

Mech Touch 7001

Chapter 7001: Gradual Takeover

Too much had happened in one day!

At first, multiple powerful first-rate states declared their intention to secede from the unified human civilization framework that had originally been setup by the Mech Trade Association and the Common Fleet Alliance.

During the time of the Great Severing, most people never questioned the assumption that the mechers and fleeters would remain in charge of the humans that could no longer return to their home galaxy.

Their circumstances drastically changed, but inertia and familiarity caused many humans to accept the reign of their familiar overlords.

Even when the Red Association and the Red Fleet started to take on their own identity and begin to make adaptations that their parent organizations would never consider, they still represented the old status quo.

No more.

The decision of so many major players seceding from unified humanity had irrevocably damaged the authority and reputation of the Red Two.

It became clear quite soon that unless the Red Association or the Red Fleet was willing to employ overwhelming force to violently bring the Terrans and the Rubarthans back into the fold, it was impossible to turn back the clock.

The possibility still existed so long as the mechers and fleeters were willing to redirect a handful of their formidable god pilots and dreadnoughts.

However, the very notion of pulling them away from the frontlines just to unleash their awesome killing power against fellow red humans was unconscionable!

Not only would the Red Two's remaining support from the population evaporate at record speed, but the god pilots and dreadnought crew involved may even go as far as to mutiny against their own superorganizations!

Even so, there were still plenty of hardliners within the RA and the RF that still insisted on bringing the first-rate colonial states back under their jurisdiction through any means necessary.

If violent means could not be employed, then what about non-violent ones?

As long as they remained discrete enough, they could employ many dirty tricks that would be difficult to trace back to their agents!

Yet the other events that happened on the same day quickly dispelled the hopes of the mechers and the fleeters.

The news and subsequent reports about the return of Bridgehead One generated a huge amount of controversy and alarm.

The good news was that the largest, most developed and most powerful central star node had become accessible again.

The greater spacetime bubble erected through the efforts of 6 ancient phase whales had disappeared for good. Multiple science vessels examined the periphery of the enormous star system and discovered that the local space had completely turned to normal again.

None of the spatial barriers had lingered, and the passage of time inside the Bridgehead One had become fully synced to how time passed by in the rest of the universe.

People could never be too careful about this. Yet after what the mechers and the fleeters learned about how the Polymath selfishly and ruthlessly took advantage of the botched attempt of the Red Cabal to eliminate the de facto capital star system of red humanity.

If she wanted to, the Polymath could have used her formidable intellect and amazing wonder machines to unravel the greater spacetime bubble with minimal risk and complications.

Yet she did not do so. She violated the secret terms of her exile and broke her promise to never seek a position of power in a governing organization or similar.

The brilliant part about her takeover plan was that she had done so gradually.

Having learned from her first botched attempt, the Polymath did not attempt to take over Bridgehead One in a single attempt.

That would have generated a lot of chaos and opposition. There were very real chances that the dissidents would take up arms and unleash weapons in the most densely populated planets of the central star node.

The damage and loss of life would have been catastrophic!

Instead, the Polymath purposefully kept the status quo in place just so that she could undermine it piece by piece on a gradual basis.

At the same time, she used the additional time afforded to her to burnish her reputation, make her case to the masses and win over one troublesome faction of loyalists after another.

It was impossible for the Polymath to knock over these barriers in a single day or month, but what about a year? What about a decade?

Time could wear away almost any form of resistance.

Only high-ranking mech pilots remained stubborn to the end, but they were the exception rather than the rule.

The Polymath did not encounter many issues with transferring them to their own preserve where they could train, meditate and generally stay out of the way.

It helped a lot that she personally offered to design brand-new mechs tailored to each individual champion.

After she essentially bribed the most stubborn mech pilots to not interfere with her business, the Polymath was free to convert the remaining population at her leisure.

It was not as easy as it sounded. Bridgehead One was absolutely massive. The Big Two deliberately built it up as the foremost anchor point of humanity's presence in the dwarf galaxy.

The mechers and fleeters almost spared no expense by pulling over so many stars and planets.

It was absolutely mind-boggling that they managed to put so many stars together, tweaked their orbits so that they would not crash into each other, and build multiple Dyson spheres around them to capture their energies and prevent their combined electromagnetic radiation output from transforming all 100 planets into radioactive hells.

Despite the fact that Bridgehead One completed such a massive transformation, its population had also ballooned.

Many mechers and fleeters who emigrated to the Red Ocean preferred to work in this star system.

Bridgehead One was one of the locations that benefited the most directly from the prosperity generated by the trade facilitated by the greater beyonder gates.

Combined with the abundance of top tier laboratories, workshops, factories and other facilities, there were only a handful of star systems in the Milky Way that could exceed Bridgehead One's splendor!

This was also one of the reasons why its temporary loss represented a substantial drop to the rest of red humanity's warmaking potential.

Even if other star systems such as the Yernstall Central Star Node could take over some of Bridgehead One's functions, it just was not the same.

What red humanity expected to receive was the original version of Bridgehead One.

What they got instead was a completely new one system star nation state.

Over a span of 15 years, the Polymath essentially took over all of the institutions that governed the many different aspects of Bridgehead One.

At the start, she successfully persuaded the majority of the population to agree to her proposal to extend the time they remained stuck in the greater spacetime bubble.

This was the most vulnerable part of her plan. If the masses strongly disagreed with remaining in isolation, then she could not execute the rest of her plan.

Fortunately, enough people became convinced by the necessity of spending several decades in a time-accelerated pocket of space in order to reverse the losing trend of the Red War.

It helped that many of the residents of Bridgehead One were already familiar with EdNet training. It was easy for them to make the comparison and expect similar outcomes, only this time their efforts would be much more tangible.

Once the Polymath bought herself a lot of time, there was little chance for the population to resist her case.

She was a Star Designer, the single-most intelligent 'human' in two galaxies. Trying to usurp leadership from billions of mortals was like stealing candies from a huge amount of babies!

Perhaps the amount of babies was a bit excessive this time, that did not change the fact that none of them possessed the strength to resist a Star Designer's machinations.

Even the members of the Red Fleet had fallen under her sway!

The fact that the Dominion of Man had become the flagship of her enormous armada represented a gigantic loss to the Red Fleet!

Fleet Admiral Stanley Argile and Fleet Admiral Amelie Jameson must have gone completely crazy once they learned that the Polymath stole their precious trump card and god ship!

There was just one other mystery that weighed heavily on many people's minds.

"The Dominion of Man is not the only top-level asset stationed in Bridgehead One at the time." A mech designer of the RA said. "What happened to the First Flame? According to the glut of information that is being disgorged into the galactic net, His Holiness has not made an appearance in decades."

An administrator who also worked for the Red Association began to grimace. "According to the 'Cybernetic Empress' herself, the First Flame played a deciding role in the defense of Bridgehead One during the initial deep strike operation launched by the ancient phase whales. After the Polymath had made her intentions to turn Bridgehead One into an enormous time capsule for ostensibly noble reasons, the First Flame agreed with her and chose to make his own preparations to save red humanity. He is not a Star Designer, so he cannot introduce new tech or govern the population as effectively as the Polymath. He can only allocate his time into enhancing his personal strength."

The RA mech designer looked skeptical. "That must be challenging. He is a god pilot who is confined to a single peaceful star system. There is not enough external pressure that can make him excited and give him an actual purpose. What has His Holiness been doing in the decades that he remained stuck in Bridgehead One?"

"The Polymath claims that the First Flame has chosen to undergo a long period of 'closed cultivation'. He did so by transforming his god mech into phoenix form before diving through one of the gaps of a Dyson sphere in order to hibernate inside one of Bridgehead One's 12 stars."

What an outrageous claim!

Any other mech pilot would have committed suicide if they attempted to dive past the corona and into the convection zone and beyond!

Perhaps god mechs were much more resistant towards the massive amounts of heat being thrown about in a star, but even they should not be able to last on an indefinite basis.

It was different for the Phoenix!

The First Flame was a god pilot who wielded the power of flame at a god-like level.

The Phoenix was probably the most heat-resistant mech that humans had ever made.

As long as the two combined their advantages, it became a lot more plausible for them to be able to survive for many years while hibernating inside a star.

Whether the First Flame was currently swimming in the upper layers or slept inside the massive core of the star, the amount of energy he had been absorbing in the last 50 or so years must be astronomical!

This was probably the best possible use of his time. The mechers could not conceive of a better alternative.

Sure, the First Flame could have remained active and either supported the Polymath's political machinations or stood against them, but what was the point?

Even if the First Flame was not a member of the Survivalist Faction, even he agreed with the notion that the continued survival of red humanity mattered above all else.

Let the Polymath play her games. So long as she contributed to their common goal, the First Flame had no reason to quibble.

The First Flame had grown too old to care about petty politics and infighting. His cantankerous behavior had already put him out of touch with the newer generations that were in charge these days.

"So how much has the First Flame changed?"

"Unknown so far. Due to the drastic reduction in E energy radiation, we know that the First Flame has not been able to absorb significant amounts of E energy during the Time of Isolation. We believe that he has grown stronger, but that his progress is selective rather than holistic. Unless he emerges from a star, we can never know for certain."

"Will he reappear now that Bridgehead One has reconnected to the main universe?"

"...That is under debate."

Chapter 7002: Unwilling to Cooperate

While many people celebrated the return of Bridgehead One, the RA and RF largely reacted in dismay after hearing about the defection of almost all of the personnel stationed in the star system.

The only ones who held true to their oaths after half a century of isolation were the expert pilots and ace pilots loyal to the Red Association and a handful of other states.

Their continued refusal to the Polymath's tempting offers once again exemplified the virtues of high-ranking mech pilots.

Of course, the self-crowned Cybernetic may have been able to convert a handful of them to her cause if she tried hard enough.

The fact that she did not do so was probably out of respect for these human heroes. She may have become a Star Designer whose work encompassed many different industries, but she could never forget her roots as a mech designer.

The Polymath also let these high-ranking mech pilots depart from Bridgehead One without incident. She even gave them permission to bring away their personal machines, much of which was stuffed with new and innovative technologies.

Naturally, it did not take much thinking for the RA and the RF to deduce that letting them return to their respective groups was a plot.

The pilots possessed a vast amount of information about what they experienced in the last 53 years.

Even if they had not had much contact with the citizens of the Cybernetic Empire, they could witness the gradual transformation of the central star node as well as its society.

Their mechs also contained massive amounts of value. The Star Designer likely did not implement more than a fraction of 53 years worth of constant technological progression.

However, what little she did chose to add to the machines most definitely put them at least two whole generations ahead of the current generation.

This was just a conservative estimate.

The tech the Polymath and the army of scientists and engineers of her empire managed to invent and iterate upon was enormous.

They had proven their capacity to produce superior products out of the same pool of base materials.

The differences in performance of many parts and systems ranged from 10 percent to 50 percent.

In fact, the Cybernetic Empire also invented tech that could outperform existing solutions by 300 percent, 1000 percent or even higher!

Nobody had a clear idea just how extensively the Polymath had single-handedly pushed the frontier of human science and technology forward.

It was impossible to predict how much progress a Star Designer could make in a few months, let alone 53 years.

People could only make a very loose estimation based on spurious assumptions.

Even then, they probably underestimated the Polymath's productivity over such a long period.

The most powerful and advanced star system of red humanity had fallen under her sway.

There were 12 Dyson spheres that were not only capable of providing astronomical amounts of energy that could be used to power enormous banks of supercomputers. No other Star Designer had so much processing power at their disposal.

While the limited environment and inability to import massive amounts of materials from the rest of the new frontier most definitely limited her R&D potential, she could still divert lots of research into improving existing tech and systems.

She most definitely placed a high priority on raising the efficiency of existing tech and materials.

Finding out solutions to obtain more for less was vital in making progress in a star system that could no longer bring in more materials.

The Cybernetic Empire also extensively reformed and rebuilt all of the existing holdings in Bridgehead One.

Many planets had become unrecognizable. High-density housing had become a lot more prevalent. Large space arcologies provided additional homes and workplaces for billions of natural as well as batch humans.

