

Mech 3051

Chapter 3051: A Larkinson Holiday

Faint ripples began to spread across a patch of space.

Those ripples soon grew into waves.

The waves grew even further to the point where space almost folded in half!

The nearby listening beacons that were close enough to monitor the obvious gravitic fluctuations with minimal delay quickly parsed the readings and calculated that an extremely sizable fleet was transitioning into the star system.

Those tiny beacons immediately transmitted their alarming data and preliminary conclusions to a larger automated listening post.

Unlike those tiny beacons floating in space, the listening post was a more robust facility that had a lot more processing power at its disposal. Most of that was being used to double-check and confirm the preliminary conclusions.

Once its automated systems became assured that the incoming readings weren't the result of a glitch, it transmitted an alarming message through its quantum entanglement node.

Word soon spread across the Treden System that a huge fleet was about to drop into the local neighborhood!

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Just as the local authorities as well as every major stakeholder tried to figure out the motives of the arriving people, a swarm of hundreds of ships poured in like rain!

What frightened the local observers a lot was that more than half of the ships consisted of combat vessels. The remainder all served to support them in some way.

There were very few civilian vessels among the large and rather eclectic fleet. The only noteworthy element that did not fit in was the capital research ship which was emphatically not designed to venture into battle.

Regardless, any local resident who looked at all of the combat carriers and even larger fleet carriers would have no choice but to shudder in fear.

Had the crown terrorists managed to swarm together in order to form a destructive fleet? This was not an unheard of phenomenon. In some rare cases, the crown

terrorists secretly converged together in order to form a large force that could directly raid unsuspecting planets that possessed relatively few defenses!

Fortunately, the identity of the fleet soon became known. The expeditionary fleet belonged to a relatively unknown group called the Golden Skull Alliance.

In order to assure the locals that the new arrivals meant no harm, the Alliance took the initiative to contact the local authorities in order to smooth everything over.

"How is it going?" Ves asked Calabast as he sat in his designated chair on the enormous bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim. "Do the locals suspect our true purpose?"

The intelligence leader pressed her lips. "That's difficult to say. We have secretly coordinated a story with the help of the Purnesse Family. Ostensibly, we are merely travelers who are on our way to a different star sector. Due to the stresses that we have suffered in the past, we thought it would be good if all of our personnel get to enjoy some shore leave. Since we don't feel safe in large and crowded star systems, we decided to go off the beaten path a bit and allow our crew to enjoy a vacation at a more quiet and less crowded vacation destination."

Ves tilted his head. "It sounds plausible. I mean we did go through a lot of stuff. Even I feel like I need a vacation after I barely managed to crawl away from Prosperous Hill VI. Surely the Triedeners are accustomed to receiving big customers, right?"

"They are, but that was then and this is now. We live in a time where the Crown Uprising has already made its mark on society. People tend to get very spooked when large fleets filled with enough mechs to raze an entire planet gets close. In fact, I have just received word that the local traffic authority is requesting us to leave most of our vessels in the outer system."

"Heck no!" Ves instantly responded. "We've learned our lesson. We will not agree to any restrictions on our freedom of movement. We're bringing our entire fleet close to Trieden II and that's it. They can fine us if they want. We'll pay it if the amount is not too excessive."

"I doubt that settling a fine will assuage their concerns. Right now, our communication officers are trying their best to stall and confuse the traffic agents, but we don't know whether this will lead to a more drastic response."

"What is your estimate?"

Calabast grinned. "The Triedeners are powerless to stop us. Compared to the rest of the Grand Loxic Republic, this star system is just a rural location. The military garrison here is too weak to force us to comply with any rules. The only way the local government officials can pose any threat to us is if they call in backup from another star system."

Even Ves knew how ridiculous that sounded. "It will take days for reinforcements stationed at a nearby star system to reach the Treden System. Besides, in order to threaten a fleet of our size, the Loxians must mobilize at least one-and-a-half mech divisions in order to put sufficient force behind their commands. Who the hell is willing enough to lower the defense of a major star system with a lot of residents and critical industries in this day and age?"

The Crown Uprising had led to a lot of worsening circumstances, but the changing times also made some actions more convenient. Ves would have been a lot more hesitant about throwing his weight around in the past.

Though the Larkinsons and the Tredener officials never stopped talking, the fleet continued to soar closer to the inner system without slowing.

Many people could feel the tension rising in the star system as the hours went by. The Larkinsons and their allies did their best to reassure the spooked Tredeners that this was just a casual tourism-related visitation. They even went as far as spending lots of money to book a large swathe of resorts and other luxurious venues.

It seemed that the foreign visitors were already planning out their holidays. From snorkeling to riding old-fashioned sailing boats, the Larkinsons were spending serious money in order to receive the best possible treatment!

As soon as the money started flowing into the pockets of the local businesses, the local authorities soon started to lower their posture.

Defending Treden II from crown terrorists and foreign raiders was important, but supporting the local economy was even more vital, especially when the Crown Uprising caused a lot of tourists and regular visitors to cancel their scheduled holidays.

It turned out the power of money was still strong enough to trump suspicion. As the fleet leisurely began to approach the orbit of their destination, nothing unusual had occurred. The black mechs hadn't even increased their attack frequency considering that the incoming arrivals mostly intended to enjoy their shore leave on the opposite side of the planet.

There was no logical reason for the Golden Skull Alliance to get involved in local squabbles. The story might be different if the Larkinsons and so on intended to settle in the Grand Loxic Republic, but their desire to reach the Red Ocean was well known.

Unfortunately, even the best of excuses failed to hold up eventually. Two hours before the fleet reached high orbit of Treden II, the situation on the surface changed abruptly.

"The black mechs are attacking the Violet Estates in force!"

"Damn!" Ves cursed as he was going over the latest battle plans in the command center. "I was afraid of that!"

The central projection soon switched to a live view of the site in question. A lot of thick and powerful shields overlapped across a relatively small location as hundreds of black mechs emerged from the water in order to assault the home ground of the Purnesse Family!

Ves made some rapid estimates based on the quantity and power of the mechs. When he compared them to the defensive power of the energy shields that the Purnessers had erected, he came to a rather pessimistic conclusion.

"Those shields won't hold long enough before we arrive!"

He did not want to go through all of this trouble only to come away empty-handed due to circumstances outside of his control. He tried to wrack his brains for possible solutions. Many other Larkinsons were doing the same as well.

Yet the fact of the matter was that there was still a lot of distance between the fleet and the planet. Even if they sent out their fastest combat carriers first, it wouldn't make a lot of difference.

Unless...

"I have an idea." General Verle's projection stated as it faced Ves. "It's a bold one and a dangerous one, but if done correctly it will get our mechs to Treden II fast enough to prevent a complete collapse of all of those defenses."

"Explain."

"As you assuredly know, in-system space travel is not constant. Since there is no air resistance limiting the speeds of our vessels, they can continue to accelerate without limit. If we just push them forward all the time, we can easily reach our destination a lot faster than usual."

Ves widened his eyes. He immediately knew what General Verle was aiming at.

"General space travel isn't about accelerating forward all the time. Doing so will just cause our ships to fly so fast that it will result in relativistic shenanigans relative to our target or destination. Also, once we reach a given coordinate, we'll shoot right past it with dazzling speed. It will take hours if not days for us to slow down and fly back in the other direction."

This was why ships stopped accelerating forward short of their destination. They instead turned around so their rears faced their destination and started to accelerate in the opposite direction, thereby slowing their forward advance so that they could come to a complete stop when they reached the right coordinate.

There were other ways to go about this problem. The ships could boost forward for a short amount of time before cutting their thrusters, thereby allowing them to coast forward endlessly with minimal fuel and energy consumption. It took a very long time to get anywhere with this approach, though.

This was why the fleet was actually taking the earlier, more standard approach. All of the ships had to slow down in order to enter the orbit of Treden II without shooting past.

Yet what if they stopped bothering to do this? What would happen if a select number of ships cut their thrusters or even turned around to accelerate forward again?

"Wouldn't the combat carriers slingshot around the planet and shoot past anyway, just in a different exit trajectory?" Ves skeptically asked.

"That is certainly possible, but..."

General Verle called up a tactical interface and began to set up a quick model of the maneuver he had in mind. He picked out the toughest, more durable combat carriers of the Larkinson Clan and proceeded to command them to accelerate forward again.

The selected vessels quickly separated from the main fleet and approached Treden II like incoming projectiles. They soon neared the planet, but instead of orbiting it or slingshotting past it like normal ships, the combat carriers instead cut through the atmosphere like a knife!

Suffice to say, this maneuver was very dangerous and did not do the longevity of the starships any favors! Due to their relatively high speeds as they rapidly descended from orbit, the humongous air resistance produced a lot of pressure and heat that battered the hulls of those vessels.

Though the combat carriers were quite tough and could take a beating, they were not designed to resist such all-encompassing forces at such considerable levels!

However... as long as the ships made it through the worst period, their surface systems would probably be crippled but the mechs and crew inside of them would probably be dizzy but okay!

"Carriers are designed to deliver mechs to the right destination." General Verle stated with a grim smile. "Combat carriers are especially noteworthy because they are designed with hostile conditions in mind. While the scenario I've painted is a bit more extreme than what the shipwrights have in mind, I believe they will hold up when it matters."

Ves remain doubtful. "You are putting a lot of faith in those vessels. Also, even if the combat carriers manage to survive entry, they will probably be trashed to the point that

we are better off scrapping them. That is a lot of expensive hardware that we will be throwing away."

"Do you value our combat carriers or do you value the Purnesse Family more?" General Verle asked in a serious tone. "We can buy replacement vessels everywhere, but we won't find many opportunities to absorb valuable groups like the Purnessers."

Ves looked pensive. He had to make a difficult decision. Though he was inclined to greenlight the radical new plan, it didn't mean he liked it! The price of rescuing the Purnesse Family had just risen drastically!

"These stupid diplomats better be worth the sacrifices we are making!"

Chapter 3052: Split Entry

With the Violet Estates under intensive siege by ten mech companies worth of black mechs, time was of the essence.

It took two hours for the main fleet to arrive at Trieden II and be ready to save the Purnesse Family, but that took way too long.

"We need to go now and we need to go fast! Skip the rest of the planning and just go forward as fast as possible!"

Every minute wasted on planning and preparation brought the Purnessers a lot closer to death than before. This was why the clan already moved into action as soon as General Verle conceived of his bold hot drop initiative.

Unfortunately, according to the preliminary calculations of the Larkinson Clan's engineering staff, not every combat carrier was robust enough to withstand the enormous forces acting on the hull by dropping from orbit at a high speed and a steep angle.

It was already a challenge to allow a huge starship that possessed an incredible mass and was filled with lots of weighty mechs to boot to land safely on a planet. To put more extreme stresses on them by performing a faster but much more risky descent was so excessive that most ships that weren't in their prime condition would simply fall apart.

"While it's true that combat carriers are designed to make drops under hostile conditions, they're mainly optimized to fly in the face of enemy firepower. They're not meant to descend into a planetary atmosphere in such extreme conditions that they practically turn into meteorites!"

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Vivian Tsai, the Larkinson Clan's resident shipwright, had suddenly become the most authoritative figure when it came to planning and realizing this hot drop operation. She looked completely befuddled as General Verle had urgently tapped her for her expertise in this urgent naval engineering challenge.

"We know it is inadvisable to subject our vessels to so much abuse, but we have to do it anyway." Ves told her. "What we need is to transport our mechs to the surface as fast as possible. Even if we have to push our ships to the point where we are forced to scrap them, it is worth it as long as we can obtain the gratitude of the entire Purnesse Family."

If the Purnessers didn't appreciate the huge effort that the Larkinsons put into this operation, then Ves would convince them one way or another.

"Hmmm." She frowned as she quickly called up an interface that listed out all of the combat carriers in the fleet. She quickly tapped a handful of ships. "Some combat carriers are more suitable for the operation you have in mind than others. These are the ones whose hulls will likely survive a violent entry in my estimates. Mind you, I am just making a hasty judgment by relying on my intuition and expertise. If you want more precise results, I need to perform a lot of simulations."

