean!

At least the mass proliferation of Auto Heretics would give all of the trapped civilians a much better chance of defending themselves against the incoming aliens!

Yet because there were too many leaders within the Red Association and other groups that rejected the notion of allowing a mech fight on a pilot's behalf, there was no political room for such a radical proposal!

"What can I do?" He asked himself again.

No clear answer came to mind, and that frustrated him to no end.

A mech designer solved problems by designing mechs.

Ves had solved many problems in the past this way. Instead of fighting or resorting to other methods, he instead designed a mech that met the needs of the people and changed society for the better.

From the Pacifier model to the Yellow Jacket series, Ves solved problems that other mech designers failed to address.

Yet in all of those cases, Ves recognized a straightforward problem and presented a simple and elegant solution that directly made it go away.

This time, the problem was not so simple and clear-cut.

He vaguely judged that there should be a way for a mech designer to make a difference by designing and publishing the right mech.

Yet was this the right solution?

"Maybe I shouldn't think so much."

He wanted to throw logic out of the window and devise a new mech based on his conflicted emotions.

"This needs to be more than a pointless exercise."

Ves decided to be more serious about this effort.

He soon determined what theme it should be based upon. He felt the urge to design a second-class and third-class Carmine mech centered around sacrifice.

As long as he was able to design a cheap mech that could be produced quickly and cheaply, a lot of trapped civilians should be able to make the last day of their lives more meaningful by making a final sacrifice.

Ves soon became to visualize the performance of such a Carmine mech.

His imagination generated a planet under siege by an overwhelmingly large alien fleet.

Alien warships hovered over the surface and bombarded different settlements at random.

Alien phasefighters escorted troop carriers down to the surface before strafing structures and humans caught in the open.

Every settlement that got raided by the aliens would eventually become annihilated off the maps.

The vengeful aliens did not intend to let any humans off. Even after the invaders bombarded every settlement to oblivion, they would still leave behind garrison troops to hunt down the ragged survivors that had run into the wild in order to hide.

Ves envisioned that many planets would suffer this kind of fate over the next months.

Instead of leaving these civilians to die to superior alien numbers and firepower, why not give them the choice to make their lives a little more glorious and strike a final blow at their enemies?

Ves imagined a very simple and crude Carmine.

In fact, it was so simple that it was essentially shaped like a torpedo more or less.

The only job of this Carmine 'mech' was to launch from the surface and collide into anything that belonged to the aliens.

Ves did not set any harsh standards when it came to the materials used to make the suicide mechs.

The armor plating and the explosive payloads could consist of any materials that the locals had on hand.

The locals could even recycle materials from structures or other vehicles in order to produce these suicide machines!

Having learned how to design by template in the Milky Way, Ves knew that it was possible to design a single template that could quickly be derived into many different local variations.

The planets in question just had to have their own mech designers who were well-informed about the availability of suitable materials.

As Ves translated his whimsical idea into a slightly more serious draft design, he became increasingly more convinced that he needed to realize this product as soon as possible!

Of course, he could already imagine that at least one person would not be pleased about his decision.

"..."

His wife frowned deeper as she studied the draft design and read through his proposal.

"Ves."

"Yes?"

"Did we not agree that you should not spend any further time on distractions and side projects? Did we not ascertain that we need to complete the Minerva Mark II Project, the Riot Mark III Project, the Promethea Mark II Project and the Lionheart Mark II Project as soon as feasibly possible?"

"That is true..."

"THEN WHY ARE YOU BREAKING YOUR PROMISE?! WE HAVE MADE SUCH GOOD PROGRESS IN THE MINERVA MARK II PROJECT LATELY! WE ARE ACTUALLY WORKING AHEAD OF SCHEDULE BECAUSE OF HOW DILIGENT AND FOCUSED YOU HAVE BECOME! IF YOU START TO DIVERT YOUR TIME AND PASSION AWAY FROM OUR CURRENT PRIORITY, THEN EVERYONE WHO DEPENDS ON THE SAINT COMMANDER WILL SUFFER! ENTIRE PLANETARY POPULATIONS MIGHT GET WIPED OUT JUST BECAUSE WE FAILED TO DELIVER A WORTHY ACE MECH TO OUR GREATEST ACE COMMANDER IN TIME!"

