

## Mech 3251

### *Chapter 3251: Dwarven Signature Mechs*

"We are Vulcan's Shield!"

"We are indomitable!"

"We are the guardians of the empire!"

As the Molten Furies continued to remain stubbornly alive while withstanding attack after attack, the morale among their steady dwarven mech pilots remained high.

The pitiful weapons of their human foes weren't strong enough to break their heavy shields!

Their mechs might be more maneuverable than their dwarven machines, but what was the point of that? The dwarven mechs just had to keep up their defenses while they advanced. Sooner or later, the Molten Hammers would be able to bull through to the enemy fleet and force every fast and flighty mech to fight the dwarves upfront whether the humans liked it or not. This was the favorite strategy employed by the Vulcans!

"Hahaha! Look at their skinny, ugly mechs! So what if they have this weird mind crap? Their gods can't help them and our souls are protected by Vulcan. They can't possibly defeat us with their feeble mechs!"

Though this was the first time the Molten Hammers experienced the various glows of the Larkinson Clan, they did not stay unbalanced for long.

As the mech pilots of an old and famed mech division, the dwarves who piloted all of the melee mechs were filled with pride and an unquestioning belief in their own strength.

The Molten Hammers had managed to drive away many of the human forces that once occupied the Smiling Samuel Star Sector!

They were one of the units responsible for freeing many dwarves from slavery and oppression!

The mech division had also taken part in the grand founding ceremony of the Vulcan Empire. Their contributions along with their valor earned them a place of pride that conveyed eternal glory!

Although the first generation of mech pilots had mostly retired, there were still a number of oldsters among the Molten Hammers. Together with Venerable Orthox, these storied heroes not only taught a lot of valuable lessons to the newer generations, but also

served as pillars of support that made every younger mech pilot feel compelled to perform at their best!

The Larkinsons and Crossers were able to feel the ferocity of their foes. No matter what they did, the dwarves never gave in and tried their best to never show weakness!

"Watch out! The dwarven offensive mechs are on the move!"

After the Vulcan's Chosen stalled the human mechs, the dwarves seemed to have gotten the measure of their opponents. The rest of the heavy assault mech regiment were finally about to show their teeth!

The Avido Berserkers moved up first! Anyone who looked at the design of their Shieldbreaker mechs could immediately tell what they were all about.

"The Avido Berserkers are the dwarven equivalent of our Swordmaidens!"

The Shieldbreaker was the lightest mech model fielded by the Molten Hammers. It was an axeman mech that was more maneuverable than other dwarven mechs but still boasted enough armor to withstand a couple of heavy blows.

As its name suggested, this offensive mech model excelled at breaking shields. Every Shieldbreaker wielded a variety of different axe configurations. Most wielded heavy two-handed battle axes but there were also mechs that either wielded a pair of smaller axes or carried a more defense-oriented axe-and-shield combination.

Regardless of the weapon loadouts, the Shieldbreaker mechs did not focus on any other targets aside from the defensive mechs of the Larkinsons and Crossers!

Whereas most offensive mechs sought to attack space knights from the sides or the rear, the Avido Berserker mech pilots didn't bother with all of that tricky maneuvering.

They just charged straight ahead and chopped at the enemy shields with great violence!

Within just half a minute, the first thick tower shields that the Bright Warriors relied upon to fend off the dwarves were already starting to show signs of breaking. Swordsman mechs and other offensive mechs of the Larkinson Clan quickly backed up the beleaguered space knights, but that did not completely solve the danger!

"Those Shieldbreaker mechs are cooperating really well with the Molten Furies."

The dwarven axeman mechs fought alongside the dwarven space knights in a well-practised routine. Each time the former launched a powerful chop with their axes, the latter surged forward and shielded against any incoming counter-attacks, thereby removing much of the threat to the Shieldbreakers!

Commander Melkor and many other Larkinsons couldn't help but admire the excellent synergy between the two dwarven units. The Vulcan's Chosen and the Avido Berserkers fought as if they had already experienced this a hundred times before.

By combining the defense of the Molten Fury model with the powerful might of the Shieldbreaker model, the dwarves already established a basic but powerful combo that was enough to frustrate many opponents!

The only weakness was that they didn't possess any means to retaliate against ranged mechs. Heavy caliber cannons such as the ones utilized by the Transcendent Punishers and the Eternal Redemptions were able to crack and overwhelm the defenses of the Molten Furies, but they were currently engaged in their own struggle against the Slug Rangers.

This was a difficult situation, and it was only growing worse as the other signature mechs of the Molten Hammers came forth!

As soon as the Avatar and Crosser mechs grouped up in order to concentrate their strength and force a breach in the defensive lines of the Molten Hammers, another dwarven mech model strode forth.

"It's the Volcano's Wrath!"

"Let the flames of Vulcan cleanse the blight of humanity from the galaxy!"

A large amount of dwarven striker mechs approached the areas in the battle line that was under heavy pressure and began to activate their flamethrowers.

Large clusters of human mechs suddenly faltered and were forced into a retreat due to the large overlapping streams of flames bearing down on their positions. The temperature in front of the dwarven mechs had grown so hot that the most badly-affected mechs even showed signs of melting!

Fortunately, the defenses of the Bright Warrior mechs were good enough to resist the heat, but the appearance of the Volcano's Warth mech regiment plugged yet another loophole of the dwarven defensive lines!

They were not only great at fending off the Ferocious Piranhas and other annoying light mechs, but also served as excellent area denial tools.

When Ves spotted the appearance of the striker mechs, he knew that they had become a great threat to the Avatars and other mech units at the center.

The Magmatar mech model was built for war and it showed. They were sturdy and wielded thick flamethrowers that were big and robust enough that they could probably be used to bash weaker mechs.

The Magmatar striker mech model didn't appear to possess much mobility, but they didn't need to be particularly fast. Their role was to provide close-ranged support to the battle line. Though the flames they released weren't capable of melting mechs immediately, it was extremely undesirable to bathe in them for an extended amount of time.

The widespread pattern of the Magmatar's flamethrower and the capability to use multiple weapons to deny a huge area instantly caused the melee mechs of the expeditionary fleet to feel as if they were being hampered at every turn.

The impregnable defenses of the Molten Furies, the destructive axe attacks of the Shieldbreakers and the anti-crowding capabilities of the Magmatar produced an even stronger degree of synergy!

"So this is what a real mech division is like!" Ves became enlightened.

He had seen hints of it when his clan fought against the Fridaymen, but that was different. The detachments from the elite mech regiments were plucked from different Coalition partners and had to fight alongside strangers from the same state.

This was different because the Molten Hammer mech division came as a whole. Ves understood the logic of organizing a mech division better now that he saw how each and every specialized mech regiment was designed to synergize with each other.

The Vulcan's Chosen formed the defensive bulwark. The Avido Berserkers formed the assault group. The Volcano's Wrath provided close-ranged fire support.

The combination of the three made for a much greater combination than anything the Larkinson Clan was able to come up with! The Avatars and so on mainly relied on the four configurations of the Bright Warrior model which was never designed with maximizing synergy in mind.

The current iteration of the Bright Warrior was meant to serve as a quality base platform that was designed to be highly adaptable in many different battle situations. They also had to be flexible enough to be compatible to a wide range of different mech pilots.

Although Ves was glad that his Bright Warriors fulfilled its role, he never really thought how they would function as part of a wider system on a battle of this scale.

Though General Verle had mentioned this topic to Ves many times, the abstract nature of the topic along with his other priorities caused him to neglect this matter.

Now that Ves not only saw the power of combined arms first-hand, but also suffered from it, he vowed he would definitely rectify this shortcoming in the future!

The Avatars of Myth, Living Sentinels, Flagrant Vandals, Battle Criers, Swordmaidens, Penitent Sisters and Eye of Ylvaine were too monotonous when it came to their mech rosters!

A single well-designed mech model might afford them great advantages against most opponents, but against true professionals, mixing and matching different specialized mech models always yielded better returns!

"I need to apply this approach for my own troops!"

The clan's mech legions all deserved to field a coherent mix of mech models that each combined into powerful systems that performed far better than the sum of their parts!

Ves quickly felt another burden on his shoulders. He knew that this could not be done unless he designed a large number of mechs. Each and every mech design not only had to perform well on their own merits, but also had to fit the fighting approach of every mech legion.

Due to this, one specialized mech design that worked well with the Avatars for example might not make sense for the Swordmaidens.

As a result, Ves would have to design at least three to four specialized mech models per mech legion, each of which had to perform better than the Bright Warrior.

Suffice to say, that was a lot of design work and would probably take years to complete.

"Once I do..."

A grand vision momentarily swept his imagination. If he entered this battle with a mech army that was largely composed of many different specialized mech models, this battle might have turned out drastically differently!

At the very least, his mech legions wouldn't have been forced into such a passive position!

"Of course, the lack of numbers is also hurting us a lot."

Though the synergy between the different dwarven mechs were excellent, the fundamental reason why the expeditionary forces were already on the backfoot was because they were thousands of mechs short!

The only reason why Ves and the Larkinsons weren't panicking was because the Molten Hammer mechs were beginning to crowd up. Part of this was due to their own tactics, but another reason why they began to condense their lines was because of the pressure exerted by the expeditionary forces.

The Avatars did not lose their will for battle. Despite the difficulty of keeping up with the Molten Hammers, the Avatar mech pilots possessed their own pride and fought with the fate of the Larkinson Clan on their shoulders.

"Reinforce our left and right wings! We need to compress their battle lines further. They're still too far apart at the moment!"

"Our middle columns can't hold the dwarven mechs back!"

"Hold as best you can! Buy as much time as possible!"

Another reason why the Larkinson mech pilots fighting against the Molten Hammers did not lose confidence was because they were all anticipating a powerful solution.

Further in the rear, the Valkyrie Redeemers led by the Valkyrie Prime had been circling around and biding their time. The Penitent Sisters had all been praying to the Superior Mother for over ten minutes. Their bond and connection to the Supreme had reached their strongest point!

On the right flank, Venerable Dise and the elite Swordmaidens had also been honing their minds and wills. The Hivar Roarers were just as difficult to deal with as the Molten Rangers and conventional solutions were too costly to undertake.

Only by employing its trump cards would the Larkinson Clan be able to change the current pattern!

"Wait for the right moment, Larkinsons. Soon, we'll show these dwarves that Vulcan won't be able to save their lives!"