"We don't have time for that." General Verle's projection spoke. "We will go with the ships that you have chosen. As a precaution, I will command the ships in question to evacuate all of their non-essential personnel. There is no need to put them at risk."

"You can do more than that, sir." Vivian stated. "It will be easier for the vessels to regain control after their descent if you lighten their mass. This will already happen once their mechs deploy from their hangar bays, but you should seek to dump any non-essential cargo beforehand. Supplies such as fuel, water, spare parts and so on should all be dumped overboard immediately. Every ton counts."

"I shall pass on the orders." Verle nodded.

"In addition, the crew left on board the vessels should do what they can to button down the combat carriers." She continued. "The outer compartments will especially be in danger. Don't leave something volatile or explosive in those areas. The crew should also do what they can to reinforce the outer hull. There isn't much they can do but they should at least retract whatever sensor modules and other vulnerable openings. Some of those sections can act as pockets that can concentrate a devastating concentration of heat and wind. After the crew have done what they can within a short amount of time, they should all gather in the interior of their vessels and pray that their rides won't fall apart too quickly."

Ves waved his hand. "You should get in contact with the captains or chief engineers of the ships directly. Don't waste any time explaining all of this to us. Just make sure the ships stay intact long enough to deliver the mechs safely and keep the crew safe. The

survival of the combat carriers and whatever material assets are onboard is not a priority. Trash them if you want, but make sure they complete their final mission first."

"Got it, sir."

Vivian Tsai quickly refined the initial hot drop plan a few minutes later. She separated the suitable combat carriers into two waves.

The first wave would drop in first and had to endure the greatest amount of abuse. With just 6 eligible combat carriers, the Avatars of Myth and the Flagrant Vandals wouldn't be able to drop too many mechs into the field!

A second wave came roughly half an hour later as the 10 combat carriers that went next were not as tough. They had to come in slower in order to allow for a more gentle descent and that delayed their eventual arrival.

"Six combat carriers doesn't sound like much." Ves grumbled. "That's just 240 mechs in total. Those are dicy numbers compared to the opposition."

Fortunately, the opposition didn't look too formidable. When Ves studied the footage of the black mechs attacking the energy shields covering the Violet Estates, he affirmed that they didn't look like anything special.

"The primary purpose behind the design of the black mechs is to make them as untraceable as possible. This means that they don't possess any distinctive strengths or advantages bestowed by the unique design philosophies of high-ranking mech designers. That said, I can tell that whoever is behind their designs are at least Seniors, so their fundamental performance parameters are highly-optimized and not deficient in any major areas."

Ves disliked bland and ordinary mechs, yet he did not deny such products could provide great value to the right customer. The black mechs were so devoid of personality that Ves truly wouldn't be able to figure out their designers or their origin even if he personally knew every mech designer in the star sector!

If the people behind the scenes were thorough enough, then they might have even imported the black mechs from another star sector. When performing business as dirty as taking out a political enemy, it was best not to leave a trace too close to home!

"What will that mean for us?" General Verle asked.

While the highest military officer of the Larkinson Clan knew a lot more about tactics and operations than Ves, he still had to defer to the experts when it came to specific matters.

Out of everyone in the Larkinson Clan, no one knew more about mechs than its resident Journeymen!

The only other person in the entire fleet who could do a better job was Professor Benedict Cortez, but Ves was not about to ask the man who used to be known as the Skull Architect for a favor!

Ves grinned as he continued to study the various mech models coated in black. "The enemy mechs are what you get if we live in a reality where mech designers aren't as special as today. These are normal, serviceable products that are mechanically sound but lack the charm of more competitive products. The inability to add any defining strengths to them is a significant handicap. It would be as if our mechs are not alive and lack any sort of glow!"

While his own Larkinson mechs would still be battle worthy even if they lost all of the advantages that Ves bestowed upon them, there was no doubt that their desirability would plummet to the bottom! There were more useful alternatives on the market that provided a lot more value for money.

"I see. Telling this to our men will definitely boost their confidence." Verle smiled in satisfaction. "What of the overall quality of the black mechs? They do not appear to be too upscale. They don't look like budget models either, though."

"You're correct, general. By my estimates, they are all midrange mechs.

In order to make life a little easier for the mech pilots who were about to drop onto the surface of Trieden II, Ves continued to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of every individual black mech model. He even requested Gloriana and the rest of the Design Department to perform their own analyses.

An expanding volume of detailed technical data entered the Larkinson database. Every Larkinson mech that constantly maintained an active connection to the rest of the data network would automatically download and process this data. The mech would subsequently be able to highlight specific weak points in an unobtrusive manner so that the pilot could target them whenever there was an opportunity!

In the meantime, the two waves of combat carriers kept racing towards Trieden II without too much regard to the challenges they were about to face.

With five mech companies of Avatars and one mech company of Vandals, the initial wave had to relieve the crisis facing the Violet Estates as much as possible.

Commander Melkor Larkinson had personally chosen to take part in this wave. He and his personal Bright Warrior had relocated over to one of the six leading combat carriers in order to command his men from the front right from the beginning!

As he sat in the cockpit of his living mech, Melkor constantly paid attention to the developing situation. The mech technicians had mounted a special command and communication module onto the back of his Bright Warrior in order to ensure he would be able to maintain his command even when subjected to substantial interference!

The ship he was on began to rattle as the first wave passed through orbital height and rapidly descended into the layers with actual air.

Even if most people didn't realize that air was an actual substance with mass and volume, anyone riding a vessel that was dropping from space would feel how much of a difference this made.

Soon enough, the vibrations affecting the entire hull became too severe for the combat carrier's various systems to suppress!

Melkor found himself unable to maintain his concentration as his cockpit began to rattle like a drum.

His heart beat faster as he realized that it wouldn't take long before he and his men faced adversity once again.

Though he felt the familiar touch of fear in his heart, his excitement and sense of duty balanced it out. Right now, the Avatars needed Melkor to lead, not to cower to the point of becoming paralyzed!

"Don't worry, sir. I'll make sure to cover you if the black mechs go after you." Isobel Koten-Larkinson reassured.

The Bright Warrior next to Melkor's brandished its rifle in emphasis. Different from many other Larkinsons, Isobel was an expert candidate! She did not hesitate to volunteer for this action in the hopes that she would be able to find her breakthrough opportunity.

Whether she would be able to succeed, nobody knew, but participating in any serious battles always provided a lot of harvest to expert candidates.

"I don't need the help. You should look after our new guests instead."

"Pff. I won't make any promises. Anything can happen in battle. I hope those snobs won't act too recklessly."

A handful of MTA mech pilots took part in the operation as well. In fact, the four who dedicated themselves completely to the Larkinson training program were jumping right into the fire by taking part in the very first wave!

While it was very reckless to push them into battle while barely giving them any time to get accustomed to the unique Larkinson mechs that had been specially prepared for them, Ves insisted on their participation.

All of the guests from the MTA had to learn that he and his fellow Larkinsons were very serious when it came to pushing their limits!

Chapter 3053: Hot Drop

Six combat carriers streaked through the skies of Treden II like flaming balls!

The surface of these vessels may have been designed to take a considerable beating, but this was something else! So many different things could go wrong that the crews aboard the ships had to cling to any shred of comfort within reach.

Even so, most mech pilots and combative Larkinsons took all of the dangers in stride. In their minds, they were made for combat and an extreme descent like this was exactly why they chose their respective professions.

"We're riding straight into hell!" Someone whooped.

"Hahaha! I haven't felt this excited since I almost died against the dark gods!"

"Going through this torture is nothing special. You should try and fight against an expert mech. Now that will give you the thrill of your life!"

The boisterous Avatars were not humorless, grim-faced grunts. Even though they maintained a professional image in front of others, internally they contained plenty of colorful personalities.

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The Avatar Commander did not want to lead a troop that was devoid of character. Just like how mechs became better when they possessed a bit of life, he believed that making his units more lively was very conducive to their performance.

Melkor did not do anything to restrict this kind of talk over the communication channels. The men all needed a distraction while every descending vessel acted as if they were flying straight into a star.

He patiently checked the clocks which showed the various important timings. So far, none of the ships had fallen apart yet, but there were several more minutes to go before it was safe enough for the mechs to exit the hangar bays.

A short distance away, four slightly different Bright Warriors that had been especially modified by Ves to make them usable by non-Larkinsons were all awaiting their own turn to drop into battle.

[We didn't sign up for this.] One of the four MTA guest pilots transmitted through a secret, exclusive communication channel established by his hyper-advanced implant.

[It doesn't matter. We follow orders and fight whatever enemy is in front of us. There is no need to overcomplicate this situation.]

[Don't you realize what the Larkinsons are doing? They want to borrow our battle prowess in order to defeat their own enemies! They don't care about our Association's neutrality rules!]

[We are operating under different identities now, Miss 'Petrov'. As private citizens, there is no rule that stops us from fighting against the indigenous population.]

[Be that as it may, the patriarch of the Larkinson Clan should at least show some more consideration for our actual duties.]

[We need to experience actual battle in order to get us closer to obtaining our goals. How will we be able to do that when we don't allow ourselves to intervene in local conflicts? It's not as if there are any aliens nearby that we can fight without worrying about the consequences of our action.]

Even though the four MTA mech pilots chose to put their trust in the Larkinsons, that did not mean they were gullible fools. Far from it. They just recognized that part of their group had to make a sacrifice and see whether the Larkinsons were truly able to deliver upon their promises.

Though they were aware that the esteemed Master Willix was supportive of Ves Larkinson, they weren't mech designers so they couldn't fully appreciate what that meant.

All they knew was that the Larkinsons might have a chance of making them fulfill their greatest dreams, but that this pursuit could very well end up leading them to an early grave!

[I don't like this mech at all.] The man who currently went by Mr. Mavelon complained. [This Bright Warrior mech is decent for second-class standards, but its strengths are rather vague and it is designed with a completely different audience in mind. The limits are so low that we will only be able to show off a fraction of our strengths.]

Compared to the first-class multipurpose mechs that they were accustomed to piloting, the second-class mechs they had to work with felt like toys in their hands!

[There are ways to express our ability beyond direct piloting skill. We'll be entering the fray outnumbered, so there will be plenty of opportunity for us to show our brilliance in our own way. We must make the Larkinsons learn the difference between us and them. They have not shown enough respect to us so far. That needs to change.]

[We do not need to change anything about the Larkinsons, Mr. Detrivo. Our mission is to take care of ourselves. I do not intend to pay any mind to our hosts so long as they can bring us closer to expert pilot. Let us see how they will fare in this imminent battle. We can pass judgement afterwards.]

As the four sacrificial MTA mech pilots continued to chat with each other without too much concern about their current predicament, the overheated combat carriers finally made it through the worst phase without losing anything too major!

Their hulls had practically turned black after being roasted by an abundance of air friction. A lot of surface modules had either burnt into a crisp or been flung away by drag. Some airlocks and hull plating had come off as well during the journey, causing the combat carriers in question to expose some of their outer compartments to the ravages of the environment!

No one cared about this relatively unimportant damage. The crews stationed in those sections had long evacuated to the center of the combat carriers. As long as they managed to survive this dangerous maneuver, they could always transfer over to a new ship.

However, some of them quickly changed their minds once the vessels began to rattle again.

"We're under attack!"

The black mechs weren't blind to the hot drop from space. The Larkinsons had carefully calculated the trajectory of the first wave to end up close to the area where the Violet Estates was situated.

This meant that the burned and battered combat carriers had quickly entered combat range from the opponents the Larkinsons were targeting!

"Damn, get out of this ship now! If we wait any longer, there won't be enough left to keep us afloat!"

The bow sections of the combat carriers were designed to endure an exceptional amount of frontal damage, but that also meant that these areas had withstood most of the heat and friction acting on the hulls just before.

The integrity of the forward sections were so compromised that the captains were very eager to get rid of their payloads!

Once the combat carriers began to stabilize themselves with whatever thrusters and maneuvering systems remained working, the mechs were finally given the greenlight to deploy!

"LAUNCH!"

All of the banter stopped as the Avatar and Vandal mech pilots knew that it was time for them to get serious.

