

Mech Touch 7031

Chapter 7031: Tech Bargaining Chips

"Hihihi! I've got you, lil bro!"

"Let go of me! It's not fair that you are older than me. I already have enough!"

"Nuh-uh. Let big sis give you a few more kisses. You've been such a good boy as of late."

"I hate you, Andraste!"

The kids were up to their usual antics again. Andraste wrestled Marvaine to the carpeted floor and began to put colorful-looking bunny ears on his head.

Aurelia meanwhile watched over her siblings as she sat on the nearby couch. Both Lucky and Clixie cuddled her body from the sides. The two cats lazily yawned and enjoyed this moment of bliss.

Their parents meanwhile spoke about much more weightier topics than they were ready to handle.

Ves sat next to his wife as he summarized his meetings with Hugo Fournier and Alexa Streon.

Just like him, Gloriana reacted with visible shock when she learned that the Cybernetic Empire had made such a massive investment in the development of living mechs and potentially other living technological creations.

The director of the Design Department fell silent for a time as she kept a loving eye on her children.

Much had happened in a short amount of time. Not even she could keep track of ongoing developments anymore.

However, she could not afford to remain blind to all of the geopolitical shifts that took place across the Red Ocean.

As a mother, she wanted nothing more than to build a society where her children could grow up in relative peace and not have to fear the specter of extinction.

Just like Gloriana herself, she wanted Aurelia, Andraste and Marvaine to grow up and become a part of a dominant human civilization that reigned supreme in the Red Ocean.

The current state of red humanity was still far from reaching this point. The reappearance of Bridgehead One may have put their race ahead, but the sudden emergence of the mutated voribugs put them in a tight spot again.

Red humanity was fracturing while at the same time its enemies had multiplied.

The only consolation was that the mutated voribugs did not consider the native aliens to be their friends.

Although the suspected territories taken over by the voribugs was relatively small, their explosive expansion combined with their rapid reproduction rates meant that they could easily become exponentially more powerful over time!

They just needed more time and star systems filled with high-quality resources.

The voribugs grown from generic materials and low-quality exotics were fairly easy to wipe out. They may possess the advantage of numbers, but did not possess the durability or attack power to pose a serious threat against more advanced human forces.

However, the voribugs possessed keen senses towards valuable materials. They drastically became stronger as they devoured mid to high-grade exotics as well as hypers. Any excess devoured by these voracious insects usually got transferred to hives where massive amounts of stronger voribugs got spawned in a matter of days!

Yes, days!

The reproduction rate of the voribugs was insane. It was as if their race had removed a biological limitation and completely turned into an evolving biological calamity.

If the voribugs kept invading human and alien space at this pace, a lot of theorists predicted that these powerful alien insects would only need up to half a year at most to reach critical mass and almost completely flatten all opposition in the Red Ocean!

At that point, the threat posed by the native aliens became irrelevant because they too would get drowned by endless tides of evolving voribugs!

The only star systems that would remain in non-voribug hands would be the ones that were permanently guarded by True God-level combatants.

There were way too few of them to safeguard large enough territories.

There was only one central star node that was as massive and energy-rich as Bridgehead One.

Other star systems were only worth a hundred as much or lower. If red humanity was reduced to a dozen or so star systems, then it would be nearly impossible to overcome the massive amounts of voribugs that proliferated throughout the entire dwarf galaxy!

It was due to the potential for the mutated voribugs to snowball at a rapid tempo that Ves considered them to be the most acute threat in the Red Ocean.

Perhaps the hidden trump cards and vast reserves of the native aliens still made them the most powerful enemies of red humanity, but their flaws were also vast and numerous.

The major races always had trouble mobilizing into a full war footing. So long as the native aliens remained complacent and unwilling to let down their guard against each other, they would always tie up a huge proportion of their population and military assets into keeping each other in check.

That might change soon once the native aliens woke up to the true horror of the mutated voribugs, but considering how the ancient phase whales were used to operating at an extremely placid pace, by the time they issued the necessary directives, the voribugs may have already overrun half of their territories!

Oh well. It was not the Larkinson Clan's responsibility to tackle this incredibly complicated and delicate situation.

The Larkinsons had become big enough to be placed on the map, but still lacked the strength to reshape it on a greater scale.

The clan needed to focus on what little it could do to help the rest of red humanity fight against the incoming threat.

"Do you think that the Cybernetic Empire reached to you and our clan because of your previous dealings with the Polymath or because we control the means to enter the Blue Dimension?" Gloriana asked.

"The latter is definitely the case." Ves answered without any doubt. "That is likely the reason why the Cybers opened up a dialogue with us so soon. They cannot afford to miss out on the next superdimensional mining bonanza. However, I think that the existence of the Living Machine Tower has turned me into a critically important mech designer to the Cybernetic Empire. I am the pioneer of living mechs and I am still ahead of the likes of Hugo and his peers. We share at least one common goal, and that is to turn living mechs into a permanent fixture of the mech industry and mech market."

The Living Machine Tower suffered from a massive handicap compared to the other Thirteen Towers due to the absence of support from the Red Kingdom.

While that probably made the LMT a lot purer and less prone to internal squabbles, it was difficult for its members to achieve anything of scale.

The fastest way to unlock the Living Machine Tower and enable it to recruit tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of mech designers was for Ves to realize his design philosophy!

When Ves realized this shared interest, he knew that he could potentially milk a lot of benefits from the Cybernetic Empire.

The Cybers would be happy to facilitate him if that meant that he could advance to the rank of Master Mech Designer sooner rather than later!

Gloriana began to realize this as well. "The Polymath clearly recognizes the value of living mechs and living warships. This is why there are Thirteen Towers instead of Twelve Towers. Everything you have described to me so far makes me think that it is a strategic imperative for them to cooperate with you. Even if they have managed to train enough living mech design specialists to get rid of their dependence on you, it is still much more efficient to let you take the lead."

Ves grinned. "That gives me leverage. I bet I can ask for a lot of interesting technologies in exchange for my assistance and cooperation. What do you think?"

"The Cybernetic Empire has technologies in abundance, so it should be open to such an exchange. That said, do not expect the Cybers to offer their most powerful and cutting-edge high technologies. We are not yet qualified to conduct such exchanges unless we are willing to trade our existing stock of high-grade superdimensional matter."

While the Cybers definitely stockpiled a lot of advanced technologies, trading them away once pretty much meant that it would be difficult to repeat the same trade in the future.

Technology theft was far too prevalent in human society. If one group managed to acquire a set of trade secrets, then other groups would eventually learn them as well.

Unless there were special limitations such as controlling the supply of Destroyer particles or making it difficult for an individual to master the relevant knowledge, other parties would soon make use of their own local variants of the same tech!

All of this meant that the Cybernetic Empire only possessed a limited warchest.

Perhaps the Polymath and the Thirteen Towers were constantly working to develop new innovations, especially after learning about the importance of superdimensional matter.

This would give them more chips to trade with other parties, but even then, the Cybernetic Empire could quickly give away all of its tech if it did not control the expenditures of the new stun grenades.

Ves could not ask for hundreds of technological secrets. He also knew he could not ask for knowledge about the truly grand and impressive stuff.

"I think we should draft a wish list of what kind of tech we want to add to our clan." He said. "The tech should be revolutionary enough to promise a lot of power, but not strong enough to demand far too much in return."

This was not an easy balance to maintain, but Ves was sure that people could manage to work with these limitations.

"What is at the top of your list?" Ves asked.

"Do you even need to ask? Archetech is at the top of my mind. There should be enough scientists in the Cybernetic Empire that have conducted a deep study on it. It is extremely helpful for my own progression if I can access their notes or better yet receive private tutoring from those alien tech experts."

"Hm, that makes sense, but I am not too certain whether the Cybers have committed enough in advancing red humanity's understanding of archetech. I guess there is no harm in asking. What else do you want to know, Gloriana?"

His wife furrowed her brows. "I am not too sure, to be honest. It is difficult to ask when we do not have a clear understanding of their technological strengths. The warfleets that passed through the Translocation Gates should be close to reaching the frontlines, is that correct?"

Ves nodded. "Everyone expects the first live feeds of their combat performances to start in a couple of days."

"Then we will wait to fill up our wishlist until we have personally seen the new and technologically advanced mechs and warships in actual battle. No matter whether it is

the native aliens or the voribugs, neither groups have any reasons to be lenient towards the armed forces of the newest human power."

The Cybernetic Empire made a strong impression upon its debut and had never retreated from this policy since.

However, this behavior also attracted a lot of criticism. There were too many individuals and groups that openly questioned whether the Cybernetic Empire was worth all of the hype.

This made it inevitable for the Cybers to show off their strength this time. The time for subtly was over.

"Regardless of what sort of tech the Cybers will debut in the coming battles, I doubt that they will have shown their full capabilities." Ves analyzed. "They just need to show off enough tech to handedly win their battle, but not so much that they would attract all sorts of tech-hungry bandits. They need to do so against two completely different opponents, neither of which are pushovers by our standards. This is an interesting conundrum. I have a strong feeling that the Cybers will surprise us with uncommonly effective solutions."

All of red humanity wanted to see how far the Cybers had come when it came to advancing their high technologies.

Offense, defense, mobility, utility.

People expected for the Cyber mechs to score better in all of those categories!

Chapter 7032: The Most Urgent Technological Demand

The countdowns had begun. Many people tracked the progress of the three warfleets and eagerly waited for the Cybernetic Empire to show off its technological prowess.

As for Ves and Gloriana, they spent their time devising a general wish list of CE tech that they would like to exchange from the new human superpower.

Even if they did not understand the full extent of CE tech, they could still look at their own works and understand their own shortcomings.

For example, the most recent Battle of Screed Tanner VI-F exposed a few shortcomings related to the mechs that fought in the field.

"The Omega Threshers and the First Sword Mark III both fought well, but my issue with them is that their performance could not be sustained for a long duration." Gloriana mentioned it to her husband when he visited her design lab.

She waved her hand and activated a projected screen that showed a few graphs.

Ves studied them carefully. The curves corresponded to the activity levels of the First Sword Mark III and two different groups of Omega Threshers.

In both cases, the First Sword Mark III and the Omega Threshers that took to the field started out strong, but gradually became more restrained as their energy reserves drastically dwindled.

Even though their first-class energy cells should have supplied them with plenty of energy, their flight systems, weapon systems and energy shields imposed heavy demands!

Nothing came for free. The Electro-Reactant Flight System bestowed the First Sword Mark III with mobility that came a lot closer to reaching the standards of a light mech than other products, but wasted a huge amount of energy when used at full power.

Most of the time, Saint Dise actually could not make full use of the power of this potent but relatively inefficient flight system!

The longer a battle dragged on, the more she rationed the full use of it for fear of draining her machine too soon.

It also did not help that her earlier abuse of the transphasic flight system had damaged its internal components, but that was a story for another day.

"Actually, Ketis had the option of designing a non-sword fey version of the First Sword Mark III." Ves mentioned. "The original proposal for the ace swordsman mech

would have kept everything simple in order to strengthen its basic foundation to the extreme. I distinctly remember that it incorporated much more dense energy cells that were especially developed by an RA Master Mech Designer that specializes in this field. Unfortunately, when we opted to proceed with the sword fey version, we needed to make a sacrifice in order to make room for other relevant specializations."

Gloriana nodded. "I understand. Without the help of that Master, you could only make do with energy cells that are more common and easy to obtain through the Red Association's internal market. That has led to the unfortunate result that the First Sword Mark III is constantly staving off hunger while she is engaged in battle, as can be seen on this activity graph."

"The Omega Threshers are doing pretty badly as well." Ves noted. "There is a clear difference between the original Omega Threshers who fought in the field and the modified Omega Threshers that linked themselves to the power systems of our warships. The former had to lower their firing rates and exercise more trigger discipline while the latter could keep pulling the trigger without any concerns about overheating or running out of energy."

In other words, the bunker mechs pretty much showed the most ideal state for an Omega Thresher.

The first-class multipurpose mechs armed with numerous potent Omega Laser Cannons would love to fire those devastating energy weapons as often as their cooldown cycles allowed!

Yet because of the limitations of their self-contained energy reserves, the Omega Threshers that fought in the field had to fight with greater restraint, especially if they were under attack.