*Chapter 3252: Small Pilots*

"Nyeow..."

"I know, Minxie. I worry about Vincent as well." Raella Larkinson said as she sat in her stateroom in a penthouse in Twilight City.

In previous battles, Raella always found herself in the cockpit. The Larkinsons needed every skilled mech pilot they could get in order to defend their clan. She still missed those days sometimes but thought it was better that she sat this battle out this time.

"Our clan has grown so much." She sighed.

The Larkinson Clan had grown so explosively in the past couple of years that it was no longer short on mech pilots anymore. In fact, the clan actually had a surplus of thousands of mech pilots. Each of them were just like her and were sitting in their homes or shelters aboard the capital ships.

Though they were all capable of piloting a mech in battle, the mech legions already assigned all of their available mechs to the best mech pilots.

Though Raella made sure to keep up her skills every chance she got, she was not a part of any of the mech legions. Even if she thought she could outfight the average Avatar recruit, she wasn't versed in any of the tactics and battle methods that the Avatars trained in. Her presence in the ranks would merely disrupt the unit she was attached to and threaten their internal cohesion.

"I chose this life for myself."

She was a director now. She put herself in charge of the growing competitive scene of the Larkinson Clan. Ever since the Vivacious Wal with its built-in mech arena joined the fleet, she had come into her element.

Under her vigorous leadership, she quickly managed to erect exciting leagues where many clansmen could have their fill for battle in the form of thrilling duels and group matches.

Yet now, the mech arena was empty and silent. The clansmen who ordinarily sat in the stands to witness mech-on-mech violence with their own eyes were absent.

There was a bigger battle taking place outside, and it was not just a game to the clan.

It would have been one thing if Raella was able to put her champion skills to the test once again, but that part of her life was firmly over by now. She was no longer a Blood Claw who risked her life to win in underground duels.

That made her feel melancholic, but only for a short amount of time.

"Nyeow~"

Minxie comforted her by rubbing her furry face against her hand. She reached out and scratched her ears in return.

The more Raella observed this battle, the more she got reminded why she didn't want to follow her family heritage. There was just something about being in the middle of that chaos and fighting for her very life that sat wrong with her. After so many years, she still couldn't explain it. All she knew was that she wasn't cut out for the battlefield.

"Jannzi and the others are much more suitable."

She sighed once again when she thought of how the Larkinsons of her generation had diverged so much.

Ves became an incredibly successful mech designer and started his own clan.

Jannzi broke through to expert pilot and was becoming more and more difficult to approach.

Ghanso also became an expert pilot, only to go bonkers and die trying to kill his own relatives.

Melkor managed to become a somewhat successful legion commander and was able to command thousands of mechs in battle.

Certainly, there were far more trueblood Larkinsons than this. Some had gone on to become the chief ministers of the clan. Others advanced to expert candidate and were now on the battlefield in order to find their own opportunities to undergo apotheosis.

Of course, there were also many truebloods who hadn't accomplished anything of note. They originally came from a third-rate state and not all of them managed to adapt to the rising standards and expectations of the Larkinson Clan. Even Raella herself found herself inferior to all of the talented second-raters that had joined up as of late.

She did not begrudge their entry, though. Even now, many adopted Larkinsons were fighting and dying to defend a clan and people that were strangers to them just a year ago. It was incredible how little time it took for foreigners from many different states to gather together and embrace a single identity.

Just as she was thinking about deep and profound matters, she suddenly saw that Vincent's Bright Warrior had just been hit by a volley of gauss rounds. The mech's rifle flung away into space as the machine lost both its arm and a considerable chunk on its life side!

"Vincent!"

Fortunately for Raella, her boyfriend managed to eject from his crippled mech in time. Just seconds after his cockpit soared back to the fleet, another volley of attacks slammed into the damaged Bright Warrior and broke it in half!

Now that she was able to confirm that Vincent made it out alive, she began to feel annoyed at his results. She had tracked his performance from the beginning of the engagement.

Nothing she saw made her feel proud of his performance.

"What a complete shame! You're disgracing every expert candidate with your performance!"

Her words weren't entirely fair. Vincent wasn't a dedicated rifleman mech pilot and he had lost his only custom mech. He was also taking part in a huge battle where his

excellent piloting skills didn't seem to matter. Aside from crippling or destroying a dozen more dwarven mechs than average, his contribution was completely unremarkable.

"You're never going to become an expert pilot at this rate!"

As Raella was trying to figure out a way to give her boyfriend a good kick in the butt in order to motivate him into working earnestly to become an expert pilot, elsewhere a certain guest pilot was feeling quite lost.

Jessica Quentin was one of the twenty MTA mech pilots that had been sent to the Larkinson Clan in order to gain their help in breaking through.

So far, their training methods and other forms of help did not particularly impress her so much. Not even the guidance of the Larkinson expert pilots had made much of a difference. No matter what theories she bought into, none of them made her feel as if she was making any progress!

She already regretted her decision to let the Larkinsons plan her training program. Their methods were primitive, unscientific and outright illogical in many ways. She shouldn't have expected better from these space yokels. Their patriarch hadn't even bothered to spend any time on her and her cohort even though he was the one who was supposedly able to help them the most!

"What's even worse is that they've dragged us all into this meaningless battle!"

The Larkinsons could have avoided this battle. To the dwarves, the Smiling Samuel Star Sector was their paradise. To mechers like Jessica, it was the equivalent of a ghetto and an experimental chamber. She didn't know what the higher-ups were up to when they allowed the dwarves to build their own state while retaining their anti-human ideology, but she knew that her superiors didn't take the Vulcanites seriously.

No matter how much the dwarves wanted to tear down the MTA and other human-centric organizations, they were too weak to be considered qualified opponents!

She had always looked down on the dwarves for that reason. The Vulcanites were clowns who thought that they were the masters of the cosmos, only to forget that the MTA could easily wipe dwarvenkind across the galaxy in just a couple of days!

Aside from vermin that had crawled into difficult regions of space such as the Nyxian Gap, Jessica was confident that the MTA could wipe the rest out. Not that it ever would. The Association was better than that. Dwarves were still humans, so they enjoyed the same basic human rights.

She directed her attention back to the battle. She was currently attached to the Speed Demons and piloted a Ferocious Piranha like the rest of her 'comrades'.

As some of the best light mech pilots in the Larkinson Clan, the Speed Demons that were personally trained by Venerable Tusa played an important role in disrupting the hardiest enemy units.

Though bypassing the enemy lines and approaching the dwarven fleet from an angle was beyond their capabilities, they were doing a good job at gnawing at the Molten Hammers from the right wing.

"Break up this formation!" A Larkinson mech officer commanded over the communication channel. "We need to squeeze the dwarven mechs closer together and that won't happen if they don't feel enough pressure. You don't need to destroy them all but you must do everything in your power to push them towards the center."

They were doing just that. Through skill and coordination, the small squad of elites swept alongside the Molten Hammer mechs, taunting them and threatening to attack their openings.

They rarely did so, though. Even though their skill allowed them to find opportunities to overwhelm any vulnerable mechs, the Molten Hammers were far too solid and coordinated to reveal any major openings.

The Magmatars fielded by the Volcano's Wrath mech regiment were especially difficult to deal with! Anytime the Speed Demons or other light mechs attempted to swoop in, a Magmatar or two would be ready to spray huge spurts of flames in their direction!

Even though Jessica could outduel pretty much every mech pilot aside from the expert pilots on this battlefield, the mech she was stuck with was far too limiting for her liking.

She still hadn't been able to get accustomed to piloting inferior mechs after many months of getting accustomed to them. She lacked the multitude of weapon systems that she enjoyed back when she piloted her standard-issue MTA mechs. Under no circumstance would she ever be rendered as ineffective in battle as this moment!

"Good job, Jessica! Keep swooping close to them. The more they experience our glows, the more they are pulling back. These dwarven mech pilots like to act tough but they don't like our glows any more than other humans!"

The woman understood what the Larkinson Clan was attempting to do. She felt quite ambivalent about it. Sure, she heard all of the stories about how the Larkinsons reversed defeat into victory by performing outright magic. She also watched the footage of the battle.

Yet no matter how well they could pull off their area attacks, there were limits. There were too many enemy mechs on the battlefield.

"These Larkinsons will be the death of me!" She whispered to herself.

Just like any other human, she feared death, but did not let that affect her thinking. She already knew when she received this assignment that no one from the Association would come to rescue her and her fellow MTA mech pilots.

For better or worse, she had to fight for her life and trust that the Larkinsons knew what they were doing as they laid the groundwork for their 'battle formations'!

"Let's see whether the hype is justified."

After several minutes of dodging flames and annoying dwarves, the Larkinsons were finally ready.

"It's almost time! The Penitent Sisters and the Swordmaidens are about to make their final approaches. They'll try and time their attacks so that they'll unleash their power at the same time to put the dwarves on the backfoot as much as possible. Get ready to advance into them and break open any holes in their battle lines!"

Though Jessica still maintained her skepticism, she nonetheless became excited for what she might be witnessing. The Larkinsons had talked so much about these maneuvers that she was bound to grow curious about the actual effects.

Were these Larkinsons really capable of coming up with a new attack method that completely surpassed the power level of a second-class mech force? What was their secret? Why did they possess so much power despite fielding weak mechs?

"Hopefully, I can get a glimpse of the answer today."

*Chapter 3253: Iron Crusher*

A slow change was taking place on the battlefield.

The Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers were still being suppressed at almost every turn. Only the struggle between ranged mechs remained fairly even, but that was because there were too many defensive options available to the ranged mechs.

However, even if the Slug Rangers had become preoccupied, that still didn't change the fact that the Molten Rangers and the Hivar Roarers were downing more enemies than the expeditionary fleet!

It took all of their effort for the Larkinsons and their allies to slow down the dwarven advance. The enemy mechs were so sturdy and powerful that they were far harder to defeat than pirate mechs or other rabble!

The power increase afforded by coordination became a lot more significant when it was applied on a large scale. It was not necessarily scary to fight against lots of dwarven mechs. It only became a problem when their mech pilots seamlessly worked together

and combined the capabilities of their machines so that they covered for each other's weaknesses!

For example, the Hivar Roarer strategy was relatively simple yet extremely difficult to deal with for the expeditionary forces. The Crumbleshells sounded ridiculous at first, but the combination of high defense and constant damage output at medium range was extremely effective at suppressing mechs that weren't able to break through their defensive envelopes.