The hangar bay doors shakily slid open. Some of the mechanisms may have gotten bent out of shape, but the door systems themselves were built to be tough enough to work even if half of the ship had collapsed!

Once the openings grew wide enough, the mechs rapidly poured out with very little margin of error. The outgoing machines could easily collide against each other if they didn't manage their speeds correctly, but the mech pilots were too well-trained to make such mistakes.

Only this way ensured that all of the combat-capable machines would be able to enter the field quickly enough to fend off the violent welcome!

"The Violet Estates are still up, though their last energy shields look like they are close to reaching their limits. Don't let them finish the job!"

The ranged mechs of both sides began to exchange fire against each other.

The commanders of the unknown force of mechs did not opt to fire at the compromised combat carriers any further. Though it wouldn't take too many attacks to break them, any firepower directed against these irrelevant assets gave the mechs of the Larkinson Clan more opportunities to dish a lot of hurt!

With the combat carriers quickly trying to curve away, a force of around 240 mechs sorted themselves out as they flew towards the besieged Violet Estates.

The Bright Warriors armed with rifles fell behind the rest as they focused more on firing their weapons and evading incoming attacks.

Melkor and Isobel were among this group. Both of them fired laser beams or positron beams at targets that were dozens of kilometers away. Their relatively high altitudes gave them a good angle against their opponents, but that also allowed the black mechs to fire back without suffering any obstruction!

"Damn, I'm hit! I need cover!"

"Focus on my targets as much as possible. We need to wear down their numbers quickly."

"My flight system has been struck!"

The rifle-wielding Bright Warriors were quickly wearing down their opponents with their strong, luminar-augmented rifles.

It was a pity that Ves lacked the time equip them all with the upgraded versions of the crystals, but the basic ones already granted them a formidable bump in firepower.

Certain lucky individuals like Melkor and Isobel were able to inflict more damage for that reason. Though Melkor wasn't putting his gift to that much good use considering his need to maintain situational awareness, the female expert candidate inflicted one telling blow after another!

One black mech lost its rifle. Another fell down as one of its legs no longer worked. More suffered serious damage to their various key systems as Isobel precisely targeted the weak points that Ves and the other mech designers had already identified beforehand!

Though the damage they dealt was quite effective, the black mechs were no slouches either.

One important aspect about their designs was that they were amphibian in nature!

This had very wide implications.

The black mechs possessed no flight capabilities. In exchange, they were able to submerge underneath the water whenever they wished. This was quite effective whenever they wanted to avoid any further incoming energy attacks.

In addition to that, the black mechs were also able to dump all of their heat into the surrounding water at much higher efficiencies than if they tried to transfer all of their heat into open air. The enemy mechs did not have to worry about overheating at all, which gave them quite a substantial advantage if they utilized any energy weapons!

The lack of necessity in making them flight capable also caused them to be heavier and more massive than their aerial and spaceborn counterparts. Even if the quality of their armor systems were substantially worse than the alloys cladding the Bright Warriors, their thicker shells gave them a lot more buffer.

All of this caused the ranged duel to proceed a lot more evenly than the Larkinsons hoped.

"These cheating mechs are diving back underwater whenever we are about to down them!" One Avatar complained.

"Hit them with synchronized volleys! Don't give these black turtles any opportunity to retreat before it's too late."

"Damnit! Their knight mechs are incredibly thick! Fighting against amphibian and aquatic mechs is an enormous chore."

Dozens of mechs from both sides had already succumbed or been rendered combat ineffective within just a single minute! The pilots mostly managed to survive the onslaught as the mechs they piloted were generally tough enough to give them enough time to retreat or eject their cockpits.

Still, that did not take away the fact that the first wave of Larkinson mechs were not able to crush their opponents in a dominant fashion.

This battle could have proceeded a lot differently if the Larkinsons were able to drop in with 2000 mechs at once!

Even so, neither Commander Melkor nor any of his men had any intentions of backing off. They continued to soar forward in order to confront the black mechs as directly as possible!

"Avatars of Myth!" Melkor roared over the command channel as he let the thrill of the moment overtake his calm! "Who are we?!"

"WE ARE LARGER THAN LIFE!"

"What do we do!?"

"WE FIGHT LIKE LARKINSONS!"

"What shall become of our enemies?!"

"OUR FOES SHALL FUEL OUR ASCENSION!"

Chapter 3054: Air vs Water

The distance quickly narrowed between the two sides!

The ferocious Avatar mechs were premium second-class mechs that were tougher and stronger than the average mech models that were usually used by private organizations. This was the benefit of an organization led by a wealthy mech designer who took care of his own men.

Yet the black mechs weren't weak despite their ignoble roles. Whoever was behind them invested considerable sums to turn them into tough and durable machines.

Though the amphibian mechs weren't exactly the fastest when they walked on land, they were uniquely optimized for combat on a water-dominated planet like Trieden II. The paradise destination was mostly covered with oceans and the only surface landmasses that existed were either islands or slightly larger archipelagos.

There was a functional elegance behind the design of the black mechs. As Ves tracked the progress of the unfolding battle from the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, he noted that their mech pilots were no slouches either.

"These guys definitely aren't crown terrorists." Ves concluded after the first minute the Larkinsons and unknown enemies opened fire against each other... "Their performance is too regular. I can smell the standardized training that they have gone through."

The enemy mech pilots previously performed a lot more sloppy when they ambushed the Purnessers and assailed the Violet Estates. There wasn't any need for the black mechs to leverage all of their strength against a weak target that only knew how to hide behind walls.

Yet the Larkinsons were different. If the Purnessers were like cowardly foxes, then the Avatars came like roaring lions!

Against actual challengers, the enemy mech pilots could no longer put up the facade of a bunch of brainwashed terrorists who were only fighting in order to retrieve a supposed crown.

Mechs continued to fall from both sides as the exchange of fire grew more intense and precise as the range narrowed.

What was important to note was that the Ferocious Piranhas had flown ahead of the Bright Warriors!

Though the infamous light skirmishers deployed by the Flagrant Vandals had to slow down their forward advance a bit in order to perform constant evasive maneuvers, they were well on their way of reaching their opponents!

The black mechs did not ignore their approach. Their ranged mechs abruptly switched from directing their fire towards the Bright Warriors in favor of doing everything they could to take down the Ferocious Piranhas!

Even though the Vandal mechs put a lot more effort into their evasive maneuvers, the ranged black mechs did not attempt to hit them straight-on. Instead, they deployed a coordinated firing strategy where each mech poured their firepower into a specific zone around their target.

As long as all of the different zones boxed in all of the directions where their target would be an instant later, it was impossible for beleaguered Ferocious Piranhas to escape getting hit!

"Ahh! I'm already out!"

"Don't bother dancing around anymore." A Vandal captain urged. " We're going down no matter what we do. If that's the case, then focus more on boosting forward and strive to close in to the enemy as soon as possible. Vandals forever!"

"VANDALS FOREVER!"

The fearless daredevil pilots of the Flagrant Vandals took the incoming fire in stride. Even if Ferocious Piranha after Ferocious Piranha dropped down or flew out of formation due to suffering crippling damage, the remainder did not let these sacrifices go in vain. With each Ferocious Piranha that fell, many more were getting closer and closer to the thick and sturdy mechs poking half of their frames out of the water.

Several Larkinsons including Ves winced as they witnessed these mechs dropping like flies. None of them were cheap and it pained them to see mechs worth several hundred million hex credits perish without even receiving the opportunity to pay back the money that the clan had put into their fabrication.

"I'm losing billions of hex credits worth assets!" Ves complained.

"Meow." Lucky huffed as he laid on the armrest.

The battle was of little interest to the gem cat considering that he and the Spirit of Bentheim were too far away to be in any danger.

"You don't know what this means. We will have to fabricate replacement mechs for the pilots that lost their original machines. This will delay the supply of mechs to the mech pilots who have not yet received anything, which means it will take additional weeks or months before we get up to full strength!"

The rescue operation cost more than money, lives and assets. It also ate up valuable time that he and his clan could have spend on other useful activities.

Seeing all of the losses the clan incurred so far made Ves feel a bit regretful for accepting Calabast's recommendation. He didn't feel it was worth it to pay such a hefty price just to obtain the services of a diplomatic family.

He was plotting to demand a greater degree of fealty from the Purnesse Family in order to get his return on investment. These damned Loxians were proving to be a lot more trouble so far than he expected.

The battle continued to unfold as Ves strayed in his thoughts.

Though the ranged Bright Warriors were hitting the black mechs fairly hard, the enemy had plenty of mechs to spare for now. The unknown force had probably done their research on the Larkinson Clan because the black mechs were doing their best to take down the incoming light skirmishers!

"Do these people know what our Ferocious Piranhas can do?!"

"It doesn't matter! We'll make their lives hell regardless of how few of us are left!"

Even though the Ferocious Piranhas neither had mass nor numbers on their side, the Vandals did not even think about defeat.

The original mech regiment that used to serve in the Bright Republic's Mech Corps had changed substantially over the years. Though it hadn't taken on a lot of new members until recently, the Vandals constantly worked to retool themselves and reengineer their martial tradition to establish their new place in the Larkinson Clan.

Though they still retained much of their former military vagabond ways, the Vandals put a lot more emphasis in their new role as the light mech specialists of the clan. This was a niche that the other mech forces currently didn't focus upon, so the former Brighters eagerly embraced the Ferocious Piranha IB as their mech of choice.

"Come on, Vandals! Let's teach those arrogant Penitent Sisters and Swordmaidens how real soldiers fight!"

"VANDALS FOREVER!"

The Ferocious Piranhas rapidly approached the vicinity of the Violet Estates. Instead of trying to enter the defensive envelope of the remaining stronghold of the Purnesse Family, the Ferocious Piranhas flew around the people they were supposed to rescue and headed straight towards the scattered formations of the black mechs!

Only a bit more than half of the mech company had made it through, but this was still a devastating amount for the enemy. As soon as the Ferocious Piranhas flew in range, the black mechs abruptly jerked and exhibited a lot less reactivity than before.

The terrible suppressive glows of these annoying light mechs were making their mark!

Unfortunately for the Vandals and the rest of the Larkinsons, the enemy mech pilots affected by the hostile glow weren't debilitated to the point where they lost control.

The controllers of the black mechs firmed up their minds and gritted their teeth in order to attack the fast and nimble light mechs that were harassing them from above and from the sides.

The close range prevented the enemy ranged mechs from continuing their attacks on the Ferocious Piranhas with as much vigor as before. Friendly fire was a very real possibility.

Instead, it was the job of the melee mechs to fend them off. However, the light mechs were so quick and mobile that it was hopeless for the defending melee mechs to have any realistic chance of downing the Ferocious Piranhas.

The aquatic black mechs simply weren't fast enough! They couldn't even fly, so how could they possibly land their attacks on the swift machines!

The only machines that stood any chance of downing the light mechs was the small number of striker mechs armed with shotgun weapons. Their broad pellets dealt pretty damage to the Ferocious Piranhas at closer ranges.

However, the Vandals didn't have to worry about getting harassed this way for long as a torrent of lasers and other beams struck the enemy striker mechs from a distance!

"Thanks for the backup, Avatars!"

"No problem, Vandals! Keep them occupied until we reach your position. We just need a minute!"

With the striker mechs quickly getting downed or suppressed to the point where they had to dip below the water, the Ferocious Piranhas were free to fly and pressure the black mechs.

The Vandals knew better than to close in to strike with their daggers, though. Their offensive power was not great and it would be even harder to deal crippling damage against well-armored amphibian mechs.

Instead, the Ferocious Piranhas did as much as they could while making threatening attack passes over the heads of the half-submerged black mechs.

Not just their glows, but also the threat of a dive attack kept the enemy machines constrained.

The black mechs simply weren't equipped to defeat the Ferocious Piranhas, especially when the Vandals acted like scoundrels with the way they were taunting their opponents without actually getting close enough to open them up to strong retaliation.

"Hahaha! Look at these idiotic black mechs. They can't shoot us down anymore now that we have gotten so close. Make sure to interfere with their rifleman mechs as much as possible. Don't give their mech pilots any peace!"