As melodramatic as Gloriana sounded, she made a valid point. Ves could not readily dismiss her arguments.

"I won't let the Minerva Mark II Project run behind schedule!" He said as he raised his palms in defense against Gloriana's fury. "I will work extra hard to meet my commitments in your project. Most of my work in this project is already done anyway. My remaining responsibilities are not too heavy. I am confident I can handle both projects at the same time. At worst, I will cut back on my sleeping hours and temporarily spend less time with the kids."

"It is times like these where it is more important than ever for us to cherish our time with our children!" Gloriana hissed.

"I don't disagree with you, honey, but my Final Glory Project is a means to give many other parents a chance to fight for the survival of their own sons and daughters. By giving them access to cheap and easily produced sacrificial mechs, they can do their part and make any alien invasion force suffer. Perhaps it might even harm their enemies heavily enough to postpone a raid. Think about it, Gloriana. This is a mech that is very much in need at this moment."

"There is little about this draft design that makes me believe that it is essential." Gloriana said in a more subdued voice. "Rather than go through the effort to produce mechs that function as missiles, why not let the local factories produce actual missiles en masse? This is a much simpler and more efficient solution."

"That is because the Final Glory Project is meant to enhance any payload it carries through the power of human sacrifice!"

"...Huh?"

Chapter 6789: Offensive Probability Manipulation

His wife reacted very poorly to the Final Glory Project.

She did not see the necessity of this project. She did not understand what people trapped on a planet with an overwhelming alien fleet hanging over their heads wanted to do. She did not approve of weaponizing the cultivation of people to produce the greatest possible bang.

Above all else, she hated that Ves had become distracted again.

While Ves had done his best to minimize the amount of time investment in the Final Glory Project, every hour spent on designing this travesty of a Carmine mech was an hour not spent on a high-end mech design project!

Aside from that, Ves figured that his wife responded negatively to the Final Glory Project because of its variable nature. Due to the need to accommodate a wide variety of materials, not much of the mech templates could be defined according to the strict standards that she was accustomed to. The lack of precision and definitions offended her sensibilities!

All of this made it pointless to discuss this side project any further with Gloriana. She was a mech designer who only cared about expensive, personalized and above all high-quality products.

She hated cheap and low-quality mass produced mechs!

Her tolerance for them continued to drop over time.

As the fortunes of the Larkinson Clan continued to rise, Gloriana became more and more pampered by her growing access to more expensive materials and more advanced tech.

The constant upgrades caused her to look at low-end stuff with an increasingly less favorable eye.

Ves liked to think he was better than that. There were no useless mechs as far as he was concerned.

Powerful ace mechs such as the Dark Zephyr Mark III and the Amaranto Mark III were fantastic machines, but could only ever serve individual ace pilots.

Ordinary mech pilots comprised the root of the mech community. They might not be powerful on their own, but they could make a huge difference on a larger scale.

They also did not necessarily need the fancy stuff.

Sure, Ves placed a high value on quality, but he understood that not every customer could afford to purchase and maintain an expensive machine.

What Ves wanted to bring to life was a cheap but effective means for people to convert their remaining strength into a single, big explosion.

Hence the Final Glory Project.

Ves began to think about who could help him in this eccentric venture.

He immediately came up with a good name.

"Hello, Ves. I did not expect you to contact me so soon again."

"I need your help, Jovy."

Ves began to present his mech proposal to the RA Senior. Jovy immediately became intrigued. His background as a Survivalist allowed him to appreciate the aspects that Gloriana failed to understand.

"This is... an unconventional and subversive idea." Jovy said as he rubbed his chin in thought. "This draft design of yours violates the principle that mechs should never do harm against their own pilots. A mech that is literally designed to weaponize the soul and any form of qi cultivation of a Carmine mech pilot for the purpose of enhancing the power of an explosion is beyond what we usually permit."