The Molten Hammers were even more refined in their synergy. Although they did not possess the power to hit back at ranged mechs, they were practically invincible at close range!

The combination of Molten Furies, Shieldbreakers and Magmatars served as their base models upon which the foundation of their combat approach rested upon. As long as the Molten Hammers were able to field a sufficient amount of all three mechs, they were able to augment their strategy with various different specialized mech models that each added a bit of extra flexibility to the mech division.

For example, when the Molten Hammers noticed that the center of the human battle line was beginning to buckle, they soon dispatched their largest and strongest offensive mechs!

It took a lot of time for these heavy melee mechs to fly to the front. Their mobility may be terrible, but in a relatively static situation like this, the dwarves were in their element. The threat of their slow but steady advance had forced the human mech forces to play on their terms.

"The Forgehammers have arrived!"

"Let Vulcan's might ring true in this star system!"

"Hammer their mechs to pieces!"

The Forgehammer mech regiment was one of the slowest but also most offense-oriented units of the Molten Hammers. The Forgehammers had long acquired a reputation within the Ferril Provincial Army for being the biggest powerhouse mechs that average mech pilots could use. They were the dream of every Molten Hammer mech pilot that preferred to go on the offensive rather than the defensive.

Nothing exemplified the Forgehammers more than their Iron Crusher heavy mech. Each of them possessed strong arms that wielded strong and heavy hammers.

Wherever they passed, every other mech reverently made way. Though this exposed some defensive loopholes as a consequence, any attack that landed on their thick armor simply bounced off or inflicted negligible damage.

The frontal armor of the Iron Crushers was almost as thick as the main shield of the Molten Fury model!

"Strike the iron!"

The massive heavy mechs simultaneously swung their hammers straight onto the damaged and stressed shields of the Bright Warriors and other human mechs!

Some Avatar and Crosser mech pilots feared getting hit by these massive hammers wielded by the oversized dwarf mechs. They ceded ground in order to evade the deadly blows.

However, some mechs weren't able to retreat in time or did not have space to do so. The outcome of these defensive mechs were severe as the solid hammers impacted straight onto their shields!

Some shields shattered. Other shields dented. In every case, the mechs that got hit by the Iron Crushers all bounced backwards, sometimes even colliding against other friendly mechs in the process.

The power of the Iron Crushers was too much!

Though their attacks were slow and could easily be dodged, in increasingly cramped battlefield conditions or in situations where their foes weren't able to move away, they were fantastic at breaking stalemates!

Of course, this was bad news for the expeditionary forces as the collapse of their center columns was accelerating. Not a single melee mech could withstand the blows of the Iron Crushers and escape unscathed. If a mech did not shatter from getting hit, they would almost certainly get knocked back by a very hefty distance. This was enough for the dwarven mechs to advance closer to the expeditionary fleet!

Of course, they were not without their weaknesses. Though their defensive capabilities were formidable, they were not heavy space knights and lacked the characteristically tough physical shields of the latter.

Their extremely low mobility and flexibility also made them vulnerable to attacks from their flanks and rear. Even a light skirmisher was able to take them out of the fight. The light mech just had to approach the rear of an Iron Crusher and attack the vulnerable flight system that was only moderately reinforced against attacks.

The Molten Hammers weren't stupid though. The Iron Crushers was one of the prides of their mech division and always surrounded them with multiple escorts.

The only way to suppress and possibly destroy the heavy mechs of the Forgehammers was to direct heavy firepower towards these indomitable mechs. The heavier the caliber, the better!

"We can't let the Molten Hammers collapse our center too soon. If they manage to cleave through our lines, they can split us up and put us in disarray!"

Out of helplessness, the Larkinsons were forced to direct their ranged firepower to suppress the Iron Crushers. Average ranged mechs didn't cut it. The Transcendent Punishers performed better but weren't the most ideal solution.

Only the Eternal Redemptions were able to slow the advance of the Forgehammers. When the Iron Crushers began to get targeted by the ultra-heavy rounds fired by the Penitent Sister cannoneer mechs, the dwarven heavy mechs finally showed weakness!

Occasionally, a bright and powerful beam landed on the Iron Crushers as well!

Unlike the attacks unleashed by average Bright Warrior mechs, the powerful positron beams fired by the Amaranto never failed to burn through the armor of the Iron Crushers and take them out right away.

However, before Venerable Stark could continue to pick off the threatening hammer-wielding mechs, her position behind the Graveyard fell under an intensive bombardment!

"Don't even think about killing my brothers!" Venerable Leiva roared as her Gauss Baron continued to pepper the Graveyard's heavily-battered surface with continuous artillery fire. "A masterwork mech is wasted on you, tall folk!"

So far, the Amaranto and the Gauss Baron were the only expert mechs that made their presence known. Everyone could sense that would soon change. The only question was which side would expose their expert mechs first. The side that put them to use first would lose a lot of initiative. If it wasn't necessary, it was best not to expose them too early.

"These humans won't last much longer. What can a bunch of cannoneer mechs do? They still have to defend themselves against our Slug Rangers."

"They should have brought at least twice the amount of mechs to stand a chance against defeating us. We're invincible!"

"We don't need to disturb Venerable Orthox at all if this battle proceeds at this rate. How many expert mechs can they muster when they don't have the backing of a state?"

Though the Vulcanites had plenty of reason to feel confident, the expeditionary forces weren't losing as much confidence as they should. They all had their reasons to believe that they would become the eventual victors of this tough battle.

The Glory Seekers put their faith in the Superior Mother whether they were winning or losing. They were still human and could still experience fear, despair and other negative emotions.

However, their strong faith in the Superior Mother along with witnessing her might in a previous occasion had given them a rock-hard belief that they would never be led astray!

Whether they lived or died, it was worth it to get noticed by the greatest Supreme of the Hexer state!

As for the Crossers, they fought for other reasons. Pride and family were two major reasons why they stiffened their spines. However, what truly kept them going was the respect and awe they held towards Patriarch Reginald Cross.

As long as their leader entered the fray, he would quickly be able to teach the dwarves a lesson! Short of a dwarven ace mech showing up, the Crossers were relieved that not a single enemy could defeat their patriarch!

As for the Larkinson Clan, their reasons were much the same. The mech pilots did not entertain any notions about giving up because there was no escape and because their families were counting on them. Each of them shouldered the future of their people and they could never afford to let the dwarves claim their victory. To lose this battle was to lose everything!

The stakes couldn't be higher for the Larkinsons. This was why they began to develop a lot of anticipation for what might be happening next.

Will the Larkinson Clan show off the might of its battle formations?

Though no one communicated with them about this topic, it still hung in the minds of every mech pilot of the expeditionary fleet.

The situation on the battlefield was not ideal to perform those massive attacks. Even though the expeditionary forces tried their best to compress the dwarven mechs together, the Molten Hammers and the Hivar Roarers did not let the tall folk dictate their movements. The dwarves tried their best to follow their own plans, which did not entail backing up and letting themselves get pressured all the time.

Anticipation continued to build up as time passed by. The Penitent Sisters and the Swordmaidens had already been moving around for a while now. They previously circled around and pretended to act like ordinary reserves.

It wasn't until a few moments ago that they had built up speed and begun their final approach.

Did the dwarves know?

This question hung in the minds of every human mech pilot. It didn't seem as if the Vulcanite got wind of what the Larkinsons might be doing. The dwarven mech formations had compressed to an extent and there were certain sections of their battle line that had become a lot more congested with mechs!

General Verle even commanded additional Transcendent Punishers and the Eternal Redemptions to open fire on the Molten Hammers.

The more the dwarven mechs came under bombardment, the more they pressed together in order to form sturdy shield walls that heavily neutralized incoming fire!

The only pity was that the Hivar Roarers were much more difficult to compress. They also split their units into two separate wings. Their mechs were significantly more dispersed as they employed drastically different battle approaches.

"It will have to do." Ves quietly muttered.

The dwarves still didn't appear to have a clue. The mechs that would be engaging their battle networks had camouflaged their actions well. Even their approaches didn't appear so notable. The situation at the front had grown urgent that many other mechs were beginning to move forwards.

Ves still wasn't sure whether it was the right decision to go through with this move at this time. Even though General Verle judged that the current situation couldn't go on much further, exposing two of the Larkinson Clan's most powerful battle formation in this relatively early stage might not yield the maximum effect.

Still, the prospect of taking out a lot of enemy mechs when they were still dense and numerous was too hard to resist. The longer the dwarves enjoyed a substantial edge in numbers, the more they could leverage this advantage to skew the balance even further!

Instead of allowing that to happen, the Larkinsons had to do their best to even the scales. At least, that was supposed to be the logic behind this move.

The main matter of concern for Ves was whether they were squandering a resource that could have been spent on greater threats.

"Where are the dwarven expert mechs? Will we be able to defeat them if we have used up our cards?"

Ves dreaded the answers to these questions.

### *Chapter 3254: Dwarven Empathy*

Orthox De Massie was a guardian of the Vulcan Empire.

He didn't start off that way. Like many other dwarves, he originated from a different state from the Smiling Samuel Star Sector.

His early life as a heavy gravity variant human was different from many other people of his kind.

He grew up surrounded by privilege. He was one of the few dwarves in the galaxy who was lucky enough to be born on a heavy gravity planet that was not populated by destitute miners.

The state that controlled the planet was a benevolent republic that believed in fairness and enlightenment. The planetary governor and the local administration were also fair and never discriminated between human and dwarves.

As a result, a large population of dwarves had formed that had risen up from their mining roots and constituted much of the middle-class on the heavy gravity planet.

Of course, when lots of dwarves began to do better, a small proportion of them achieved even greater success!

Tycoons, mech designers, politicians and more emerged from the booming planet. Half of the time, the planetary governorship was claimed by dwarves, which resulted into even more favorable policies. The humans weren't worried about this as they knew the rich and powerful dwarves weren't interested in expanding their reach to other planets.

Dwarves were the natural inhabitants of heavy gravity planets. If they lived on another planet without any gravity accommodations, their bodies would quickly grow weak. Their bones and muscles would atrophy and all kinds of negative body changes would occur. Their altered genetics could only stave off this kind of decay for so long and it was quite expensive to reverse the maladies.