The Ferocious Piranhas distracted the black mechs so well that they bought plenty of time for the leading edge of the Avatars to finally get close.

"Lancer mechs! Drive a wedge through their formation!" Melkor commanded.

"By your will!"

The Bright Warriors in lancer mech configurations had gone ahead of the rest of the Avatars as their forward acceleration and velocities were higher. They pointed their long and thick lances straight ahead as they did not show any fear of telegraphing their next move towards their opponents.

However, the response surprised the Lakrinsons. The black mechs did not opt to face the incoming charge head-on. Instead of hastily repositioning their sturdiest and most defensive machines to meet the incoming charge, they did something much simpler.

They all dove underwater!

In one instance, the amphibian mechs were poking out of the waterline, looking more than ready to fight against the incoming Larkinson mechs regardless of the losses.

In the next instance, the site they previously occupied had turned into calm water with only a small number of downed black mechs poking out from the shallow surface.

"Damn! We lost our targets!"

"Are they leaving?"

The lancer mechs smoothly flew past the site where the black mechs had previously congregated without driving their lance through any solid metal.

The mech pilots of the offense-oriented Bright Warriors expressed a lot of frustration at being denied their moment of glory!

"The black mechs are popping out again!"

The enemy force did not intend to retreat from the battle now that they encountered serious opposition. Instead, they chose to meet the challenge of the Larkinson Clan and fight against the powerful Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas despite the heavy casualties that they would surely sustain!

As the melee Bright Warriors that followed after the lancer mechs crashed into the lines of the black mechs, a furious struggle broke out as both sides tried to take each other down with no further signs of backing off. Neither the Larkinsons nor unknown assailants believed that they were about to suffer defeat!

"That's strange." Commander Melkor murmured as he observed the behavior of the black mechs from afar. The rifle of his mech periodically spat out beams as he took aim and pulled the trigger. "What gives these black mechs the confidence that they can beat us especially considering that our second wave is on the way?"

He quickly drew one worrying conclusion. "They're not alone! This isn't their force! Hostile reinforcements are probably on the way!"

Chapter 3055: Barbarians at the Gates

The situation on the battlefield careened in a direction that neither anticipated!

The black mechs that sought to break the Violet Estates and destroy the core of the Purnesse Family did not back down even when confronted by a small force of powerful Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas.

Instead, they stubbornly stuck around regardless of the losses they incurred. This signalled to everyone that the mastermind behind the black mechs was quite determined to complete their mission!

"They're not mercenaries, that's for sure." Ves grunted.

If the pilots of the black mechs were simply soldiers of fortune, they should have retreated after encountering serious opposition. While they actually outnumbered the arriving Avatars and Vandals, it was not easy for them to defeat a force of higher-quality mechs. Even if the unknown force managed to eke out a win, they would definitely suffer significant losses!

That might not sound so bad if they insisted on completing the mission, but the movements of the Larkinson Clan in space couldn't be hidden! Anyone with a decent monitoring system in space would be able to notice the second wave of combat carriers arriving hot on the heels of the first wave.

Then there was the rest of the expeditionary fleet to consider!

Why would any opponent stick around knowing that they might have to overcome thousands of high-quality mechs?

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The Larkinsons weren't stupid. Ves, General Verle and many other clever minds deduced the possible reasons behind such behavior.

If the black mechs were piloted by actual crown terrorists, then their current suicidal behavior shouldn't be a surprise. The brainwashed idiots only cared about inflicting the

greatest amount of damage. They did not possess any sense of preservation when they were 'activated'.

However, after the analysts of the Larkinson Clan studied the characteristics of the black mechs as well as the behavior of their mech pilots in battle, their conclusions were very clear.

"These unknown combatants are well-trained even by second-class standards. While they lack the intimate coordination and brotherhood of military servicemen, their skill and teamwork are clearly better than a typical mercenary force. The most probable identities of these mech pilots are long-standing members of a family organization's household troops."

This guess fit the image that Ves had built in his mind. The household troops of families, clans and noble houses tended to be extremely loyal to their cause. It was rare for them to be as skilled as military mech pilots, but their employers usually invested substantial amounts of money in their training.

"Calabast, have you been able to figure out the culprits of this attack? Who is behind these black mechs?"

"We haven't gathered enough data to figure that out." The woman spoke as she sat next to Ves. A panel of projected screens constantly bombarded her with footage and raw data. "While the few clues we've ascertained up until now have narrowed down the list of possible enemies who have reasons to target the Purnesse Family, there are too many interests in the Grand Loxic Republic."

"Damn."

Knowing who the Larkinson Clan was facing would have been quite helpful in predicting the enemy moves, intentions and amount of mechs it was willing to deploy. His clan had entered the conflict with too much haste and suffered from the gap in intelligence.

It couldn't be helped. The situation of the Purnesse Family was too dire. If the Larkinsons hadn't made haste, the Violet Estates would have collapsed by now!

"The arrival of the second wave is crucial. The black mechs are obviously banking on reinforcements to bail them out, but they aren't the only ones who are relying on follow-up troops to gain the upper hand." General Verle's projection stated as he continued to command the overall situation from the Graveyard.

Calabast frowned. "The problem is that our maneuvers are in the open and the enemy's movements are in the dark. Our opponents can roughly predict how many of our mechs are on their way while we have no clue how many enemy reinforcements are on the way. We don't have any suitable sensors in place that can detect an incoming wave of enemy troops."

This was something that Ves noticed as well. In fact, the Avatars of Myth and Flagrant Vandals weren't performing well against the amphibian mechs at all at the moment!

"We didn't enter the battle with the most appropriate mechs and loadouts." He gestured towards the main projection.

Larkinson mechs were helpless to prevent the black mechs from diving into the water whenever they got into trouble!

The Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas were quite weather resistant. They were designed to fight under stormy conditions and on untamed planets with fairly hostile environment conditions.

However, they were not designed to submerge in a large body of water!

Once they fell in, there was a significant chance that they wouldn't be able to get out!

If the Larkinsons were fighting against regular landbound mechs, then this battle would have unfolded a lot differently. Mechs on land couldn't swim through solid ground, so there was no way for them to escape a determined assault.

Yet because the Larkinson mechs were fighting against amphibian mechs that used the very oceans as their inexhaustible fortification, they were unable to down the black mechs quickly enough!

The Avatar and Vandal mech pilots who clashed against the black mechs began to grow more and more frustrated. Each time multiple Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas ganged up on a black mech, the target in question simply dove into the water and neatly avoided getting attacked on all sides.

Each time a lancer mech charged against an amphibian mech, the latter simply dipped below the surface and reemerged right after the threat had flown past its head.

The only downside to doing this was that the black mechs weren't inflicting as much damage to the Larkinson mechs as before, but it was still a good way to prevent themselves from getting defeated by a qualitatively superior mech force!

[These Larkinsons are idiots.] Miss Quentin communicated in a private communication channel. [Aerial and spaceborn mechs may be able to suppress aquatic and amphibian mechs, but they can never defeat the opposition. Right now, we're not only fighting on the homeground of these black mechs, we also came without the right equipment!]

The Bright Warrior she piloted hovered helplessly above the waterline. Its sword barely had any opportunities to cut through metal. Each time Quentin was about to display her supreme skill to the other Larkinsons, the black mech in her sights would shamelessly dive below and avoid a direct confrontation.

The enemy even marked out her mech as an extremely dangerous threat. This meant that any opponent she targeted would dive underneath the surface preemptively before she could even launch her first attack!

[If I was piloting my usual mech, I would have been able to chase them through the water or snipe them from above a long time ago! These Bright Warriors suck!]

First-class multipurpose mechs were characterized by their great degree of versatility. Many of them were fully capable of fighting underwater. Even if they didn't perform too well under aquatic conditions, they still possessed numerous weapon systems that allowed them to punch through water.

Unfortunately, the Larkinson Clan never prepared for this kind of situation.

[We're not here to enjoy a picnic, Quentin.] Mr. Detrivo admonished as his Bright Warrior in knight mech configuration protected the rifleman mechs hovering further away. [We wouldn't be facing any challenge if we fought with our old mechs. Plenty of mech pilots endure situations like this without any complaints. This is what true combat is like.]

He may have a good point, but none of the MTA mech pilots felt they were benefiting at the moment. They just piled up more complaints towards the Larkinson Clan!

Even Ves felt a bit ashamed at the lack of capabilities of his mech forces.

He let out a tired sigh. "I never thought our clan needed to prepare for aquatic combat so soon. I should have designed at least one amphibian mech for the clan. We wouldn't be in this sorry situation if we prepared an actual answer against our current adversaries."

While he recognized this shortcoming, he wasn't sure if he would actually address it anytime soon. This was a rare situation that would probably not be repeated anytime soon. The focus of the Larkinson Clan still lay in space. Ves did not think he made a mistake by focusing most of his attention towards flight-capable mechs. Air and space combat still remained the main modes of combat to a clan based around a fleet.

General Verle did not look as frustrated though. He had a cunning smile on his face. He already figured everything out and formed the most appropriate answer to this development.

When Ves glanced at his trusty military leader, he grew suspicious.

"I know that look of yours. You look as if the situation is still within your grasp. What are you up to, Verle?"

The general actually chuckled. "Have you forgotten about our primary mission? Why should we insist on eliminating this anonymous force of black mechs? Sure, another straightforward victory would embellish our battle record and provide a lot of glory to the Avatars and Vandals, but is that what we are really after?"

Ves widened his eyes in realization. "You mean..."

"Our primary objective has always been to rescue the members of the Purnesse Family that are trapped in the Violet Estates. Defeating the ones who are targeting them or saving those brightly-colored mansions from destruction are merely side goals that we aren't obligated to pursue."

Indeed, even as the Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas kept the black mechs busy, the damaged combat carriers that originally brought the first wave of Larkinsons to the surface had quietly swung back around in order to approach the Violet Estates!

Quick communication between the Larkinson Clan and the Purnesse Family enabled one of the combat carriers to pass through the final defensive barrier without any opposition.

While the other five ragged-looking starships formed into a makeshift wall that blocked any stray projectiles fired by the black mechs, the remaining combat carrier hovered only a short distance away from the main entrance of the largest estate.

The doors slid open, causing a throng of well-dressed but panicked-looking people to float out with their coffers and other luggage.

Security officers stationed aboard the combat carrier flew just outside the open and empty hangar bay and urgently guided the crowd to enter the vessel with haste.

"HURRY UP!"

"FORGET ABOUT YOUR FIFTEEN COFFERS!"

"GET IN NOW OR I WILL KICK YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!"

The Purnessers were unaccustomed to receiving such rough treatment, but the most senior Purnessers such as Ambassador Shederin did not voice any complaints.

What was dignity compared to their lives? The final siege against the Violet Estates had truly caused a lot of Purnessers to reevaluate their priorities!

It took longer than the Larkinsons wanted to evacuate thousands of trueblood Purnessers and their attached personnel and retainers. Too many of them wanted to bring their luggage along despite being commanded to leave all of those useless goods behind. This caused the evacuation process to experience a small but significant delay.

"They're all in! Close the hangar bay and get out as fast as possible!"

The combat carrier already flew forward even before the hangar bay doors had fully closed!

The survivors of the Purnesse Family looked bleakly at the Violet Estates becoming smaller and smaller just before the huge hangar bay doors finally slid shut.

They were all stuck aboard a ragged, burn-marked combat carrier now. The empty hangar bay looked distressingly bare and functional, which was completely opposite to the elegant and luxurious locations they were accustomed to. The Larkinson Clan was a definite step down from their old environment!

"This is our new life now." Someone whispered. "From today onwards, we have lost our permanent home. We'll be wandering the stars forever like a pack of vagabonds."

"We have become barbarians now."

Chapter 3056: Stuck in Water

The offensive initiated by the black mechs had never been about wiping the Violet Estates from the map.

Their overriding mission had always been to crush the members of the Purnesse Family!

Once the Larkinson Clan recognized this truth and moved to evacuate the trapped Purnessers, the black mechs went crazy!

They no longer played cat and mouse against the Avatar and Vandal mechs flying in the air. Instead, they swam around the island and tried to throw as many attacks towards the departing combat carriers as possible!