All of that extra room became necessary when the Cybernetic Empire had transformed at least 50 of these planets into battlestations of enormous proportions!

Although these war planets could also house billions of people, they would not be able to enjoy much comfort.

However, the planets were so heavily armed that they could easily resist the attacks of alien assault fleets, including those led by lesser phase lords!

If they faced enemies that they could not defeat, then the war planets also had the option to move away.

Their enormous thrusters enabled these titanic armored globes to slowly move away from the orbits of the nearest stars.

Although their acceleration rates were atrocious, at least they could still move, which was better than any other planet!

This gave many people ideas. What if the Cybernetic Empire deployed these war planets to the frontlines of the Red War?

The Polymath must have made them mobile for this express purpose. There was no other reason to go through the trouble of embedding them with enormous thrusters and developing a planetary-grade warp drive!

However, since their normal acceleration rates were so low, their warp travel speeds were also fairly poor.

A typical starship equipped with a superdrive could complete an interstellar journey in a single day.

A war planet may take months or years to complete the same journey!

This was an enormous setback to those who wanted to deploy the war planets to the frontlines.

"So these 'war planets' can move to different star systems, but their interstellar traversal speeds are lower than that of outdated alien warp-capable starships, is that correct?"

"Yes, sir. There is a probability that the Polymath is deceiving us about the true mobility of her war planets, but we deem this to be unlikely. She can raise her

bargaining power by claiming that they can reach a destination in a shorter time frame. The fact that she is frank about this limitation serves to reassure us and limit our expectations. The war planets can still be useful in defending our territories, but only up to the zones around Bridgehead One."

Leaving aside everything else, the war planets could still be used to help red humanity keep hold of more territory if the Red War had become a lost cause.

Yet that did not offer the RA and RF much consolation.

The more territory red humanity lost, the more the balance of power shifted towards the owner of the richest, most populated and most developed central star node that still remained in human hands.

Fortunately, the Cybernetic Empire had not neglected the need to build up more mobile and conventional combat assets.

The CE already disclosed that it had fully mobilized a whopping sum of 180 warfleets. Each of them could be told to deploy to the frontlines of the Red War at any time due to abundant preparations.

Each warfleet comprised at least 50 warships, 50 carriers and 20 support vessels.

Only a minority of them consisted of capital ships, but there were still many fleets that had way more hulls at their disposal.

This also meant that every warfleet could also deploy at least 1 mech regiment's worth of mechs in combat.

The Cybernetic Empire did not just focus all of her industries on the military sector.

It turned out that the one system nation state also produced a massive amount of civilian starships.

After all, the factories needed to keep running while the workers also needed to be put to good use.

The Polymath most definitely understood that one of the growing shortcomings of red humanity was the growing shortage of starships.

To be more specific, interstellar shipping came under increasing stress. Transport vessels got lost due to commerce raiding or had to be converted into carriers in order to carry mechs into battle.

This came at a detriment to shipping. The orbital shipyards available to red humanity tried and failed to replenish the lost transport ships.

It did not help that these resource-hungry production facilities needed to be supplied by a huge number of industrial goods!

Therefore, the deterioration of shipping lanes directly impacted the production of starships, which subsequently strained logistics even more, which caused orbital shipyards to become even less efficient!

Many strategists and planners worried about this negative feedback loop, but they could do nothing to solve the problem.

They simply did not have time to address the shortage of transport vessels.

It just so happened that the Cybernetic Empire had bought 53 years worth of uninterrupted production time.

"During the Time of Isolation, the CE's factories and orbital shipyards produced over 200,000 transport vessels."

"Say what?! 200,000 hulls?! Truly?!"

"Yes, but do not expect quality from them. They are designed with efficiency, affordability and ease of use in mind. They are slow, fragile and low-tech. While they happen to be modular and easily upgradeable, this will take up additional production capacity as well as orbital shipyard capacity."

"How many orbital shipyards does Bridgehead One contain?"

"We have counted a total of 512 orbital shipyards, but there are many other orbital facilities that may or may not possess limited shipbuilding facilities. The function of these stations are not always clear."

"512?! If these orbital shipyards can produce a single first-class or second-class combat carrier a month, the Cybernetic Empire can enrich itself in record time by selling its monthly output! Wait, the Cybers have likely exhausted their reserves of easily accessible metals and materials. They will need to import an astronomical amount of materials from other locations in order to feed their orbital shipyards as well as many other factories."

"Correct. We do not believe that the Polymath is happy to sell all 200,000 transport vessels to the rest of red humanity. At the very least, she will not let go of them easily without securing supply contracts to fuel her hungry industries."

After the initial rounds of contact, it soon became clear that the Polymath and her loyal Cybers were not that eager to share their technological, industrial and military accumulation with others.

The fears of the mechers and the fleeters came true.

The Polymath refused to give away the vast majority of her scientific advancements for free.

Just as the Big Two maintained their superiority over the rest of humanity for a long time by building up a significant technological lead, now it was the turn of the Red Association and the Red Fleet to suffer the same treatment at the hands of the Cybernetic Empire!

The war planets did not show any signs of moving anytime soon. Their enormous thrusters remained completely cold and their planetary-grade warp drives continued to stay dormant as they had for many years.

The 180 or so warfleets that were raring to go to the frontlines and beat back the native aliens did not have permission to set off. Whether they would do so ultimately

depended upon negotiations between the Cybernetic Empire and the various powers of red humanity.

Initial indications showed that the Cybernetic Empire very cleverly sought to establish mutually beneficial relationships with the newly independent Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact.

The latter had become especially desperate to forge an alliance and receive military aid after a tide of evolved voribugs had begun to assault its border regions!

"What a disaster. Our hegemony has come to an end. Internal dissent and division has grown far past the point of containment. The Red Association and the Red Fleet will not collapse, but it is impossible for us to maintain the same amount of control over the states as before. We may even be forced to relinquish our right to enforce our laws upon the population and return to our original duties, which is to regulate mechs and warships."

This represented an enormous fall from grace. The mechers and the fleeters were previously the undisputed rulers of the united human race!

Was there a way for the RA and RF to force the Polymath into surrender, regain possession of Bridgehead One and claim her enormous accumulation of civilian and military assets?

Maybe. Sending a pair of god pilots may be enough to humble the Polymath.

Yet no one dared to make this suggestion. The Star Designer had 53 years to prepare for Bridgehead One's return. She most definitely spent a lot of time on researching and developing countermeasures against every known god pilot.

Even if the First Flame had not pledged his service to the Polymath, nobody wanted to test the theory that she had developed superweapons that were strong enough to counter god pilots.

Chapter 7003: The Red Two's Decline

"What does she want? No one founds an empire without holding territorial ambitions. It is ridiculous to expend so much resources into building so many war planets, warfleets and transportation vessels."

"Does she seek to conquer our territories?"

"That is... a feasible option to Her Excellency... or should we say Her Imperial Majesty."

"Adopting the latter term means that we accept her illegal claim to Bridgehead One."

"Legality is dead in this day, age and galaxy. Force is the only law that matters, and right now, the Polymath enjoys a 53-year head-start compared to the rest of the competition. As painful as it is to lose ownership of all of our assets and personnel in Bridgehead One, we need to admit to the reality that exists, not the reality that only exists in our fantasies. I recommend that we give up any attempt at contesting Her Imperial Majesty's claim on Bridgehead One."

"Because might makes right."

"Exactly. You sound as if this is a distasteful practice. You are not wrong, yet what of it? Your feelings will not sway anyone, certainly not a Star Designer that commands a force that can single-handedly save red humanity... or collapse the framework of our society."

"Your stance calls for appeasement. That... may be a mistake in itself. We both know what the Polymath attempted to do during the Survivalist conference. She is convinced that red humanity can only thrive under her absolute rule. She has spent 53 years proving her theory in a single central star node alone. From what we have been able to observe, she has truly made the most out of the resources and manpower available to her. This means that she has most certainly strengthened her resolve to expand her governance model to other human territories. Mark my words. The neighboring star systems and subsequently the zones around Bridgehead One will fall under her sway sooner rather than later."

"That is impossible. We will never allow it. They are too populated and industrialized. They were set up to support Bridgehead One and take advantage of its many benefits. Now that the central star node is lost to us, the remaining star systems have become even more important. Losing them translates into losing a large amount of people, industries, resources and more."

"You are a naive if you think the Cybernetic Empire will remain confined to a single star system. Look at how prosperous it has become. Its population has ballooned, but under the fair and optimized administration that Her Imperial Majesty has personally devised and implemented, many inefficiencies have been worked out of people's lives. No one has gone hungry or destitute. Anyone can find work. Those who cannot do so anymore can live out their retirement in relative comfort. Family planning is precisely managed through a combination of incentives and cost increases. Every citizen has great confidence in their empire's ability to resist the alien invasion."

All of this was undoubtedly true. If the people of Bridgehead One thought this way, then it was possible for others who lived in the surrounding star systems to hold the same ideas.

If the populations of the star systems that traditionally maintained strong relations with the central star node requested to join the Cybernetic Empire en masse, it would be difficult to reject their demands.

For one, the Red Two could not offer superior protection to them unless they recalled a god pilot or a dreadnought and sent them to patrol the wavering star systems.

This was an unthinkable decision. The star systems at risk of defection happened to be the rear-most territories of human-occupied space. There was little chance the native aliens would attack these territories in the near future.

Recalling a god pilot or dreadnought also consigned many people at the frontlines to their deaths. Not only would public support for the Red Two plunge even further, but red humanity would lose even more territory in the process.

This directly increased the Cybernetic Empire's importance!

In fact, the Cybernetic Empress had a perverse incentive for red humanity to lose the Red War.

Not completely, though. It would not do for the native aliens to overwhelm the formidable defenses of Bridgehead One and completely destroy human civilization in the Red Ocean.

However, if red humanity managed to cling to a single zone or just a small core territory that included Bridgehead One, then that would turn the Cybernetic Empire into the strongest if not the sole governing entity in the remnant of human space!

Although many people did not think that the Polymath would be cruel and heartless enough to consign trillions of innocent humans to their deaths just to consolidate her grip over red humanity... the possibility still existed.

All of these factors more or less granted her a huge amount of bargaining power. The Cybernetic Empress could dictate terms to the rest of red humanity, and everyone would have little choice to swallow most of her demands.

She won.

What the Polymath failed to do the first time, she succeeded in the second, all because she found an opportunity to cheat.

Who could possibly defeat the machinations of a Star Designer who possessed a 53-year head start?

The Polymath was exactly the kind of Star Designer who thrived on gathering abundant information and taking the time to analyze all of the variables before formulating a long-term plan to stack the deck in her favor.

That was already scary enough.

Giving her all of the time she needed to see her development plan come into fruition?

That was impossible to defeat.

The only reliable ways to defeat such a monstrous opponent was to defeat her with overwhelming force or rely on a variable that she had not been able to foresee or plan around?

The Red Two did have that in some measure.

Superdimensional technology had exploded onto the scene like a supernova during Bridgehead One's absence.

The Red Association had transformed the Invictus into the first superdimensional god mech.

The machine had not only become the most effective ancient phase whale killer in the dwarf galaxy, but could also defeat damn near anything else.

This meant that the Fist of Defiance served as a good deterrence against the Cybernetic Empire's overreach!

If the situation became dire enough that it was more important to recall the god pilot from the frontlines, then the mechers may actually go through with it, if only to stabilize their rear.

Yet this was an extreme option. The Red Association could not afford to realize this threat too easily, so that gave the Polymath a lot of wiggle room.

So long as her acts to subvert the old order remained subtle enough, there was a high likelihood that her victims would grit their teeth and endure the bleeding.

This was what was frustrating about the new status quo. The mechers and the fleeters did not doubt that the Cybernetic Empress would resort to such measures.

After all, if the mechers and the fleeters could think about this development strategy, then the Polymath definitely considered it many years ago!

The apparent reality that the Terran Alliance and the Rubarthan Pact declared their sovereignty on the same day of Bridgehead One's reappearance was not a coincidence either.