The same applied to humans. Unless they augmented themselves with specific gene mods, they would always have to wear a suit or belt that offset the gravity acting on their bodies. No baseline human could tolerate having to carry and move around twice or thrice their own body weight for an extended amount of time! Even an ordinary fall could prove fatal!

It was for this reason that dwarves and humans managed to live in harmony in the same state. There was little competition for territory and the dominant race did not exploit the minority.

"We live in a world of luxury and abundance." Orthox's father once said to a much younger boy who had just reached his tenth birthday and found out his genetic aptitude. "However, do not think that all is well for dwarvenkind. Once you set out into the galaxy, you will learn that dwarves like us do not live so well. Most humans don't see us as equals like they do in our state. They develop a contempt for our kind when they look at our stockiness and our diminished height. Regular humans are the most proper race of mankind in their eyes. Everything else is a mutation and an abomination."

To a young Orthox who grew up playing with expensive toys and going on many holidays to other planets in the same state, this sounded almost alien to him. While he heard people say that dwarves in other states didn't have it as good, it had always been an abstract matter to a kid like him. The local dwarves also deliberately avoided any mention of their more unfortunate brothers and sisters. Children didn't deserve to bear this burden too soon.

Obviously, his father thought that his son was old enough to learn some of the harsh truths of the galaxy.

"Humans aren't always pleasant, Orthox. You will learn once you get more exposed to people from different places. There are much fewer dwarves in the galaxy than humans. We are also absent from higher ranking positions in human space. That puts us at a severe disadvantage whenever a governing body decides upon something important. We lack representation and we lack the numbers to make our rulers care about us. The only reason why it is different in our state is because our human rulers are generous, but never forget that as long as one president decides that dwarves like us aren't worth taking care of anymore, all of our riches might get taken away."

His father waved out across the balcony, showing off the large underground city which the dwarves have built over many generations with pride.

When the younger Orthox looked out towards the city he grew up in, he carved his father's words in his bones.

He would not let his fellow dwarves lose their prosperity.

Soon afterwards, he began to attend a mech academy. He immediately stood out from his peers due to his B+ genetic aptitude. Though it had not reached the legendary A-grade, his distance to it was so small that there was essentially little difference!

He began to advance through his courses with stellar grades. Expectations piled up on him as he showed a penchant for piloting melee mechs. Whether he wielded a sword, axe, spear, hammer or any other handheld weapon, he was able to outduel all of his peers in no time!

Everything went well for Orthox, but throughout his training, he never forgot about his father's words. He studied the state of the galaxy and the conditions of dwarvenkind throughout human space.

What he learned when he browsed the libraries shocked him. To see dwarves who did not look so different from him stained with dust and operating outdated mining machines on some cramped planet did not sit well with him. It physically made him ill to read how callously human governments and corporations treated the dwarves they controlled.

His people were never treated at the same height as normal humans!

Through his teens and twenties, his empathy and lack of understanding defined his journey.

The more he learned about the ill treatment of dwarves, the more he felt frustrated.

The more he felt frustrated, the more he poured himself into his training.

Soon, his frustration morphed into a deep anger towards the state of the galaxy and the lack of support from humankind.

He began to ask many difficult questions.

"Why doesn't the MTA free our dwarven slaves?"

"Why do humans treat us so poorly?"

"Are dwarves really treated as lesser citizens outside our state?"

Though he became more and more confused, it did not affect the growth of his strength. By the time he graduated, he received an extremely attractive offer for a military commission.

He was just contemplating whether he should go through with his original plan to serve in the armed forces when he saw the news about the rebellion in the distant Smiling Samuel Star Sector.

"VULCAN LIVES!"

"FREEDOM TO THE DWARVES!"

"SLAY THE OPPRESSORS!"

For the first time in human history, a growing band of dwarven rebels not only managed to launch a successful rebellion, but also gained enough momentum to take over a state!

Even if the Paramount Kingdom was just a measly third-rate state, the rebellion was just starting to swell!

When Orthox saw how lesser dwarves showed both courage and fearlessness in the face of heavy human opposition, he felt as if he had found the reason why he had been brought in this galaxy.

He looked down at his own strong hands. "Why am I here? For what reason did I learn how to pilot a mech? Is it just to retain my own privileges, or am I here to make a difference?"

He admired the rebels without looking down on them. He understood that their situation was much worse than his. Yet despite the odds, they did not hesitate to fight against powerful and numerous humans just to free dwarvenkind!

What happened next was a whirlwind that completely transformed his life. He banded together with fellow sympathizers and supporters. They pooled all of their assets and resources together to raise an outfit that was able to field roughly 160 second-class mechs in battle.

Then, they all traveled to the Smiling Samuel Star Sector in order to answer the calling of the dwarven rebels!

Years went by as more dwarven compatriots like him rallied to the Vulcanites. Many of them had long felt that they were missing something and did not hesitate to convert to the Vulcan Faith once they became enlightened to this new dwarven religion.

Others were not as quick to worship Vulcan, but they fought for dwarven liberation all the same. Orthox belonged to this group. Though he was a secularist by nature, his time with the Vulcanites caused him to become increasingly attached to his new people.

Each of them were working towards the creation of a strong and powerful dwarven state!

Suffice to say, the escalating war presented a lot of hardship to the dwarves. Even rich and powerful foreigners like Orthox almost lost his life. Many of the comrades who he grew up with sacrificed their lives to fulfill the same ideal.

With each friend he lost, he began to feel more hatred towards the cruel and callous humans who denied the dwarves their right to live a decent life. He began to feel increasingly more guilty whenever his circle of friends grew smaller and smaller.

In desperation, his mech put down the hammer and axes and started to carry simple shields. The thought of losing his friends and seeing his fellow dwarven battle brothers fall was excruciating to Orthox!

It was then that he truly found his calling.

From winning battles to breaking through to expert pilot, Orthox De Massie became a name that inspired and invigorated the Vulcanites.

All of his dreams came true.

He was proud that he had managed to help his fellow compatriots conquer the Smiling Samuel Star Sector.

The long peace that followed as the dwarves consolidated their rule and erected a massive state from the ruins of human domains did not give him any further opportunities to excel in battle.

Orthox didn't care. He had witnessed so much death that he was more than happy to embrace peace. The longer that mech pilots like him remained in their bases, the more time the dwarves were able to live free and happy lives.

"The humans might come back one day, though. We need to be ready to fend off their greed."

His duty and his feeling of responsibility towards the Vulcanites kept fueling his growth. He knew that this victory was just a drop in the bucket. Many more dwarves in the rest of the galaxy were still subject to wretched conditions. It was impossible for the Vulcan Empire to stretch its influence across hundreds of thousands of light-years.

He made a vow to himself.

"As long as a dwarf was still living in captivity, I shall never release my vigilance! I can still do more for dwarvenkind!"

His iron-clad conviction caused him to continue to feel restless. Unlike many of his fellow Vulcanites, he never gave in to complacency and always kept his guard up against the humans living in the surrounding star sectors. States like the Empire of the Lost were always plotting to take revenge and put dwarves back into their supposed place.

The more he worried, the greater his perceived pressure. The greater his pressure, the more he strengthened his will.

His strength as an expert pilot steadily grew stronger. Before he knew it, he became a high-tier expert pilot. He was someone who was qualified to become an ace pilot, a supreme dwarven icon that could guard the dwarven state at least a hundred times better than before!

Of course, while he feared a reprisal, he never expected that his state would strike the first blow.

To be more exact, it was the Ferril Province that chose to launch an attack, but Orthox wasn't a fool. The new cult that he didn't really care about had bewitched his fellow dwarves and driven them into a frenzy.

"Attacking humans is folly!"

Yet no matter what he said, his status and respect as a high-tier expert pilot carried no sway to the fanatical Vulcanites who believed they needed to take their struggle against the tall folk to the next step.

In the end, the opinion of a god carried far more weight than a demigod!

*Chapter 3255: Old Guardian*

The moment the higher-ups decided to launch an extremely provocative attack, Venerable Orthox De Massie learned the news shortly afterwards.

The Ferril Provincial Army had chosen to mobilize three whole mech divisions for this hastily-organized operation.

The generals didn't have much to choose from. Many mech divisions were either too far away or stuck performing other missions. The number of units who were stationed close to the projected route of the human fleet and could be mobilized in their entirety only amounted to a handful.

The Vulcan Empire had embraced peace for a very long time. It was unnecessary to keep every military unit on a war footing. It was not only expensive, but also hard on the soldiers.

If the Ferril Province had more time, then it could have gathered thrice as many mech divisions. As it was, sending out the Molten Hammers, Slug Rangers and Hivar Roarers on short notice was the limit.

Venerable Orthox never doubted that his mech division alongside the other two divisions of the Ferril Provincial Army would claim victory. He and his fellow dwarven soldiers were not only fighting on home ground, but also brought a lot more mechs to the battlefield.

As far as he was concerned, winning this battle was just a formality.

That did not mean he was happy with this decision.

"Do these people even know how many dwarves will be driven to their deaths?!"

Orthox couldn't bear the thought of reliving the dark days of the dwarven rebellion. Back then, the sacrifices were worth it because the dwarven rebels fought for their freedom. They succeeded, so the Vulcan Empire should not have any reason to pick a fight against the humans.

No matter how many advantages the dwarven force possessed, the disparity in numbers was not overwhelming enough to produce a perfect victory. Their human targets would never roll over and accept their deaths in peace. Thousands of dwarven lives would definitely be lost, many of whom he personally knew and befriended.

The thought of losing so many more comrades was intolerable to someone who always tried his best to guard their lives!

His opposition to this lightning operation was clear to see, but too many muddled dwarves did not support his stance that it was a mistake to attack the humans.

It took a personal visit from his old friend and superior for Orthox to drop his opposition.

"The decision has already been made, Venerable Orthox. The dwarven people want to fight for their dwarven god." General Iker Kebrinore spoke.

Both of them were standing in Venerable Orthox's personal meditation chamber aboard the Great Ram. Images of the expert pilot's many fallen friends and battle comrades lined the bulkheads.

The expert pilot did not turn around to face the general. Instead, he kept folding his meaty arms behind his back while continuing to stare at the mementos of his past.

His will, which had long been tamed after many years of peace, had suddenly grown a lot hotter and restless as of late. Even General Kebrinore began to feel more unwelcome in this compartment.

"Is it truly the dwarven people who wish to slaughter our human visitors and spit in the eye of the MTA? Or is it the mad 'Flame Herald' who is attempting to push us into a black hole in order to fulfill his selfish ambitions?"