Kinetic shells kept bouncing against the hulls and vulnerable components of the escaping vessels.

The attacks exerted a considerable degree of pressure towards the combat carriers.

If the six ships were still in their prime, then they could have easily resisted the attacks for a time.

Yet right now their surface integrity was not only compromised, but they were also being hit in the rear where the hull plating was relatively weaker and where their main thrusters were prominent weak points!

The crews and captains of the retreating vessels quickly adjusted to the situation. The Larkinson Clan deliberately assigned the most intact of the six to carry the survivors of the Purnesse Family... This vessel flew at the head of the formation.

In the meantime, the other five combat carriers all escorted this critical ship and used their own hulls as shields against the increasing amount of projectiles launched by the black mechs.

In order to prevent their main propulsion systems from being taken out of action too early, the combat carriers flew in oblique angles behind the VIP vessel. This caused most of the incoming firepower to hit the vessels on the flanks and at an angle, which effectively mitigated much of the damage that they accumulated.

The plan was working!

The Hexer-built combat carriers that the Larkinsons bought second-hand from the Hexadric Hegemony were several decades old, but that did not mean they were faulty. Far from it. After receiving constant attention from their new owners, the vessels all ran smoother than before. Many of their structural issues had been addressed and their nature as combat vessels ensured that they were still tough enough to endure all kinds of difficulties over their lifespan.

Even if one of their sides started to incur serious damage, the combat carriers merely spun around in order to present another side towards the enemy ranged mechs!

In fact, even if the incoming fire started to batter the insides of the combat carriers, their high degree of redundancy and compartmentalization ensured that they would still stubbornly remain in working condition even if entire ship sections began to collapse!

"Our ships are still holding!"

"They're not capable of returning to orbit, though. They've incurred too much damage!"

This was the only downside to the improvised plan of the Larkinson Clan. It took a lot of effort for these heavy ships to fight against the powerful gravity pulling down their ships and increase their altitude. Much of their propulsion systems were either compromised or only partially effective.

Though the chief engineers of the respective vessels did not completely rule out the option, in their professional judgement, the risks were too great to make the attempt.

"We need to wait for the second wave of combat carriers to arrive." Vivian Tsai explained to Ves and General Verle. "The combat carriers that are arriving next will enter the atmosphere under more gentle conditions. If we ease up their trajectory further, chances are high that they will remain intact enough to ferry the VIPs back into orbit."

Once the Purnessers reached orbit, they could transfer over to a more defensible vessel like the Spirit of Bentheim or the Graveyard.

Taking down a capital ship was many times more difficult than taking down a single combat carrier!

As long as the enemy didn't dispatch at least an entire mech division or something, the mission to save the Purnessers would pretty much be in the bag!

In order to accomplish this, the first wave of combat carriers had to hold on as long as possible. Even as they exhausted all of their energies towards increasing their altitude, their progress was still too slow for the Larkinson Clan's liking.

However, the black mechs had lost all of their initiative after the latest developments. The amphibian mechs tried to keep up with the escaping combat carriers by traversing closer in their direction.

Hundreds of amphibian mechs surged forth like waves of metal. The melee mechs stuck close to the ranged mechs, preventing any Bright Warrior of Ferocious Piranha from assaulting the important machines.

"Avatars! Focus all of your efforts on taking down the ranged amphibian mechs! As long as they lose their ability to attack from a distance, they can do nothing to stall our departure!"

Commander Melkor had already made peace with the fact that his Avatars wouldn't be earning supreme glory today. Though he really wanted to stick around and crush these opponents, the mission always came first, and completing it would provide enough proof that his men were not weak.

The Avatars and Vandals both coordinated their actions in order to neutralize the ranged potential of their foes. The aggressive posture of their melee mechs rarely resulted in takedowns, but it still forced the black mechs to dip below the water, preventing them from launching attacks towards the escaping vessels.

Meanwhile, the remaining ranged black mechs that were trying their best to complete their primary objective were being bombarded by a torrent of energy beams!

Two Bright Warriors performed noticeably better in this ranged duel.

Isobel Kotin was one of the many mech pilots who became an expert candidate after the traumatic but extraordinary Battle against the Abyss.

Compared to the colorful personalities of other expert pilots and expert candidates, Isobel was rather boring. She was a quiet and analytical person by nature, and that usually caused her to attract little attention back when she was a regular mech pilot.

However, her diligence and constant effort towards improving herself seemed to have paid off. After taking her first step on the road to becoming a demigod, her skill and confidence rose by leaps and bounds.

Though she had hardly become more assertive, she had become more dedicated to polishing her marksmanship now that she experienced significant improvements after surpassing her mortal limits!

Due to her status, she was one of the lucky few who received an upgraded luminar crystal rifle. The laser beams she fired seared through the thick armor plating of the amphibian mechs as if they were plasma cutters.

It didn't matter if amphibian mechs were able to pile up more armor than other mechs. Against more powerful laser beams that accurately hit the weak points of the enemy machines with very few misses, Isobel was able to destroy or cripple an opponent with considerably greater efficiency than her fellow Avatars!

The other mech pilot that performed extremely well was Mr. Mavelon.

In truth, all of the MTA mech pilots possessed extremely good marksmanship. First-class multipurpose mechs fought at both range and up close, but most of the time they relied on their large and varied integrated arsenal to defeat their opponents before they even had an opportunity to bring out their blades.

Though the Bright Warrior he was piloting lacked all of the advanced systems that could facilitate its ranged performance, Mavelon had to admit that the fundamentals of the mech model was quite sound.

The precision of his energy beams virtually matched that of Isobel Kotin. At some moments, the mecher's accuracy and effectiveness surpassed that of the expert candidate!

His excellent performance fully showed how extremely good training could elevate normal humans far beyond the average level of mech pilots. Whatever method the MTA employed to train its internal mech pilots, it was an incredible accomplishment to elevate their skills past what most of the mech community thought was the limit for regular humans!

Different from Isobel who mostly relied on raw talent, a budding will and superhuman intuition to gain the upper hand, Mavelon relied mostly on his enhanced intellect, his augmented response times and his extremely thorough systematic training.

As a result, his consistency was even higher! He steadily downed one enemy mech after another regardless of what kind of response they made. The black mechs that had become his targets even didn't manage to submerge beneath the surface before Mavelon launched his fatal attacks!

Mavelon's performance did not go unnoticed. Melkor and the other Avatars were already aware of the performance of one of the few non-Larkinsons in their midst.

"These guest pilots are no joke!"

At any other time, the Avatars would have paid more attention to the performance of their guests. As it was, the combat carriers still needed cover.

Through the constant efforts of the Avatars, the black mechs with ranged capabilities dwindled in numbers. No matter how hard the enemy tried to protect them, it was hard for amphibian melee mechs to block attacks coming from above!

The oceans might be the enemy's domain, but as the focus of the battlefield moved into the skies, the lack of flight capabilities of the amphibian mechs became a very great limitation!

As the combat carrier that contained the VIPs kept soaring higher, it became increasingly clearer that the black mechs had lost their shot at destroying the Purnesse Family.

Their ranged mechs had practically become extinct while their melee mechs swam helplessly in the water. Their sturdy legs and powerful aquatic propulsion did not allow them to fly into the skies!

Though Ves was happy to see this outcome, he soon remembered an important point.

"Everytime the Purnessers attempted to leave Trieden II, someone intercepted their escape vessels. Is the anti-air capabilities of these black mechs really that weak?"

In truth, the ranged prowess of the enemy was quite strong. While they didn't fare too well right now, under normal circumstances they possessed more than enough firepower to down any average shuttle or transport.

Yet these amphibian mechs were still limited. The enemy had to possess another solution.

Half a minute later, the situation changed. Some of the scouts in the vicinity detected a large amount of disturbance from beneath the water.

"We're detecting a lot of disturbance from below! Whatever is coming is rising to the surface at a rapid speed. Watch out!"

A volley of more than a hundred missiles jumped out of the water and soared towards the fleeing combat carriers!

The four escorting vessels did their best to surround and cover the key ship that carried the Purnesse family.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The missiles tore into the exposed and weakened sections of the combat carriers in question. Their smart guidance systems had already judged where they could inflict the most damage.

Two combat carriers shook in the air and lost so many systems that they were no longer able to increase their altitudes.

Instead, they were starting to tilt downwards as their remaining intact propulsion systems were overstraining their systems in order to compensate for the loss of other vital systems!

"Abandon ship! She won't be able to keep herself aloft much longer."

Escape pods shot out of the two crippled combat carriers in droves as the crew resolutely gave up the vessels they called home.

"Watch out! A second volley is coming!"

More missiles shot out of the water! Some of them hit the combat carriers that were already doomed, but most went on to hit the remaining three vessels!

This time, the vessel carrying the Purnessers couldn't escape punishment. The combat carrier violently shook as her battered surface endured dozens of destructive impacts.

The Purnessers stuck in the hangar bay screamed as they felt the vessel around them groaning and shaking under all of the attacks!

"This ship is close to falling apart!"

"We need to relocate to another vessel. Why hasn't the Larkinson Clan dispatched a proper vessel? This combat carrier is already on her last legs. How irresponsible!"

Most of the Purnessers had never been exposed to war-like circumstances in their entire lives. The only way they could process this crisis was by giving into their worst fears or complaining about how the Larkinsons were botching this rescue mission!

Chapter 3057: Armored Missiles

A hidden and unseen enemy force was launching missiles towards the escaping combat carriers!

The two volleys that had struck the already-damaged combat carriers had felled two of the heaviest-damaged starships and dealt considerable damage to the remaining three. Though the missiles weren't too powerful, the integrity of the vessels weren't too great.

It wasn't necessarily to break the fleeing combat carriers in half! Just damaging their propulsion systems was enough to take them down. Once they crashed into the ocean, there was no going back!

The opponents who fired the missiles from the depths were hidden and the Larkinson Clan didn't possess the capability to attack any hostiles too far below the surface.

Commander Melkor and the other Larkinsons in the field felt more frustrated than ever at their limited loadouts. While their Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas performed well enough against spaceborn, aerial and landbound opponents, it was a real mistake for them to think that they could effectively fight against an aquatic force.

Water might not sound impressive, but when a lot of it gathered together, it acted as a natural shield and fortification to those who felt at home in the water. A lot of attacks simply became invalid or drastically lost effectiveness once they hit the waterline and many mechs optimized for other environments turned into flailing rocks the moment they were submerged.

"Maybe I should design some aquatic mechs once I have an opportunity to do so..." Ves muttered. "Situations like these might be rare, but we'll get confronted by aquatic opponents again in the future."

Calabast nodded. "This is especially the case if you intend to join the hunt for phasewater. The exotic is particularly prevalent in lakes, seas and other wet environments. The word 'water' is there for a reason."

That was true, but those who didn't want to bother with aquatic or amphibian mechs were not helpless. Phasewater was so prevalent in the Red Ocean that it even showed in asteroids, deserts and other dry and waterless environments.

Those who prepared an aquatic force possessed an undeniable advantage though. Water-based deposits were usually larger and yielded a lot more phasewater on average. In contrast, the phasewater deposits that had ended up in a dry environment were usually located there because of accidents or natural geological movements.

This was a concern for later, though. For now, the Larkinson Clan had to address the immediate crisis. He analyzed the missile attacks and made a professional judgement based on what he had witnessed.

"Our mechs need to do their best to intercept the remaining missiles at all costs." Ves stated. "The third volley will likely cripple the two surviving escort vessels. The fourth

volley has a high chance of destroying the flight capabilities of the last and most crucial escort vessel."

"Our second wave of combat carriers are already descending through the atmosphere." General Verle pointed out. "They will arrive soon enough. Once they do, the vessels and the mechs they carry can immediately relieve the first wave. However..."

"They are still a couple of minutes away. The first wave won't be able to hang on for so long." Ves grimly concluded.

The battle progressed far too quickly. The Larkinsons were still in the process of bringing in their second wave while the reinforcements of the black mechs had already arrived!

"We're detecting a third incoming volley of missiles!"

"Damn! Block or shoot them down at all costs!"