Their shield links did not help matters either as its usage significantly increased their overall energy consumption in order to keep them active and restore the depletion of the energy shields.

The energy links did not actually alleviate their condition all too much because each of the mechs needed the energy themselves.

The Saint Commander chose to deploy the Omega Threshers forward and out of energy link distance from the Premier Fleet and Bluejay Fleet.

This strategy prevented the native aliens from easily targeting the much more precious human carriers and warships, but it also left the Omega Threshers without the means to easily recharge their energy reserves while they remained in the field.

Although the Premier Branch only considered the Omega Threshers to be a stopgap solution, it would eventually move on to fielding their own living version of a first-class mech that was strong in mid-range combat.

Given that the Cybernetic Empire happened to invest a lot of focus in the development of energy weapons, if the next mechs of the Larkinson Clan incorporated offensive CE tech, then they would also need the energy reserves to sustain the higher damage output.

"Do you think the Cybers have developed superior energy cells?" Ves asked.

"Most definitely." His wife responded. "Think about it, Ves. Bridgehead One has so many Dyson spheres and swarms that the Cybers are collecting more energy than they know what to do with it. The demand to store it as effectively as possible is high, so they most definitely focused on developing much better energy cells in order to more effectively power all of their energy-hungry tech."

The environment shaped the tech. During the Time of Isolation, Bridgehead One was abundant in energy, but short on materials. The Cybers had to find creative and inventive ways to get more work out of less resources.

Ves knew without asking Hugo that the Cybers must have developed superior energy storage tech in order to increase their efficiency. Perhaps the Polymath herself had devoted a significant amount of time to this research! These projects were worth her attention!

He quickly began to imagine how much stronger the mechs of his clan would be if they had better batteries.

They would last longer, be able to sustain their potent damage output and would not have to go back and resupply at their motherships so often.

High-performing mechs such as the First Sword Mark III would become even more restrained. Saint Dis no longer had to metaphorically tie one of her arms behind her back because fighting at her full power would rapidly drain the energy reserves of her ace mech.

There were many other applications of much more effective energy cells. From stronger infantry wargear to longer-lasting stealth shuttles, many aspects of the Larkinson Clan would become stronger if it made use of CE tech energy cells!

"You are completely right about this, Gloriana." He said with a serious expression. "This should be our highest priority request. Its importance exceeds that of superior flight systems, energy shields, shield-breaking weapons and etc. The applications of superior energy cells are too numerous. Every mech can benefit from any improvements in this area. It would be great if the Cybers have also developed superior second-class energy cells. The expeditionary fleet can also benefit greatly from fielding mechs with stronger battery lives."

Even if this crucial CE tech would not remain exclusive to the Cybernetic Empire for long, it would still benefit the Larkinsons if they directly obtained it from the source.

After all, compared to trying to learn this tech through leaks was much less reliable than obtaining full technical documents, working examples of the tech and direct tutoring from the relevant experts of the Cybernetic Empire.

Ves had long grown dissatisfied with the energy constraints of not just the First Sword Mark III, but all other ace mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

The only ace mech with acceptable energy endurance was the Minerva Mark II, but that was mainly because the ace command mech was not armed with exaggeratingly powerful flight systems or energy weapons.

Even so, superior energy cells greatly affected her overall combat performance because other mechs served as her weapons!

The longer mechs such as the Omega Thresher lasted in the field, the more freely Casella Ingvar could use them to pummel their enemies.

The Dark Zephyr Mark III did not possess too many energy sinks either, but the ace skirmisher mech also had much less capacity to accommodate energy cells.

This meant that Saint Tusa frequently had to show restraint and curb the speed and maneuverability of his ace mech for fear of running out of juice in the middle of the battlefield.

In fact, the Dark Zephyr Mark III was due for a minor upgrade.

Ever since his last upgrade, the Larkinsons gained access to better tech and materials.

Gloriana had already started to prepare for the much-anticipated superdimensional conversion of the Dark Zephyr Mark III.

Unfortunately, her work was greatly hindered by the inability to combine superdimensional tech with archetech.

This was why she decided to voice her second request.

"I need help in devising a solution to stably integrate superdimensional alloys in archetech." She said. "Before you say anything, I know that the Cybernetic Empire likely does not have any prior exposure to superdimensional matter, so how could they possibly know how to combine a new technological field with an obscure alien tech base? However, I have much more faith in the ability of the CE to solve this significant technological challenge than the RA and RF."

"Why do you think so, honey?"

"Motivation." Gloriana stated the key point. "The RA and the RF are not that interested in archetech. They recognize the benefits of this alien tech, but it is exactly because it is weird and difficult to learn that they think that the costs outweigh the benefits. Even if they have assigned a number of researchers to the problem that I have mentioned, their abilities are not too great and they are not receiving much support from their superiors."

"And you think it will be different for the CE?"

Gloriana nodded with a grin. "The RA and the RF already have access to superdimensional matter. The CE does not. Before the opening of the third portal to the Blue Dimension, the Cybers must be desperate to acquire any scrap of high-grade superdimensional matter. We merely need to offer modest quantities of armor and weapon-grade superdimensional matter to incentivize the Cybers to put their formidable R&D capabilities to use on this problem. I bet that if we offer as much high-grade superdimensional matter to construct a full superdimensional mech, we can even convince the Polymath to use her precious time to solve this problem on our behalf!"

That sounded outrageous!

"Do you know how much value you are giving away with such a trade?!"

"I know very well, Ves." Gloriana seriously said. "Giving away this much high-grade superdimensional matter will mean that one Larkinson expert mech or ace mech will not undergo superdimensional conversion in the short term. However, I will still try to persuade the Saint Commander to negotiate this deal. Archetech is too important to our clan. All of the high-ranking mechs of the latest generation are archemechs."

"That is not exactly correct."

She conceded the point. "The only notable exception to this rule is the First Sword Mark III, but she will suffer for this shortcoming in the future. If we leave out the absurd durability and damage resistance of her superdimensional armor system, her ability to tolerate damage in depth is inferior to that of the Dark Zephyr Mark III. If we want to raise the survival rates of our high-ranking mech pilots, then we need to be able to offer the best possible protection for their machines."

Ves furrowed his brows. He did not object to the assertion that archetech had become an indispensable advantage to the Larkinson Clan, but he did not agree with her terrible trade proposal.

There had to be a better way for her to get what she wanted!

He suddenly recalled that he had his own ways of gaining the cooperation of a Star Designer.

"Wait, Gloriana. Before you go off to the new matriarch in order to share your proposal with her, hear me out for a minute. You just need the help of a Star Designer to solve a difficult technological problem in a short amount of time, right?"

"That is correct." She confirmed. "Only a Star Designer can solve this problem quickly and perfectly."

"Does it have to be the Polymath? Why don't we try and approach one of the other Star Designers?"

"..."

Chapter 7033: High-Level Technological Assistance

Gloriana shook her head in disappointment.

"If you still have two opportunities to ask for a minor favor from a Star Designer, we could have used them earlier and persuaded Ketis to turn the First Sword Mark III into an archemeh. Resources are meant to be used, Ves. I thought you understood that considering that you have been making a lot more decisions as of late that prioritized our short-term interests over our long-term ones."

Ves shook his head. "That may be true, but that doesn't mean we should use up everything right away. Ketis has more reasons to object to your inclusion in her mech design project. Besides, it is a bad habit to run to a Star Designer in order to solve our most challenging problems. It may take two years for you and your research associates to figure out how to combine archetech with superdimensional tech, but the lessons and insights you will learn on the way will expand and enrich your problem-solving skills. That is incredibly valuable to your long-term development as a mech designer."

"We cannot wait that long." His wife said with a scowl. "I am aware that we are currently designing the Riot Mark III with an archemetal interior that is clad with a superdimensional alloy armor system, but this is not a genuine solution in my eyes. Out of all of our current and future high-ranking mechs, the Riot Mark III is most prone to enduring heavy damage during combat. The absence of superdimensional reinforcement in the internals will cause the machine to collapse too easily once he has suffered a single armor breach."

She admittedly raised a good point. Ves did not think this solution was perfect either, but it was the best they could come up with given their current limitations.

Just as with the First Sword Mark III, Ves hoped that the Riot Mark III would be able to rely on her energy defenses and superdimensional shell to prevent incoming attacks from penetrating any deeper.

However, as soon as a greater phase lord armed with a Saint Piercer or another dangerous superdimensional weapon managed to punch through all of these tough shells, the internals would not fare well as their ability to cope with damage fell far behind!

Granted, this was nothing special. Pretty much every other mech including high-ranking ones possessed this common weakness.

The issue was that the Red War and the new war against the mutated voribugs drastically increased the number of deployments of any frontline military force.

These days, many mechs fought in more battles in a month than they had in decades in the past!

The heightened frequency of combat encounters combined with fatigue and inadequate repairs drastically increased the probability of mechs suffering an armor breach.

This was also the instance where these machines were most prone to falling in battle. Their survival rates were much better if they were still relatively fresh.

In short, strengthening the internals of a mech drastically increased its fault tolerance and longevity, especially during wartime.

The downsides of difficult and more costly maintenance was trivial so long as archetech was only reserved for the expert mechs and ace mechs of the Larkinson Clan.

Right now, superdimensional technology was on the rise, and the Larkinson Clan happened to sit in the front-row seats of this powerful new trend.

Not even the rise of the Cybernetic Empire could overshadow the brilliance of superdimensional matter.

The new superpower may have developed clever ways to get more out of their existing materials, but so long as the latter remained constant, there was only so much they could do to raise their strength.

Superdimensional matter was new and still underdeveloped. It had amazing potential that was just waiting to be tapped by anyone who was smart and capable enough to exploit its multi-dimensional traits.

All of this meant that the Larkinson Clan could not afford to miss out on this promising development.

That was bad news for Gloriana who already committed heavily to archetech. She not only sunk years of her time into developing this exotic alien specialization, but also shifted her design philosophy around archemechs.

She had even discovered an opportunity to becoming a Master Mech Designer through her new specialization. So long as she advanced her understanding of archetech so much that she could reinvent it into a tech base that got rid of its alien weirdness and converted it into a version that was more compatible with human technology, then she believed that her breakthrough was just around the corner!

Ves briefly narrowed his eyes.

If he wanted to sabotage his wife's progress and make sure she continued to experience delays and setbacks in her difficult research, then he should resolutely refuse to use up his remaining favors to her benefit.

After all, these were the favors that the Red Association extended to Ves for his massive contributions to red humanity.

If Gloriana wanted to enlist the aid of a Star Designer, then she should figure out how to help red humanity become stronger in her own way.

Why should Ves use his own precious reward to facilitate her progress?

If he helped her with this problem, then the probability that she could become a Master Mech Designer before Ves rose drastically!

However... there was more at stake than Ves' own selfishness and ego.

The Riot Mark III Project, the Lionheart Mark II Project, the Promethea Mark II Project and the future refit of the Dark Zephyr Mark III all depended on whether Gloriana could combine superdimensional tech with archetech.

Without a practical enough fusion between the two techs, the Larkinsons would remain stuck in an awkward position where they were forced to resort to inferior means and solutions for an uncomfortably long time.

This was also the wrong time to hold back on this front. The wars against the native aliens and the mutated voribugs would only grow more heated over time.

Even if it looked as if the native aliens had no good answers to the more basic forms of superdimensional mechs at this time, Ves did not expect that to remain this way.

The Larkinsons needed to accrue as many advantages as possible before conditions deteriorated even further.

Ves had a vested interest in making all of the high-ranking mechs of the Larkinson Clan stronger and more survivable.

If he could use up one of his remaining favors to help Gloriana solve this critical technical problem, then that would leave him and the clan with more room to demand other concessions from the Cybernetic Empire.

"Perhaps your proposal is feasible." Ves eventually concluded. "The likelihood that the Polymath and the Cybernetic Empire have conducted extensive studies on archetech is too low. We may as well turn to the leaders of the RA for help. Which Star Designer do you think we should approach for this problem? The Resonance Smith is the strongest materials scientist in the Red Ocean, but the Xenotechnician excels at exploiting and reverse engineering alien technologies. Perhaps I can use both of my

favors at once in order to get them to work together, but I have a feeling that is overkill."