"Be careful what you say, Orthox!" The dwarven general became slightly alarmed! "I know you have your differences with the Dwarven God Cult, but it has become the mainstream amongst the youngsters. Flame Herald Uven Yellowshoe is even better than his father at converting Vulcanites to his beliefs. It is already a certainty that Vulcan will become known as a dwarven god within the next decade."

Venerable Orthox feared no cult leader. That said, he felt helpless at what was going on as of late. The changes in the Vulcan Empire did not sit well with him but matters of faith was never his strength.

"We fought too hard to free dwarves to see our hard work collapse. The Flame Herald is delusional if he thinks that Vulcan will help us fend off the MTA's wrath!"

"The MTA is distracted, my friend." General Kebrinore replied. "It has been for many decades. We are a mere sideshow to the mechers. The Red Ocean and the first-rate superstates are much greater concerns to them. As long as we don't do anything outrageous, I can guarantee you that the Big Two won't lift a finger."

"You don't know that, general!" Orthox yelled, his braided brown beard shaking with alarm! "I don't trust the Flame Herald to keep his cool and restrain his ambitions. He's the exact sort of person who will drive us into an impossible war against humans! Have you studied the enemy human states around us? I have, and I can tell you that each of them will not hesitate to rob our freedoms and put us back in the mines where they think we belong!"

The general was not as blind to the potential risks and dangers as many of his other dwarves. Many dwarves of the ruling class felt the same way as Venerable Orthox.

It was useless, though.

"Orthox..." Kebrinore sighed as he brushed his long and bushy beard. "Times have changed. The children who grew up in the Vulcan Empire are not content with hearing about the glories of the past. They are restless and ambitious. The Flame Herald is but one of many dwarves of the younger generation who believe they are capable of doing more. Over time, oldsters like us will die or retire from power, making way for brash and foolhardy dwarves who think they are on top of the galaxy."

"What are you saying, general?" The expert pilot glared.

"Think about it. Do you wish for these eager dwarves who have never witnessed the depravity of war to start a conflict with humans by themselves, or do you want to be on hand to guide them and protect them as best you can? I am certain that if we do not join in, the Dwarven God cultists will find a way to start a war without us, and more dwarves will eventually die because experienced soldiers like us aren't there to cover for their lack of experience."

General Kebrinore put Venerable Orthox in a difficult bind. A guardian must never abandon the people he vowed to protect. As a knight mech specialist, the thought of turning away was blasphemy.

The problem was that the role of a guardian was different from a leader. Venerable Orthox was not in charge and never sought to rule over his fellow dwarves. In his opinion, safeguarding their freedom and protecting them from external threats was his main responsibility. The tedious task of politicking and making decisions was best left to other dwarves.

Now, Orthox wished he would have become a bit more active in the political arena. Back in the early days, the dwarves who founded the Vulcan Empire were all sincere in their wish to provide a better life for their kind. They had just survived a brutal war and did not wish to diminish their population any further.

Those like-minded leaders were mostly gone these days. Orthox couldn't have possibly known that the Dwarven God Cult would rise up and earn support for its radical ideas. He also never expected that more and more dwarves were willing to start a war without thinking too much about the consequences!

Since the decision to attack the humans was set in stone, Venerable Orthox did not oppose General Kebrinore's argument. If the dwarves he cared about were so eager to fight, then he needed to be there in order to hold their hand and guard them against any major threats.

This was his duty as a soldier of the Vulcan Empire.

He still had questions, though.

"Why attack now? Why not wait until we are better prepared?"

"The Dwarven God Cult has grown impatient. It doesn't want to wait much longer to surpass the Vulcan Faith." General Kebrinore answered. "There is also a deeper significance to attacking this specific fleet. It is said that the Larkinson Clan is blessed by several human gods."

Venerable Orthox frowned. "You don't believe in that, do you?"

"It doesn't matter what I believe. The Larkinson Clan is associated with both hexism and the Ylvainan Faith. There are even rumors that they worship more gods, from some kind of cat to their patriarch himself."

"There are many foolish humans who believe in gods. What makes these Larkinsons different?"

"They can call upon their gods in battle or manifest their powers through their mechs. It's difficult to explain, but you will see why people think this is the case when you meet them in battle. All I can tell you is that the Larkinsons are the perfect punching bags for the Dwarven God Cult. They believe that Vulcan, the dwarf version that is, is locked in a struggle against human gods. What better way to prove their devotion to our god by beating up the favorite emissaries of obvious human gods such as 'The Superior Mother' and 'The Great Prophet?' The symbolic and religious meaning of defeating the Larkinson Clan is ten times bigger to the Flame Herald than attacking other human targets!"

Venerable Orthox still mulled over this discussion for a long time afterwards. As he sat in his cockpit and witnessed the battle unfolding, he questioned whether the Dwarven God Cult had made the right decision.

Fortunately, his dwarves had the situation well in hand. The Molten Hammers, the Slug Rangers and the Hivar Roarers did not disappoint and gained the upper hand in almost every aspect of the battle.

Even without the intervention of him and his fellow expert pilots, the dwarves were easily capable of tipping the scales in their favor. Though Orthox felt pained whenever he saw a mech pilot lose his life, he did not feel too burdened.

Battle was inherently dangerous and no one was able to protect every comrade. This was a lesson he learned a long time ago. Trying to coddle them would not only tire him out sooner, but also prevent his fellow dwarves from growing up and learning how to fight by themselves.

The only reason for him to step forward was if the enemy brought out its expert mechs. Even then, Orthox wasn't concerned at all, because the intelligence clearly stated that the human fleet was short on expert pilots and expert mechs. By how much, he wasn't sure, but it was impossible for private organizations to whip out so many expert mechs in a short amount of time.

"What a senseless slaughter."

Just as he thought that this battle had no suspense, he suddenly felt an enormous threat in the distance.

His eyes widened as his connection to his mech spotted a peculiar enemy mech formation surging forward.

This seemingly ordinary mech formation was the source of his alarm!

"What the...?"

Before he knew it, the marauder mechs began to glow and project a giant apparition of a robed lady that looked imperiously at the Molten Hammer mechs trying to break through the center!

As the lady began to swing her arm, the alarms ringing in Venerable Orthox's head had spiked!

Dwarven lives were at risk! Lots of them, in fact! How he knew that, he wasn't sure, but as a knight mech specialist and a self-proclaimed guardian of dwarvenkind, he never doubted his own instincts!

"These human mechs must be stopped!"

Venerable Orthox no longer paid attention to his instructions to stand by. Thousands of dwarven lives were at stake at the moment and he needed to be there in order to stave off a catastrophe!

"As long as I stop those mechs, everything will be right again!"

The Gatecrasher he piloted went from a relative standstill to speeding towards the front! Its powerful flight system boosted the expert mech forward with great power as Venerable Orthox did not hesitate to activate a resonating ability!

Soon, a heating comet flew above the dwarven lines as the glowing red Gatecrasher began to build up a huge amount of momentum in surprisingly little time. Venerable Orthox thought that as long as he reached the front and slammed his mech head-long into the lead marauder mech that led the enemy formation, he would be able to disrupt whatever move the enemy had planned!

Unfortunately, while his Gatecrasher was able to charge forward at a blazing fast pace, the giant human female had completed her arm motion.

A massive glowing wave of energy surged from her hand and advanced right into the middle of the Molten Hammer line!

Death had come, and it was ready to reap the lives of those who affronted the Superior Mother!

"NOOOO!" Venerable Orthox desperately roared as his desperation amplified his will!  
"SPLIT UP AND GET OUT OF THERE! DON'T GET HIT BY THAT ENERGY ATTACK!"

*Chapter 3256: Equal Before Death*

The much-anticipated battle formation of the Larkinson Clan had finally unleashed its promised attack!

The Superior Mother's death phase of existence was heartless, impartial and utterly cold against any form of life. No matter whether the energy wave passed through friendlies or enemies, humans or dwarves, Larkinsons or Vulcanites, every living human was equal in front of her might.

Of course, the Larkinsons that had kept the Molten Hammers busy in the middle of the battlefield had already received instructions in advance. The mechs had all moved out of the anticipated trajectory of the death energy attack well ahead of time. Numerous mechs even took hold of the arms of machines that had lost a portion of their mobility.

No one wanted to stay in the danger zone now that the Penitent Sisters had channeled their ultimate attack!

The Molten Hammers that had been fighting against the expeditionary forces with plenty of success became confused for a moment. Why did the tall folk retreat? Did the humans not realize that the dwarves were able to move a lot closer to the enemy fleet?

The retreat was too coordinated for it to be a spontaneous action. It was planned in advance.

"What is the purpose of giving us space?"

"Have the humans given up on this fight?"

"Vulcan bless us! The cowardly tall folk have lost heart and wish to beg for their lives!"

"Shut up! What if this is a trap?!"

Not even the commanders of the Molten Hammers knew what to do for a moment. In the absence of instructions, the dwarven mechs maintained a cautious, defensive stance. Their mech pilots instinctively drew closer together as if to obtain more comfort in numbers.

The dwarven mechs outnumbered their human counterparts. That was clear from the beginning. The Molten Hammers did not have to rush to make any decisions in haste. The mech division had always advocated for patience and deliberation. It fit with their steady but solid fighting style.

No matter what stratagem the enemy employed, the Molten Hammers always had faith that their powerful defenses and strong battle lines could weather any storm!

It wasn't until several dwarves who possessed a wider perspective of the battle spotted an anomaly that they discovered that something was wrong.

"What is the point of projecting a giant human?"

"That's their goddess! Their goddess has come to punish us for our transgressions!"

"Vulcan, protect us and save us from this evil woman!"

It wasn't until the giant apparition along with the mechs that were responsible for her appearance had released an inexplicable energy wave that the Molten Hammers really started to feel threatened!

"The humans have released an unknown anomaly! Get out of its firing path!"

Disarray ensued. The Molten Hammers in the path of the energy attack received panicked instructions that caused many dwarven mech pilots to falter or freeze.

This wasn't a part of their training. Aside from the veterans of the rebellion who had already learned to get out of the way of anything odd or dangerous as soon as possible, the younger dwarven mech pilots showed mixed reactions.

Some followed the instructions of their superiors and elders without much thought. Others became locked in paralysis as the appearance of the giant woman along with her strong aura had exposed them to phenomena that went far beyond what they had been trained to fight against!