Commander Melkor had already issued the necessary orders. The Bright Warriors that previously suppressed the black mechs left their remaining opponents behind and flew back to the surviving combat carriers at their best speeds.

Knight mechs took positions around the weak points of the ragged starships and braced their shields.

Other melee mechs without any defensive equipment grabbed any solid piece of debris they could pick up or pull out from the less important sections of the ships and used that as makeshift barriers. Though this was not exactly the most elegant solution, the broken hull plating they carried along with the formidable defensive power of their frames should be enough to block a missile!

"They're coming!"

As for the remaining Bright Warriors armed with rifles, they took on the crucial task of intercepting the missiles!

The missiles didn't possess any good ECM systems so they were quite easy to target, especially with lightspeed laser beams.

However, the missiles turned out to be quite tough!

"What the heck? They're like torpedoes!"

A single shot wasn't enough to blow them up. It took multiple repeated strikes in order to penetrate the surprisingly tough exteriors and take out the payload or propulsion mechanism.

Commander Melkor suddenly started to sweat as his own rifle took out a missile. Even his upgraded rifle required at least two or three shots to take down an incoming missile.

This was a problem because the missiles rapidly accelerated towards the fleeing carriers as soon as they jumped into the air. At least half of the volley would probably go through and deal considerable damage to the vulnerable vessels!

Just as he thought that he and his men wouldn't be able to complete their mission, a very bright and powerful energy beam split into multiple smaller beams before threading through the Avatar mech formation. These split beams all hit their marks, causing six deadly missiles to fall short of their target!

Another split beam shot out from behind soon after. Each of the constituent energy beams hit a missile without fail.

By the time the remnants of the volley reached their targets, the defending Avatar mechs easily blocked the few that got through!

A mech that resembled the Bright Warrior model but performed drastically differently had emerged from one of the surviving combat carriers. It was armed with a larger and much more formidable looking rifle.

What was remarkable about this mech was that it exuded a form of resonance that was similar to true resonance but ultimately fell short.

Yet even if it was not strong as an actual expert mech, its capabilities were still leagues better than a regular mech!

"Thank you for the assistance, Venerable Stark." Commander Melkor thanked in a sincere tone.

"Don't waste your time on pleasantries, commander." The older woman replied. "Our opponents aren't done yet and you still have to command your men. Watch out for the next volley."

The unseen enemy below the surface did something different this time. The fourth volley of missiles did not come at the expected time.

Had their opponents run out of missiles? That sounded extremely unlikely.

Were the enemies of the Purnesse Family reevaluating their offensive after being continually stymied by the Larkinson Clan? That didn't seem likely either due to the commitment that they had already shown.

Ves' face turned ugly. "They're stacking their volleys!"

The best way to increase the amount of missiles going through a determined defense was to launch multiple volleys but adjust their forward trajectories so that the later ones were able to catch up with the earlier ones.

If timed and programmed correctly, this was a good way to overwhelm the point defenses of any target!

"They have to hurry up, though, because our second wave is almost close enough to bail out our first wave!"

The unknown enemies were aware of this dynamic as well, because they only stacked their missiles once.

Soon enough, twice as many armored missiles shot from the water and soared towards the escaping vessels!

This time, the enemy also made sure to spread the missiles out a lot more in order to prevent the Larkinsons from intercepting the missiles too easily.

The Larkinson ranged mechs along with the Bright Beam Prime put their all in destroying the incoming wave!

Venerable Stark even chose to employ her costliest resonance ability once again. When she resonated with the spiritual energy and the luminar crystals locked inside the rifle of her mech, her weapon spat out a split beam that harvested a dozen spread-out missiles at once without any misses!

Her instant shot relieved a lot of the pressure. Isobel Larkinson and Mavelon were also pitching in. Even though their lives weren't at risk, the high stakes of this mission along with their strong desire to avoid a humiliating defeat drove them to perform at a higher level.

While their accuracy was already high, the time they needed to lock on to their targets and adjust their aim had shortened a bit. This allowed them to take down the missiles at a higher rate than anyone else. Their weapons were even starting to overheat due to their rapid discharges. The expert candidate and the MTA mech pilot were harvesting missiles left and right.

As for Melkor... he couldn't do two jobs at once. Ves wasn't able to juggle his multiple responsibilities properly, and he possessed a lot more augments. How was the Avatar Commander supposed to do any better?

To his credit, Melkor was fairly good at recognizing when he was needed. The various mech captains had their units well in hand. His input wasn't particularly needed at the moment so he partially let go of his situational awareness in order to channel the utmost of his marksmanship skill.

"I'm too rusty." He cursed as he saw one of his shots miss a missile by several meters.

It had been too long since he fought a serious fight! Due to being stuck behind a desk during every work shift, Melkor spent precious little time on improving his shooting ability. The most he could do was to prevent them from sliding back too much.

Fortunately, his other men were doing more than enough to compensate for rustiness. The double volley of missiles eventually dwindled down to around fifty warheads.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Explosions rippled through the fleet and in front of the mechs that tried to block them with their shields and frames.

Several mechs that already withstood previous attacks incurred so much damage that they began to lose altitude. Their cockpits hastily ejected from the damaged frames.

The mechs failed to block all of the missiles from hitting the ships. One of them even started to list before drifting away! More escape pods spread from the doomed vessel as it was clear that she was not going to play any further role in this battle.

While Melkor was glad that most of his men were able to preserve their lives, it became harder and harder to withstand the pressure.

"We made it through!" He sighed in relief.

It didn't matter if the enemy fired another volley. Even though the defenses of the first wave had reached a low point, an important change occurred.

"We've arrived, commander!"

Distant combat carriers that were still radiating lots of heat were rapidly descending from above!

Hundreds of mechs launched from the vessels with great haste. The melee mechs surged forward as quickly as possible in order to bolster the defensive line. The ranged mechs on the other hand readied their rifles in preparation to shoot down any missiles that shot out from the water.

The battlefield quieted down. The amphibian black mechs that were stuck in the water were no longer relevant.

Now that a force of 400 fresh and fully-stocked Avatar and Vandal mechs had reinforced the ones that came first, the Purnesse Family appeared to be saved!

Yet Melkor and many other Larkinsons did not lower their guard. They continued to monitor the ocean below for any major movements.

Their sensors soon detected a huge form ascending from the depths.

"There's no way that this is a missile. It's too big!"

"What the hell is coming up?"

Much to the astonishment of the Larkinsons, several long stretches of water were soon displaced as a number of large, cylindrical submerged ocean vessels revealed their presence.

The size of these vessels exceeded that of any combat carrier!

Before the clansmen could admire the new arrival, huge doors slid open from the upper sides of the newly arrived ships. A large amount of flight-capable mechs surged into the air and formed into loose but organized formations!

The mechs weren't coated in black this time. The enemy had finally thrown away all pretense and brought out their full strength in order to end the Purnesse Family!

Shederin Purnesse almost turned red when he recognized the colors and markings of the newly-emerged machines.

"They're from the Diyast Family."

"That's impossible!" Novilon Purnesse reacted with shock. "They're supposed to be dead."

"It appears we have missed some key members. Our rivals must have sheltered and provided a lot of assistance to their remnants."

Neither Shederin nor Novilon looked pleased at this discovery. The truth was that the Purnesse Family had been the primary drivers behind the downfall of their rival Diyast Family!

Chapter 3058: Blood for Blood

The blood of many members of the Purnesse Family froze when they recognized the culprits behind the slow extermination they endured.

The appearance of several aquatic carriers proved that the assault on the Purnesse Family was not a hastily-prepared operation.

It took an immense amount of effort to transport such a class of sea vessels onto a relatively small and quiet paradise planet. Aside from modular construction and shipment, the more likely answer to their appearance was that they had been covertly constructed in some kind of secret underwater stronghold!

The lengths in which the Diyast Family went through in order to build up the strength to overwhelm the Purnesse Family in one swoop was excessive!

Like many people, Ves was surprised by the appearance of several large sea vessels. He could tell how much effort had been put into constructing them and the mechs they carried. The cost, time and manpower needed to put all of this together just to destroy a single family that was too weak to defend itself was absolutely mind boggling.

This was definitely a plan that had been in the making before the Crown Uprising swept the galaxy!

Even if there was no possibility of using the crown terrorists as a pretext to attack the Violet Estates, the Purnesse Family would have been targeted anyway. Perhaps in a few months or years, the enemy would have completed its preparations and launched a surprise assault that was so overwhelming that virtually every Purnesser at any location suffered an attack at the same time!

This was the best way to cut the Purnesse Family down in total, but the price of doing so was immense...

At the very least, the identities of the culprits would become clear. There was no way to disguise an effort that was huge to the rest of the Grand Loxic Republic. Sanctions would follow as the established powers of the great state would not tolerate a disruption to this degree.

Therefore, when the Crown Uprising changed human history forever, the people targeting the Purnessers saw another, less costly alternative.

By hastily painting some of their mechs in black and letting them fight against the Purnesse Family in the open would not be able to fool the knowing, but at least gave the ones responsible a pretense!

As long as no one bothered to back the Purnessers up, this pretense would continue to hold up, thereby preventing the Grand Loxic Republic from getting embroiled in a serious scandal.

Ves had to admit that this plan was quite shrewd and utterly ruthless. It should have worked splendidly especially after it became apparent that the Purnessers had lost all of their value and support.

"It's too bad that we happen to drop by and ruin their best laid plans." He sardonically remarked.

The slow extermination campaign made the Purnesse Family so desperate that it began to reach out to anyone who was willing to bail it out. This happened to draw the Larkinson Clan over to the Trieden System in order to pick up this supposedly easy bargain.

How could he know that the bargain he was looking for turned out to be another scam! He and his clan had been bamboozled once again!

"Meow."

Lucky directed a contemptuous look at Ves as he rested on the armrest.

"Oh shut up."

"Meow meow."

Ves ignored the accusations of his cat. Instead, he turned to Calabast.

"Who the hell are these guys?"

"According to the utterings of the Purnessers aboard our combat carrier, we seem to be dealing with the Diyast Family."

"And they are...?"

"Our hasty research shows that the Diyast Family used to be a lineage that is roughly similar to that of the Purnesse Family." The spymaster succinctly explained. "The two were even rivals once upon a time. Much like the people they are targeting, the Diyasts inserted a lot of people into government institutions, but instead of focusing on diplomacy, they focused more on the military sphere. They were aligned with the Foerendal Party, which is considerably more proactive and expansionist than the Hegenarion Party."

"What happened to the Diyasts?"

Calabast shrugged. "Public sources are rather vague and scarce on that. It seemed that the Diyasts did something naughty and got struck down because of their violations, but the reactions of the Purnessers on our ship makes me suspect that there is a greater story behind this past scandal."

Ves narrowed his eyes. "Are you suggesting that the Purnessers set the Diyasts up? Did the latter fall unjustly?"

"I can only speculate, but from what few clues that I have gathered, the Purnessers might not be the innocent victims as they make themselves sound. We do know that the removal of the Diyast Family allowed numerous Purnessers to acquire higher positions. In addition, if you look at this revenge action, it is so extreme that there have to be factors at play that we are not aware of. After suffering a great calamity, the Diyasts still managed to build up all of this hardware and find enough loyal and well-trained personnel to crew them all. The Foerendal Party has to be behind this power move."

"In other words, the Purnessers are reaping what they sowed. When you play a dangerous game, you shouldn't be surprised if danger comes to your doorstep." Ves muttered.

Neither Ves nor any other Larkinsons exhibited much interest behind this sordid story. What did it matter what sins the Purnessers incurred in the past? Who cared whether the remnants of the Diyast Family were justified in killing off the Purnesse Family?"

All of this drama was irrelevant to the Larkinson Clan!

"What are our chances against these mechs?" Ves asked General Verle.

"It will be a tough fight. The Diyasts have deployed almost 500 mechs, all of which appear to be on par with the black mechs we have seen before. If we assume that the quality of the mechs and the training standards of the mech pilots are equal, then the survivors of our first wave along with the mechs that have arrived with our second wave will have to fight an uphill battle. The Diyast mechs outnumber us to such an extent that the pressure on our side will be heavy."

"We have the Ferocious Piranhas though."