"Usually."

"I believe it is easier than before to request an exemption for your project so long as you can prove its viability. If it is truly possible to convert a person's qi cultivation into an accelerant for a lack of a better word, then this taboo project of yours has merit, as distasteful as it looks. Your means are horrible, but your intentions are noble. In my personal opinion, I can see the demand for this sort of mech. We would have designed such a sacrificial mech ourselves already if not for the fact that only you can design proper Carmine mechs."

Ves was glad to hear that Jovy was receptive to the idea. Just as expected, the Survivalist acknowledged how horrible it was to design a mech that would kill its own pilot, but its usefulness during the ongoing crisis was too great to ignore.

In other words, Jovy approved.

"I did not call you just to check whether the Red Association is okay with my admittedly dangerous mech." Ves said. "I want you to collaborate with me on this design project."

"This... does not appear to be a mech design with a great amount of technical content." Jovy responded while raising his eyebrow. "You only intend to design a second-class and third-class version of this mech concept, so what is it that you require from me exactly?"

"What else? Your design philosophy, Jovy. I have a better idea what you are capable of now that we have worked together on a few projects. I have been keeping track on

how the Yellow Jacket mechs respond to getting struck by large-caliber warship-grade weapon attacks. The probability that a Yellow Jacket is able to resist such massive blows are slim, but they are not really statistically discernible. This situation becomes a lot more interesting when I look at the actual battle footage. There are Yellow Jackets that are still operational despite getting struck by kinetic projectiles as large as their mech frames. It is very obvious that your design philosophy has changed the fates of the mech pilots of the affected machines."

His friend understood what Ves was getting at. "You have taken an interest in my design philosophy. Specifically the ability to make extremely low-probability events happen."

"Yup. Instead of trying to use your probability manipulation to produce better defensive outcomes, I want you to focus on making the Final Glory Project more effective at penetrating through azure energy shields and other defenses. A single suicide mech is unlikely to trigger this condition, but what about a thousand? If so many suicide mechs slam into the same starship at the same time, at least a few of them should be able to inflict serious damage that can get through whatever defenses are in the way."

Jovy furrowed his brows. "Your idea has merit, but I fear that the reality will not be as optimistic as you hope. Bypassing the defenses of a target is a very low-probability event. My design philosophy will not be able to make much of a difference as you hope."

Ves dismissively waved his hand. "It will be fine. It would be great if a suicide mech is able to trigger this rare condition and inflict damage that goes straight through the azure energy barrier during a battle, but if it doesn't happen, then that is just bad luck on the part of the pilots."

"Hm. That is a good attitude to take. Playing with probabilities means accepting outcomes that you may not be happy with. I can work with this so long as you do not expect me to raise the probability of a successful result. There is not much I can work on considering that your draft design does not leave any room for expensive materials. I believe that the use of phasewater can dramatically increase the effectiveness of this mech of yours. If a planet still has this substance to spare, its people can still integrate it into the warheads to produce much more effective explosions."

"I do not think that you will find much phasewater lying around in the Middle and Lower Zones." Ves shook his head. "In fact, I want to achieve the same effect as phasewater technology but without using any actual phasewater."

"You are asking me... to replicate the effect of phasewater technology without using any of this substance. Do you know how difficult it is? You may as well be asking an ace pilot to fight like a god pilot. The technological leap you seek is far from mature."

"But you guys are making progress, right?"

"We are." Jovy admitted. "Our long-term studies on phasewater have already yielded limited results. Obtaining large amounts of superdimensional matter has greatly advanced our understanding of what truly takes place underneath the surface layers. The recent insights in our research has given us new avenues of research where we can replicate some of the effects of phasewater technology through alternate means. If our researchers are able to make progress fast enough, I can incorporate some of their results in your Final Glory Project. That should enable your suicide mechs to inflict greater material harm onto their enemies."