It would also be an excessive waste of a precious favor. If he could get what he wanted with one favor, then it would be stupid if he expended two of them at once.

His wife frowned at the mention of the two Star Designers.

"Both of them are... men." She spoke with a hint of distaste.

"So?"

"Female Star Designers are underrepresented in the Red Ocean. Out of the 14 known Star Designers, only 6 of them are women."

Ves adopted a weird expression. "What does that have to do with the subject at hand? I am not going to approach the Web Mistress or the Leyline Seer to request their help on a problem that other Star Designers are clearly better qualified to address."

That sounded as stupid as approaching the fleeters for advice on mechs.

His wife was smart enough to know that as well, but her stubbornness prevented her from making the obvious conclusion.

Fortunately, she was not in charge.

"This is my favor that I am using up, so I will be making the arrangements." He told her. "Resonance Smith or Xenotechnician, which one do you prefer? The former is more likely to possess an in-depth understanding of superdimensional matter, and should offer more advanced solutions to transform it into more usable alloys. The other should be able to figure out how to expand the scope of archetech to incorporate superdimensionality, though this may be a bit too much for a single favor."

Gloriana scowled but did not argue the point any further. Being told to choose between the two male Star Designers was like trying to choose between two unpalatable meals.

"If I am forced to choose between the lesser of two evils, then I think it is better to solicit the help of the Resonance Smith. I admit that Xenotechnician may be able to alter archetech to accommodate this new tech, but... I do not want him to solve this problem. I want to do it myself. The solution offered by the Resonance Smith may be inferior compared to the alternative, but it is not a heavy request, nor one that promises to solve all of our problems at once. There is enough room for improvement on our end."

That was a thoughtful response. Ves thought about it and felt it made a lot of sense.

Gloriana just wanted to solve the immediate short-term problem that prevented superdimensional materials from blending in with archemetal.

The most superficial and basic solution would do. She did not want a Star Designer to solve the problem as completely and comprehensively as possible. That would turn into a form of overreliance that could ruin her ambitious breakthrough plan.

"I agree with your reasoning." Ves said in an approving tone. "Our proposal to the Resonance Smith shouldn't take up too much of his time. In contrast, if we ask the Xenotechnician to expand the possibilities of archetech, he may need to work on it for multiple days if not weeks. That is not a good use of a Star Designer's time. I am sure that his time is better spent on more important projects."

He approved of her decision for more than one reason. Ves had already contacted the Xenotechnician in the past, and his impression was not entirely positive.

For all of the accomplishments made by this old Star Designer, the Xenotechnician came across as weird and even alien at times.

People also suspected the Xenotechnician for maintaining an ambiguous relationship with the Cosmopolitan Movement.

It was only because no one could prove this relationship existed that the Xenotechnician could escape blame, at least in the open.

Despite his apparent innocence, Ves would prefer it if he did not deal with this particular Star Designer.

Most of the cosmopolitan cells would love nothing more than to claim Ves' head and earn a rich bounty from the Red Cabal!

Ves also had other reasons to seek out an audience from the Resonance Smith.

If he was able to speak with him in person, Ves may be able to bring up a few other interesting problems. A simple guiding answer from the Star Designer could help a lot.

"The Resonance Smith it is, then." Ves said and smiled. "I will contact Jovy shortly afterwards and let him make the necessary arrangements. Hopefully, the Resonance Smith will be able to talk within the week."

Now that Ves thought about using up one of his two remaining favors, he began to think about what he could do with the other one.

After all, it was better to use it up now than later. There were many more problems that could be solved by the RA as opposed to the Cybernetic Empire.

Both superorganizations excelled in different areas.

The RA definitely accumulated a lot more expertise in hyper technology and superdimensional technology.

The Cybernetic Empire most probably built up a formidable lead in almost every other field of conventional technology.

This should guide his decision on what he should use his last favor on. The Red Association may have fallen behind in most technological disciplines, but it was not a pushover, especially when it still retained the services of 9 Star Designers, each of which excelled in different areas!

Chapter 7034: The Uncertain Future of the Red Association

After his talk with Gloriana, Ves immediately acted upon his decision and informed Jovy that he wanted to cash in one of his favors.

"Are you sure about this, Ves?" The Reality Trickster asked. "This is your favor, but it will end up benefiting your wife more than you. The advice and guidance from a Star Designer is a rare and highly coveted privilege. Many mech designers would literally kill their own parents if they could obtain such a reward. The right guidance from one of the best mech designers in existence could lead them away from dead ends and help them overcome their bottlenecks. There are many documented instances of mech designers experiencing a renaissance in their careers after holding a brief but insightful talk with a Star Designer."

Jovy did not exaggerate in his description. Star Designers had reached an unfathomable level when it came to mech design, scientific research and practical engineering. They were for all intents and purposes the gods of the mech designer profession.

Mortal mech designers — including most Seniors and Masters — were so much further behind that they could always gain useful pointers from a simple talk.

However, Ves had already made up his mind on the matter. His wife clearly needed assistance more than him. The continued inability to combine archtech with superdimensional technology was also holding back the development of all Larkinson high-ranking mechs.

"I have already considered all of the arguments." He said. "You do not need to dissuade me from making this choice. Just arrange a virtual meeting if possible, okay? I am not opposed to meeting the Resonance Smith in person, but I think we can save ourselves a lot of time if we keep it virtual. I can talk to him on the Tarrasque if the connection needs to be highly secure."

"I shall make sure to mention this request. Do note that every Star Designer has their own individual quirks and preferences. Some insist on holding meetings with others in person. Others are more tolerant to holding sensitive talks over the galactic net. From what I know, the Resonance Smith is rather mistrustful of the galactic net, but he is also one of the most open-minded Star Designers. He has to be in order to become a leader of the Unbound Humanity Faction."

The mention of that faction caused Ves to chuckle. "I guess what is unfolding across human space is a dream come true to him. Red humanity is becoming increasingly less bound by the overly restrictive rules imposed by the mechers and the fleeters. The Cybernetic Empire has explicitly rejected the rule of the Red Three and has amassed

over 10,000 warships despite the restrictions set by the RF Warship Quota Program. The examples set by the Terran Alliance, the Rubarthan Pact and most notably the Cybernetic Empire will encourage other states to take back their sovereignty, exactly as the Unbound Humanity Faction has aspired."

Jovy's expression worsened. Most mechers were opposed to the extreme ideology of the Unbounders. Only the members of the Dissolution Faction were worse within the Association!

Currently, life had become awkward for Survivalists such as Jovy. One of their great leaders had left the Red Association in order to start her own empire.

That was already bad enough, but it became worse when she actively worked to undermine her old organization!

Fortunately, the Survivalist Faction could still count on the support of the Fist of Defiance and the Xenotechnician. Their prestige was no less than the Polymath and was more than enough to keep the faction under control.

That did not stop mechers and particularly the Survivalists from wondering whether the Unbounders had a good point.

Were most mechers wrong about the need to keep the space peasants under their thumb? Was it truly better to give people the rights that had been withheld for centuries?

Such debates became more and more frequent within the halls of the Red Association.

This was also why Jovy did not dare to issue any strongly worded statements about this contentious matter.

"Once you or your wife has met with the Resonance Smith, you only have a single favor left. Have you decided how to use this remaining benefit, or do you prefer to keep it in reserve?"

"I have thought about that, but our need for technical support is too great." Ves responded. "I am plagued by a number of troublesome problems. None of them are as

acute as the issue with archetech, but I can still gain a lot if I can obtain the advance of a Star Designer."

"Which esteemed Star Designer would you like to meet?"

Ves spent a bit of time on filling Jovy in on his plan. The choice of tech that he wanted to improve in the short term dictated the choice of Star Designer.

Jovy listened and eventually smiled. "I am optimistic about your proposal and choices. A Star Designer does not wish to be troubled by trivial matters. Your ideas are worth considering at the highest level. I will attempt to arrange another meeting. How urgent is this business of yours?"

"Not that much, to be honest." Ves admitted. "Gloriana's case is more urgent. Any delays on her part will significantly impact our clan. My demands are not that urgent, so I do not mind if my turn comes later."

"That is good to know. This will make it much easier to arrange a meeting, either virtual or in the flesh."

They spent a few more minutes talking about the necessary rules and precautions when it came to speaking with a Star Designer.

"Every Star Designer bears a great burden." Jovy mentioned. "Aside from the Polymath, each of them is short on time. They have an excellent capacity to invent new technologies, refine existing ones and produce great works as long as they have abundant access to resources. However, doing any of that takes time. Star Designers do not look kindly on people who waste their time."

"I know. I can promise you that my ideas will not be wasteful to anyone."

Now that Ves had concluded the most important business, he relaxed his posture and began to explore Jovy's views on other matters.

"The Red Association has suffered a lot of blows as of late. Aside from strengthening your control over the Red Ocean Union, have you guys done anything to reverse the decline?"

Jovy sighed. He did not bother to hide his weakness in front of a close friend like Ves.

"We have indeed fallen into a pessimistic situation. We do not have the luxury to think about reversing the decline when we should still focus on stopping the bleeding. We do have a number of ambitious plans in the works, but none of them are close to completion. I think we must still monitor the Cybernetic Empire and the first-rate colonial superstates further before we can formulate a proper strategy."

"Are you guys hoping to restore the Red Association and the Red Fleet to their positions as hegemons of red humanity?"

This was an important question. Jovy sighed again.

"I do not think it is appropriate for the Red Association to govern human territories like the Mech Trade Association had done during the Age of Mechs. I am personally of the opinion that red humanity is ready to undertake greater responsibilities. While I do not necessarily agree with the Unbounders, now that multiple states have begun to claw back their rights, it is impossible to bring them back to the old status quo."

"Are you saying... that you don't want to go back to the good old days of the Big Two?"

"Not... precisely." Jovy said with a frown. "The Age of Dawn is not the Age of Mechs. Those that try too hard to make it this way will only see themselves crash into a titan shield. Our Association needs to adapt with the times. During the previous age, we provided security, stability and restraint to a traumatized race. These days, humans do not want to remain coddled. They want to grow up and undertake more mature responsibilities. They want to cast off the taboos that we have set for them in favor of making their own rules."

"That sounds a lot like children growing up to the point where they are ready to leave their parents and live by themselves." Ves remarked.

"That is a good metaphor, I suppose. It does not entirely apply to this situation as many states used to be old and powerful star nations or star empires. The Big Two had forced them all to regress into their immature states. Now that we have entered a new

age, those that have always resented our control over them seek to shed our patronizing treatment of them and regain full control over their own destiny."

"Do you approve?"

"...Perhaps. It is not a simple matter, Ves. I admire the Terrans, the Rubarthans and even the Cybers for having the guts to maintain separation from the superorganization that has the greatest number of god pilots and Star Designers at its disposal. Then I began to think about the future of the Red Association."

"What did you come up with, Jovy?"

"Faultlines within the Association have grown worse. I can no longer contact a number of my old classmates, and relations between the factions are continuing to deteriorate. The intelligence debacles related to the Red Split and the unveiling of the Cybernetic Empire has put too many people on edge, both ours and that of the people. The Polymath has also proven that it is possible to effectively leave the Red Association and build your own little empire. Her success will embolden many other individuals, though not all of them are bona fide freedom warriors."

Ves instantly thought of a god pilot who had always been out of whack with the rest of his exalted kind.

"The Huntsman has become increasingly more estranged with the Red Association, right? Are you afraid that he will soon be next?"

Jovy simply nodded. "That is correct. It is no secret that the Huntsman is devoting much more attention to the development of his Hunting Association. He only needs to cease his ambiguous stance and make his preferences clear in order to clarify his new status as a leader of a powerful association."

What he left unsaid was that the departure of the Huntsman may spark a trend among the remaining god pilots and Star Designers.

If they all began to declare independence and rule over different fiefs, then red humanity's would continue to splinter in a time where unity was needed the most!

Just as Jovy was about to elaborate his concerns, both of them suddenly paused as they received emergency notifications.

"It's time." Ves whispered.

"It is." Jovy confirmed. "The warfleets of the Cybernetic Empire are finally ready to showcase their power."