The tight cohesion and coordination that the Molten Hammer mech units showed before had disappeared.

Some mechs that were in the middle of a compact formation tried to move away, only to collide into their comrades who had yet to move.

Plenty of mechs were able to move away but had been slow to act due to the incomprehension of their mech pilots.

Others who were more cautious or recognized the threat early had already tried to move outside of the path of the incoming energy attack a long time ago. The only reason why they hadn't moved out yet was because their mechs were too slow!

"We can't get out of the way fast enough!"

The Molten Hammers discovered to their horror that their proud and sturdy mechs had become their own worst enemy at this moment. The Molten Furies, the Magmatars and the massive Iron Crushers in particular did not possess enough acceleration to move out of the way before the swift energy attack reached their positions!

"Eject from your cockpits! Forget about your mechs! Your lives are more important!"

"FORM A SHIELD WALL! Our defenses are invincible! Even gods can't break our armor!"

The dwarven mech pilots all took action in different ways. Whether it was ejecting their cockpits in order to get out of the danger zone faster to fearlessly linking together in order to form the most desperate shield wall in their lives, not a single dwarf was waiting for their deaths!

Alas, only a fraction of lucky mechs and mech pilots situated at the periphery managed to evacuate in time. The rest were too far inside the danger zone or did not possess the speed to get out of the way in time. The Iron Crushers for example needed several seconds to even complete a cumbersome course change!

It only took a short moment for the attack released by the Penitent Sister battle formation to reach the front of the disarrayed Molten Hammer mechs.

Whether they recognized the threat or not, whether they moved their mechs away or linked up to defend against the unexplainable, whether they trusted in the defenses of their mechs or chose to eject their cockpits prematurely, every victim was equal in front of the Superior Mother's attack.

For a moment, the entire battlefield appeared to stagnate. Many mech pilots who had been paying attention to the eye-catching spectacle couldn't help but slow down their attacks or abort their offensive movements.

The energy wave traveled quickly through space, but not as swift as a laser beam. It just traveled forward with an inevitability that shook the hearts of anyone that was in its inexorable path.

On the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves remained solemn as he gripped the shaft of this new hammer.

"The dwarves have brought this on themselves."

Though he wished to defeat the Vulcanites, he did not revel in the deaths of their mech pilots. A part of him felt that mech pilots didn't deserve to get killed in this fashion. There was no glory in their futile resistance. They either got out of the way... or lost all of their vitality. There was no other outcome.

"The attack wave is bigger than last time." He whispered.

This was quite impressive because the amount of Penitent Sister mechs that launched this attack was actually a bit less than before. Though the all-female mech legion had recruited thousands of new mech pilots, the recent recruits were not Hexers in origin and still had much to go before they completed their training and indoctrination.

The effectiveness of a battle network depended highly on mutual understanding and mental alignment. Though devoting themselves to a singular figure or ideal was a good way to narrow people's differences, it was not enough. The newcomers had to truly live and think like the rest of the Penitent Sisters in order to join their most honored circle.

Since the Battle of Reckoning, the Penitent Sisters veterans who had launched the attack that slew the entire crew of the Auralis had become a lot more pious and devoted to the Superior Mother. Their previous successful experience offered them a lot of guidance and they had all consciously worked to increase their compatibility with the battle network and each other.

Of course, there was also another reason why the attack wave became more threatening this time.

"The Superior Mother has grown stronger. A lot stronger." Ves observed with mixed feelings.

He felt it when the Penitent Sister battle formation activated the Superior Mother's crown and channeled a portion of her power. The presence the ancestral spirit exuded in the brief moment she was active could be felt across the entire battlefield.

Compared to previous times, her death aspect had become a lot more concentrated and condensed. Ves could imagine why this was the case.

"She has witnessed too much death."

The Komodo War still raged on. An uncountable number of mech pilots and other service personnel lost their lives every day. Whether they were Fridaymen or Hexer, the Superior Mother was close to death every single day.

Ves frowned for a moment. In his impression, the Superior Mother had started to grow a bit out of balance. He originally designed her to become a spirit that personified the six phases of existence, namely life, death, godhood, damnation, dust and woman.

For as long as he knew her, the Superior Mother had always come across as a balanced individual.

Now, he wasn't so sure anymore. Though Ves was definitely glad that her death phase formation had gained a substantial increase in might, he wasn't sure what this will mean for her future development.

"I can't worry about that right now. For now, her emphasis on death is extremely useful."

The results were obvious. Any mech that got swept by the eerie grey wave instantly went silent and shut down. This was the typical sign that the mech pilot lost the ability to pilot a mech.

There were many reasons for this. Perhaps the neural interface malfunctioned. Perhaps the power reactor fizzled out. Perhaps the mech pilot suffered a concussion and was unable to concentrate anymore.

Regardless, the mech pilot might not have necessarily died. This was what most of the dwarves believed, even though the terror in their hearts hinted at a more dreadful truth.

When the wave passed through the thickest formations, a couple of units were more badly affected than others. The renowned Forgehammer mech regiment had concentrated all of its famed Iron Crusher mechs in the middle in order to force a breakthrough.

Their situation was the worst out of all of the other dwarven mechs. Not only were the Iron Crushers smack in the middle of energy attack's area of effect, they also moved as slow as snails, causing them to have no chance of moving outside the danger zone!

"Vulcan save us!"

"The forge shall always burn!"

Now, almost each and every Iron Crusher mech became affected by the wave of death in the same way. Its silent passage calmly passed through their frames as if they existed in a different dimension.

If not for the fact the Iron Crusher mechs all shut down afterwards, the dwarves would have claimed that this was just an illusion!

Yet the truth was there to see for everyone. The command center aboard the Great Ram all fell silent as the operators became pale as they stared at the telemetry. Every single mech pilot inside the mechs affected by the massive attack lost their life signs.

There was no exception. No matter whether the massive death energy wave passed through the thick Iron Crushers to the more economical Shieldbreakers, not a single form of protection made any difference.

Not even energy shields were able to block this strange attack.

After sweeping through over a thousand Molten Hammer mechs, at least hundreds of more machines were still in the death energy wave's trajectory. Sheer terror had caused many dwarves in its path to break down. Even if they were still able to escape the danger zone in time, the mech pilots were already locked in the illusion of their deaths!

"WAKE UP! FORM UP BEHIND ME NOW!" A roaring voice boomed across the communication channels of the Molten Hammer mechs.

As the strongest and most prestigious expert pilot of the mech division, Venerable Orthox enjoyed many privileges. With just the press of a button, he could override all communication protocols and get his message across at the loudest possible volume!

His willful roar shook the dwarven mech pilots out of their paralysis. Just as they began to move their mechs, their hero had already surged forth.

A huge red comet had soared in front of the surviving mechs and slowed to a halt! The famed Gatecrasher had finally entered the fray and it did so at full power!

"NO DWARF SHALL PERISH UNDER MY WATCH! MY SHIELD SHALL NEVER YIELD!"

The Gatecrasher was just a single expert mech, but as soon as Venerable Orthox resonated with its shield, a huge red barrier came into existence that covered enough area to shield a mech company!

As soon as the death energy wave collided against the Gatecrasher's extraordinary shield, the seemingly unstoppable reaper of lives was blocked!

Everyone from the expeditionary fleet widened their eyes. They couldn't believe how someone managed to block their greater trump card!

Unfortunately for the dwarves, the area covered by the massive death energy attack was far greater. The energy that bypassed the Gatecrasher's powerful resonance ability went on to sweep through hundreds more mechs before reaching the end of the Molten Hammer formation.

"NOOOO!"

Venerable Orthox did not need to access any life sign readings to know that his fellow battle comrades had died. Even as he suddenly exhausted a lot of strength to block the powerful attack, his will had grown even firmer as his sense of failure drove him to exert an even greater effort to prevent any more lives from getting lost!

"Tall folk... MUST DIE!" He roared, his expert mech's resonance shield exploding like a volcano!

Meanwhile, General Kebrinore had become ashen-faced as he witnessed the ruinous attack from afar. How many lives had been lost.

"Sir! The energy wave has not dissipated! It... it's turning around!"

"WHAT?!"

#### *Chapter 3257: Living Death*

The Larkinsons had made use of the power of their battle formations several times. They had grown familiar with many of their properties and had developed several tricks to harness their power to a greater degree.

One of the discoveries they made was that prime resonance and possibly true resonance were capable of augmenting these massive attacks.

Whatever energy the battle networks evoked evidently had some relations to resonance. This was a valuable discovery because it taught the Larkinsons how to utilize their battle formations more effectively.

Venerable Joshua's domain was based around life. His obsession around living mechs not only caused him to synergize well with them, but also granted him unfathomable powers that were hardly witnessed elsewhere in human space.

His ability to attach a portion of his force of will to the discharge of a successful battle formation attack was an extremely mysterious ability.

Plenty of scientists had attempted to explain what was going on. They quickly gave up like many other people who attempted to research expert pilot manifestations. While it was possible to make some descriptions based on observations, it was impossible to come up with a sound theory that could be applied in a wider context.

All they knew was that once Joshua attached his will to an energy attack like this, he gained the ability to control it in a limited fashion.

Compared to before, he had obviously grown stronger and more proficient in controlling his abilities.

Inside the cockpit of the Valkyrie Prime, Venerable Joshua was doing his best to pilot his mech while at the same time exerting his will over the energy attack he realised.

It was difficult!

The strain was enormous, both because the battle formation attack was way too powerful and because it was traveling increasingly far away.

However, these were not fundamental problems to him. He did not control the energy wave attack directly. Instead, he was able to make 'suggestions' to it as if it had come alive and gained sentience.

The green corona around the grey energy attack pulsed brighter each time Joshua attempted to channel his will from afar.

"Turn around... turn around... go to the left... hold straight!"

Though it sounded like a ridiculous method to control an energy attack, for some reason he was truly able to 'convince' the death phase attack to curve around!

Joshua decided to command it to turn to the left. It took quite a lot of effort for the attack to turn around. It visibly grew smaller as it seemed to have lost a lot of energy. However, it was worth it as the massive wave began to harvest the lives of hundreds more dwarven mech pilots who were completely caught off-guard. How could they have ever expected an energy attack to loop around?!

"Damnit, it's turning into us! Get away!"

The expeditionary forces became panicked when they saw the distant energy attack approaching their way.