That was good news. Ves looked forward to seeing how much a difference Jovy's design philosophy could make.

The two Seniors continued to talk about the planning and logistics of this project.

"Will you seek out the cooperation of other mech designers?"

"If possible. I am still considering a few names. I think it should be important for the Final Glory Project to be equipped with well-programmed ECM systems. Solutions related to making a mech tougher or faster are bound to make the product more expensive. ECM modules don't have to be expensive in order to produce a satisfying result. It would be especially interesting if tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of suicide mechs deploy at the same time. They can combine their interference and blind the enemy sensors even further."

All of this could help the suicide mechs to get close enough to the alien warships without getting shot down along the way.

Ves decided to call two lead designers to his office.

Soon enough, Ariana Roux and Kelsey Ampatoch arrived. When Ves briefed them on his mech proposal, the pair of Journeymen immediately understood their possible roles in this mech design project.

"Both of us are specialized in hacking and electronic countermeasures," Kelsey pointed out. "Ariana is more effective at compromising enemy systems on a large scale, while I prefer to dive deeper into subverting the computing systems of important targets. Together, we should be able to develop second-class and third-class ECM systems that can help your new mechs survive the journey from surface to orbit. It will be a challenge for us to keep the cost and reliance on high-grade materials low."

"Do your best," Ves said. "Do not forget that there will always be hundreds if not thousands of Carmine mechs launching at the same time. Try to figure out a simplified and user-friendly way for all of those living mechs to link up with each other and use their collective processing power to hack any visible alien unit."

"You are asking for too much," Kelsey Amatoch warned Ves. "What you have just described is similar to data link technology. We do not have to be so ambitious. It is enough for the Carmine mechs to be able to synchronize their actions and prevent any unnecessary or wasteful overlap."

Ves liked what he heard. Once the pair of mech designers understood their assignments, they had already begun to brainstorm.

"This should be enough," Ves decided. "We will leave the final slot open in case I think about involving another mech designer. The probability that will happen is low, but not non-zero."

"I can forward you a handful of names."

"No thanks. I can take care of this myself. I want to keep this project as in-house as possible. We will have to design two mech templates, though. Can you do that, Jovy?"

"Theoretically. I have yet to employ this method on a real mech design project, but I should be able to get by with assistance."

The Final Glory Project was not that complicated or technical, so Ves did not think it would take longer than a month to bring it to completion.

It would still be a rush job, though. The lack of prototype testing was painful, but Ves wanted to bring his product out sooner than later.

"The people will have need for a product like this." Ves predicted. "There are few ways for civilians to effectively strike back at their enemies. I suppose they can volunteer to man a turret or drive a tank, but they will get blown up all the same. It is better to design a Carmine mech that is just functional enough to make it to orbit and crash into enemy ships before unleashing explosions fueled by a sacrifice ritual."

Chapter 6790: Material Importance

Ves faced numerous obstacles when it came to pushing the Final Drive Project.

They questioned its timing. The Design Department was too busy to divert time and resources to a side project of questionable usefulness.

They questioned its necessity. Why design a mech that was nothing more than a suicide vessel with a few added parts that were unique to Carmine mechs?

They questioned its value. If a population of a planet that had come under the threat of annihilation wanted to convert local resources into a means to strike back at the native aliens one last time, they could easily resort to more efficient alternatives such as plain surface-to-orbit rockets or fixed gun turrets.

The skeptics all raised good points, but their perspective was not as complete as that of Ves.

As someone who had lived through similar though not identical circumstances, Ves understood the helplessness of being reduced to a captive on a planet that had fallen to an invading enemy.

When people saw no way out, they wanted to go out with a bang. What better way for them to do so than to supply them with a mech that could do so better than any other product?

Rather than loading a shuttle with volatile fuels and other explosive materials, the Final Glory Project was designed to do the best possible job with the least amount of resources.

The suicide mech not only converted the obvious explosive materials loaded into its mech frame into its payload, but also turned the spiritualities of their mech pilots into accelerants!