The warfleets had reached their target destinations and had waited long enough to be able to strike at the same time!

In two different star systems, two formidable warfleets stood ready to challenge the armed forces of the native aliens!

In another star system, another CE warfleet was just about to reinforce a planet that had been losing a battle of attrition against the mutated voribugs!

None of the enemies targeted by the CE were easy to deal with. The native alien forces were all led by formidable phase lords while the mutated voribugs could drown the CE forces with overwhelming numbers.

Yet the Cybers did not try to avoid these challenges. They could have targeted weaker opponents, but in order to make a statement, they deliberately picked adversaries that would have inflicted significant losses to the elite armed forces of the Rubarthan Pact.

"Why are they starting up a fight at the same time?" Ves asked with a frustrated voice. "Don't they know this makes it harder for viewers to keep track of everything during a live broadcast?"

Setting aside this annoyance, Ves at least appreciated the detailed and high-quality view. The quality was far better than the perspectives of typical battle footage.

Chapter 7035 - 76th Dominators Warfleet

Three live streams started at the same time.

A huge amount of people tuned into at least one of the broadcasts.

Those who grew obsessed with the Cybernetic Empire's strength and technological lead even tried to view all three broadcasts at the same time!

Nobody could talk about anything else on that day. Everyone who did not have urgent work duties to attend to all gathered around and began to exchange their views on how extensively the three CE warfleets would dominate the battlefield.

Betting platforms pounced on the opportunity. They allowed their customers to place many wagers on the outcomes of the upcoming battles.

"I think the warfleets will crush the native aliens. They are 50 years ahead. That has to count for a lot. I don't think the Cybers will do that well when fighting against the mutated voribugs. They are too different from other enemies. The bugs don't even make use of energy shields as far as I know."

"Oh, come on. The voribugs only know how to throw endless bodies at their enemies. This is not the first time our race has fought against those kinds of enemies. We crushed dozens of these swarm-based races back in the Milky Way during the Age of Conquest. We developed specialized methods to exterminate them at the time. The Cybernetic Empire should easily be able to dig up the old manuals and make the appropriate preparations."

"The mutated voribugs are different from other swarm races. There is not only proof that they are directed by a greater intelligence, but they are continuing to evolve. What works today might not necessarily work tomorrow."

"Pff, they are just bugs. No matter how much they adapt, they can catch up to the Polymath's powerful war weapons."

Debates continued to rage across human-occupied space. Many people grew fascinated by the mystique of the Cybernetic Empire.

In the days since the return of Bridgehead One, the Cybers had constantly been teasing everyone about the strength of their warfleets.

Today, it was finally time for them to prove that their strength matched their boasts.

As the warfleets approached their respective adversaries, Ves had reunited with his wife and his children back in their grand stateroom on the Tortuous Scream.

They all settled down on the couches and decided to observe one engagement at a time.

If Ves wanted to, he could watch all three live feeds at the same time and still remain fairly confident that he would be able to keep track of significant developments.

However, not everyone was comfortable with collecting information in this matter. They wanted to enjoy the battles in the simplest and most straightforward way possible.

This was why Ves decided to view the battles in sequence. He did not put too much value in the live viewing experience. It was not as if he could change anything considering the battles took place many light-years away.

"Which live feed do you want to watch first?" Ves asked his family. "According to the information provided by the Cybernetic Empire, the forces on display consist of the 24th 'Gamma Scorchers' Warfleet, the 27th 'Assimilators' Warfleet and the 76th 'Dominators' Warfleet."

"Their nicknames are not chosen at random." Gloriana noted and gestured towards the three live feeds that were currently projected in the center of the main living room. "The Gamma Scorchers are clearly completely reliant on energy weapons as their damage source. The mechs and warships of the Assimilators are all made out of smart metal. The Dominators on the other hand look more conventional, though they clearly have a strong preference towards big guns."

Due to the high detail and availability of multiple different recording angles, it was easy for mech designers such as Ves and Gloriana to incorporate their work into the overall setting.

They only needed to study the individual feeds one by one to gain an overall understanding of the strong points of every fleet.

Compared to most red humans, Ves possessed additional information that could explain why these warfleets possessed such radically different technological paradigms.

The 24th Gamma Scorchers clearly enjoyed the backing of the Energy Weapon Tower.

The 27th Assimilators could not have grown up to this point without the aid of the Smart Metal Tower.

The 76th Dominators obtained all of their advanced big guns from the Heavy Ordnance Tower.

Ves was unable to determine whether one of the other Thirteen Towers had intervened in the formation of these specific fleets.

It didn't matter too much. The names reflected their essence.

"I want to watch the Dominators!" Andraste already voiced her preference. "With a name like that, these mechs must be able to kick the alien butts and teach them a lesson that they will never forget!"

"The 76th fleet doesn't appear too impressive." Gloriana gently pushed back. "The only notable traits is that their gun ports and gun batteries are bigger. I do not expect them to introduce any revolutionary new tech."

"Perhaps that makes the Dominators a good choice to start with." Ves voiced his own opinion. "I don't want to end this viewing session on a disappointing note. By picking the least interesting looking one in front, we can get it over with and simultaneously move on to watching the other battles."

His wife pressed her lips. She contemplated his argument and decided it had enough merit.

"Fine. The other two warfleets will hopefully delight us with revolutionary new tech that only the Polymath can invent."

As Ves and Gloriana continued to analyze the tech utilized by the 76th Warfleet and tried to estimate the firepower of every mech and warship in view.

Soon enough, the mechs on reconnaissance were about to collide with the enemy fighter screen.

The Dominators did not hide their approach. Their warfleet possessed a greater proportion of capital ships than the other ones.

"Interesting." Gloriana spoke as she paid close attention to the types of mechs fielded by this warfleet. "The warships and most notably the capital ships are clearly the golden boys of this fleet. The mechs are only present as screening elements. Their configurations are largely focused on scouting, ECM and intercepting enemy small craft."

"That sounds... boring." Andraste complained. "I changed my mind. I hate the Dominators. Mechs can do more than fight the enemy small fry."

"Let's not dismiss the Dominators too soon." Ves warned his daughter. "The mechs are about to engage the phasefighters."

The Cybers prepared for this moment. They clearly did not want to reveal too many details, so they only fielded a single mech model, a first-class multipurpose mech that wielded a distinctly large shotgun.

On the surface, these mechs exhibited good performance. Their armor looked thick enough to resist a couple of mean hits. Their azure energy shields looked unusual and a lot more refined than what everyone else was making use of. Their mobility was considerably greater as well.

This alone should give these striker mechs a good advantage against the opposing phasefighters.

The only downside was that the enemy phasefighters outnumbered the first-class multipurpose mechs by more than 3 to 1!

Even though the Larkinsons had recently faced worse odds, the difference was that the Larkinsons enjoyed the protection of two ace mechs, but the 76th Dominators had none!

In fact, Ves did not spot any expert mech or ace mech at all. Perhaps the Cybers were holding them back for later, but he had a good feeling that the Cybernetic Empire was unable to produce them for reasons that Ves could not fathom.

The forward elements of both forces began to clash.

The phasefighters struck the first blow by launching transphasic missiles at long range.

Each of them carried a notable amount of missiles, and their pilots or their field commander evidently chose to launch them right away!

Whether this was the right decision or not became pretty clear when the CE mechs responded in unison.

First, they formed active shield links with each other.

Ves could not tell whether the Cybers had improved shield link tech, but it appeared they did not introduce anything groundbreaking.

That, or they were deliberately limiting the performance of their shield links in order to appear weaker on this front.

Whatever the case, the active shield links provided plenty of assurance to the outnumbered first-class multipurpose mechs.

As the potent transphasic missiles were able to strike their targets, the mechs quickly responded by lifting their shotguns and firing them in the right direction!

Thousands of explosions lit up the darkness of space!

The power and penetration of those small missiles were so good that even first-class mechs would get worse off if they came close enough.

Yet the shotguns launched small pellets that spread out just enough to intercept every enemy missile.

The phasefighter pilots must have felt surprised at how easily the humans repelled this attack, but they still committed to launching attack runs.

Yet when the alien strike craft attempted to grind the mechs to death, the CE mechs simply tried to keep up with the phasefighters before using their shotguns to spray flechettes in their general directions.

The mechs shouldn't have been able to land every shot. The enemy phasefighter pilots had grown accustomed to fighting against human mechs and learned how to evade attacks more effectively than before.

However, all of this became useless when the flechettes actually homed in on the dancing phasefighters and struck their azure energy shields!

"What?! Are those missiles?!" Ves gasped.

Gloriana activated another projection and froze the instance those flechettes were in flight.

When the female mech designer zoomed in far enough, she noted that the flechettes did not contain any propulsion or other systems that could explain why they homed in as soon as they flew somewhat close to energy strike craft.

"These flechettes are special." She said with a puzzled frown on her face. "The data from the live feeds is not complete enough in my opinion, but from what I can observe, the flechettes are attracted by the phasefighters or more specifically their azure energy shields. When the flechettes are launched towards phasefighters that have lost their shielding, the homing effect disappears."

"Interesting."

Fortunately for every human viewer, the Cybernetic Empire started to display a portion of technical data during the live feed.

"Phase Attractor Rounds are shotgun rounds that are specialized in taking down enemy phasefighters." Ves read the description. "Phase Attractor Rounds come in both transphasic and non-transphasic versions, but the former is very rare as the latter can already do the job. Your theory is right, Gloriana. The shotgun projectiles can indeed home in on energy shields without needing to resort to finicky tech.

Due to these attraction characteristics, way more flechettes ended up hitting their targets than usual.

Enemy phasefighters lost their most potent form of protection. Once their airframes got exposed, it was trivial for the first-class multipurpose mechs to take them down!

In this way, the first-class multipurpose mechs of the Cybernetic Empire just showed that it relied on non-transphasic weapons to completely roll over the enemy's phasefighters!

This small victory enabled the mechs to conduct more thorough and aggressive anomalies.

The Dominator warships could freely advance towards the enemy mech and troop concentrations.

The native aliens must probably be wondering how to counter the absurdly effective shotguns wielded by the mechs, but these were hardly the trump cards of this warship-oriented fleet!

After reaching a certain distance, the Dominator warships brought their massive cannons to bear against the distant enemy warships.

The range was still a bit too far for most cannons, but with the help of the scouting data from the forward mechs, the human warships were able to calculate their firing solutions a lot more confidently than normal.

"The warships are attacking! Wait, they're launching missiles?"

Instead of opening fire with their big guns, they chose to launch missiles instead.

The data showed that they were all transphasic missiles, which meant that the Cybers had just expended a serious amount of phasewater!

Was it worth it? Ves and the other soon received their answers when they saw the effects of their warheads

The native aliens made a valiant attempt at shooting down the incoming missiles, but the CE munitions were fast and also agile enough to evade lots of intercepting fire!

When multiple missiles converged on different targets, strange explosions took place that shocked Ves and other viewers!

This was because the azure energy shields that should have been able to resist explosive attacks of this magnitude briefly became inactive.

"The enemy energy shields have been disrupted! The aliens are likely trying their best to reset their shield generators, but there is still a delay.

This delay was crucial as the CE warships simultaneously opened fire with their predominantly kinetic cannons!

Each of them launched explosive shells that flew as fast as gauss rounds and slipped through the temporary gaps in the enemy defenses.

As soon as they impacted the exposed hulls, the shells detonated!

Hull plating got ruptured! Turrets became damaged or got blown away! Multiple compartments became exposed to the vacuum of space!

This was just the opening salvo of the warships of the 76th Dominator Warfleet, but already its tech had put the enemy forces at a severe disadvantage!

Chapter 7036: Dynapulse Disruptor Missile

The 76th Dominators Warfleet... dominated their opponents.

The 53 years worth of preparation and technological development paid off as the Cybers proved that they possessed the tools to effectively counter the defenses that the native aliens relied upon to stay in the fight.

It was surprising to many viewers how the ordnance used by the CE mechs and warships immediately shut down any attempts of the enemy to make a comeback.

The Dominators did not appear to rely on any other notable gimmicks to produce these devastating results.

Their performance was definitely higher than normal, but this was not reason enough for them to be able to inflict serious losses against the native aliens while incurring little damage in return.