The Red Two had completely overlooked this possibility, but the more intelligence they gathered, the more they obtained clues that indicated that the Cybernetic Empire

had been in contact with the two first-rate colonial superstates for at least three months but likely more!

This was an increasingly plausible theory.

After all, if the Polymath managed to reverse the properties of the greater spacetime bubble to her advantage, then she should also be able to poke a hole in it and establish a restricted form of communication with the outside universe.

That meant that they were all in cahoots with each other.

Perhaps the Terrans and the Rubarthans may still be wary towards the Polymath and her ambition to expand her rule to all red humans.

It was not a good idea to completely surrender all of the initiative to the Polymath.

Although it was definitely short in many aspects, the Cybernetic Empire could already be classified as a first-rate colonial superstate in its own right!

So long as more and more people adopted this interpretation, they would grant a lot of soft power to the newly emerged empire.

Perhaps that was the point of naming it in such a grandiose way. Calling the polity a dukedom or a principality simply did not produce the same level of impact.

What this meant was that the Polymath's personal fief may not fit the traditional definition of an empire at this time, but it could actually become so long as everyone agreed to her version of the truth.

It would not be difficult for her to make this happen.

"What are her goals? Does she seek to conquer our entire civilization, or is she merely aspiring to establish the Cybernetic Empire as a major power? Will she tolerate the continued existence of the Red Two? What is her stance towards the Red Collective, and how eager will her enormous population adopt systematic cultivation?"

"We need more information to obtain the answers to those questions. The upcoming negotiations centered around territorial recognition, military assistance and technology sharing will be critical. The ease in which the Polymath dispatched her armed forces to the frontlines and barter a fraction of her amazing new technologies to us will serve as important indicators. The more concessions she demands for her services, the less optimistic our situation becomes."

"...If the Polymath sees no reason to allow the Red Association and the Red Fleet to exist in their current forms, then we may have no future left. We have already started to fall from grace. When we combine that with the serious setbacks that we have suffered in a single day, I cannot see how we can maintain the glory that the Big Two have maintained for over four centuries."

"This turn of events cannot be stopped anymore. We can either adapt or we allow the rising power to push us into obsolescence. My suggestion is to give up on imposing our rules to the states that are unwilling to accept us and work with what we have left. The majority of the states and organizations based in the Red Ocean Union are still under our sway. We should stem the bleeding and engage in damage control by reinforcing our support base in the only colonial alliance that still looks up to us for protection and guidance rather than the Terrans or the Rubarthans."

"Ah, perhaps we can also exploit the emerging voribug crisis to our advantage! I do not know where they came from and how they have mutated into such an aggressive and rapidly expanding species, but this threat is most likely a variable that the Polymath has not been able to predict or plan around in advance!"

"You are correct, but... do not mistake our voribugs as allies. Unlike the Polymath and her Cybers, there is no possibility of negotiating with these insectiles. We can use their indiscriminate invasions as pressure points, but that should be the limit. We should not allow hundreds of populated star systems to become devoured by the voribugs solely because we want to preserve as much of our old glory as possible."

"You are making a humanist argument."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It is becoming more and more difficult to stay human in this increasingly dangerous galaxy. We are beset by too many threats. The native aliens have been pressing down

on us for years. The Terrans and the Rubarthans have slipped our leash at the worst possible time. The Cybernetic Empire has just arrived but not only hoards a large amount of future generation technologies, but also possesses the largest reserve of uncommitted warfleets out of all of us. Then our race is also being targeted by increasingly more numerous swarms of mutated voribugs. Can any human solve all of these threats at the same time?"

"..."

Chapter 7004: Viscounts into Play

Many galaxy-shaking events unfolded on this day, but not everyone had the time or attention to consider all of the changes and implications.

Back in the Screed Tanner System, the battle between the humans and the native aliens had little clue of what was going on in the rest of the dwarf galaxy.

Even if they received a notification about the secession of the first-rate colonial superstates and the return of Bridgehead One, the soldiers first needed to finish their respective fights before they could think about matters beyond their mission and mortality!

Not even Ves dared to direct too much attention away from the ongoing struggle. His mood became a little more unbalanced, but he tried his best to set aside any distractions that should be dealt with at a later date.

"The Tortuous Scream has been hit! No physical damage, minor drain to one of the forward azure energy shields."

"The 7th company on the anti-spinward flank needs reinforcements! The defenders of Screed Tanner VI-F have concentrated their most elite and veteran phasefighters on this side! Our Dracoloids are being outmaneuvered and our Omega Threshers are being assailed at close range."

"The Saint Commander is already responding to the offensive thrust of the native aliens. More Omega Threshers are redirecting their firepower towards the anti-spinward flank."

"The elite phasefighters... are disintegrating! They are faltering under a concentrated barrage of resonance-empowered Omega Lasers!"

"Monitor the energy reserves of the assisting Omega Threshers and make sure to dispatch enough E-MULES to prevent them from going into the red. What is the state of the center and spinward flank of our mech units?"

"Redirecting so much firepower to the anti-spinward flank has caused the enemies in the other quadrants to catch their breath and reorganize. It will take much greater effort to break their spirits the next time."

"Then let our soldiers grind them down again. Under the Saint Commander's light, we have nothing to fear from this alien rabble. Our priority is to preserve the lives of our troops. We cannot afford to present any openings that the native aliens can exploit. Make sure to ramp up the rotation of E-MULES. None of our combat mechs have completely expended their energy, fuel and ammunition reserves, but it will not take long before the most hard-fought machines will run low enough to constrain their fighting tactics."

"Sovvy is reporting odd movements from several alien fleets. They are showing signs of making a sacrificial play in an attempt to take out our flagship at all cost. The smart AI estimates that there is a 56 percent probability that the native aliens will attempt to make this desperation play. The probability is rising by the minute!"

High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas frowned in thought. The Larkinsons had been afraid of this play. Even if the native aliens were currently losing war machines left and right, the humans would be suffering casualties sooner or later. It was impossible to save everyone in a battle of this scale and intensity.

"What are your suggestions, tactical officer?"

"Sir, I suggest we back away and cede space to the native aliens for the time being. If the native aliens have gone mad and thrown all caution to the wind, they may be willing to sacrifice 20 of their ships just so that they can eliminate our flagship. According to the semi-reliable information provided by the Moloch Squadron, many aliens on the other side regard our flagship as the source of all of their ills."

"Hm. There are cases where the native aliens have turned suicidal when the pressure becomes too much for them to endure. Keep a close eye on their mechs and starships. If they begin to exhibit anomalous behavior caused by distractions or nihilism, inform me regardless of what else I am preoccupied with. Oh, please notify the Morpheus to

scan the surroundings. If the native aliens have prepared a surprise, our alien stealth ship has a better chance of uncovering it than others."

The command center of the Tortuous Scream continued to remain busy as all of the Larkinsons worked on their assigned stations without any problem.

Yet all of the crew members did was to perform rote and standard functions.

They fulfilled their duties as if they were truly making most of the important decisions.

Yet for all of their busywork, there was a sense of emptiness in their hearts.

There was not much room for them to show initiative because the Saint Commander had taken over.

As long as Casella Ingvar had taken over command over the armed forces, she was capable of absorbing lots of data and deciphering the implications behind them. Although she clearly did not always get it right, putting her in charge of the fleet made it even more unbearable to lose.

Many human command officers and staff found themselves on the sidelines as most of their input did not help the Saint Commander all that much.

Casella was so good at taking command and tracking every piece on the checkerboard that she did not necessarily need the additional help!

However, the Larkinsons of the Premier Fleet did not give up so easily. They directed their attention towards logistics and tried to be on the lookout for strange enemy movements.

It was clear that the synergy between the command staff and the Saint Commander still needed a bit more work.

"Captain! The Saint Commander has just given our ship orders to advance and get ready to unleash her full firepower."

The high captain rose higher in his seat. "Are we finally unleashing the full power of our bunker mechs?"

"Yes, sir. Saint Commander Ingvar believes that the native aliens are struggling to endure the successive setbacks. The flight of their greater phase lords has not pushed them to their breaking point solely because they still enjoy a large numbers advantage. The native aliens are hoping that their successive attacks on our resonance-empowered and shield-linked mechs and warships have pushed us closer to exhausting our energy shield pools."

The native aliens were not entirely unaccustomed to fighting enemies protected by shield link technology.

Aside from eliminating a single shielded enemy by relying on overwhelming force, the only other fundamental way to defeat shield linked opponents was to drain them of all of their energy shields, whether they originated from themselves or were loaned by other friendly units.

Once this devastating event happened, the unshielded targets quickly turned into sitting ducks, though not always.

Unshielded mechs and warships still posed a considerable threat against the numerically superior alien war weapons, but their ability to resist attacks to their physical states was limited.

"Alert! Sovvy wants to warn us of the possibility that the core alien fleet led by the Protector of Karnak is angling to launch a missile swarm, a heavy torpedo salvo or both. The native aliens may have caught wind of what we are attempting to do. They have raised the priority of eliminating our flagship."

"How likely is our smart AI correct?!"

"Over 60 percent! Signal traffic is increasing. We have already spotted signs that the native alien warships are about to remove the covers from their missile launcher systems."

"Damn! Inform the Saint Commander, but begin making preparations ourselves. Check the state of our tertiary gun batteries and fix the unfunctional ones by any means necessary."

"We are not alone in this, sir. There are a multitude of faster and nimbler subcapital warships in the Bluejay Fleet that can help us intercept the incoming ordnance."

"That will not be necessary." The Saint Commander spoke directly to the command staff through an internal communication channel. "Watch."

Her Command Field shifted as she activated another aspect of her power.

So far, she had only chosen to Commandeer the mechs and starships of the Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet.

The mechs-turned-Knights fought valiantly and produced greater impact.

However, just because they gained the equivalent power of a quasi-expert mech did not mean they could ignore the physical reality entirely.

The necessity of fighting at least 5 times more enemy strike craft than their own number took a toll on their psyches and machines.

As advanced as their first-class multipurpose mechs may be, many of the enemy phasefighters were barely able to keep up in a few areas, but that was already enough to turn them into serious threats.

The disparity in numbers as well as firepower was even greater when it came to the warships.

The native aliens simply had a lot more hulls and big guns at their disposal!

Since the Saint Commander could only barely empower the massive warships with her true resonance, the Tortuous Scream and the warships of the Bluejay Fleet were losing the trades with their much more numerous enemy counterparts.

If it was not for the power of shield link technology and clever maneuvering, the first human warships would have succumbed to enemy attacks by this time!

All this time the warships were getting pummeled, the Saint Commander held back what may arguably be her greatest weapon.

No more.

She decided the timing was right.

Within the 155 artillery bunkers of the Tortuous Scream, modified Omega Threshers had settled into the protective enclosures.

Although not originally designed to function as bunker mechs, the Larkinson-developed FFEE1100-L variant not only attached them to an extra pair of bunker-mounted large luminar crystal cannons, but also hooked them up to massive cables that fed them with energy while also siphoning away excess heat!

These Omega Threshers had already made good use of their bunker advantages while being elevated to Knights.

Now that Casella chose to bring out the big guns, she instantly Enfeoffed 57 modified Omega Threshers, replacing their inferior empowerment with a much more superior version!

The differences immediately became apparent!

The lucky first-class multipurpose mechs glowed brighter and exuded much greater power!

Not only that, they also gained the protection of a cruder version of a resonance shield, which meant they had gained the strength of a mid-tier expert mech according to the resonance meters!

It was already notable enough for a single mid-tier expert mech to participate in a battle on this scale.

However, nobody had a clear idea of what it meant to deploy 57 of them at a time.

Even if the newly elevated Viscounts still possessed many deficiencies compared to authentic mid-tier expert mechs, their offensive performance should at least be close enough to make the distinction irrelevant!

So far, the Saint Commander had been relatively light in directing the mech pilots of her Knights.

Due to the trust they put in her leadership, she was able to take direct control over their controls, enabling her to pilot their machines with far greater skill than any mortal could hope to match.