Ves had no idea whether this would make a substantial difference in the final results. He had no data or proof to back up his expectations.

However, he felt that the results should be substantial enough to make it worth pursuing this idea. This should especially be the case if the pilots in question had made significant attainments in qi cultivation.

Every Carmine mech pilot that had made the solemn decision would essentially be conducting a ritual that was designed to prime their entire being into a ritual fueled by sacrifice!

Ves even thought about including an expanded ritual that called for hundreds if not thousands of people sacrificing their lives to pump his upcoming mech with as many spiritual combustibles as possible.

He also thought about converting the human spirits into demons in order to make them even stronger than before.

However, none of these ideas sounded reasonable or practical to implement in a short time frame.

He could have explored them further if he had more time at his disposal, but he had no choice but to keep his project as tight as possible.

When he thought about what he could add to the Final Glory Project that could make a significant difference in its effectiveness, he knew that he could only resort to E-technology.

Imposing heavy demands on tech and materials would only make it more difficult to mass produce the sacrifice mech. Each handy feature and each tech that relied on specific materials such as phasewater or other rare resources reduced the practicality of this last resort.

Only E-technology was exempt from this limitation. A mech did not become more expensive if Ves expanded it with additional E-technology applications. This was the perfect solution for circumstances where local producers were short on high-quality resources.

Of course, Ves could not pile a huge amount of E-technology onto a mech design without encountering limitations.

Over the years, he had gotten pretty good at estimating how much E-technology he could get away with in a mech design.

A more complicated mech design that was being worked on for a longer period of time by multiple mech designers always acquired the most expansive spiritual foundations.

The quality and properties of materials used in the design also played a significant role. The more expensive the mech, the more E-technology it could accommodate.

Hyper materials especially helped to expand a mech's spiritual capacity!

High-ranking mech designs such as the Dark Zephyr Mark III, the Amaranto Mark III and the incomplete Minerva Mark II fell into this envious category.

The Final Glory Project was shaping up to be completely unlike those high-end projects.

While Ves was able to rope in multiple mech designers to his side projects, they only amounted to one more Senior Mech Designer and two additional Journeyman Mech Designers.

They were unable to provide as much growth to the spiritual foundation as a Master Mech Designer. The difference between Masters and the lower ranks was vast.

Ves could not even fathom how much more a mech designed by a Star Designer could encompass.

In any case, Ves had a strong desire to load the Final Glory Project with as much E-technology as it could fit, but this would be challenging as the sacrifice mech had to be a low-end product.

The inclusion of any hyper material would definitely amplify the performance of Final Glory Project, but this presented its own problems.

Low-grade hyper materials were very abundant in most star systems. The problem was that their attributes were all over the place. There was very little consistency of what sort of hyper materials were available that aligned with specific attributes.

One star system could be packed with metal-attributed hypers, but be completely devoid of earth-attributed hypers.

Another star system could feature an equal mix of fire and wood-attributed hypers, yet miss out on the other three classical elements.

The cultivation scientists of the Red Collective had conducted extensive studies on hyper material distribution. As far as Ves knew, these clever figures failed to discern a clear pattern.

One of the few solid conclusions that came out of these studies was that no single attribute was prevalent in every star system occupied by red humanity.

Ves therefore faced a difficult design problem when it came to the Final Glory Project.

He could include the use of hyper materials, but make its attributes variable somehow, which made it a lot more difficult to design the mech templates. Jovy might not be up to the task.

He could also choose to leave hyper materials out of the mech design. This would substantially weaken the explosions generated by the suicide mechs.

Another option would be to design multiple variations of the same suicide mechs. In addition to designing a second-class and a third-class version, he could also split them into variants aligned with each of the 5 classical elements.

Ves at least managed to learn from the aforementioned studies that practically every star system had at least one prevalent grouping of hyper materials that was aligned to fire, water, metal, earth or wood.

A handful of researchers even proposed a theory that every star system was defined by a single 'dominant' element. This element essentially determined what other hyper materials could emerge among the planets, moons and asteroids floating in orbit of one or more stars.