"These mechs and warships are not alive." Ves concluded with certainty. "There is also not that much hyper technology in them. Much of their power comes from regular exotics and phasewater. What is notable is that their phasewater content is not high, but outperforms anything we currently have."

This was what two mech generations worth of progress looked like. The Cybernetic Empire had to do the best they could with limited amounts of exotics and phasewater at their disposal.

"There is also another factor that is affecting their performance." Gloriana mentioned. "Have you noticed how the mechs and warships are so well-controlled? Their responsiveness is higher than average and their targeting is excellent."

"What have you guessed, honey?"

"I think that the extensive cybernetics allows the crew members to interface with any compatible equipment. This allows them to control their stations much better and more extensively than normal. I think that they also leverage the power of AIs at the same time, but I cannot verify that from an outsider's perspective."

Ves could see why his wife came up with those guesses. The performance of the mechs and warships were a bit too smooth and optimal.

As Ves continued to ponder over this subject, the Dominators continued to dominate their opponents.

So far, the CE warfleet only lost a few dozen mechs. Many more machines remained spotless due to their superior energy shields and the added insurance provided by their active shield links.

None of the warships incurred significant damage despite the best efforts of the enemy vessels.

This was mainly because the CE vessels produced results too quickly!

Each time they targeted an enemy warship, they first launched a salvo of what the annotation in the live feed described as 'Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles' that inflicted low material damage but possessed exceptionally strong spatial disruptive effects against all manner of transphasic energy defenses.

The Polymath apparently developed the initial version of the Dynapulse in person to give her forces a relatively cost-effective way to bypass the ubiquitous transphasic energy defenses of the enemy.

Subsequent uses of the Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles revealed that the pulsed spatial disruption effect was exceptionally strong.

Their effects were similar to the space suppressor modules that had become ubiquitous in melee mechs.

The difference between the two was that the Dynapulse concentrated all of its power in a single potent pulse effect!

This successfully enabled the transphasic warheads to 'banish' any nearby energy shielding, but only for as long as the spatial disruption weakened, which only amounted to a few seconds most of the time!

A few seconds sounded like nothing. It was an exceedingly short window of opportunity for most humans.

If mechs happened to be nearby, then they may be able to slip through the temporary gaps produced by the Dynapulses, but only if it was fast enough and already built up a head start!

It was much more practical to use this temporary gap in the defenses to slip in attacks, which was exactly what the Dominators were doing.

The warships timed their attacks perfectly. Their cannons opened fire just before the Dynapulses created a gap in the defenses of the enemy vessels.

This made it so that the explosive rounds could always slip through the openings before they closed up again and never fail to strike the hull!

There was nothing particularly special about the explosive rounds aside from their unusually fast muzzle velocity and impressive accuracy at this range.

While none of the attacks penetrated deep into the hull, it was not necessary as plenty of surface components and other shallow systems got wrecked in the process.

Besides, when several CE warships concentrated their firepower on a single enemy vessel, the sheer amount of attacks landing on the alien hull was enough to crack the vessel apart after enduring a few brutal salvos!

As the alien fleet immediately began to diminish in numbers, it became increasingly clear that there was no way for the native aliens to win this bout.

Their phasefighters get completely shredded by the homing flechettes shot by the mechs.

Their warships were unable to tank a lot of damage with the help of their segmented multi-layered azure energy shields because the Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles exploited all of their weaknesses!

If nothing else happened, this alien fleet was doomed to fall despite the fact that it outnumbered the 76th Dominators.

Yet the native aliens could field more than phasefighters and warships.

The alien leaders clearly thought that since the Dominators did not bring their own high-ranking mechs, they would become easy pickings.

That was not what happened at all. The CE mechs and warships seemingly came from a different era. They employed refined and optimized ordnance that the Heavy Ordnance Tower had spent multiple decades on iterating!

Perhaps the native aliens might still be able to fend off the Dynapulse Mark I or whatever, but became completely helpless when they had to defend against the Dynapulse Mark XV!

Ves and every other experienced engineer could detect a hundred different ways the Dynapulse had been improved upon over the years. This was not an experimental product. It was a mature product that could breach open the defenses of damn near any alien warship so long as enough warheads detonated in the same place at the right times!

"Oh boy." Gloriana said. "The Cybers have made the native aliens truly angry now. Their phase lords finally feel compelled to take action."

The enemy phase lords previously disdained to take action when they saw that a human fleet sought to attack their mortal minions.

Yet now that the humans deployed several unexpectedly powerful new tech, the phase lords realized quite quickly that they needed to take action in person if they wanted to prevent their forces from collapsing!

A total of 2 greater phase lords and 15 lesser phase lords simultaneously took action!

This was a formidable number of phase lords. The Larkinsons managed to defeat a similar force by relying on a superdimensional ace mech, but the 76th Dominators likely did not bring any champions to this fight.

What did they intend to rely upon to kill or deter all of these phase lords?

"The greater phase lords and several lesser phase lords are equipped with Saint Piercers and incomplete Saint Armors." Ves observed. "The ones with good equipment are leading the charge while the ones without this benefit are hanging back in order to use their spatial abilities to disrupt the Dominators."

Already, the more erudite-focused phase lords began to constrict and destabilize the fabric of space across a wide area.

Multiple Dominator vessels began to slow down as their superdrives were no longer able to maintain their warp travel states.

Whether the CE vessels could secretly overcome this interference remained unclear, but for now they behaved similar to any other contemporary human warship.

This meant that they lost much of their mobility advantage. The incoming phase lords would definitely be able to catch up to the CE vessels!

Without the protection of ace mechs, most human fleets had no way of repelling so many powerful phase lords.

Yet this time may be different. As the enemy phase lords continued to close in, the CE mechs conspicuously maintained their distance, making it clear that they did not intend to play any part in what was to come.

Instead, the warships all started to launch missiles at the leading greater phase lords!

"They are unleashing the same Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles as before!"

The native aliens attempted to crush the missiles mid-flight by squeezing it with the fabric of space, but the missiles appeared to be strangely resistant against these effects!

They flew unerringly through twisted and folded space until they accurately converged onto the two phase lords!

So many missiles detonated against the energy defenses of the two native gods that part of their enlarged bodies became obscured by all of the explosions.

Yet even if their views became obscured, Ves and the others keenly noticed that the clustered explosions actually managed to rupture the powerful spatial barriers, but just for a moment!

The warships of the 76th Dominator Warfleet had already primed their gun batteries. Each of them soundlessly boomed as they propelled a completely different kind of projectile towards their target than before!

Unlike the regular explosive shells that had inflicted effective damage to the hulls of enemy warships on the cheap, these ones were clearly a lot more expensive and high-end!

They soared through space at an even faster speed and slipped through the gaps in the spatial barriers with unerring accuracy.

Once they struck the bodies of the greater phase lords from various angles, several things happened at once.

The rounds that collided against the alien-grade superdimensional raiment actually fractured while only leaving scratches behind!

They broke apart far too easily!

"The rounds aren't transphasic?"

However, the raiments worn by the enemy phase lords did not cover their entire true bodies, so the rounds that managed to slip through the gaps and strike open flesh actually managed to penetrate past the skin and into the flesh.

They did not go past that, but this was already a respectable result for a non-transphasic round.

Yet that was just the beginning.

At first, the greater phase lords ignored the fractured metal that had lodged into their flesh.

Yet they soon regretted it as they began to experience a lot of pain from the injured parts of their true body!

When they turned their heads to look down at their wounds, they found to their horror that the flesh and other body tissue surrounding their wounds had begun to blacken and weaken!

"The rounds are toxic to phase lords somehow!" Gloriana gasped in surprise.

"According to the annotations of the live feed, the new rounds are actually corrupting and breaking down the phasewater that sustains the transformed flesh of these phase lords."

Ves widened his eyes in shock and also a little fear.

Phasewater had become an essential component to sustain the life of every phase lord.

If a new weapon was capable of corrupting phasewater into another substance that did not possess the same properties, then it could easily drain the strength of a phase lord and cripple parts of his body!

"These Polybite phase corruptor rounds are another invention from the Polymath." Ves noted without too much surprise as the live feed essentially advertised the latest product demonstrated by the Dominators. "They are made from processing high-grade and mid-grade exotics in a special way that allows the finished product to gain a necrotizing effect against phase leader body tissue. The production cost is fairly

expensive, but the greatest advantage is that its production does not use up any phasewater."

This was a critical advantage that should make the Polybite rounds a lot more accessible to more human forces!

At this time, the warships of the 76th Dominator Warfleet started to get serious. They split up into multiple squadrons and began to circle around the greater phase lords. They used the now-classic combo of Dynapulses to briefly open gaps in the spatial barriers before slipping Polybites to hurt the native gods!

While the greater phase lords were still able to cope with the damage due to their larger bodies and much higher phasewater content, the lesser phase lords had it much worse!

Their spatial barriers were significantly weaker so it took fewer Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles to create a gap in their defenses. They also lacked Saint Armors and so could not defend themselves as effectively against the poisonous rounds.

The Polybites also inflicted much more severe damage to their true bodies as losing dozens of liters of phasewater represented a much more severe injury for the lesser phase lords!

In a mirror to the Battle of Screed Tanner VI-F, the lesser phase lords lost their nerves first.

The Polybite appeared to be especially designed to inflict great pain on these arrogant native gods!

That combined with losing any feel or control for their injured parts of their bodies caused them to grow so spooked that some of them proactively used their own blades to cut off their necrotized flesh before the toxins could spread any further!

After suffering these heavy blows, the lesser phase lords no longer had any desire to challenge the strange new human warfleet anymore.

They all backed away in order to get out of range from the astoundingly effective new missiles and kinetic rounds.

This of course left the two greater phase lords without the support they expected.

Eventually, the pair of alien leaders made the sensible choice and chose to retreat.

Many human viewers became disappointed when they saw that the Dominators did not employ any other miracle weapons in an attempt to kill the retreating phase lords, but they had already delivered a stellar result as far as everyone was concerned.

For the first time since the start of the Red War, a fleet of mortal mechs and warships managed to defeat a superior force of alien phasefighters, warships and phase lords without relying on gods and magic!

The fleeters must already be salivating at the technological breakthroughs on display!

"We have to find a way to get our hands on the production methods of the Dynapulse Disruptor Missile and the Polybite Phase Corruptor Round at all cost!"

Chapter 7037: The Polymath's Grift

In just a single brief engagement, the 76th Dominators Warfleet accomplished a feat that resembled the Larkinson Clan's victory at Screed Tanner VI-F.

Of course, the numbers and circumstances were substantially different, but the parallels were pretty clear to Ves.

At Screed Tanner, the Premier Fleet sortied into battle with far less numbers than the enemy.

However, the Larkinsons managed to defeat several times their own number and kill half of the alien defenders by relying on the superior arms of a superdimensional ace mech and the amazing synergy between the Mienrva Mark II and the first-class multipurpose mechs under her command.

In other words, the Larkinsons relied on the strength of their champions to turn a severely disadvantaged lineup into an unbeatable force!

The Dominators belonging to the Cybernetic Empire did not take this approach at all, mostly because they did not have any high-ranking mech pilots to spare.

Most of the existing expert pilots and ace pilots who found themselves trapped in Bridgehead One stayed loyal to their original states and organizations.

Very few had been persuaded to pledge their loyalties to the Cybernetic Empire.

This was detrimental to the nascent superpower as its long-term isolation had caused its homegrown mech pilots to experience far too little life pressure.

Short of staging cannibalistic and extremely wasteful death matches, the Cybers had no way of pushing the willpower of its soldiers to the extreme.

The Polymath therefore decided to seek her salvation in technology rather than people. If the latter proved unreliable, then the former might provide her with a solution.

Her hard work paid off. With 53 years at her disposal, she was able to invent quite a few counters to the most common combat solutions employed by the native aliens.

In this short-lasting encounter, the Dominators won against sizable force of native alien fleets led by over dozen phase lords.

Even if none of them were particularly powerful or noteworthy, they were still difficult if not impossible to defeat by a fleet of mechs and warships that lacked its own champions.

Yet the Cybers managed to do it. For the first time since the start of the Red War, the mundane cannons and missile launchers of dozens of warships effectively managed to easily dismantle enemy hulls and repel all of the phase lords!