However, Casella only did that on occasion. Not only would she strain her concentration if she tried to micromanage over 1400 first-class mechs, but she would also deprive the pilots of a valuable learning experience.

Yet when it came to harnessing the firepower of 57 potent Viscounts, the Saint Commander did not want to leave anything to chance.

Casella rapidly picked her targets. She rapidly shifted her gaze from one enemy warship after another.

After half a minute of waiting, she mentally commanded her Viscounts to launch a highly coordinated precision strike!

The modified bunker bunker mechs acted in unison. They first opened fire with their Phase Disintegrator Guns!

228 brightly glowing resonance-empowered energy bolts soared across space and strangely attracted the attention of many humans and aliens before accurately striking the segmented multi-layer energy shields that covered over a dozen targeted warships!

Just a single bolt possessed the power to exhaust a segmented azure energy shield!

What amazed everyone was that none of the shots went to waste. Every Phase Disintegrator bolt accurately struck an segmented azure energy shield and removed it before the next energy bolt flew through and exhausted the next energy barrier that had gotten in the way!

In just over a second, every affected alien warship temporarily gained gaps in their energy coverage!

While the aliens were quickly trying to plug the gap by hastily reshuffling the orientation of their segmented azure energy shields, the Saint Commander acted faster!

The instant the momentary gaps in the defenses appeared, the Viscounts already opened fire with all of their deadly precise and accurate energy beam weapons!

Their high-tech Omega Laser Cannons as well as the bunker-mounted large luminar crystal cannons all fired resonance-empowered transphasic hyper laser beams through those gaps!

None of the energy beams missed!

Since each of them had been fired with the power of an average mid-tier expert mech, the energy beam inflicted way more damage than anyone aside from Casella could have imagined.

They drilled through whatever hull plating was in the way and created holes straight through compartments, ship systems and more!

It just so happened that Casella's targeting had been very deliberate. All of her Viscounts happened to target any missile launcher or torpedo launcher system, even those that could not have been directly targeted at the current angle.

The penetrating firepower of her Viscounts had drilled through all of the hull plating and emergency energy shields and finally struck the weapon systems in the locations that they could least afford to get hit.

A multitude of explosions engulfed the sides of the targeted vessels as their own explosive munitions detonated before they had a chance to launch!

Chapter 7005: The Power of Viscounts

The Omega Thresher was an interesting mech model.

Just as its name suggested, the first-class multipurpose mech model was primarily designed around the use of its Omega Laser Cannons.

The combination of high power per shot and excellent precision made the Omega Thresher good for mid to long-ranged combat.

While it was not as accurate as a dedicated marksman mech, it came with an advanced targeting system that helped to improve its hit rate at longer ranges.

After all, the consequences of missing a shot with an Omega Laser Cannon was much more severe. The necessity of accumulating a huge amount of power before discharging it in a single powerful strike always took up a lot of time.

The problem with the Omega Thresher's configuration was that its weapon systems did not synergize particularly well.

Its Phase Destructor Guns could have served as an excellent complement to the Omega Laser Cannons.

The former could tear down transphasic energy shields with ease, the latter could cut right through solid metal.

It seemed obvious that the Omega Thresher was a mech designed to utilize both capabilities at once.

Yet in practice, the two were only effective together employed at short range.

The muzzle velocities of Omega Laser Cannon was equivalent to the speed of light.

The muzzle velocities of the Phase Disintegrator Guns were much slower and also a bit less precise at longer ranges to boot!

The Phase Disintegrator Guns had never been designed to kill or snipe. The Red Association asked for a support weapon, and that suited the Saint Commander fine.

The problem that many mech pilots faced when they tried to master the art of piloting this machine, it became too difficult to effectively use the Phase Disintegrator Guns together with the formidable Omega Laser Cannons.

The former launched energy bolts that could not fly exactly straight at all times. They always followed a randomly skewed trajectory that was subtle up close, but became increasingly more obvious at longer distances.

The relative slow muzzle velocities of the energy bolts also only really made them useful at closer ranges.

That severely limited the value proposition of the Omega Thresher model. It obviously possessed a configuration that excelled at ranged combat.

Why must it deliberately discard this advantage and fight opponents at a range that did not leverage the full potential of its devastating Omega Laser Cannons?

The best possible use of the Omega Threshers was to strike a distant target with its Phase Disintegrator Guns to sap away its energy shields before using the Omega Laser Cannons to inflict a large amount of material damage to the exposed enemy.

Yet as the mech pilots hired by the Premier Branch began to master the use of this RA mech model, they found that it was practically impossible to accomplish this feat on any target aside from one that was completely stationary.

As long as the range was far enough and as long as the target was moving and attempting to evade incoming fire, the difficulty of landing consistent hits with the Phase Disintegrator Guns drastically rose!

In fact, after the Larkinson mech pilots asked their colleagues over at the Bluejay Fleet for advice, they learned that even the RA's own highly trained and heavily augmented first-class mech pilots struggled to perfectly land the attacks in sequence.

Unless they became expert candidates or expert pilots, they had no hope of hitting distant enemy targets with the Phase Disintegrator Guns before immediately striking them with the Omega Laser Cannons!

The two weapon systems were drastically different from each other. Each of them demanded their own set of skills because the parameters related to firing them were not comparable to each other.

A mech pilot might be able to dedicate decades of training into mastering long-distance shooting with laser weapons.

However, the skills and instincts associated with them did not translate so easily to energy weapons with drastically different properties such as the Phase Disintegrator Guns.

This was a shame, as the combination made the Omega Thresher incredibly powerful in theory.

Its value drastically rose if it was able to pop transphasic energy shields with greater ease without relying on melee mechs with space suppressors to weaken distant enemies in advance.

Unless a first-class mech pilot dedicated his entire life to mastering the Omega Thresher's eccentric combination of armaments, it was unlikely for any of them to be able to use the mech model to its full potential.

This was why the performance of the bunker mechs was so much more astonishing to those who understood the nuances of the Omega Thresher design.

In the hands of regular mech pilots, the Omega Thresher was a deep machine that they could never fully tap due to their mortal limitations.

However, if an ace commander took direct control over their machines, her unnaturally high skill and intuition easily enabled her to accomplish this superhuman feat!

The Saint Commander's multitasking capabilities were so impressive that she did it 57 times in a single attack salvo!

What impressed everyone the most was not that she succeeded, but that she attained a 100 percent success rate!

This was a powerful indicator of her fine control and her ability to precisely guide the actions of multiple mechs to a very precise degree.

A brief lull ensued on the battlefield as both the humans and the aliens needed a bit of time to come to terms with the initial result.

Of the alien warships that suffered surface hits as well as more severe damage due to the premature detonation of live warheads, not all of them got crippled right away.

Only 9 hulls appeared to be in such bad shape that their burning and partially collapsed hulls already started to drift out of formation.

The other affected alien warships were a bit larger, tougher or did not load their tubes with powerful enough missiles.

These vessels had been spared the misery of their more injured cousins, but that did not mean they had been able to make it out unscathed.

Some had lost their azure energy shields. Others could no longer make use of some of their gun batteries anymore.

"AGAIN."

While everyone else was still busy with evaluating the damage of the previous devastating massed attack, the Viscounts were already firing their second salvo!

Phase Disruptor bolts surged from the bunkers of the Tortuous Scream and struck the damaged but still relatively intact warships.

Due to the disruptions caused by the secondary explosions on their hulls, the targeted warships were unable to respond in an adequate manner.

They turned into sitting ducks as they witnessed their segmented azure energy shields disappearing in a rapid sequence just before a handful of resonance-empowered Omega Laser Cannons and luminar crystal cannons fired their destructive beams straight through the gaps and bore deep into the hulls!

The damage was less severe than last time as the bunker mechs of the Tortuous Scream could no longer target any convenient missile launcher systems filled with explosive munitions.

"THIRD SALVO."

The modified Omega Threshers continued to fire their weapons at a rate of fire that was significantly faster than the base model!

The Omega Laser Cannon was a demanding energy weapon system. It had many problems related to energy supply and heat management.

It just so happened that hooking up an Omega Thresher to the systems of a capital ship easily mitigated all of these problems!

While it was still possible to overheat and damage the weapons by channeling too much into them, their upper limits had been raised to a whole new level!

This meant that the modified Omega Threshers could get away with doubling and maybe even tripling their firing rates! This was especially the case when Casella's true resonance toughened up the mechs even further, especially when she tapped the power of the brand new Dragon Scales resonating material!

In other words, the Omega Threshers increased their firing rates to a level that would have caused their weapons to overheat and explode if they kept this up a few more times!

Only the fact that they had temporarily gained the power that was equivalent to that of a mid-tier expert mechs kept their overstressed armaments and other systems in working condition.

Again and again, the Viscounts kept repeating the same routine on the same targets until a dozen or so warships eventually succumbed entirely.

Even if none of the resonance-empowered attacks was able to destroy a warship in a single hit, it was already enough to disable the alien vessels to the point where they could no longer contribute to the ongoing battle.

These hulls had lost too many essential systems and could no longer move under their own power.

As the Viscounts maintained their horrible firing rate, everyone eventually accepted the reality that Casella and the bunker mechs did not consume much energy and other resources by maintaining this performance.

This was one of the scariest aspects of a true ace commander!

Due to her presence and Command Field, the Tortuous Scream had undoubtedly established herself as the most powerful 'warship' on the battlefield.

She may as well be a dreadnought by how much she outclassed other warships in terms of firepower.

Although the raw damage output of the Omega Threshers could not match that of the primary gun battery of an alien battleship, mid-tier expert mech-level true resonance could turn any trash into treasure!

The aliens could do little to defend against this barrage. Many of their warships had moved forward in an attempt to pummel the outnumbered human warships and prevent them from escaping.

Now, this aggressiveness came back to haunt them as many of their vessels had lingered well within the effective range of the Tortuous Scream's bunker mechs!

The Saint Commander kept focusing on directing the highly effective and surgical firepower of her Viscounts. She had to release a bit of her attention on all of the Knights in the fields, but that was no issue, especially when her actions delivered repeated blows to their confidence and morale.

The alien phasefighters and warships outnumbered the human mechs and warships by a very considerable extent.

Yet because of the intervention of a single human false god, the disparity in numbers gave them no comfort or solution against this onslaught!

So long as the Saint Commander continued to Enfeoff her bunker mechs, the Tortuous Scream effectively wielded the raw firepower of 57 mid-tier expert mechs at the same time!

Although it sounded impressive, it had remained an abstract statement so long as no one actually fielded 57 identical expert mechs on the same battlefield.

It was only now that the Saint Commander actually realized this condition in reality that both humans and aliens finally understood how powerful her Viscounts could be when operating under favorable conditions.

"The aliens are faltering! They are growing more and more time and are confused by the second."

"They are not breaking, though. The aliens are still putting up a fight, though their heart is not in it anymore."

"If we keep up the pressure, the aliens will crack sooner or later. Maybe they will even choose to evacuate from the Screed Tanner System entirely! All of the spoils in this star system will belong to our clan!"

"Don't count your chickens before they hatch. Keep an eye out for those lesser phase lords. Many of them have run away, but a handful may still choose to return."

"Heh. That will translate into their demise. Saint Dise has kept chasing them in order to push them further and further away from the battlefield."

Just two ace pilots had managed to cow and demoralize the numerically superior aliens!

Although the human attackers did not enjoy a large safety margin, it was still incredibly impressive that they managed to whip the aliens into such a sorry state.

If the enemy worked harder to maintain morale among the troops, then there was still a chance that they could overpower the Tortuous Scream by recklessly throwing phasefighters and warships at the flagship.

Yet because the native aliens kept doubting and second-guessing their ideas, they failed to make the correct response!

Chapter 7006: Dracoloids Take Flight

Although the repeated salvos launched by the 57 modified Omega Threshers was taking a greater toll on her willpower, the Saint Commander did not allow the bunker mechs to take it easy.

The more Phase Disruptor bolts and energy beams they channeled into the opposing hulls, the more damage the alien vessels sustained!

The cohesion among the enemy warships deteriorated as more and more hulls fell out of position and drifted off after losing most of their power and propulsion.