This was the most ideal solution of the options that Ves considered if not for one crucial fact.

Designing additional variants took up more time.

Yet time was his most precious resource.

He sighed. "Gloriana will hate me more if I expand the scope of my project further."

Ves was unable to make up his mind. He decided to contact Jovy as he had agreed to take up the responsibility to convert the mech designs into more general mech templates.

"So what do you think, Jovy? Which direction is the best?"

The physical projection of the Survivalist mech designer paused in thought.

"Considering the limitations that you are working under, you have no other choice than to settle for the simplest and most expedient choice. Just leave hyper materials out of the mech designs entirely. Their absence will weaken the results of the Final Glory Project, but it will preserve its universality, which is more important at this time."

"I see. I agree. I just feel bad that we can't do more for the poor chums that will soon find themselves trapped on their planets. They don't have any good options to defy their enemies for the final time."

"You are wrong, Ves."

"What am I missing?"

"We cannot do more for them due to time constraints, but what about others?" Jovy began to smile. "We are not alone. When we design a universal mech template, it is expected for others to adapt them into localized mech designs. We can completely leave it up to other mech designers to do the hard work of integrating hyper materials in the mech designs. In order to make it more convenient for them, we should deliberately open up gaps in the mech templates that can be filled with any hyper materials."

"That... actually sounds similar to one of the other options that I have presented."

"That is true, but instead of doing the work related to hyper materials ourselves, we outsource it to other mech designers. Do not underestimate the mech industry. Even if there are no good mech designers on a rural planet, the residents can still get their hands on a variant that just happens to integrate hypers of an attribute that is abundant in their environment."

Jovy's description reminded Ves that he did not have to bear all of the burdens. There was an entire community of mech designers and other professionals. By approaching the Final Glory Project as a work that actively invited others to contribute to its body of work, the project gained greater significance.

Ves liked it. Ves liked it a lot.

"Great idea. Your solution is much better than the ones that I have devised. Let's do it like this, then. The biggest complication that I can come up with is that if other mech designers try to be too fancy with implementing their own hyper technology applications, it may conflict with the sacrifice-based E-technology that I intend to implement into the mech templates."

"Well, solving a problem begins by identifying it. You are already on the correct track by becoming aware that this can degrade the performance of your mechs. The next step is to think about how you can mitigate or solve this problem."

"I guess I will have to figure it out. I already have a few ideas, but I will need to research it further."

Ves spoke a bit more with Jovy.

He felt truly grateful to his old mecher friend for backing him up in a project like this. The Final Glory Project would have been much more troublesome to implement without the assistance of a highly educated and highly talented mech designer like Jovy.

This dependency also highlighted the fact that Ves was not as versatile and capable as he would have liked.

Mech templates were usually the business of Master Mech Designers, but that was not an absolute rule, or else Jovy would not be able to cover this area.

Now that he had become involved in two projects that relied on mech templates, Ves felt it may be time for him to address this shortcoming.

"Can I learn how to design mech templates, Jovy?"

"No." His friend immediately responded. "You are not ready yet. You have to meet many requirements in order to earn the qualifications to design by template. You already satisfy several major criteria, but your grasp of materials science and metallurgy is... below average, especially when it comes to first-class materials. You cannot properly design a mech template that takes into account the enormous variety of similar materials known to our civilization if you do not possess a deep understanding of this field."

That was a fair assessment. "So I just need to improve my knowledge in the field of materials science and metallurgy?"

"Yes, but do not forget other related fields. You must also increase your comprehension of the materials that are relevant to phasewater technology, hyper technology and in the future superdimensional technology."

That was a lot.

Ves could not figure out a way to make up for the relevant gaps in his knowledge in a short amount of time unless he made use of the Tree of Possibilities.

That would cost him a lot of AP, which he did not have.

"Forget about it, then. I will wait until I have advanced to the rank of Master Mech Designer before revisiting this topic." Ves grumbled.