In fact, the enemy powerhouses might have been able to grit their teeth and forcibly get close enough to the Cyber warships to physically tear them apart, but the high-and-mighty native gods proved completely unwilling to bear this hardship.

When faced with a completely new and different kind of human force, the native aliens grew fearful of what other surprises the Dominators had in store.

Combined with the large amount of pain and injury inflicted by the poisonous projectiles launched by the Cyber warships, the alien phase lords ultimately decided to cut their losses and withdraw!

This was the most prudent decision they could have made. Ves and most people had already guessed that the Dominators likely held a much more deadly arsenal in reserve.

It was impossible for the Polymath and her Cybers to spend half a century on developing just a handful of special munitions!

In this way, the cowardice shown by the enemy phase lords happened to save them from even worse fates.

The only real damage they suffered was the loss of face. As for the phasefighters and warships that got shot down by the humans?

Those casualties meant little to the native gods who had access to almost an entire dwarf galaxy's worth of manpower and resources!

The native aliens could easily replenish those losses given how much territory they still held.

The phase lords were much more difficult to replace as it took a long time for new ones to emerge and even longer for them to grow in power.

"Damn cowards." Ves cursed. "They already thought about retreating as soon as they experienced actual pain for the first time in many years. The Dominators could have shown off much better toys if these pathetic phase lords possessed an actual spine and possessed courage comparable to that of a valiant expert pilot."

"That is not who they are." Gloriana mentioned. "Phase lords and especially those of the erudite persuasion are more often than not members of the politician, statesman and patriarch class of their respective societies. Even if they come from a military

hierarchy, their actual combat experience is limited. Martial phase lords are better in this regard, but true warriors such as the Arena Lord of Ya'gwasa are the exception rather than the rule."

This was the problem of making champions out of the top echelon of society rather than the bottom.

The latter all experienced an uncountable amount of hardships before they managed to struggle their way to martial supremacy. High-ranking mech pilots understood the value of force and knew how to maximize every part of their strength.

The former had lucked into their power due to the randomness of their birth. Once they were lucky enough to survive the most dangerous transformation event at the start, the alien phase lords no longer became susceptible to mortal weaknesses and constraints.

"Be that as it may, leaders still have to hold themselves to a higher standard." Ves said with a frown. "It is really unacceptable for them to retreat at such an early stage. At least the Protector of Karnak and the Endless Stomach mustered up their courage and sought to challenge the first full superdimensional ace mech they had encountered on the battlefield. The two greater phase lords saw one of their own getting butchered by a superdimensional blade, but that did not stop them from doing their duty."

"You cannot compare them to the greater phase lords that fought against the Dominators, Ves. The Protector of Karnak is a jureg who is a die-hard loyalist of the Red Cabal. He has also received an abundant amount of rewards for his loyal service, from superior phasewater organs to a full superdimensional armor that covers his entire exoskeleton. In contrast, both the lesser and greater phase lords that fought against the Dominators were clearly inferior."

That was a fair point. The Dominators clearly did their research and picked an opponent that was unlikely to produce too many complications.

It was clear that new weapons shown today were very effective against the phase lords like the ones that showed up in past battles.

However, the Red War was evolving and so were its participants. Red humanity had slowly begun to roll out superdimensional mechs, while the native aliens did likewise

by cladding their own phase lords in increasingly better and more comprehensive superdimensional armor.

Without an abundant supply of superdimensional matter of their own, the Cybernetic Empire needed to scramble to develop effective counters against superdimensional weapons and armaments.

Even so, that did not take away the stellar performance of the special munitions on display.

Both Ves and Gloriana rewound the footage and observed the 'Dyapulse Disruptor Missile' and the 'Polybite Phase Corrupter Round' in action.

Since the Cybers were responsible for broadcasting the live feeds, they helpfully provided annotations that contained a large amount of descriptions and technical data.

While the information was not even close enough for people to produce their own versions of the two munition types, it still provided them with plenty of details to determine whether they were good fits for their own armed forces.

"What do you think, Gloriana?"

"This live feed is clearly a sales pitch." Gloriana responded. "It does not seem like it on the surface, but it is abundantly clear to those in power that the Cybernetic Empire is trying to sell them her solutions. If my suspicions are correct, the Cybernetic Empire will not license out its Dyapulse and Polybite. It is much more profitable and advantageous for the Cybers to produce their special munitions in-house and sell them to all of the major powers at a high profit margin."

"That... sounds incredibly plausible. The Polymath can even expand on this gift. She can sell outdated versions of the Dyapulse and Polybite for slightly more competitive prices, but jack up the costs for the more modern and effective versions. This solves several problems at once. First, every human power will become dependent on the continued existence of the Cybernetic Empire. No one will dare to attack it openly because their supply of anti-phase lord munitions might get cut off as a response. Second, the Cybernetic Empire can quickly solve its resource deficit by accepting payment in the form of raw materials."

This scheme possessed clear colonial overtones. The Cybernetic Empire played the role of an old and established industrial power while the other states that held vast territories had little choice but to mine and ship a large proportion of their resources to Bridgehead One instead of using them to fuel their own factories.

If this pattern persisted long enough, then the Cybernetic Empire would eventually grow powerful enough to reduce all of the other human powers to its vassals!

It did not matter whether they pledged their allegiance to the Cybernetic Empress or not. The de facto reality was that the other states and organizations remained heavily dependent on superior Cyber tech and manufactured goods.

How typical.

Ves always suspected that the Polymath was up to no good. He felt relieved now that he understood the scheme that she had concocted.

It was not really underhanded when the Cybernetic Empire published so much information in the open. This was clearly an open conspiracy where the Polymath invited everyone to play her game because there was no better option available.

"The Cybernetic Empire's monopoly on Dynapulses and Polybites will not last forever." Gloriana told her husband. "Once these munitions fall into other people's hands, there will be plenty of researchers and developers looking to reverse engineer them and develop their own versions of the same tech."

"Hm, you're right Gloriana, but the Cybernetic Empire still enjoys a massive head start in this field. It will take at least a year or longer for others to be able to come out with their own versions. By that time, the Cybernetic Empire has already made a killing from its monopoly. The differences in quality and performance will also remain substantial for a time."

"The rest of us can solve these challenges faster if we put a Star Designer or better yet multiple Star Designers in charge of these operations." His wife asserted.

Ves did not agree with her, though. "That may be true, but it will never happen. We are talking about the works of a highly respected Star Designer. I am quite sure that people of this status are personal friends and maybe even colleagues with each other.

They will try to avoid stepping on each other's toes because they might need to ask others to collaborate with them in the future."

There were very few Star Designers in existence, and each of them had risen up to become the ultimate masters in their specialization.

The Polymath happened to be a lot more special than others because she did not possess a particularly profound specialization.

Yet what she lacked in specialization, she made up for it in generalization. Her knowledge base was so broad that she was practically the most comprehensive repository of knowledge in the Red Ocean.

The Polymath therefore played a vital role in the post-Great Severing society of red humanity because she could adequately substitute for the many specialized Star Designers left behind in the Milky Way!

It was for this reason and more that the Star Designers were inclined to treat the Polymath leniently despite her acts of treason, rebellion and subversion.

Ves inwardly sighed.

He needed to hurry up and become a Star Designer as well!

So long as he became a True God in his current profession, everyone else would be willing to overlook his many transgressions.

People would do everything in their power to please him in order to benefit from his creations!

Chapter 7038: The Red Fleet's Salvation

The Dominators finished their battle the fastest among the three Cyber warfleets.

Their new tech spooked the native aliens and drove them away before they could put up a proper fight.

That was regrettable, but the live footage still contained enough demonstrations of the new tech put to use.

It was pretty clear to Ves that the 76th Dominators Warfleet basically served as a vassal to the Heavy Ordnance Tower.

In turn, the Heavy Ordnance Tower served as the Polymath's designated managers, custodians and maintainers of all of the new tech related to physical munitions.

Ves grew more and more certain that a polity as large as the Cybernetic Empire could never be truly united as the Polymath desired.

Instead of letting different factions emerge and cause chaos within her dominion, the Polymath must have decided to create her own factions in the form of the Thirteen Towers.

This way, every major faction of her empire would at least be centered around productive research and industrial activity.

The Cybers would be more inclined to compete against each other to earn more wealth, resources, talent and most importantly their sovereign's favor.

Although there were definite downsides to making the Thirteen Towers so dominant in society, the Polymath must have made a careful calculus that proved that the benefits were worth the price.

"What do you think about what you have seen and listened to our discussion, kids?" Ves suddenly asked.

While they were just children, the three brats were also smart and precocious in their own ways.

"I don't like the Dominators." Andraste voiced her opinion first. "They are boring. They clearly don't value their mechs because they are only there to protect their warships. It is all about heavy firepower for this fleet. While the big guns are

powerful, there is no heroism behind their use. You don't even need people to man and control the guns. You just need to program the smart AIs to time the use of the new missiles and rounds and make sure they don't open fire at the wrong targets."

That was a typical answer from a mech-obsessed child. Andraste's words proved to be quite insightful.

She was right.

The development of the Dynapulse and Polybite made warships more relevant again. The enemy phase lords needed to take human warships a lot more seriously once the new munitions became more prevalent.

However, the new munitions also lowered the importance of ace pilots and reduced red humanity's dependence on their champions.

This was good as there were simply too few ace pilots to cover every battlefield, but it was also bad because this development might cause their growth to slow down.

High-ranking mech pilots had long cemented their position as humanity's best troubleshooters.

They defeated the undefeatable and created miracles on the battlefield. Everyone had good reasons to believe that the ultimate way to end the Red War was to make their god pilots strong enough to force the entirety of the Red Cabal to surrender or die.

"The Red Fleet has no choice but to cooperate with the Cybernetic Empire." Aurelia made a more politically insightful remark. "The RF has been one of the greatest losers of the Great Severing. It is cut off from the vast amount of warships left behind in the Milky Way. The ones they have left in the Red Ocean clearly is not enough to maintain territorial supremacy over human-occupied space, let alone the Red Ocean Union. They also lack power players in the form of god pilots and Star Designers. The only source of hope they have is a living dreadnought in the form of the Dominion of Man, but she and her crew have long fallen into the palm of the Polymath."

In other words, the Red Fleet had turned from one of the two hegemonies of human civilization into the weakest 'major power' of the new frontier!

The fleeters had not stood still. Despite their reputation for being old-fashioned and sticklers for tradition, they had made a few earnest efforts to keep up with the rapid changes by adopting living AIs and letting at least some space peasants play around with warships, but that was not enough to offset their massive decline in reputation, power and military assets.

This was why the performance of the Dominators was so astonishing to them. The superior tech developed by one of the ultimate mech designers of all people could very well be their salvation.

The problem was that the RF and the CE were geopolitical rivals if not enemies.

The Cybernetic Empire clearly was not satisfied with maintaining control over just a single central star node.

It wanted to grab more territory. It wanted to subjugate its neighbors and bring them under the unified command of its empress.

Early indications already showed that the Cybers thought themselves as superior to the ignorant and backward space peasants that had been 'left behind'.

This also included the fleeters, who only remained powerful because they coasted on the attainments of their predecessor organization.

If more people realized that the RF had degenerated more than what was apparent on the surface, the fleeters would have already collapsed by this time!

In order to prevent such an outcome from unfolding in reality, the fleeters needed a way to regain power and prove their military might on the battlefield.

They needed to do so without relying on high-ranking mechs or superdimensional matter.

The munitions that Andraste dismissed as boring and uncool were just the solutions that the fleeters needed the most.

Ves could already foresee the inevitable outcome between any secret negotiations between the two major powers.

The Red Fleet would have to make a number of heavy concessions such as not enforcing its rules upon the Cybernetic Empire and maybe outright abandoning its mandate on governing a united human civilization.

In exchange, the Cybernetic Empire would be happy to supply the fleeters with a greater share of the industrial output of special munitions.

Perhaps the RF might even be able to acquire an exclusive monopoly on the heaviest battleship-grade munitions, but that would force it to surrender so many concessions in return.

The Cybernetic Empire may even be able to take over the RF outright, which was the worst outcome for many people!