Alien spacers desperately tried to engage in damage control. They put out fires, performed emergency repairs and tried their best not to scream and panic.

Their efforts produced very limited results. There was no way to fix a melted azure shield generator or patch up a broken power generator.

What was worse was that secondary explosions, accidental electrical discharges and explosive decompressions regularly inflicted casualties among their number!

Their gods had forsaken them! Just two human false gods had managed to completely dictate the battlefield!

At this point, it was rather admirable that half of the alien soldiers still retained their fighting spirit.

The phasefighters and warships under the command of the Protector of Karnak proved to be a cut above the rest.

Even as the less disciplined and well trained forces of the various raiding fleets began to falter, the soldiers responsible for defending the Screed Tanner System tried their best to rally the remaining aliens and prevent them from routing.

The native aliens still had a chance of winning this battle.

The Tortuous Scream, though powerful, was only a single warship. She was clearly orven-made and had only been half-heartedly converted for human use.

The native aliens therefore had a good idea on her layout, performance and weak points.

So long as they pushed through the human lines and struck the battleship directly, they should most definitely be able to shatter apart the most threatening human vessel!

They only had to brave the formidable attacks launched by the Tortuous Scream while also shoving their way past the human mechs.

Whether this plan was realistic remained to be seen, but it served its use in rallying the confused aliens and giving them a common goal to dedicate towards.

"The native aliens are exposing themselves to greater danger. Their phasefighters are trying to bull their way past our mechs, and they are succeeding due to their numbers advantage!"

"Their surviving warships are forming into flanking squadrons before attempting to circle around the main battlefield. They are likely attempting to pincer our flagship from multiple directions at the same time."

Of the 133 alien warships, more than a quarter of them had been knocked offline.

Much of the remainder had incurred varying degrees of damage. The Tortuous Scream along with the warships of the Bluejay Fleet had managed to breach the energy defenses of multiple enemy warships and inflict serious damage onto their outer shells, but other alien warships would swoop in and use their own intact azure energy shields to provide valuable cover!

This enabled the damaged but unbroken vessels to patch up their holes and contain the worst of damage so that they could fight against.

More and more ships like that appeared among the native aliens.

The Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet had been spared from following suit as they relied on their shield link technology to keep their own vessels protected over a much longer period than normal.

This meant that the shield link arrays and shield generators of every linked vessel needed much more time and attention to return to their peak conditions, but the Larkinsons could worry about this later.

For now, they needed to ensure that the last enemy offensive could not get through and pummel the Tortuous Scream from multiple directions at the same time.

Various different intelligence sources painted a worrisome picture for the command staff.

"The native aliens are becoming desperate enough to disregard their losses in order to inflict a serious blow against our flagship. The precision attacks launched by the Viscounts have lost much of their deterrent effect. The native aliens know what is coming and they are psychologically prepared to see it through the end. These fanatics

are still praying to their native gods despite seeing their own deities forsake them not too long ago. This is not does not make sense!"

"The native alien belief in their native gods is too deeply rooted in their society. Their behavior cannot be measured by logic, so do not even bother to try. What matters is that these aliens are fanatical enough to persist in the face of overwhelming opposition."

High Captain Gilbert de Raanvanchas tried to figure out how to stop all of those flanking warships from getting through and pummeling his ship from several different directions.

"There are too many enemy warships! At this rate, our Enfeoffed mechs will not be able to eliminate most of the hijacked vessels. Diverting other mechs to our defense will help, but that will free up much of their surviving phasefighters, which are still numerous enough to inflict serious damage to our forces."

Despite wiping out thousands of phasefighters, the defenders still had thousands more!

What was worse was that the Larkinson mechs and other friendly units mostly managed to eliminate the weaker alien strike craft.few

The more threatening ones that refused to execute the directives of its own maker still remained intact for the most part.

These elite phasefighters managed to avoid too much attention and set themselves in a position to save the day at an opportune time.

"The aliens must die." The Saint Commander succinctly stated. "The current Viscounts are unable to disable much of their warships in time. Part of it is due to the absence of space suppressors in the vicinity of our targets. Another part of it is due to orientation. As long as the enemy vessels keep their bow pointed in our flagship's direction, they can prevent the bunker mechs from targeting their propulsion systems."

This was one of the downsides of relying on ranged weapon systems, especially energy weapons that lacked a strong enough visual impact.

Even without their phase lord leaders, the remaining alien officers had scrambled to form effective countermeasures.

From using the hulls of smaller and less important ships as literal cannon fodder to redlining their propulsion systems, the native aliens were willing to ruin their own vessels just to be able to destroy the Tortuous Scream!

"Our flagship needs to back off and delay the moment of interception as much as possible."

"On it, sir, but do not expect to be able to outrun the enemy warships. Their sub-capital ships are significantly lighter and possess higher acceleration rates than our battleship. The warp factors of their drives should also be superior."

There was no outrunning the pursuing alien vessels.

The Bluejay Fleet attempted to provide cover. They were able to stall one of the pincers, but lacked the numbers and firepower to do the same to the other pincer.

The Saint Commander finally made an important decision.

"I am demoting the current batch of Viscounts back into Knights. The modified Omega Threshers have exceeded my expectations in this battle, but their limited angles of fire have become too much of a constraint."

As much as the mech pilots of the Enfeoffed first-class multipurpose mechs wanted to retain the power of a mid-tier expert mech, all good things came to an end.

So long as this power did not belong to the mech pilots, it could be given and taken away at any time.

The Saint Commander only provided minor consolation to the 57 lucky mech pilots before seeking to empower an entirely different group of first-class multipurpose mechs.

She decided that this was a good time to test out a second major feature of the Minerva Mark II.

A certain metallic owl-shaped fey soared across space and approached a troop of prepared Larkinson mechs.

Unlike the Omega Threshers, the Dracoloids fared much better when fighting up close than from afar.

This was exactly what the Saint Commander needed at this time.

At this time, the Dracoloids had not left the radius of the Minerva Mark II's Command Field.

The ace command mech was able to amplify the range of Casella's Command Field to a ridiculous extent, so it was not easy to escape her diluted domain field.

Even so, when the Victrix arrived in front of the Dracoloids, every Larkinson mech pilot felt as if they were standing right in front of the Minerva Mark II!

The owl fey began to transmit an uplifting message to the Dracoloid pilots!

"Arise, my new Viscounts, and carry my power into battle. Breath fire into the hulls of the alien warships and rend their propulsion systems asunder!"

Every Dracoloid gained a vague corona and glowed brighter. Power exuded from all 57 machines as they each carried a significant measure of Casella's true resonance!

After the Dracoloids irrationally reared up their draconic heads and released a spray of searing flames, they flew straight towards the pincer of enemy warships that were attempting to attack the Tortuous Scream directly!

The dragon mechs flew much faster than before. Combined with Casella's excellent skill and intuition, the Dracoloids skillfully evaded most of the intercepting fire that was being channeled in their direction.

It did not matter too much if they got struck by an attack. The Dracoloids were designed to take a few beatings. The imitation resonance shield proved to be fairly effective at blocking attacks as well, and even if some still went through for one reason or another, their empowered armor systems easily repelled any lingering attacks.

Once they got close enough, the Dracoloids finally got to work. They circled two of the larger enemy warships at a time.

They were playing a dangerous game!

As long as the secondary and tertiary gun batteries still remained operational, the new Viscounts could potentially become beset by so many attacks that they would wear out their defensive measures in record time.

However, the Dracoloids did not have any intention of maintaining this distance. They utilized their entire arsenal of weapon systems in order to breach the energy defenses at the rear.

This took a bit of time, but not that much!

When a whopping 57 mid-tier expert mechs utilized their claws, integrated gauss cannons, integrated plasma cannons at the same time, the energy barriers simply couldn't take it anymore. Their generators suffered a major fault that needed to be addressed in record time!

The Dracoloids all managed to get inside the defensive envelopes of the two warships. They wanted no time and quickly began to savage the metal parts that were closer to the rear of the enemy vessels.

Once they managed to breach the engineering bays of the enemy warships, the dragon mechs released a short spurt of resonance-empowered flames that completely wiped out anything important and recognizable!

However, the Dracoloids did not stick around long enough after they initially crippled the enemy warships within reach.

The Dracoloids hopped away from their defeated enemies and began to repeat the same moves again, down to the second!

It became clear that this had become a new pattern. The Dracoloids did not waste any time on chatter or explanations. Their main objective was to neutralize the offensive launched by the warships that comprised this pincer.

After multiple rounds of hopping, over half of the ships comprising the pincer fell out of formation and tumbled in multiple different directions!

The crew grew horrified when the damage inflicted by the Viscounts had left them almost completely adrift!

The Dracoloids were unstoppable. Their pilots became so infected by the rush of power that they constantly egged each other on. They truly enjoyed the moment of invincibility!

While the Dracoloids possessed lackluster ranged solutions, that was okay.

Their offensive capabilities as well as the honest exposure to their main weaknesses were enough to put them on the shortlist.

The repeated words of encouragement and the presence exuded by the Victrix made the Larkinsons aware that they were fighting in the presence of their ace commander.

This was enough to make them docile and obedient!

Chapter 7007: Crumbling Alien Morale

The battle of Screed Tanner VI-F unfolded in a completely unexpected manner.

The human attackers may be relatively small in number, but their quality was so high that they were able to put up a good fight and minimize their losses despite being heavily outnumbered.

Just the fact that Saint Commander Casella Ingvar was able to Commandeer over 1400 first-class multipurpose mechs was already impressive enough.

Although the mass empowerment did not entirely make up for the huge disparity in numbers and absolute firepower, it at least ensured that the mechs became strong and tenacious enough to hold back the enemy forces for a lengthy period.

To be more precise, the Knights could not only defeat several phasefighters with their resonance-empowered weapons, but the strength of their azure energy shields also became much stronger!

If a warship happened to strike one of the Knights with one of their powerful secondary gun batteries and managed to collapse the azure energy shield quickly enough to prevent the shield links from reinforcing it, the mech in question still had a good chance of making it away alive!

Although mechs that had lost their energy shields were not as fragile as alien phasefighters, their armor systems could only resist so many attacks.

The native aliens always tried to concentrate their firepower on the human mechs that had lost their energy defenses!

This was an old habit of theirs, and it happened to remain useful when fighting against the humans.

Everyone knew that once an enemy unit lost energy shield coverage, the exposed enemy needed to be taken down with haste before it could retreat to the rear or buy enough time to restore its energy defenses!

This made it very dangerous for the small number of mechs that attracted too much enemy firepower.

Their shield link transceivers worked as hard as possible to siphon shield energy from other friendly assets, but they were not omnipotent.

There were enough native aliens that had fought against the forces of the Red Two in the past to learn how to counter this powerful life-saving tech.

The easiest solution was to knock the energy shield out with a single overwhelming blow, as mentioned before.

The hardest solution was to attack the shielded enemies as often as possible. By putting a higher priority on inflicting damage than securing kills, the shield-linked units would exhaust their collective reserve of shield energy sooner or later.

This was clearly the most wasteful and time-consuming solution, but there were many times when there was no better solution at hand.

A more clever solution was to block the shield links.

Much like tight-beam laser communications, the shield links could be blocked so long as an obstacle got in the way.

The elite and veteran alien phasefighter pilots understood how shield link tech worked and developed special tactics to limit the effectiveness of this measure.

The best way to deal with a mech protected by shield link technology was to surround it with several phasefighters and make sure to circle around and interrupt the shield links as often as possible!

Even if it was not possible to maintain a 100 percent block rate, interrupting the connections on a repeated basis was already enough to severely degrade its performance.

The alien phasefighters had already relied on these tactics to eliminate dozens of powerful mechs.

However, even if they managed to erase the energy shield advantage of a mech, it was still difficult to secure the kills!

The subtle willpower reinforcement enhanced the defensive performance of the already decently well armored mechs.

So long as other machines had enough time to reinforce the unshielded mechs, the latter usually managed to get away, if a bit battered and bruised.

The differences in performance between Knights and unempowered mechs were therefore too comprehensive!