"That's true, but their glows are less effective against second-class mech pilots." Verle retorted. "I don't know where the Diyasts got all of these mech pilots from, but their resilience is not that much inferior to military mech pilots. They will doubtlessly get distracted by the Ferocious Piranhas, but it is too optimistic for us to hope that they will be able to accomplish anything more."

That meant that there weren't any easy solutions for the Avatars and Myth and the Flagrant Vandals that were arrayed against the Diyast forces. They had to fight a tough and determined opponent the old-fashioned way.

Though the Larkinsons were already dispatching even more support, it took a considerable amount of time before the next wave of combat carriers arrived.

Ves began to look pensive. "I recall that we offered to dispatch additional prime mechs as well as a small contingent of Penitent Sisters, Swordmaidens and Ylvainans in the second wave."

"The commanders of the Avatars and Vandals refused the help. They want to win this battle on their own merits. The moment the two mech forces have to rely on others to secure victory, the damage to their confidence and self-image will be incalculable. Right now, the odds are still within a tolerable range, so the men in the field are still hopeful that they can gain the upper hand."

It wasn't just a matter of pride. The performance of the Avatars and Vandals would define their image to the rest of the Larkinson Clan for years to come.

In previous battles such as the Battle against the Abyss and the Battle of Reckoning, the Swordmaidens and the Penitent Sisters established strong and invincible impressions for themselves. The two female-dominated mech forces did not need to prove their strength any further because everyone already acknowledged their strength.

The others felt a lot of pressure to catch up. The Living Sentinels were more laid-back because they never aimed to be the best in the first place, but the Avatars could not accept being relegated to fourth or fifth place.

They had to get into the top 2 at least!

"Pride is so silly sometimes." Ves shook his head. "We're about to lose a lot of mechs and a fair amount of mech pilots. It is going to be a pain to replace them both."

The only reason why he didn't feel more upset was because what was happening fell in line with his own thoughts. The Avatars had grown very quickly as of late, but the embrace of so many newcomers severely degraded their cohesion and hardiness.

A hard fought battle would definitely hammer and condense the Avatars into a unified fighting force!

While Ves tried to weigh the costs and benefits of this evolving battle, the Diyast Family had fully deployed all of their aerial mechs.

Different from the black mechs of before, the orange-and-grey machines were fully flight capable. They were already eying the combat carriers of the Larkinson Clan that had hastily entered the atmosphere of Trieden III.

The Larkinsons hadn't been idle all this time. As soon as the heavily-damaged combat carrier carrying the VIPs approached the more intact vessels of the second wave, numerous shuttles traveled back and forth.

Under the cover of several combat carriers repurposed into makeshift walls, the evacuees were being transferred over into the hangar bays of several combat carriers whose hulls were still in the process of cooling down.

While this hastily transfer took place, two old enemies exchanged words with each other.

"Ernesto Diyast." Novilon Purnesse grimly said. "I never thought that you managed to escape the hunting squads."

"No thanks to you, kid." The man in charge of what was left of the Diyast Family scoffed. "Did you ever think that your family's plot would come back to haunt you in this way?"

"We did nothing! We merely acted on behalf of the Loxic President and the Hegenarion Party! Both of them are already dead or on their way to the grave. Aren't you satisfied with their fall?"

"NO!" The middle-aged man shouted back. "I AM NOT! Don't lie to me, you brat. I know your ways. Everything that comes out of the mouth of a Purnesser is a distortion. My friends and I have done our own research. While it is true that the Hegenarion Party dealt the main blow, the principal reason behind our collapse was because you Purnessers wanted to get rid of an obstacle!"

Novilon Purnesse's mood worsened. "We were just abiding by the rules of the game."

"Screw the rules! What you did went way out of line! The conspiracy you enacted against my family not only led to the deaths of my parents, grandparents and thousands of other relatives, but also caused me to lose my wife and children! Children, Novilon!"

"I am truly sorry for that, Ernesto, but what happened to your family was outside of our control. While I do not begrudge your right to take revenge against us, think of what is left of the Diyast Family. Now that you and your forces have reemerged in the open, you should know very well what that means."

"SCREW THE GRAND LOXIC REPUBLIC!" The Diyast survivor shouted as his eyes bore into the projection of one of his hated foes. "Our Diyast Family has already died as far as I'm concerned. I do not seek a future for myself. The only reason that I have been hanging on until now is to repay blood with blood and kill every member of your Purnesse Family!"

Ernesto Diyast had gone mad! Novilon Purnesse that there was no hope in persuading this crazed survivors to call off this attack.

The vengeance-obsessed madman was willing to squander everything the Diyast Family had left in order to satisfy his final desire!

"Attack!"

The two sides immediately opened fire on each other as a larger battle began to unfold!

Chapter 3059: Bootleg Pendants

Just before the air battle broke out in earnest, the Avatar and Vandal mech pilots took advantage of the short reprieve to reorganize their lines and form a new battle plan.

The surviving mechs of the first wave were no longer fresh and battle ready as before. They had performed valiantly against the black mechs and it was unreasonable to ask them to fight as hard as before.

It was a pity that the current situation of the Larkinsons didn't look favorable. The second wave brought around 320 mechs to the battlefield, but that still left them considerably outnumbered by the 500 formidable-looking Diyast mechs!

Though the aerial mechs that had showed up also featured bland designs that lacked inspiration, their overall quality was still high enough to give any Larkinson mech a run for its money.

As many analysts and mech designers of the Larkinson Clan began to perform rapid estimates of the enemy's expected battle performance, their overall conclusions weren't optimistic.

"In terms of value, the two sides are roughly even. Our Bright Warriors and Ferocious Piranhas are qualitatively better. In terms of numbers, the story is different. Missing a hundred or so mechs matters significantly when the gap between the mechs of both sides isn't overwhelmingly wide... The Diyasts will be able to take advantage of their superior numbers to gain the initiative and maneuver much more freely on the battlefield."

This was exactly what happened when both sides began to fight in the air!

The Diyasts didn't bother to communicate with the Larkinsons. Ernesto Diyast and his trusted men were completely consumed by their need to take revenge against the Purnesse Family! Nothing, not even a foreign clan with an unusual battle style would be allowed to stop the reason why they had invested so much time and effort in this attack!

As far as the Diyasts were concerned, the Larkinsons were just extensions of the Purnesse Family. Anyone and anything that dared to stand in their way of completing their revenge had to be eliminated!

The aerial battle began with a furious exchange of fire. The Larkinsons mostly employed energy rifles while the Diyasts continued to favor kinetic rifles.

Beams seared through the exteriors of Diyast mechs while solid projectiles cratered against the tougher armor of the Bright Warriors.

After the first few volleys, it became clear that the advantage in numbers allowed the Diyast mechs to exert considerable greater pressure at range. The Avatar ranged mechs had to invest more effort into dodging incoming attacks or sheltering behind other mechs in order to remain operational.

The different weapon types mattered a lot in this battle. Gauss rifles and other physical ranged weapons were heavily limited by the amount of ammunition that the mechs were able to carry.

However, as long as their rounds didn't run out, the rifleman mechs were able to inflict a formidable amount of damage in a short amount of time!

Positron rifles and laser rifles packed less punch on average. The beams had a tendency to spread out across the surface of a target and modern mechs were quite good at coping with excess heat.

It took time for the damage dealt by energy rifles to become telling. This was not a long time, but in a situation where the enemy possessed a greater punch, the Bright Warriors armed with ranged weapons would definitely be routed if this pattern continued.

[This damn mech model is too slow!] Mavelon complained as his mech got impacted by a gauss round that shattered some of its surface layers. [If I was piloting my old mech, I could have dodged this blow with ease!]

[Stop complaining and shoot these new enemies down! We might actually be defeated by these yokels if the Larkinsons can't get their act together.]

The four MTA mech pilots who took part in this operation endured a lot more pressure due to the changing circumstances. Even if they had the option to eject from their mechs, suffering defeat in their first deployment would become a huge stain on their records.

Their colleagues back in the Association would never ever take the four seriously again if they knew what happened!

Many other Larkinsons were aware that they had to do something special in order to reverse the current trend.

"Vandals!" Commander Melkor shouted over the command channel. "Suppress their rifleman mechs! Take them out if you can, but don't let them fire at us unopposed!"

"We're already on our way, commander! The enemy light mechs are running interference against us but we Vandals will make quick work of them. Just watch!"

The Vandals deployed in the field all piloted the Ferocious Piranha, which many Larkinsons considered one of the best mech models of the Larkinson Clan.

In their initial confrontation against their Diyast counterparts, the orange-and-grey mechs actually exhibited a slight but crucial edge in speed and acceleration.

The enemy light mechs were faster!

Yet when the range between the two groups of swift mechs decreased, the Flagrant Vandals actually gained the advantage!

Their hateful glows forced every enemy mech pilot to alternate between feeling abnormally calm to getting engulfed by overpowering fury.

Getting subjected to one of these glows was already bad enough, but the rapid switch between the two threatened to drive the mech pilots crazy!

Though the Diyast mech pilots were not weak by any means, the constant pressure exerted onto their minds imposed a significant handicap on their performance.

It was as if they were forced to waltz while their feet were stepping on heated coals! Who could possibly maintain a completely even cadence under those conditions?

The furious, high-speed dogfight that ensued resulted in rapid strikes and rapid takedowns.

Soon enough, the Diyast light mech specialists realized that they suffered from another disadvantage.

"Hah!" A vandal mech pilot laughed. "It takes more than that to drive your knife through my armor plating!"

The armor system of the Ferocious Piranha model was substantially better than that of the opposition.

It was extremely expensive to mount quality armor onto mechs that had to be as light as possible. Yet Ves was willing to invest more than most people spent on light mechs to ensure that his Ferocious Piranhas would not fall apart so quickly.

This was one of the reasons why the Ferocious Piranhas managed to fell more Diyast light mechs while their opponents failed to perform as brilliantly. The Ferocious Piranhas were much more suited for dogfighting than the opposing mechs!

After dozens of mechs started to fall from the sky, the Flagrant Vandal mech pilots began to show their difference in another way.

While the enemy mech pilots were certainly skilled and were capable of executing numerous standard tactics, their lack of foundation soon became evident.

The mech pilots employed by the Diyast Family did not possess much of an identity! They merely passed the required classes of the mech academies they attended before going through another round of standard training when they were taken in by the Diyasts.

Yet the fallen family was not able to grant anything extra to their mech pilots. Ernesto Diyast and his fellow survivors had lost too much in the initial collapse of their family.

The martial tradition and the strong and distinctive identity of their household troops was completely lost! This meant that the mech pilots all had to start from scratch.

This made a considerable difference on the battlefield. The Diyast light mech pilots fought while employing standard tactics and formations.

Against normal opponents, this was already sufficient, but against the Flagrant Vandals which possessed a military heritage and counted a lot of experienced veterans in their ranks, the Ferocious Piranhas under their control easily isolated and ganged up against pockets of enemy machines.

"Damn! They're starting to split and run!"

Seeing that the situation was rapidly becoming more unsustainable, the commander of the Diyast light mechs ordered his men to avoid direct confrontations.

The enemy light mechs all pulled back and spread out in different directions. They utilized their superior mobility to outrun the slightly slower Ferocious Piranhas and taunt them along the way. Some of the retreating light mechs even pulled out light-weight pistols or other ranged weapons in order to harass the Vandal mechs.

When Melkor briefly paused between his shots to take stock of the overall situation, his lips curled into a smile.

"You can play hide and seek all you want, but that leaves us free to confront other opponents!"

A portion of the Ferocious Piranhas continued to chase after the fleeing Diyast light mechs. Their goal was not necessarily to eliminate the mobile machines. It was already enough for them to keep the enemy machines occupied.

What was even more crucial was that the remaining Ferocious Piranhas flew in the other direction and dove straight towards the ranks of enemy ranged mechs!

The rifleman mechs armed with gauss rifles were suddenly faced with a crisis as numerous Ferocious Piranhas flew past their sides and occasionally swooped in to drive their daggers through their fragile frames!

Fortunately, the Diyasts assigned numerous escort mechs to cover their backs. The knight mechs and other melee mechs did their best to fend off the swooping Ferocious Piranhas and deter them from getting too close.