Fortunately, Joshua had been paying close attention. Through his efforts, he asked the living energy attack to continue looping around until it swept across the battle lines of the Molten Hammer along its length!

"STOP FOR ME!" A distraught and tear-stricken Venerable Orthox boomed as he summoned more strength and will than ever before to pump more power in his defensive resonance ability!

The massive resonance barrier that exuded from the Gatecrasher's shield began to expand across a wider area. This caused it to block a larger proportion of the deathly energy attack and save many Molten Hammer mech pilots from losing their mental activity.

The resonance barrier had grown ragged by the time the death wave passed through in a much-diminished state!

Though Venerable Orthox had definitely made a difference again, he did not feel happy at all. The sensors of his mech were able to detect thousands of silent dwarven mechs around his position.

The suffering soon ended, much to the relief of the dwarves. Shortly after losing a lot of cohesion due to the interference of the Gatecrasher, the living energy attack finally expended the last of its energy.

The immediate crisis had passed, but the nightmare had only just begun.

"Vulcan's breath..."

"How... could the human gods be so powerful?"

Not a single person who participated or observed this battle could retain their composure after this grand display of power.

In the design lab of the Spirit of Bentheim, both Gloriana and Juliet had interrupted their duties and lowered to their knees in order to pray to the Superior Mother.

"Mother..."

They were grateful that the Supreme had answered their calling and lent her power to the Larkinson Clan!

The same phenomena happened on many ships crewed by the Penitent Sisters. The piety of the devoted worshippers of the Superior Mother had once again intensified now

that they had witnessed and benefited from another concrete manifestation of her power!

"We are the chosen of the Superior Mother... never forget that. Our Supreme has led the way. Let us finish the job we started!"

When Commander Melkor had witnessed the results of this massive attack once again, he couldn't help but twitch.

He would be lying if he said he wasn't jealous. Out of all of the mech legions, the Penitent Sisters appeared to have the strongest backing. Their 'guardian spirit' was a lot stronger and more militant than the Golden Cat.

Though Melkor also wanted his Avatars to channel the Superior Mother's might and unleash devastating attacks that was able to kill mech pilots directly while bypassing many barriers, he didn't want everyone to convert to hexism!

He slumped and released a sigh. "Forget about it. Let the ex-Hexers have their fun. We'll just stick to our own repertoire."

Elsewhere, Jessica Quentin had become shocked to the point where she almost forgot to pilot her mech.

The amazement in her was palpable. Though she had already heard stories about this mystical wide area energy attack discharge, she half-thought that all of the stories and footage were fabrications meant to dress up the Larkinson Clan.

It turned out that there was real substance behind all of the fantastical boasts!

"This is way beyond the power of an expert mech!" Jessica alarmly cried!

Her Ferocious Piranha had not been close to the energy attack as it passed, but even from a distance she was able to feel the overwhelming sense of terror that she had only experienced once in her career as an MTA pilot!

"This... is a power that is similar to that of a powerful ace mech! How can a bunch of regular mechs led by a custom mech unleash so much power? Venerable Joshua isn't even piloting a real expert mech!"

It didn't make sense to her and the other MTA mech pilots! Their vision was higher and they also used to be able to kill a lot of Molten Hammer mechs with ease. Yet that was when they were piloting their powerful first-class multipurpose mechs. The difference in cost and tech was so wide that it was always a given that the MTA's best machines could crush anything designed and made by space peasants.

What happened just a moment ago subverted all of her cognition. They knew that the galaxy was vast and many ingenious mech designers had invented reality-defying methods to allow mechs to defeat the enemy in creative ways.

"This... is different."

The power displayed by the Valkyrie Redeemer mechs went far beyond a simple combination attack! The properties of the energy attack were so unreal that it went far beyond a new application of technology.

"This... is human power!"

Another MTA member shared the same thought. Jovy Armalon had long forgotten to chew on the snack he popped in his mouth.

As a Journeyman who possessed another unorthodox design philosophy, Jovy was perhaps the closest comparable mech designer to Ves. This also caused him to become certain that this manifestation was not what an average mech designed by a Journeyman should be capable of! The power level was way too high!

"Where does all of the energy come from?" Jovy's frown deepened as he began to ask a ton of difficult questions. "How can a second-class mech based on second-class technological principles unleash so much power without any powerful weapon systems? How can the Larkinsons possibly produce such an unusual energy attack that just passes directly through every mech and only causes people in the way to become braindead?"

The questions in his head swelled so much that he had become utterly incapable of snapping out of his fugue!

Back at Halcyon Citadel all the way in the Komodo Sector, even the two Masters had fallen silent.

With their access, they had already witnessed and analyzed a lot of data about this powerful energy manifestation beforehand. They expected the Larkinsons to employ the same powerful solution that they had shown during the Battle of Reckoning.

Neither Master Olson nor Master Willix were in a hurry to analyze the data gathered by the stealth corvette. If previous data failed to yield any meaningful results, then there was little hope that they would be able to obtain enough clues to crack the secret behind this revolutionary new method.

"Pity..." Willix looked regretful.

"Beyond material." Olson grimly nodded.

"Too specific."

"Ves."

"Untransferable."

"Master."

"Master."

"Odds of survival: 13.67 percent. Odds of success: 1.35 percent."

"Flawed model."

"Proof."

"Irrational."

"Incorporated in model."

"Low accuracy."

"Irrelevant."

"Doubt."

"Time."

"Time."

The Masters shared no further words with each other. They continued to observe the live footage and data readouts with great expectation.

Compared to the rather tempered reactions of the Masters, the Vulcanites were incredibly shocked.

In the command center of the Great Ram, many of the dwarven officers, operators and analysts looked as if their blood had drained from their faces.

"No wonder the human gods are so strong..."

"We... we picked the wrong humans to fight!"

"Vulcan... Vulcan won't let the tall folk get away with this! He is still with us! He has to be! Right?!"

"..."

The outbursts in the command center were highly unprofessional, but right now not a single dwarf cared about that. They were all trying to process what had happened and how much damage their forces had suffered from this singular powerful move.

"Casualties?" General Kebrinore asked as his beard shook with a mix of fear, recrimination, regret and anger.

No one spoke up. Everyone was still locked in their own roiling thoughts and emotions.

"GIVE ME A NUMBER!" The general boomed, his deep and thundering voice shaking many dwarves awake.

"We are still investigating and confirming the list of casualties, general."

Kebrinore scowled. "Just tell me how many of our mechs are reading zero mental activity in their cockpits!"

"Over three-thousand sir! This figure is still rising as we confirm the data transmitted by our dormant mechs."

That meant that three-thousand nearly-intact Molten Hammer mechs had turned into extremely expensive tombs for their pilots.

In one moment, the Molten Hammers were riding high. In the next moment, the pilots had all been thrown into the abyss.

There was no glorious battle.

There was no escapable transition.

There was no damage to the mechs.

Their mech pilots... had just turned into living corpses.

Just as the dwarves reluctantly thought that the worst had passed, something else was happening on one of the flanks!

"How... how could this have happened!?" Kebrinore's heart skipped a beat.

Thousands of Hivar Roarer mechs looked as if they had just flown through a forest of blades. Many lightly-armored bestial mechs showed various degrees of damage across their exterior. Some even lost limbs or all of their functionality due to what they had gone through!

It turned out that while the Penitent Sister battle formation attracted all of the attention, the much smaller formation of elite Swordmaidens had unleashed their own battle formation attack!

From the initial results, the attempt by the Swordmaidens to break open the Hivar Roarers had succeeded. The bestial mech division at the right flank had lost all of its momentum and its threatening Crumbleshells had become a lot more vulnerable to attack!

### *Chapter 3258: The First Sword*

The Swordmaidens shouldered the burden of defending the Larkinson Clan once again.

It was a tired refrain and one that Venerable Dise was becoming increasingly weary of. She did not fear battle. She understood why Ves was taking risks. Greatness could not be achieved without making bold decisions.

The success of Ves and his clan stood as a testament of his approach. Each time he brought the Larkinson Clan to the edge and overcame a challenge, the survivors all benefited massively. The rapid growth that ensued soon enchanted many clansmen to the point where they no longer thought about the costs the clan had paid to get to this point.

Venerable Dise did not forget. From Commander Lydia to Mayra, she had lost many sisters along the way. The original band of sisters who originated from the Faris Star Region had been reduced to a fraction of its former glory.

Though Dise was glad that many talented young women had joined the ranks of the Swordmaidens as of late, it wasn't the same. The aspirants who came from the Heavensword Association possessed excellent qualifications and far more talent than the women who originated outside human space, but they lacked a ferocious and desperate quality that only children of the frontier possessed.

The Heavensword Association was a second-rate state after all. The conditions over there were paradise for swordsmen and swordswomen. No one in the state grew up cold, hungry and orphaned. The streets were clean and no one threw their waste buckets onto the mud-ridden paths.

Glimpses of her childhood flashed through her mind before Dise reasserted her will.

"I'm not that little girl anymore..."

She was an expert pilot now. She survived everything Aeon Corona VII could throw at her and managed to survive and thrive through a combination of skill, luck and happenstance. Her inexplicable bond with Qilanxo as well as a couple of her fellow expert pilots added a lot of color in her life.

"Thank you for your well wishes." She replied to no one.

Still, it wasn't the same. She still yearned to go back to the old days where she roamed the frontier piloting a third-class mech under the leadership of Commander Lydia. Though her life and the life of her fellow Swordmaidens was much more difficult and bereft of comfort, it was the habitat that Dise called home.

The Larkinson Clan was rich but far too soft in comparison. She never fully felt at ease with the long periods of peace and quiet. The lack of risk in most regions of space had caused her to feel more and more lethargic.

This was why she was looking forward to entering the Red Ocean. Only in a region that was more dangerous than the Faris Star Region could reignite her battle thirst.

Battles like these also brought her back to her greatest days. She felt guilty for enjoying battle. After all, she cared a lot for her fellow Swordmaidens and did not wish to drive them to their deaths.

Fortunately, she was an expert pilot. She had already condensed her will and resolved the dilemmas in her heart. She had made peace with the fact that she was a warrior and that her fellow Swordmaidens also needed to hone themselves in battle. Only blood could make them stronger!

"How many sisters will die this time?"

In previous battles, Ves and General Verle tried their best to preserve the old guard of the Swordmaidens. This time, that wasn't easy to accomplish anymore because their current opponents were too overwhelming.