Every Dracoloid and Omega Thresher mech effectively fought like mechs that were several times more expensive to build and difficult to obtain.

The mechs fielded by the Bluejay Fleet also derived many advantages from Casella's Command Field.

Therefore, a magical and completely lopsided result unfolded on the battlefield.

The human attackers had gone into this fight while being heavily outnumbered in terms of strike craft, warships and champions.

Yet due to the excellent advantages of just two of the Premier Fleet's ace pilots, the native aliens stationed in the Screed Tanner System suffered so many setbacks that their surviving soldiers practically became traumatized!

After all, they not only lost over 4000 phasefighters, but also lost 47 warships!

The Viscounts empowered by the Minerva Mark II possessed ample enough power and numbers to cripple a warship's most essential functions.

It was a bit difficult for the mechs to quickly destroy or damage the warships beyond recovery.

Viscounts or not, their weapon systems were too small and lacked the scale to inflict widespread destruction.

However, that was not a big problem. The primary gun batteries of the Tortuous Scream and the somewhat smaller but still potent primary armaments of the Babylon Excavator and the Tarrasque easily finished off the crippled and practically defenseless hulls.

Alien warships that had lost both their azure energy shields and propulsion may as well be asteroids given how easy it was to calculate a firing solution and pummel the target with slow but devastating shots.

Plasma bolts, laser beams, positron beams and kinetic rounds easily penetrated through the hull and disintegrated large parts of the citadel of a crippled vessel.

If the design and interior of the alien warship in question happened to be known, then it became even easier to destroy the vessel.

The human warships just had to aim their weapons at the main power generators, the munition storage compartments or other unstable elements and fire away!

Even if the human warships had to divert their firepower away from more functional enemy warships, they still prioritized the destruction of the crippled hulls because the enemy still had a chance to recover them during the engagement or after the fighting had ended.

While these attacks merely served to finish off the disabled warships for good, the sight of their collapse actually disheartened the alien soldiers even further!

The spectacle of witnessing ships explode or break apart carried much more visual weight than seeing a mostly intact vessel drift out of formation.

The aliens felt a greater sense of loss and tragedy as they witnessed so many impressive homeships succumb to violence.

Many of the hulls had only been constructed in the past few years!

They had been designed and built to fight the top powers of the human race, and therefore incorporated plenty of excellent human technological solutions.

Yet when the two sides entered into battle, the humans thoroughly managed to destroy almost 50 alien warships at this point!

In contrast, not a single human carrier or warship suffered the same fate!

The superior tech, maneuverability and defense offered by shield link technology kept them all safe.

What was more ridiculous was that the effective firepower of just one captured and partially converted alien warship easily exceeded that of a dozen warships, if not more!

Even if the Tortuous Scream relied on an ace command mech and her bunker mechs as opposed to normal gun batteries, the fact of the matter was that this combination alone was directly responsible for much of the losses suffered by the native aliens!

Their attempt to pincer the flagship of the Premier Fleet failed.

One of them had become completely savaged by the Dracoloids-turned-Viscounts.

It was as if the dragon mechs had turned from technological limitations of dragons into the real deal!

Each Viscount moved faster, struck harder and resisted far more damage than their tech ought to be able to resist!

Even without relying on shield link technology, the Dracoloids were already agile and resistant enough to survive long enough to shred the azure energy shields of an alien warship before crippling the vessel!

"The aliens... are breaking."

Although the native aliens still 'outnumbered' the humans, the continuous setbacks completely snuffed out their fighting spirit.

It had been dim for a while. If not for their pride, training and instructions from above, they would have preferred to cut their losses and retreat.

They had banked all of their hopes on the last gambit, yet the Enfeoffment of 57 Dracoloids completely crushed their last viable attempt to destroy the Tortuous Scream.

The alien soldiers saw no hope of achieving their win conditions anymore.

Sure, many of the human mechs and warships had suffered so much attrition that their azure shield generators were on the verge of failing.

Every few seconds, a mech had to withdraw from the battle line and return to its mothership in order to replenish its reserves and give its azure shield generator time to recover.

The shield link transceiver also incurred a certain degree of stress due to bearing a heavy burden.

The mech technicians needed to perform a quick inspection and make sure to replace worn components before they had a chance to fail at the worst possible moment.

Fortunately, not many mechs needed to rotate at the same time.

The Larkinsons actually began to rotate their mechs many minutes earlier. This set up a healthy pattern where recently topped off mechs were able to return and fight with much greater gusto than before.

There should never be a situation where an entire mech company was at risk of collapsing in a single instant because all of the machines had simultaneously reached their limits!

Through this clever and prudent management, the human mech units kept fighting without deteriorating in any significant fashion.

The Knights demonstrated a level of persistence and resilience that far exceeded that of other first-class multipurpose mechs.

As long as they remained within the impressive range of the Minerva Mark II's Command Field, fighting against them was like fighting against lesser versions of the human false gods!

This had been an unfair confrontation from the beginning.

It slowly dawned upon the alien soldiers and particularly the phasefighter pilots that they had not been fighting against their mortal equals all this time.

Instead, they had been fighting against humans that harnessed the power of gods!

The distinction between false gods and real gods did not matter to them at the moment. After all, at their level, anything related to divinity was unreachable by their standards!

The only way to cope with such power was to seek salvation from their own native gods.

Yet what were the alien phase lords doing?

They had fled from the battlefield!

After the First Sword Mark III demonstrated her capacity to butcher a greater phase lord like a pig, she had turned into an absolute terror to the lesser phase lords!

Perhaps the Protector of Karnak and the Endless Stomach possessed the means to cope against the superdimensional mechs, but the rest would only lose their heads if they attempted to intervene.

Now that the First Sword Mark III had temporarily given up on killing the two troublesome greater phase lords, she had been circling around the battlefield.

Not all of the lesser phase lords had abandoned all of their responsibilities and fled from the Screed Tanner System without remorse.

There were still plenty of them that still wanted to wait until the First Sword Mark III ceased her pursuit of the lesser prey and became preoccupied with the two greater phase lords again.

Unfortunately, the First Sword Mark III did not give up.

Anytime a lesser phase lord turned back and tried to get close to their fleets, the ace swordsman mech ruthlessly homed in on the alien champion and charged forward with her Decapitator poised to butcher another giant alien pig!

How could a lesser phase lord possibly think about rescuing his fleet and subordinates under those circumstances?

It was not worth it to risk their lives to save a bunch of mortals and mundane possessions.

The Red Ocean was big enough for a lesser phase lord to be able to replenish those losses easily as long as he returned to his home territory.

This was also a good excuse to stay away from the battlefield and avoid scary opponents like this superdimensional ace mech!

If one such machine had appeared, others would soon emerge as well.

Lesser phase lords may be at the bottom of the alien god totem pole, but few of them were truly stupid. They could easily deduce that the human-alien battlefield was about to become a lot deadlier for their kind!

These thoughts and more caused the lesser phase lords to grow even more timid.

So long as the First Sword Mark III remained active on the battlefield, the native gods had no intentions of reinforcing their mortal alien forces!

Chapter 7008: Withdrawal to Screed Tanner VI-F (FIXED)

The continued inaction from the lesser phase lords eventually broke the back of alien opposition.

Despite transmitting repeated requests for relief, their gods had turned their gazes away from their faltering phasefighters and warships.

To many alien soldiers, the complete lack of empathy and courage shown by the lesser phase lords practically caused their faith to collapse.

Without faith, how could they possibly muster enough motivation to persist in this battle?

The aliens began to withdraw.

As soldiers, they attempted to organize their retreat as orderly as possible, but that did not last very long.

Many aliens just wanted to put as much distance between them and the deadly human mechs and warships!

It did not help that their human counterparts immediately smelled weakness.

"The aliens have lost their will to fight! Press harder! Do not give them a chance to catch a breath! The stronger our attacks, the faster their remaining cohesion will crumble!"

There was a big difference between an orderly retreat and a complete rout.

The goal of the human forces was to trigger the latter. Not only would the total breakdown in order make it a lot more difficult for the native aliens to reorganize and reform their ranks, but it also made every enemy asset a lot more difficult to defeat!

The alien phasefighters and warships were several times more difficult to defeat when they covered each other's backs and employed sophisticated tactics.

Once they became so panicked and desperate to flee the battlefield, they could no longer pay attention to such operations.

This was exactly what was happening!

The native aliens attempted to withdraw by assigning a rear guard to buy time for others to make an escape, but they had made a critical error!

The forces under the command of the Protector of Karnak lorded over the other forces.

While there was a lot of logic in sacrificing the more disposable assets to preserve the more valuable ones, the aliens were not pawns that could be discarded at will.

If their native god personally ordered their raiding fleets to form such a rear guard, then they may obey this order without question just because they had been conditioned to absolutely obey their deity.

However, the order came from the commanding officers of the forces that defended the Screed Tanner System.

They weren't even gods. They were merely mortal juregs that had reached a high rank by earning the trust of the Protector of Karnak. There was still an enormous gap in status between the two. Even if the former spoke with the backing of a god, that was still not as good as the real deal!

Besides, it was very doubtful that the native aliens were willing to obey the orders of a jureg greater phase lord.

The juregs were fanatically loyal to the phase whales and had always been associated with the Red Cabal.

The phase whales recognized the usefulness of having these stupidly loyal aliens by their side.

Due to these dynamics, the juregs therefore cultivated a reputation for being the bullies and enforcers of the Red Cabal, especially in the last decade when the organization was forced to become a lot more prominent.

Therefore, other major races generally disliked the pompous juregs who constantly tried to persuade alien populations to worship the phase whales before their local gods.

Suffice to say, the juregs did not endear themselves to the orvens, nunsers, zzamayels and etcetera due to causing so many religious disputes!

The trusted jureg commanders therefore generated so much hatred and animosity that the remnants of the alien raiding fleets did the complete opposite!

They not only refused to form a rear guard in order to hamper the human pursuit forces, but they split up and fled in different directions!

What a clever decision!

This naturally made it a lot harder for the human forces to catch them all. The Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet did not field a lot of mechs and warships, so splitting them up would cause them to lack the strength to complete their missions.

There was even a risk that the native aliens would suddenly turn around and launch a counterattack against their pursuers!

Therefore, the best decision that the pursuing human mech forces could make was to follow the largest group which happened to consist of combat assets that still answered to the Protector of Karnak.

The greater phase lord may have become too distracted to pay much attention to the state of his fleet, but he was still able to recognize how it got pulled into a disaster.

Now, the greater priority of this faltering collection of phasefighters and warships was to retreat to Screed Tanner VI-F.

There, the alien soldiers could rely on the fortified space station and other fixed defenses to stall any attack attempts.

Depending on how quickly the humans were able to dismantle the defenses, the subordinates of the Protector of Karnak may judge that it would be better for them to cut their losses and run.

"Come on, fellows! These jureg-led aliens have little to no faith left. It will not take too much of a brow to make them lose resistance!"

A squad of Dracoloid mechs flew towards an alien frigate that was already showing signs of stress.

They were immediately met with intercepting fire from the alien ship's point defense guns.

Many of them had been installed relatively recently. It became clear that the native aliens placed more emphasis on smaller and compact weapons that could effectively intercept both ordnance and incoming strike craft.

The Dracoloid mechs therefore endured a high frequency of attacks. Their azure energy shields immediately took a toll, yet they put their trust in shield link technology as well as Casella's Command Field.

Since the Dracoloid enjoyed both advantages, this mech model was able to show off such amazing combat power.

Yet it was undeniable that it was not the most valuable reward.

The Omega Threshers maintained their distance from other forces and got credited for blowing up a lot of stuff.

"This is so easy! The Omega Laser Cannons are so powerful, and the Phase Disintegrator Guns always succeed in stripping the vessel of their energy defenses."

There was little chance the native aliens will slow down and fight us to death, so the combatants quickly grew hyper aggressive!

More and more aliens had been pushed to the brink of exhaustion. Their reaction speeds slowed and their ability to respond to danger had atrophied.

More alien assets began to show flaws.