Ves reminded himself that he needed to talk with his RF liaison in order to find out whether the fleeters even had a future in this new and changing dwarf galaxy.

"What do you think, Marvaine?" Ves asked his youngest child.

The child looked thoughtful even as he hugged his colorful lion plushy.

"Hmmm... if the Dynapulses become so common that transphasic energy shields can no longer do their job of protecting warships, won't the native aliens switch to putting thick armor on their vessels like we do? This is not the weapon that we have that can counter energy shields. We have the Dark Zephyr and superdimensional mechs, and others have space suppressors and transphasic weapons."

Both Ves and Gloriana nodded in agreement.

"You raised another good point, Marvaine." Ves said with an impressed voice. "Every invention provokes a reaction. It depends on how extensively the Cybers are willing to let their Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles proliferate, but even moderate availability will

still put their shiny and expensive battleships at great risk. The alien naval doctrine of going light on armor and heavy on energy shields will probably die as you have guessed."

Gloriana did not look too optimistic towards this development. "This does not actually improve our chances of winning the Red War all that much. The native aliens control much of the Red Ocean. Their industries are abundant and still largely intact. They can easily redesign their warships and order the mass production of new armor-heavy warships that are less susceptible to space suppressors and the new Dynapulse Disruptor Missiles."

"I am sure that the Cybernetic Empire has developed special munitions that specialize in penetrating transphasic hull plating as well, but I agree with your point. It is a lot easier to disrupt the functionality of energy-based defenses than penetrate through meters worth of dense alloys." Ves said.

The native aliens would suffer for a few years as most of their warships were still biased towards energy shields rather than armor.

However, once their ponderous shipyards had begun to roll out the new warships, the significance of the Dynapulses would probably decrease, though not to the point of irrelevance.

After all, no one prohibited the practice of piling a warship with both energy and material defenses.

The only downside to all of that was that the vessel would become fat, slow and relatively light on firepower.

"My overall conclusion is that the Dominators are meant to showcase what ordinary red humans can do with the help of special munitions." Gloriana said. "I am sure that the CE will sell their Dynapulses and Polybites at a premium, but I do not have the impression that they are expensive to produce. Perhaps the Cybers will intentionally increase their complexity and blend in useless materials in an attempt to increase the difficulty of reverse engineering, but that does not change my original point. Making it difficult to reverse engineer is not a purely selfish choice."

"I agree."

Both of them knew that the Cybernetic Empire was on guard against the Cosmopolitan Movement.

Red humanity suffered from their technology theft too many times. The native aliens had rapidly gained technological parity with their human foes by shamelessly taking advantage of stolen human technologies.

The Cybernetic Empire's closed borders and reticence towards trading away its superior tech might frustrate a lot of humans, but it also denied the cosmopolitans another easy way to contribute to their alien masters.

After making sure that he had seen what he needed to observe from the live feed of the 76th Dominators Warfleet in action, Ves was finally ready to switch the channel and observe another battle.

Of course, by this time the engagement had already run its course, but Ves simply rewound the broadcast until it had reached the start of the battle.

"The 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet has caught my eye for a while." Ves said as the footage began to play again.

The projected view clearly displayed the hundred or so warships and a mech regiment flying forward in space.

The ship designs appeared fairly consistent, though their gun batteries consisted entirely of energy weapons rather than kinetic ones.

The mech designs looked much different, with most of them bearing all manner of energy weapons on the mech frames. Even their melee armaments came in the form of energized or energy blade forms.

The assets of the Gamma Scorchers clearly consumed a lot more energy than average when compared to the mechs and warships of the Dominators.

It did not do their sensor profiles a lot of favor. Their mechs and warships must be glowing like lighthouses when they start to warm up their weapon systems and put themselves in a more active state.

"Hugo Fournier told me that the Energy Weapon Tower has received greater priority than the other towers." Ves said as he leaned forward so that he could focus more on the action that was about to unfold. "I assumed that the Cybers did not invest heavily into physical weapons, but I was wrong about that after learning about the Heavy Ordnance Tower. Even so, I think that the performance of the Gamma Scorchers will definitely be a treat for our eyes."

"If this is the case, then I think that the tech demonstrated by the Gamma Scorchers will be more difficult to obtain by third parties." His wife warned him. "Do not assume that we can obtain superior CE energy weapons through exchanges. The Cybers can trade manufactured special munitions to the rest of red humanity without needing to fear for copycats, but the same does not apply for energy weapons as you cannot sell munitions for it. You can only sell the whole mechanism."

Ves paused in thought. "You are right. Once we are able to obtain a few copies of the new CE weapon systems, reverse engineering them means that everyone can produce their own versions, and that includes the native aliens."

If this was true, then the Cybernetic Empire would probably do their best to keep its energy weapons exclusive for its own usage!

Chapter 7039 - 24th Gamma Scorchers Warfleet

Just like with the Dominators, the first contact between the Gamma Scorchers and the native alien forces that defended the occupied star system involved mechs and phasefighters.

Both sides sent a portion of their screening forces further ahead of their main elements, so the chance that any warships would intervene between the initial skirmishing was minimal.

At first, the first-class multipurpose mechs of the Gamma Scorchers behaved identically to their cousins at the Dominators. They flew forward with confidence and with active shield links pooling their energy defenses.

One big difference was that at least half of the mechs carried a conspicuously large energy rifle.

This was most definitely their main weapon, though their mech frames also contained a lot of barrels of smaller integrated weapon systems.

"Damn." Ves said as the recorded footage continued to highlight the mechs in the vanguard elements. "None of these machines are living mechs. The Living Machine Tower clearly hasn't gained enough influence to enable their products to spread to every warfleet."

He looked forward to observing the CE's own take on living mechs, but apparently living mechs had not reached a status that allowed it to earn a place in every warfleet.

"What did you expect, Ves?" Gloriana said with a smirk. "You are one-of-a-kind. The Cybers may have raised 400 mech designers who can design decent living mechs, but do not forget that they are still Journeyman at most. Without Seniors or more importantly Masters, they lack seniority in the face of the Masters who work at the other towers. This is why they need you. Only the original pioneer and the best person to realize a design philosophy related to living mechs can lead them to glory and universal acceptance."

Ves nodded even as he lamented the lack of living mechs on display. It would have been really great to observe alternate approaches to living mechs that had effectively grown into their power for multiple decades.

"They're beginning to fight!" Andraste yelled.

The phasefighters began to use their typical opening which was to launch a massive salvo of transphasic missiles. They unloaded at least half of their warheads at once!

Lesser mech forces usually got devastated by these starting salvos if they were not adequately equipped to intercept dangerous warheads.

The native aliens had long noticed that the humans did not use missiles all that much. They were practical weapons, but they cost so much that it was not profitable for most private forces to throw them around all day.

Larger militaries invested a bit more into missiles, but even then the calculus was still not in their favor.

The Great Severing put red humanity in an even worse position. They could not afford to use transphasic missiles in great numbers, which also meant that they had very little experience dealing with them as both users and targets.

The native aliens had begun to take advantage of this major shortcoming by loading every phasefighter and warship with missiles.

Although the expense was not light on the part of the native aliens, they were much more able to bear the burden of producing them and expending them en masse!

The range between the two vanguard elements was still considerable, but the Gamma Scorchers did not wait until the transphasic missiles came close enough to take action.

Instead, their integrated laser weapons instantly became active and accurately began to shoot at the missiles!

Normally, the missiles tried to do their best to avoid getting shot down, as the aliens had invested phasewater and other expensive resources into making them. From ECM to evasive flight patterns, none of the missiles should be easy to shoot down!

Yet the CE mechs demonstrated very strong ECCM capabilities. They broke through the jamming and likely utilized excellent AI systems to aim the weapons in the right direction and trigger them to fire at the exact right timing.

One missile after another shattered apart or exploded prematurely.

What impressed knowledgeable viewers such as Ves and Gloriana was not just the amazing accuracy and precise power adjustments of the targeting systems utilized by the mechs.

It was the weapon system itself.

"These are not ordinary laser weapons." Gloriana critically said. "Look at the energy readings. They are lower than what should have been used to destroy the armored missiles from a forward facing."

"Hm. You're right. Their feel is... off." He said. "On the surface, those mechs are making use of regular integrated first-class transphasic hyper laser guns, but its implementation of phasewater technology is far superior to their application of hyper technology."

Many weapon systems at this level had to incorporate both phasewater technology and hyper technology to be useful in the Red War.

Ordinary laser weapons would not be able to effectively wear down the transphasic energy shields used by every enemy unit otherwise.

Ves had witnessed countless mechs utilizing directed energy weapons in one form or another.

He was most familiar with the simplest and most ubiquitous laser weapons, as they possessed excellent advantages in warfare, particularly in a space environment.

He also worked a lot on luminar crystal weapons, causing him to develop a good feel for the performance of similar energy weapons.

This was why he could immediately detect that there was something off about the most inconspicuous energy weapon systems embedded into the CE mechs.

"The warfleet is called the Gamma Scorchers." Gloriana noted. "Could it be that they are using gamma laser frequencies for their intercepting fire?"

"No. Absolutely not. That is not the feeling that I am getting. Besides, it is a waste of energy to devote so much power for the purpose of intercepting missiles."

Gloriana wanted to ask how Ves managed to develop a feel for gamma laser weapons, but she thought better of voicing this doubt.

"Then what do you think is taking place?"

"It has to be the application of phasewater technology that is different." Ves spoke with certainty. "I am a phase lord, so I have a sense of how space is being used and manipulated. The quality and fidelity of this recording is good enough that I can vaguely sense some of that stuff. The way the laser beams cross through space is subtly different from what I have seen from other transphasic laser weapons. It is... cleaner and less disruptive somehow."

"So are you saying that the laser beams generated by the CE mechs are more efficient?"

"Perhaps. The Cybers need to publish more data before I can be certain about this. There is only so much I can observe through vision alone. Still, logic dictates that 53 years is enough for the Cybers to develop a much more optimized and energy-efficient version of a simple transphasic hyper laser weapon system."

That said, the tech currently on display was not particularly revolutionary.

The really good stuff should come a little later.

Just as expected, the CE mechs managed to shoot down many times their number of transphasic missiles.

Although the enemy phasefighters wasted a huge amount of firepower in the process, they at least managed to lighten their mass and hold back a reserve of more agile missiles to use in short-ranged dogfights.

What was more important was that the native alien pilots managed to gain a measure of their opponent.

How well a force of mechs was able to cope with an incoming missile salvo usually described how well the aliens could put it down.

Since the aliens learned that the mechs were quite powerful and tricky to defeat in a hurry, the phasefighters adopted a more cautious posture and began to split up into multiple wings in order to strafe the mechs from safer distances.

They clearly did not want to get too close to the mysterious mechs.

Yet just as the phasefighter wings began to fire at the mechs with their transphasic hyper positron cannons, the mechs finally began to shoot at their adversaries with their main handheld energy rifles.

In an instant, hundreds of beams that were much more energetic than the previous ones accurately struck each and every phasefighter in a domineering display of excellent training and coordination!

Every mech accurately shot a single phasefighter each and managed to land their hits, thereby achieving the most efficient outcome possible!

Ves had a feeling that such displays would become a defining characteristics of the Gamma Scorchers.

In any case, when the highly energetic laser beams struck the azure energy shields that protected the phasefighters from taking damage, the spot where the shields got struck lit up far beyond the usual level.

Ves and Gloriana both held in their breaths as they witnessed the aftermath of this unusual sight.

"The phasefighters... have incurred damage!" Gloriana gasped. "How is this possible? The energy shields are still intact, if destabilized."

Ves narrowed his eyes. "I can think of at least two different explanations. The first one is that the gamma lasers struck the azure energy shield in a strange frequency or possesses special properties that caused that section of the shield to energize and involuntarily radiate destructive energy in the direction of the phasefighter. The second is that the gamma laser possesses a special property that enables it to partially pass through the transphasic energy shield."

Both theories sounded viable, but it was difficult to determine which one was correct without the CE volunteering further information.

Unlike the previous live feed centered around the Dominators, the Cybers did not choose to give away too much sensitive technical data. They only provided basic information such as the name of the new weapon system.