However, this was already enough for the Flagrant Vandals. The Larkinson Clan clearly recognized that the Ferocious Piranhas did not need to risk themselves to take out their current targets.

As long as they kept making threatening movements while making sure their glows affected the enemy mech pilots, the Diyast ranged mech pilots would not be able to fire their weapons against the Avatar mechs as comfortably as before!

What was even better was that the need to protect the ranged mechs from getting cut to pieces forced a considerable amount of Diyast melee mechs to remain stuck in protection duty!

The fact that these melee mechs were unable to join the main clash further ahead meant that the numbers difference became a lot more tolerable for the Avatar mech pilots.

When the numbers became a bit more even, the performance of the Avatars finally began to stand out from the norm.

"Avatars! Let's show our clan what we can do. Invoke the Golden Cat!" A mech captain commanded.

The mech pilots he commanded simultaneously clutched a pendant that hung over their piloting suits.

These little pendants were shaped in the form of a golden cat head! While they weren't totems because Ves didn't fabricate them in person, the pendants didn't have to be alive in order for them to serve their purpose.

The Avatar mech pilots used them as a focus for their thoughts and meditations.

Right now, they were doing their best to concentrate their minds and plead towards a spirit that represented the heart and soul of the Larkinson Clan.

Back on the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves briefly frowned and turned towards his bodyguard.

The Larkinson Mandate carried by Nitaa fluctuated for a moment.

The Golden Cat received the earnest pleas of the Avatar mech pilots in the field. After a moment of thought, she decided to answer their calls!

Nyaaaaaaaaa!

Through the vigorous and growing Larkinson Network, the nexus began to exude a lot of her energy through a number of specific bonds.

Every Avatar mech pilot that was clutching their pendants felt an invisible spurt of energy flowing through their bodies and minds. Even their mechs became more alive as they too received a boost from the generous cat!

Though the Bright Warriors did not look any different from the outside, the moment they surged forward and clashed against the enemy mechs, the skill and fighting spirit of the Avatars had spiked!

"Agghh!"

"I'm going down!"

"We can't stop these golden mechs!"

The mech company that had received the blessing of the Golden Cat achieved immediate local superiority. No enemy mech managed to last more than ten exchanges of blows.

Not only did the Avatar mech pilots employ greater skill and accurate judgement, they also fought as if they could always count on their comrades besides them! Their vastly-improved teamwork prevented many of them from falling!

Chapter 3060: New Avatar Method

If Ves was drinking a cup of coffee right now, he would have spurted all of it out of his mouth at this time!

"How the hell have these Avatars become so good?!"

He always tried to keep up with the current state of his diverse and unique mech forces. He had a good grasp of the overall strengths and weaknesses of every mech force. He also possessed an overall judgement of their ranking.

The Swordmaidens were the strongest, followed closely by the Penitent Sisters. A substantial gap existed between the two and the remainder. The Avatars of Myth and Flagrant Vandals had fallen too far behind to catch up in a short amount of time.

This was why Commander Melkor was desperate to allow his Avatars to lead this operation. If he and his men ever wanted to surpass the powerful female mech pilots, they had to go above and beyond in order to regain the throne!

Melkor and a lot of Avatar officers thought very hard about how they could close the gap. They realized that they had to acquire a unique advantage that they could depend upon to give them an edge in battle.

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One of the reasons why the Penitent Sisters and the Swordmaidens were so stupendously scary in battle was because Ves bestowed them their unique battle networks.

One of them used the extremely powerful Superior Mother as its nexus while the other centered around a living expert pilot!

Due to their notably high degree of unity and cohesion, the Penitent Sisters and Swordmaidens were able to activate extraordinary battle formations that could launch massive, battle-changing strikes that could harvest hundreds if not thousands of lives at once!

Every other mech force was insanely jealous at what the Penitent Sisters and Swordmaidens possessed. Yet other than the Battle Criers, Ves denied the request to fashion battle networks that were tailored to others.

Ves was actually quite willing to strengthen the combat prowess of his soldiers in this manner. It took relatively little effort on his part to provide powerful trump cards to his troops.

Yet the requirements to establish and activate a battle network were quite harsh. The mech pilots that channeled a battle formation had to be united by a common cause and become as aligned and homogeneous as possible.

Theoretically, only twins and very close relatives should achieve close to perfect integration.

Short of that, the highly intensive training standards along with the strong martial cultures of the Penitent Sisters and Swordmaidens served as an adequate substitute.

The rest were too messy to match this level of dedication according to Ves.

Was this really the case, though?

Commander Melkor didn't think this was the case. Sure, the Avatars had grown so large and numerous that a lot of differences had emerged.

The longer-serving Avatars were a lot more jaded and mature than the ones that joined in recent months.

The small number of trueblood Larkinsons always felt more privileged than the large number of adopted clansmen who had only recently embraced their values.

The Avatars who originated from second-rate states always felt that they would eventually be able to supplant the ones who came from third-rate states like the Bright Republic and the Sentinel Kingdom.

With so many contradictions within the Avatars, Commander Melkor had already tried and failed to impose a greater degree of conformity among his men.

Nothing stuck and it would take far too much time and much greater effort in order to mold his Avatars into identical fighting machines.

One day, the Avatars racking their minds over this problem came up with an alternative solution.

"Trying to unite thousands if not tens of thousands of Avatars is undoable. What if we take a step back and try to gather like-minded mech pilots into smaller units? It is much easier to foster unity in a mech squad or a mech company!"

The Avatars experimented with this idea and achieved positive results during their initial attempts. Commander Melkor was highly encouraged by the results and approved further attempts to convert more mech companies into highly homogenous units.

The easiest way to accomplish this was to gather people together of the same backgrounds!

For example, the mech pilots who all clutched their Golden Cat pendants and invoked the ancestral spirit were either truebloods or former citizens of the Bright Republic!

Of all of the people in the clan, only the original Larkinsons and those who knew of their reputation were able to develop the most intimate connections to the Golden Cat.

That turned them into a model which other Avatars were supposed to follow!

Now, this special experimental unit of Larkinsons were finally showing their worth on an actual battlefield!

Unlike before when they were confronting the black mechs, this time they were confronted by aerial enemies who wouldn't be able to shake off the Larkinson mechs so easily.

This was the perfect stage to debut the new Avatar Invocation Method that Commander Melkor and his officers had cooked by themselves.

What was remarkable about this was that the Avatars never involved Ves or asked for his assistance at any point. The Avatars were very prideful and they wanted to show the patriarch that they did not need anyone's help in order to expand their own methods.

Now, their hour had finally come, and the first mech companies that had successfully mastered their new exclusive technique were fighting harder than ever in order to vindicate all of the effort put into this initiative!

"Invoke the Golden Cat!"

"Invoke the Golden Cat!"

Two more mech companies experienced an invisible transformation that subsequently improved their effective performance by at least thirty percent!

This difference might not sound so drastic, but in a fast-moving clash where every difference mattered, this improvement was nothing less than a revolution.

The ranged mech company that had just invoked the Golden Cat aimed and overlapped their fire to a much more effective degree. They not only took down enemy mechs at a faster rate, but also suppressed any Diyast mech that was about to launch a fatal blow against a friendly machine.

The melee mech companies outfought the mechs opposite them to such a devastating extent that the handful of MTA mech pilots fighting alongside them were filled with questions.

In truth, their skill and ability allowed them to perform even better on an individual basis, but the rising momentum of so many Avatar mechs affected the course of the battle to a much greater degree!

[What happened to these Larkinsons?!] Miss Petrov, who was piloting a lancer mech, expressed her befuddlement. [Did they simultaneously inject their bodies with stimulants or something?]

Miss Quentin shook her head as she did her best to keep up with the advancing Avatars and chop enemy mechs with the sword of her own machine.

[They haven't lost control. Far from it. They exhibit even greater precision and coordination than before. That is not what typical stimulants can do. Whatever these Larkinsons have done, I can feel their momentum rising!]

Commander Melkor grinned with pride as the battle swung in the favor of the Larkinson Clan.

The Avatars were finally showing their worth under his leadership!

"Surround the Diyast mechs! Don't let them fall back to their sea carriers!"

The Ferocious Piranhas began to harass and block the rear of the diminishing enemy mech troop. While the Diyast mechs initially outnumbered the Avatars and Vandals in the field, the last few stratagems successfully whittled down this disparity.

Now that the Diyasts lost more than a hundred mechs in a short amount of time, their situation became even less optimistic.

If the revenge force couldn't overcome the Larkinsons when they held this advantage, how could they possibly reverse the situation now that the superior Larkinson mechs faced less pressure?

Even though the Diyast mech pilots were very loyal to their cause, they were not immune to swings in morale. They could easily sense that the high tide that they were riding on had crashed straight into a dyke.

The Diyast mech force did not possess much advantages to begin with, but now that the orange-and-grey mechs were falling left and right due to the heroic performance of a handful of enemy mech companies, the dream of the Diyast Family might never come to pass!

Surging morale boosted every Avatar mech pilot that fought against the Diyasts. Even if they weren't a part of the special mech companies that had invoked the Golden Cat, the 'regular' mech pilots still fight with more skill and confidence than even in their best training sessions.

How could the Diyast mech pilots possibly match this boost? Their fighting spirit constantly eroded as they lacked a pillar that could prop up their morale and rally their confidence. Ernesto Diyast was not an accomplished war leader and could do little to encourage his men to stand their ground.

"My revenge... my family..." The surviving Diyast hollowly uttered in the command center of one of the sea carriers. "No! I can't let my quest for vengeance fail! Not when I have worked so hard to get to this point! Men, forget about fighting these Larkinsons! Just chase down those fleeing combat carriers and take them all down! As long as any of them plunge into the ocean, the Purnessers will enter our domain!"

It was a sound plan, and it might have actually worked if he had issued this order at the start.

However, their entanglement against the Larkinson mechs had become so devastating that the remaining Diyast mechs were too few in number to succeed in this plan!

They tried anyway. The Diyast mechs all split up and tried to circumvent the crazy Bright Warriors and the devious Ferocious Piranhas.

Yet this half-baked initiative that had started too late was destined to fail.

The Avatars did not allow their opponents to leave unopposed. The Bright Warriors stubbornly gnawed at the heels of the escaping Diyast mechs and either forced them to stop and fight or simply defeated them straight away!

Any Diyast mech that succeeded in slipping through the net were quickly chased down by a pack of ravenous Ferocious Piranhas. The Vandal light mechs were able to catch up to any medium mech without fail, so the attempts to get away by the latter seemed very farcical.

As for the light mechs that outraced the Ferocious Piranhas, their numbers were too few to threaten the combat carriers that had already distanced themselves from the hotspot.

The empowered ranged mech company might not have the blessing of Ylvaine, but their overall performance received a collective boost that was just enough for them to down the dodging enemy light mechs by coordinating their fire.

From the moment the sea carriers submerged back into the water, the Larkinson Clan knew that it had accomplished its victory.

"The Avatars and Vandals have won!"

"Hail the Larkinson Clan!"

"Hail the Golden Cat!"

The operation to evacuate the Purnesse Family was settled even before the third wave of Larkinson mechs arrived.

With the help of a new combat method, the Avatars of Myth succeeded in pioneering a new battle approach!

Back on the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves was lost for words.

He had long thought that he was the only one who was qualified to invent new spirituality-based methods in the Larkinson Clan. No one came close to matching his competence in spiritual engineering.

Though he was aware that he had a long way to go before he could catch up to his mother, in his clan he always considered himself to be the sole authority in this field!

Yet now, the Avatars of Myth encroached upon his domain despite possessing no expertise in spiritual engineering.

"How?" Ves asked.

He turned around and pinned his eyes towards the Larkinson Mandate. He could feel smugness radiating from the Golden Cat.

"Get over here!"

He did not bother to ask Nitaa to hand over the book. He activated a hidden command and commanded the antigrav brace to detach from Nitaa's combat armor and fly straight into Ves' outstretched hand!

Once he held the book in his grasp, he communicated directly with Goldie.

"What have you been up to these days?!"

Nyaaaaaaaaaaa.