Numerous phasefighters accidentally crashed into each other and forcibly connected them to the chamber. This was a catastrophe that should have never taken place!

Several alien frigates had decided to band together in order to reduce the pressure, but only ended up stabbing each other in the back.

Crazy incidents like this unfolded across the battlefield.

"Sir! Many of the alien forces have moved beyond the range of the Minerva Mark II's Command Field. Continuing to chase after them will make our fleets much more vulnerable. What is your decision, sir?"

"Do not pursue." High Captain Gilbert instructed. "If you do, you risk coming into contact with the lesser phase lords that are lingering in the periphery. Wiping out all of the lesser phase lords and alien remnants is too difficult and unrealistic for us. We must focus on completing our primary objectives."

The Saint Commander chimed in as well.

"Do not feel tempted to pursue. No matter how weak a collection of alien warships may be, they can still outnumber and outgun any pursuit force. We need to focus on more urgent priorities."

Many mech pilots groaned, but they knew better than to disobey.

Instead of setting off to pursue the miscellaneous routing enemies the mechs restrained themselves and remained on guard. Any surprises could put their imminent victory in jeopardy. They needed to be ready to respond to any counterattacks.

Now that the main opposition had melted in front of them, the two victorious fleets advanced towards Screed Tanner VI-F at a steady pace.

The Saint Commander did not relax even though her forces had managed to break the back of alien resistance in this star system.

Scaring away the enemy phasefighters and warships was different from eliminating them permanently.

She still held a bit of vigilance towards the native aliens. No matter whether they were juregs or nunsers, so long as they were numerous enough, they may still have ideas about turning around in order to fight!

In order to reduce this possibility as much as possible, the human forces took preventative measures.

The Premier Fleet and the Bluejay Fleet lost many potential opportunities to capture and convert the notorious alien vessels.

Many of the crippled hulls had been destroyed as a precaution. The humans weren't stupid enough to give the alien crew a chance to restore the ships and launch a surprise attack while the humans were caught off-guard.

Once enough hulls got destroyed, the Larkinsons finally gained enough reassurance.

The Saint Commander no longer ordered her troops to blast apart the next alien hulls. The human warships instead had to send in their marines and hopefully capture enough valuable goods by leaving the hulls intact.

It was also possible to capture the warships and convert them to their own use. However, this was a risky proposition that would likely cause the Larkinsons to suffer losses and delay their departure from the Screed Tanner System.

This was why the boarding parties ruthlessly killed every alien crew member in the way and prioritized the theft of phasewater and other high-quality resources.

The humans did not take the bait!

They did not attempt to capture the alien warships. The Larkinsons lacked experience in this aspect. They much preferred to let their mechs do all of the work, but their machines were too big and clumsy for this sort of work.

"It feels so frustrating to let so many cowardly alien phasefighters and warships leave." A Dracoloid mech pilot complained. "I could have destroyed at least two more alien frigates or destroyers if we could move further than the prescribed limit."

"The Saint Commander is holding us back for our own good, Rick. Have you forgotten that these alien raiding fleets originally traveled to the Screed Tanner System in order to offload their plunder? The real valuables should still be left in the large amount of stockpiles on the surface of Screed Tanner VI-F!"

The strategy chosen by Casella Ingvar made a lot more sense in that context. The moon base was the real prize.

In order to enrich the Larkinson Clan, the Saint Commander grew eager to secure the enemy base and prevent the enemy from transferring all of those goodies!

"We need to send a powerful enough advance force to intercept inbound alien starships and lock down those treasures if possible."

"I shall send ahead my Viscounts." The Saint Commander informed everyone.

The current Viscounts had already completed their tasks. No intact warship was left within the range of the Minerva Mark II's Command Field.

This was a ridiculous amount of space!

Yet despite being able to extend the range of her domain field to over 145 kilometers, Screed Tanner VI-F was located much further away at the moment!

Most Commandeered mechs would lose their empowerment after they moved too far away from the source.

This should have happened to the Viscounts as well, but in reality they retained the same level of strength as before!

200 kilometers, 500 kilometers, 1000 kilometers.

The Enfeoffed Dracoloids merrily flew away from the flagship that hosted the Minerva Mark II and did not doubt their power in case they were met by enemies.

Instead, they remained strong, and it was all because of the metal owl that shadowed their movements!

It hadn't been too obvious before, but now everyone could see and figure out that the Victrix extended the Minerva Mark II's Command Field!

Casella's appreciation for the Victrix rose. She could hardly imagine life without this handy owl fey by her side. Ves had done an excellent job at bringing it to life and filling it with a sense of purpose!

She was also incredibly impressed by her Viscounts.

They had already been instrumental in defeating the enemy warships and causing the native aliens to lose their confidence in the battle.

Now, the Saint Commander intended to find out if they could perform well when operating by themselves.

Chapter 7009: Dragon Mech Appreciation (FIXED)

The Battle of Screed Tanner VI-F had most definitely reached its later stages.

It may even be almost over. So long as the human forces managed to destroy the remaining organized alien fleet and completely demolish the fixed defenses over at the lightly fortified moon, nothing could stop the Larkinsons and their allies from plundering the intact alien stockpiles!

There were many advantages to achieving a decisive victory in this star system.

Many Larkinsons looked forward to enriching the clan even further. The native aliens clearly stashed a lot of stolen plunder on this moon.

Once the Premier Fleet recovered it all, the Larkinsons had no obligations to return any of the treasures to their proper owners.

After all, if the original owners lacked the strength or willingness to fight to take it all back, then they were not worth this consideration.

This was another instance where the power of the fist trumped over the power of law and the power of reason.

What mattered to the Larkinson Clan was that it possessed a proper legal basis to claim the goods that the aliens originally stole. No matter how murky the background may be, most ordinary folk did not want to get involved in anything dangerous.

More importantly to the people living in the Caesarion Upper Zone and beyond, a decisive defeat of the aliens stationed in this key location would make them all a bit safer!

Every Larkinson was still motivated to fight for the common good. Being able to fight these battles may be a burden to some mech pilots, but not to the mech pilots!

The more enemy warships and bases they shattered, the more experience they accrued, which had very real effects!

Many humans derived great satisfaction from seeing the forces of seeing the native alien aggressors taken down a notch.

It would be even better if they could take complete control over Karnak Base!

This was why the Saint Commander and many others paid close attention to the Viscounts sent ahead of the main forces.

The Enfeoffed Dracoloids attracted a lot of attention no matter where they traveled.

These machines originally did not warrant so much attention. Their performance in the past was decent, but not exceptional.

That changed as soon as they got Enfeoffed into Viscounts.

The performance of the Enfeoffed mechs had been nothing less than astonishing.

The Larkinsons as well as others who had been paying attention became even more optimistic about their performance.

It was not impossible for them to be able to inflict a lot of damage to the alien defenses and disrupt the enemy's arrangements over at their occupied moon.

However, it seemed a little risky to place so much responsibility on the shoulders of empowered Dracoloids.

"Saint Commander, are you sure you want to move ahead with a force of Viscounts comprised of only Dracoloids?" High Captain Gilbert couldn't help but ask. "Is it not better to replace a quarter of them with Omega Threshers? I fear that their unbalanced weapon configuration will cause them to suffer a disadvantage. The base defenders have not directly suffered all of the blows to their morale. They are still organized and able to resist. They also have an abundant amount of guns at their disposal. If the Viscounts are not accompanied by E-MULES or friendly warships, their linked energy shields will only be able to resist so much damage before they all reach their limits."

The Saint Commander did not harbor the same doubts.

"I understand your skepticism, but I have taken the measure of our enemies... as well as our newfound strength. I did not dispatch the Dracoloids to their fortified starbase on a whim. I have confidence that they can destroy it and eliminate the closest thing to a safe harbor that the aliens have left in this star system. The Omega Threshers and E-MULES will only slow down the current batch of Viscounts."

Casella sounded as if she had fallen in love with the Dracoloid mech model.

This was not strange as she was hardly the only one that had become enamoured by this close combat-oriented dragon mech model.

So long as no one demanded it to fight at longer ranges, the Dracoloid performed extremely well at close ranges!

It possessed the right balance between protection and mobility. The dragon mech's gimmick of breathing fire also happened to be a lot stronger when empowered by true resonance.

The raw damage inflicted by this resonance-empowered spray of fire exceeded that of normal melee attacks!

This made the fire breathing attacks much better suited for quickly taking down azure energy shields as well as more material targets.

The only limitation was that the Dracoloids only had a limited reserve of propellant, but they could get more out of it by biting and ingesting transphasic materials.

So far, the Dracoloids had little need to do so, because the alien warships were not powerful enough to warrant such measures.

However, the Saint Commander already anticipated that the dragon mechs needed a bit of extra power, so she had already commanded them to devour moderate quantities of hull plating earlier.

Their special stomachs 'digested' the pieces of transphasic alloys and efficiently separated the phasewater from the remaining materials.

Anything flammable went into one pocket while the rest got ejected from the dragon mechs through a strategically located rear port.

If necessary, the Dracoloids could keep eating more transphasic alloys in order to extract more phasewater, but time was of the essence.

The Dracoloids only needed a slight amount of phasewater in order to amplify the power of their breath attacks!

The question was whether this was enough to quickly take down the most powerful orbital space station.

As the Dracoloids continued to close in on their primary target, the alien orbital defenses had finally begun to greet them with a myriad of attacks!

The Dracoloids separated from each other and began to engage in their own individual evasive maneuvers.

Through the Command Field spread by the accompanying Victrix, every mech pilot felt as if Casella Ingvar was standing right behind them and controlling their piloting in person.

The Larkinson mech pilots felt extremely honored that they had been chosen to become her temporary vessels, though they would have preferred to maintain control over their mechs.

However, they recognized that what they were about to do was extremely dangerous. Their margin of error was exceedingly thin. Only the superhuman skills and judgement of an ace pilot could enable them to tackle the next challenge without suffering excessive casualties.

Under normal circumstances, it was impossible for just 57 first-class multipurpose mechs to challenge an orbital starbase of this caliber!

Yet the Dracoloids dared to do so. Given what the soldiers stationed at the fortified space station had witnessed up ahead, they had become extremely wary of the mechs blessed by the power of a human false god.

"We have detected the launch of elite phasefighters! The native aliens are scrambling them as fast as physically possible! We estimate that the space station still houses over 300 small craft. Each of the phasefighters are configured for high-speed interception and are also armed with transphasic missiles!"

These were the kind of alien strike craft that human mech pilots least wanted to fight against!

Their superior mobility meant that it was not only difficult to shoot them down from a distance, but also very difficult to get close enough to strike them down with melee weapons.

Their armament of transphasic missiles enabled them to punch above their weight and inflict heavily damaging blows on all mechs, including Enfeoffed ones!

In any case, their numbers may be too small to defeat the Viscounts, but they could still inflict a lot of damage under the right circumstances.

As the phasefighters rapidly flew in the direction of the incoming mechs, they began to split up into multiple squadrons.

This already told the Saint Commander that the elite phasefighters likely did not intend to dogfight the empowered Dracoloids, but instead rely on hit-and-run attacks to exert pressure and be in a position to punish mistakes.

As long as these phasefighters could keep this up, they could become a serious problem.

This was why the Dracoloids opened fire at them even though there was still a bit of distance between the two groups.

The Dracoloids were all armed with 4 compact gauss guns and 2 plasma guns. Their quantity, size and firepower left much to be desired, but that did not mean they were useless!

First-class multipurpose mechs were designed to be useful at every range. Even if the Dracoloid model was heavily slanted towards closer ranges did not mean it was incompetent in ranged combat!

Under the tight control of the Saint Commander, over a hundred resonance-empowered plasma bolts rapidly crossed the distance and struck the azure energy shields of the enemy interceptor craft!

Immediately afterwards, the Dracoloids launched a larger salvo of resonance-empowered gauss projectiles at the same enemy phasefighter!

The combination of attacks proved too much to the enemy craft. The fastest and most skilled among them had engaged in last-second evasive maneuvers, but their efforts proved to be in vain as the Saint Commander successfully read their future movements!