[Irradiator Gamma Laser Weapon]

"That is helpful... not." Ves snorted.

The Cybernetic Empire's reluctance to share juicier data clearly sent a signal to people like Ves that this tech was unlikely to be available for exchange.

The Cybers simply wanted to show off their powerful graser weapons in advance so that others would not be surprised if the CE forces employed weapons that would have been associated with war crimes in the past.

This was yet another instance of the Cybernetic Empire flagrantly violating the taboos of the Red Two.

Whatever was the case, the so-called Irradiators proved to be effective at eroding the phasefighters regardless of their energy shielding.

The mechs could have finished off a lot of enemy strike craft sooner if they concentrated their firepower, but they deliberately danced around while always keeping their gamma laser weapons pointed at one phasefighter each.

Since the phasefighters suffered from the same problem as warships, their relatively thin and flimsy armor was not able to effectively resist the reduced radiation damage inflicted by the graser beams.

Although it was very clear to Ves that much of the power of the energy beam on one side turned into waste heat, at least a significant fraction of it still managed to get through and inflict serious damage on the other side.

The mechs only had to strike at a phasefighter 6 or so times before the latter started to suffer equipment breakdowns and serious internal damage!

In a few lucky cases, the azure energy shield generators fizzled out, causing the exposed enemy craft to get blasted and melted to pieces after getting struck by the full might of a graser beam!

In other cases, the propulsion system or the pilot died before the energy shields disappeared, thereby producing a strange sight of a shielded phasefighter coasting through space like a ghost vehicle!

One phasefighter after another got eliminated in this silent and eerie display.

The native aliens meanwhile claimed very little results. Their firepower was scattered to begin with, and suffering all of this damage while still maintaining their energy shields rattled their confidence.

Eventually, the relevant alien commanders made the sensible decision to recall the phasefighters.

The pilots couldn't get away from these hellish mechs quickly enough! Their craft all turned around and bolted away as if their lives depended on it, which happened to be true this time!

"Aww. They retreated too soon. Cowards."

"I think it is often a good idea to back off if you are dealing with the unknown." Ves gently admonished his daughter.

Chapter 7040: Energy Weapon Improvements

The Irradiators equipped by the mechs presented an interesting technological solution to red humanity.

Although it was not the most efficient weapon, it did not matter so long as the targets behind the energy shields were fragile and easy to damage.

The fact that the energy weapon-focused mechs managed to repel the vanguard forces of the enemy phasefighters with ease already showed how the Irradiator Gamma Laser Weapons could be used to eliminate or drive away similar enemy strike craft in future engagements.

So long as this weapon became widespread enough, the native aliens would not dare to produce any more phasefighters that relied heavily on energy defenses but invested little in their material defenses!

Together with the shotguns that launched flechettes that homed in on energy shields, it should already begin to dawn on the native aliens that the entire phasefighter concept had become obsolete.

CE tech fulfilled the expectations of many hopeful viewers. Although the innovations were not as flashy as most people expected, their effectiveness was undeniable.

Perhaps the native aliens might rely on their large number of researchers and developers to quickly devise countermeasures against the Phase Attractor Shells and the Irradiator Gamma Laser Weapons, but these were just two of many technological countermeasures developed by the Cybernetic Empire. A few tweaks or quick fixes to their energy shield tech should not be able to negate all of the new countermeasures.

Ves believed that the only way for the aliens to adapt to the new human arsenal was to abandon their focus on energy shield tech entirely.

This was easier said than done.

Generation after generation of alien shipbuilding had invested heavily in transphasic energy shields. It was the main form of defense that had served the aliens well for countless years.

To be told that their defenses no longer did their jobs and that they had to switch to a completely different defensive approach would probably offend a lot of stubborn aliens!

What was worse was that it threatened the dominance of the vested interests behind energy shield tech!

When faced with the threat of obsolescence, this powerful trans-species mafia would never obediently roll over and allow the native aliens to reduce their investment on energy shields.

Ves predicted that resistance against the adoption of human-style armor-heavy defenses would cause a lot of delays. It may take years if not a decade for the Red Cabal to finally overcome overwhelming opposition and finally convince all of the military industries to completely switch over.

Even then, a lot of existing phasefighters and warships still remained stuck with their energy shield-heavy defenses.

His eyes lit up as he realized the possibilities opened up by the availability of CE tech.

If the aliens truly required a lot of time to switch over their entire defensive paradigms, then red humanity enjoyed a multi-year window of opportunity to defeat a large number of native alien fleets and retake a lot of captured territory by taking advantage of the mismatch in generational technology!

So long as the Cybernetic Empire made at least a couple of its anti-energy shield armaments available to the masses, that should already be enough for existing forces to gain a huge advantage on the battlefield!

After all, most red human commanders deeply understood the value of superior technology and were much more willing to adapt to the latest trends.

Those who rejected innovation had already perished in battle or got removed from their positions.

The Red War was so brutal to red humanity that the latter could not allow itself to get bogged down by incompetence. Any failure could lead to the deaths of millions if not billions of civilian lives.

Although it was terrible for red humans to live and fight when subjected to so much pressure, it was only through adversity that they unlocked their potential and rose to the occasion.

The native aliens were still too far from reaching that point. Even if they suffered a setback at the frontlines, the vast majority of their population would remain safe and

sound. Even the most recent voribug invasion only raised alarm among the aliens who lived in the regions closest to the advancing insects.

"The native aliens are repositioning their forces." Gloriana remarked.

The phase lords in charge of the fleets recognized that they were facing a different opponent from usual.

Seeing that the Gamma Scorchers had yet to deploy any high-ranking mechs, the lesser and greater phase lords made the uncharacteristic decision of unfolding their true bodies to the fullest!

"Whoa."

The sight of several moon and asteroid-sized phase lords immediately bolstered the flagging morale of the alien soldiers.

The phasefighter pilots who previously grew reticent at the thought of fighting against the mechs armed with strange energy weapons quickly grew confident now that they were being watched over by their gods.

Ves leaned forward as the native alien forces began to leverage the presence of so many large phase lords.

Although they had grown so big that their raiments no longer offered meaningful coverage, their body mass was so stupendous that it would take forever for warships to drill through all of that flesh and bone, let alone their spatial barriers!

"The enemy phasefighters and warships are beginning to position themselves behind their phase lords!"

"Clever." Ves spoke in admiration. "The native aliens are sharp enough to notice that the CE mechs and warships are overwhelmingly armed with directed energy weapons. They can only attack in a straight line, which means that if they remain in formation, they can only ever attack from the front. The phase lords can use their massive true bodies to serve as temporary walls that can block a lot of attacks. In the meantime, the phasefighters can get close enough to directly threaten the enemy warships while the

alien warships can opportunistically appear out of cover and go back into it when they need to give their energy shields time to restore."

This put the Gamma Scorchers at a severe disadvantage. They could split up their fleet into multiple squadrons in order to counteract this strategy, but that made them vulnerable in different ways.

Both sides began to shoot at each other as they maneuvered around the battlefield.

The CE warships initially did not demonstrate any remarkable tech at this time.

Their powerful transphasic hyper graser beam cannon batteries inflicted hefty damage, but the overall performance improvements were incremental rather than revolutionary.

Although they inflicted a bit more damage onto the enemy spatial barriers than contemporary laser cannons of the same caliber, it was nothing to write home about.

Without additional countermeasures such as sending in melee mechs to weaken the spatial barriers with the help of their space suppressors, it would take forever to undermine these tough energy defenses!

"What is going on?" Ves frowned. "Shouldn't the Gamma Scorchers be unveiling their next big weapon already? They are letting the native aliens get uncomfortably close. The erudite phase lords have already begun to interdict and disrupt the CE forces with their spatial abilities."

Many energy beams suddenly began to miss as the surrounding space became crooked and unstable.

The human vessels also had trouble maintaining the right trajectories. In a few instances, a couple of mechs almost collided against each other!

The alien warships had also begun to pummel the azure energy shields of the CE warships.

While Ves could perceive plenty of clues that the CE version of azure energy shields had clearly been improved and optimized over several decades, the performance boost was not remarkable enough to turn the battle around.

Ves did not think the commanding officers of the Gamma Scorchers Warfleet were stupid, so it must have been a deliberate choice for them to give up their range advantage and let the enemy forces get close.

"So much bravado." Gloriana commented as she made a similar conclusion. "The Gamma Scorchers are clearly armed with a large amount of long-ranged precision armaments, but they are readily throwing it away. Are they afraid that if they open fire in earnest, the native aliens will become so frightened that they will immediately initiate a retreat?"

"That is the only explanation that makes sense. Whether it is true or not, the Cybers will have to present their answer soon, because if this continues, the phase lords will get close enough to physically kick or grasp the CE warships."

Ves had no doubt that the Gamma Scorchers knew exactly what they were doing. He refused to believe that the commanders in charge of this warfleet overestimated its capabilities.

In fact, the native alien advance proceeded so smoothly and without any interference from expert mechs and ace mechs that they grew suspicious.

The alien forces slowed down their advance and channeled much more power to their sensor systems in order to search for possible ambushes.

There was none. The Gamma Scorchers had come alone, and that puzzled the native aliens.

Unfortunately for the clueless enemies, the Cybers had waited long enough. Now that the enemy had come close enough, they finally began to unveil their next technological marvel!

"Look at the gun turrets of those warships!" Marvaine shouted. "They are... transforming!"

Transforming was a bit of an exaggerated description. From what Ves could observe, additional reinforcing materials formed around the existing energy weapon cannons, making them look thicker and better protected.

Unknown mechanisms also came into play and altered the functioning of the entire weapon system.

Nobody knew what was going on. Even Ves could not recognize the purpose behind all of these changes.

"They're about to open fire!"

Once the primary and secondary laser cannon batteries completed their metamorphosis, they quickly began to accumulate energy before launching weaker transphasic hyper energy beams at the spatial barriers that protected the phase lords advancing at the front.

"Huh?"

Ves and many other people initially became surprised that the warships fired weaker energy beams than usual, but they soon noticed an unusual sight.

The energy beams did not shut down.

Instead, similar to mining laser arrays, the cannons persisted in their efforts and continued to spit out their beams without any signs of ending.

Ves and Gloriana's eyes gradually widened as they saw that the transformed cannons showed no overt signs of danger or instability!

Although the cannons were obviously straining to maintain this constant damage output, it was amazing to see that none of its active components had overheated or broken down by this time!

"These laser cannons are expressly designed to keep this up for a longer duration!" Ves spoke in realization. "The damage output is insane if they don't get shut down. Look at how the enemy is taking this latest move!"

The phase lords grew disconcerted. While the laser beams that struck their spatial barriers did not produce any dramatic results, the alien leaders still did not like to see their main form of protection getting drained at a constant and unceasing rate.

They tried their best to speed up their forward motion, but their spatial barriers continued to weaken over time, especially when multiple warships directed all of their primary and secondary energy weapon batteries to wear down their energy defenses.

"This is a massive improvement in the field of laser weapons." Ves said. "Persistent energy beam weapons are nothing new, but it has never been done for normal warships at this scale. All of those transphasic hyper laser cannon batteries have overcome one of the biggest problems that plague most directed energy weapons. The new tech enables them to inflict much higher damage in a much shorter time scale."

Normal laser weapons tended to fire their energy beams for a very short interval before immediately shutting in order to prevent overheating and accelerated wear and tear.

The cooldown cycle was often many times longer than the period when the weapon was inflicting actual damage, and that had long been the source of frustration of many people.

Most laser weapon developers eventually accepted this status quo. Trying to lengthen the period when the beam weapon remained active often reduced its longevity at an accelerated rate. The benefits were not worth the costs.

Evidently, the Gamma Scorchers thought differently. Their reinforced laser weapon systems were clearly able to bear the incredible strain of keeping their beam weapons active for almost a full minute!

This had obvious consequences to the native aliens. The phase lords under fire had already begun to consider whether they should retreat.

Then, the Gamma Scorchers made their killer move.

Their warships suddenly switched from targeting all of the phase lords evenly to concentrating all of their firepower to a single point of the spatial barrier of a single greater phase lord!

This sudden concentration of firepower temporarily relieved a lot of phase lords, but happened to cause extreme distress for the single remaining target!