The Dracoloids proceeded to repeat the earlier routine, this time producing a much more dramatic result!

In just a short amount of time, over 50 phasefighters succumbed to the precise and highly coordinated attacks from a first-class multipurpose mech that wasn't even supposed to excel in ranged combat!

The Dracoloids did not rest on their laurels. They immediately reoriented their guns and began to exhaust the defenses of the next batch of alien phasefighters!

No matter how the alien pilots tried to dodge or evade the incoming attacks, their efforts were no different from child's play in front of an experienced and knowledgeable ace commander.

For all of their training, their combat experience was very low. The alien pilots possessed far too much rigidity in their actions and lacked the fluency and improvisation of true veterans.

All of this meant that as long as the ace commander cracked the code of their training, Casella Ingvar pretty much figured out the evasion patterns of other enemies.

By the time the alien phasefighters had been reduced to half, the remaining 150 or so phasefighters quickly lost all of their courage!

It was one thing to charge straight at a bunch of uppity standard mechs.

It was another thing to charge straight into mechs that tapped into the power of gods in order to become stronger!

In the face of certain death, the well-trained phasefighter pilots had turned around and abandoned the mission entirely!

"Disappointing. I hoped that they lasted longer."

After driving away the mechanical equivalent of pigeons, the Dracoloids had a clear path to the final boss.

Soon, the mechs became inundated by the crazy gunfire from the secondary gun batteries!

The Dracoloids tried their best to become as slick as possible, but when the space around them became so inundated with firepower, it was difficult for them to find windows where they could evade every incoming attack.

No matter if they maintained their course or dodged in a different direction, they would always get hit somehow!

The Dracoloids tried their best to resist the attacks, but their mobility was not as exaggerated as that of a light mech. It would have been so much easier to evade the strikes if the machines moved a lot faster.

That said, it was not that easy for the aliens to whittle down the number of Viscounts.

Although the gun batteries mounted on the alien starbase tried their best to shoot down at least a handful of the Dracoloids, their attacks were not powerful and consistent enough!

The Dracoloids relied heavily on their linked energy shields to weather the storm, so much so that they were pushing them to their limits!

The energy shields got struck so hard that it was on the verge of collapse, but they had lasted long enough to deliver the Viscounts to the vicinity of the enemy starbase.

The Dracoloids managed to get close enough without losing any of their number!

The dragon mechs collided against the solid azure energy shield before savaging it with a pair of claws!

That was not all. The animalistic machines also opened their maws and spewed a concentrated blast of extremely hot fire!

The resonance-empowered and phasewater-catalyzed flame breath unleashed by the dragon mechs savaged the titanic energy shield that protected the alien starbase from harm!

Combined with the overlapping effects of 57 resonance-empowered space suppressors, the massive azure energy shield lost its integrity at an astounding rate!

Chapter 7010: 14 Large Saboteurs

The Red Cabal established two strongholds in the Screed Tanner System.

The first was the fortified starbase along with a string of defensive platforms that orbited Screed Tanner VI-F.

The second was the base built on the surface of the moon.

These defenses ensured that even if a mishap occurred to the alien warships or gods, they could still withdraw to a position of relative safety.

Sure, a powerful and determined human force could lay siege on the strongholds and topple them eventually, but this was bound to take a lot of time.

This was also the last reliance of the jureg-led fleet that served the Protector of Karnak.

Yet even as their surviving phasefighters and warships retreated to an orbital position that they assumed was safe, the alien soldiers found to their horror that their bases were already on the verge of collapse!

It only took a relatively short amount of time for the Viscounts fighting under the gaze of the Victrix to strip the powerful starbase of all of its protection!

This shouldn't be possible!

The starbase was built to resist the momentous attacks of multiple warships, including large and formidable battleships!

One of the defining characteristics of the starbase was that it relied on a single immense energy shield generator as its main source of protection, similar to human titan shield technology.

The difference was that the alien version utilized by the Red Cabal derived a number of its working principles from the spatial barriers of phase lords and phase whales.

This effectively meant that getting past the starbase's energy shield was almost as difficult as overcoming the spatial barrier of a greater phase lord!

How could the humans possibly breach this immensely powerful barrier by relying on just 57 mechs?

It turned out the answer was simple.freewebnovel.com

The massive energy shield had never been rated to defend against 57 first-class mid-tier expert mechs!

When the Enfeoffed Dracoloids struck with all of their fury on a single point, the huge but ponderous energy shield generator struggled to resist the reality-distorting attacks!

A torrent of resonance-empowered gauss rounds, plasma bolts and claws strikes already started to cause a weak point in this section of the energy shield.

When the Dracoloids subsequently released and ignited all of the phasewater-infused propellant that was left in their internal tanks, they overwhelmed the energy shield

with so much unnaturally hot and spatially disrupting flames that a temporary gap had formed!

It was as if a fire had taken a bite out of the massive energy sphere!

The starbase's energy shield generator urgently worked to close this gap as soon as possible.

The alien engineers responsible for overseeing its operation understood how dire the situation had become. They switched off all of the safeties and overloaded numerous systems, causing the energy shield generator to quickly close the gap and restore its total coverage.

Yet this brief delay proved crucial. 14 Dracoloids managed to slip through the narrow gap during this short interval of time!

More Dracoloids attempted to go through as well, but the gap was too small to allow too many mechs to squeeze through.

By the time the other dragon mechs wanted to get through, the energy shield had already restored full coverage!

Fortunately for the Larkinsons, this was already enough.

The Dracoloids that remained stuck outside had ceased their attacks and directed all of their spare energies towards defense and evasion.

As for the 14 machines that managed to get inside quickly enough, nothing stood in their way as they split up and began to assail the secondary and tertiary gun batteries that covered this side of the starbase!

The native aliens never envisioned that the humans would be able to slip past their all-powerful energy shield at this junction.

The aliens also assumed that the starbase would enjoy the protection of phasefighters and other defenses.

These assumptions no longer applied this time as the Viscounts had already shredded the defending phasefighters while enduring the attacks of starbase and the surrounding platforms.

Now that a bunch of Dracoloids reached the surface of the starbase's exterior, they immediately began to savage any gun battery within their reach!

The Dracoloids entered into a frenzy!

They employed a savage combination of ranged attacks and claws strikes to quickly disable as many turrets as possible.

It took too much effort to destroy the gun batteries entirely, but they did not need to go that far just to make the gun emplacements inoperable.

The Dracoloids worked slowly at first, but as the Saint Commander who controlled the Viscounts became more familiar with the designs of the base turrets, she quickly directed the dragon mechs to disable the critical surface components that fulfilled essential functions.

So long as these parts got trashed, the rest of the turret assembly turned into useless lumps of metal!

It would take an entire alien crew to come out and replace the broken parts. This could only be done after the battle had ended.

Casella Ingvar did not intend to give the native aliens a chance to do so. She wanted to do nothing less than to destroy this critical alien asset!

As the Dracoloids efficiently cleared out all of the gun turrets on this side of the starbase, the remaining 43 dragon mechs that lingered outside of the large energy shield immediately experienced a lot of relief.

While the starbase still retained its turrets on the other side, there was no way they could angle their guns in their direction.

The job of the 14 Dracoloids was not over, though. Instead of wasting more time on disabling gun batteries that posed no immediate threat, the machines simultaneously began to breach into the base by clawing their way into the hangar bay, cargo loading docks and other weak points.

Once inside, they continued to burrow through the compartments.

It was not particularly difficult for the Dracoloids to burrow deeper into the starbase.

Although the starbase's walls were actually thicker and more solid than the bulkheads of alien battleships, they still could not withstand the claws and other attacks of the Viscounts!

Soon enough, the Dracoloids managed to disable numerous functional parts and systems, ranging from life support to fire control systems.

Even if the starbase was designed and built with a lot of redundancy in mind, the damage caused by the 14 Dracoloids was considerable!

The intruding machines did not engage in mindless destruction, though.

They bypassed many vital sub-systems in order to dig their way straight to the center of the starbase.

The native alien soldiers stationed in the large orbital fortification did everything they could to stop that from happening.

They employed measures ranging from hastily barricading the walls with spare materials to detonating torpedoes when a mech got close enough.

A few of these desperation measures could have worked if not for one important fact.

The alien officers and ratings were plotting all of these radical plans while they were within the range of Casella Ingvar's Command Field!

It was as if they had entered her actual domain, but weaker.

The native aliens certainly felt her presence from the Command Field propagated by the Victrix, but they did not have a full understanding of what that meant.

It was hard to surprise the Saint Commander when she was able to monitor everyone and anything that had entered her Command Field!

Even hostiles could not escape her gaze!

The language barrier and the instinctive resistance of the alien soldiers may prevent Casella from understanding them completely, but she could already devise a lot of theories through observation alone!

In fact, every ace pilot could do what Casella was doing and more.

Certain ace pilots such as Saint Dise could even weaponize her domain field and rely on it to defeat a lot of enemies!

Casella was unable to do so innately, both because her domain attributes were not suited for direct attacks and because she never gained a proper Saint Kingdom in the first place.

It didn't matter. The Saint Commander already gained the ability to attack directly with the help of Mindstorm Alloy, though the truth was a little more complicated.

The resonating material was embedded into the mech frame of the Minerva Mark II. This meant that Casella was best able to leverage its power within her ace mech's own domain field.

She could feel that it was possible for her to generate a psychic storm over longer distances by using the Victrix as a medium.

She had tried it out during her previous practice sessions, but never managed to pull off this feat.

Perhaps she needed to develop a specialized technique. It could also be that her resonance strength was too low to support this advanced operation.

Whatever the case, she would master this method sooner or later. She just needed to be patient.

"Detecting high energy readings consistent with large power generators and an enormous azure shield generator!"

"We are closing in on the main shield generator!"

The mech pilots could feel that they were moving closer to their goal. Their Dracoloids kept digging towards the center by following different routes, taking care to avoid the most destructive and troublesome traps. This delayed their arrival to the center of the starbase, but it was better than getting blown up or electrocuted!

The native aliens did not understand how the Dracoloids managed to evade all their improved but effective traps.

They continued to plot new ways to waylay the mechs, only to realize that they had run out of options!

The engineers and other aliens stationed in the center could only watch on with despair as the first dragon mechs successfully breached the thick armored walls and immediately opened fire on the massive shield generator!

To its credit, the shield generator was wrapped in a thick and solid transphasic hyper metal shell. It was not as easy to destroy as the other systems of the starbase!

The Dracoloids did not give up. Seeing that their primary target was being so difficult, the dragon mechs flew over the heads of the helpless alien engineers and attacked the shield energy generator with their claws and teeth!

This finally caused the main shield generator to destabilize and eventually collapse!

"The Starbase is open!"

The remaining Dracoloids that previously had no choice but to linger outside of the massive energy shield could now join their 14 brethren!

The new arrivals immediately got to work by wiping out entire compartments and ripping apart the remaining gun batteries that still remained functional after all of this effort.

The orbital starbase was finished!

Not a lot of time has passed between the arrival of the Viscounts and their remarkably quick feat of creating a breach in the defenses of the opposing mech.

The survivors of the first battle all felt as if they had been cursed. How come they suffered so many setbacks in a row?

The demise of the orbital starbase meant that it was almost impossible for the native aliens to maintain control over Screed Tanner VI-F and its orbit.

If the native aliens did not evacuate in time, then the humans would swoop in and conquer everything!

The only other location that could give the retreating alien forces a bit of reprieve was Karnak Base built on the surface of the moon, but without orbital protection, it became exceedingly risky to rely on it to weather the storm.

At this point, more and more of the native aliens "Look! The phasefighters and warships that previously withdrew from the main battlefield are altering course!"

The native aliens fought against human mechs many times. The former's ability to deduce the future and determined the best path forward discovered that This was a testament to how deadly it was to confront strange and bizarre enemies openly.

"The aliens have lost all semblance of courage. They are broken. This... this is amazing!"

The starbase continued to suffer from secondary explosions and partial collapses as the Dracoloids dug their way out into open space.

"The aliens should be finished this time!"