With the quality of their mechs and their quantity advantage, the dwarves could very well sweep through the entire expeditionary fleet if the Swordmaidens did not give their all in this fight!

Venerable Dise did not want her closest and most familiar comrades to come to harm. She needed to fight with all of her will and effort if she wanted to keep the Swordmaiden mech pilots by her side alive!

"Let's go, First Sword. Get ready for your baptism in blood!"

She received a positive vibe from her expert mech. As a machine designed primarily by Ketis and tailored for her use, the First Sword had become a powerful extension of her body and will.

In fact, she somehow suspected that the last-minute tune-ups had somehow boosted her expert swordsman mech even further. From the moment her mech unsheathed the

Decapitator, she strangely felt more in tune with the mech-sized greatsword than before.

Whenever she resonated with it a little, she could sense a sharpened edge that yearned to cut through mechs.

Was this an effect of the masterwork properties of her mech sword?

She shook her head. "I don't need to think so much. I just need to fight."

As an expert pilot and swordswoman, she was meant to fight whoever opposed her and her fellow comrades. She fought not just for the Swordmaidens but also the clan that gave them a new home and future. That was her role. She could leave the other matters to other Larkinsons.

Now that she had finally received the command to go on the attack, she focused on her immediate task.

Her will grew more solid as it swept across her entire mech. A faint corona surrounded the First Sword as the expert mech easily accepted her influence.

She always wondered how mech designers made that possible. Resonating with the First Sword was an entirely different experience from the Bright Sword Prime.

As for the Decapitator, she did not resonate with it yet. It was a powerful weapon and a masterpiece in its own right. Dize did not want to draw upon it unless it was necessary.

As the First Sword and a mech company of Bright Warriors piloted by Swordmaidens, swung around to approach the Hivar Roarers, she quickly swept through the summary of the data on the enemy mechs.

Since their appearance, the Larkinsons failed to take down more than a handful of Crumbleshells. The turtle mechs with their odd rotations and alternating cannon fire looked like something out of a cartoon, but their effectiveness in battle was undeniable.

Taking them down was her highest priority, but when she looked at the spread formation of the dwarven mechs, she did not have much hope of finishing them in a single blow.

"They're too dispersed."

Sure, the Glory Seekers along with the Flagrant Vandals and other units were doing their best to pressure the enemy's sides. However, the Hivar Roarer mechs fought with different mech doctrines that put a greater emphasis on maneuver warfare. Their mechs did not have shields for the most part and their highly maneuverable avian mechs performed best if they could leverage their full mobility.

Through their constant movements and harassments, any human mech that attempted to get close to the crucial Crumbleshells would get torn apart from all sides!

Venerable Dise already made a judgement in her mind. The lighter bestial mechs had to go. If she was able to remove them from the board, then even if she wasn't able to inflict any serious damage to the Crumbleshells, the turtle mechs could easily be cleaned up once they lost their abundant bodyguards.

Her grin turned increasingly more bloodthirsty. She was glad the Hivar Roarers mechs were less well-armored than the other dwarven mechs. They would serve as excellent practice targets for one of her latest sword techniques.

"Sisters!" She called out to her fellow Swordmaidens.

Venerable Dise didn't need Ves explaining to her that the alignment between herself and her fellow Swordmaidens was crucial to empowering a battle formation. As the living nexus of the Swordmaiden battle network, she understood these nuances instinctively!

She glanced at the mechs piloted by her closest sisters. As Dise began to arouse the battle network, she sensed the invisible bonds between herself and her sisters becoming more apparent.

"You know what we must do. The dwarves in front of us threaten our home and wish to end our sisterhood. They know nothing about what they are facing! We have fought gods, warships and expert mechs without turning our tails. Compared to the monsters that we have vanquished, these bands of dwarves are unworthy to take our lives! Let us show them the might of the Swordmaidens and show them the folly of challenging our blades!"

"FOR LYDIA!"

"FOR THE SISTERHOOD!"

"FOR THE CLAN!"

The Swordmaiden mechs began to accelerate! At the same time, the mech pilots all channeled their minds in a way that brought them closer to Venerable Dise. As sisters who fought, trained and grew up together in the frontier, their compatibility and familiarity with each other was exceptional, so the battle formation quickly took hold!

This time, the Swordmaidens adopted a swarm formation. The mechs all buzzed around in random patterns that did not seem to make any sense. It made the formation look like anything but. Even pirate mechs displayed more order than the chaotic movement of the Swordmaiden mechs!

Yet as Venerable Dise expanded her will and resonance to encompass these machines, the randomized movements took on an inexplicable charm that started off subtle but steadily rose to a crescendo.

Anyone looking at the buzzing formation would begin to feel increasingly dizzy. The Hivar Roarers who glimpsed the approaching Swordmaidens began to feel as if their senses were cut by a thousand blades!

Horror began to well up in them as the space around the Swordmaiden mechs began to get filled with countless apparitions of swords. It was as if their formation had been swept by a space storm!

"Form up! Repel the incoming enemy swordsman mechs at all costs!"

The Hivar Roarers did not choose to respond in the same way as the Molten Hammers. They were attackers by nature and most of their bestial mechs lacked the defenses to withstand heavy blows.

Therefore, they fell back to their training and initiated a counter attack! By making proactive decisions, the dwarves hoped to regain the initiative and spoil whatever plan the enemy had in mind!

"Feast for Ferril!"

"Glory to the dwarves!"

"Victory for Vulcan!"

"ATTACK!"

Though Venerable Dise was slightly caught off-guard at the enemy's response, it did not interrupt her own arrangements. As soon as she and her battle formation reached the right distance, she resonated with the sword of her expert mech with all of her will!

"Decapitator!" She roared as the masterwork sword began to glow and pulse in blue. "Guide my wrath and unleash my fury!"

At the same time, the blade illusions within the battle formation also began to glow in blue! A huge amount of energy began to channel from the Swordmaiden mechs, Venerable Dise, the First Sword and the Decapitator!

All of these elements had aligned closer than they had ever been, causing them to resonate with each other with unprecedented intensity!

In fact, the extraordinary Decapitator began to glow and buzz with so much disturbance that its blade had seemingly merged with the escalating energy manifestation!

For a single moment, the entire right flank seemed to have become frozen in time. Venerable Dise was channeling so much power that it was as if she had become a god of this entire domain!

"Bladestorm." She whispered.

With a mighty horizontal swing, the First Sword swung its Decapitator in a mighty sweep!

At the same time, the storm of illusionary blades surged forth like a storm too great to be stopped by any man, dwarf or mech!

To their credit, the charging Hivar Roarers did not collapse or lose their confidence. They charged fearlessly into the extraordinary energy storm as if their courage and valor was the key to withstand this attack!

"Charge forward!"

"Vulcan always protects!"

"Don't be fooled! This is a mere parlor trick!"

The fanatical believers invoked their faith in Vulcan as they believed that he would never fail to protect them in battle.

Unfortunately, their god did not help them this time.

A grand, supernatural storm that stretched across a surprisingly wide area despite being generated by a limited amount of mechs swept across more than a third of the Hivar Roarer mechs on this side of the battlefield!

Thousands of mechs incurred continuous attacks from the front! Each and every blow hit as hard as the swing of a greatsword. Though many bestial mechs were able to withstand numerous direct hits of this strength level, the problem with the energy bladestorm was that every machine sustained at least two-dozen attacks!

If not for the fact that the successive blade attacks weren't concentrated and hit randomly across the entire frames of the Hivar Roarer mechs, they would have all been sliced to pieces by now!

Still, the sharpness of the blade attacks were not to be underestimated. Thick armor plating bore many deep scars. Many vulnerable modules and parts had either been cut to pieces or crippled to the extent that they had become burdens to their mechs.

As the bladestorm quickly swept across the entire length of the Hivar Roarers at this flank, the blades soon lost cohesion and disappeared.

In the end, many broken and heavily damaged mechs floated in space. Their dwarven mech pilots had not lost their lives for the most part, as unlike the Penitent Sister battle formation the bladestorm only inflicted material damage.

That did not make it any less deadly. With so many avian mechs losing their wings and other limbs, these flightless birds had turned from predator into prey!

#### *Chapter 3259: Disobedient Children*

The extraordinary attacks on both the Molten Hammers and the Hivar Roarers had completely changed the balance of this engagement!

Before the Penitent Sisters and the Swordmaidens employed their most powerful trump cards, the military mech divisions of the Ferril Provincial Army had firmly gained the upper hand.

Their solid mechs, their powerful ranged support and above all else their superiority in numbers had conflated the confidence of the dwarves to the point where they already assumed they had earned their glorious victory.

This sudden reversal completely shattered their overblown expectations.

On two different occasions, the Larkinson Clan unleashed two powerful area attacks that had ravaged the dwarven lines.

The Molten Hammers did not incur any damage to their mechs, but the same could not be said for their mech pilots. Regardless of how much effort the dwarves back in their fleet attempted to wake up the affected victims, not a single measure succeeded in pulling them back from their brain dead state!

"Three-thousand lives..."

This was just a fraction of the amount of dwarves in the Ferril punitive fleet. However, the life of a mech pilot was vastly more significant than the life of a ship crewmember. The former played a crucial role in piloting the weapons of war employed by the dwarves.

Without conscious, living mech pilots, all of those tough and expensive mechs had been rendered useless!

It didn't matter that the mechs hadn't incurred any scratches. It was even less consequential that the dwarves who had 'died' from the death attack were still physically healthy and functional.

As long as the Superior Mother's manifestation had suffocated their spirits, there was no chance at all for the dwarves to cling to their feeble lives.

Only a single dwarf who had far exceeded his mortal limitations had managed to survive.

Venerable Orthox De Massie's body was not necessarily stronger or tougher than that of any other dwarven soldier. Aside from the standard suite of augments that honorable expert pilots like him received from the state, he did not gain any extra protection against ordinary attacks.

Even so, not only did Venerable Orthox and the Gatecrasher survive the death wave attack, he also managed to block its passage to the best of their ability!

Ves had been shocked when he saw what the dwarven expert pilot managed to accomplish. Was this the true power of a defensive expert pilot?

He gained an entirely new appreciation of expert pilots who chose to dedicate their lives to defend their people.

"Venerable Jannzi can become strong like this as well one day." He realized.

It might not take too long for her to be able to summon a shield that could block a massive attack.

Though her future expert mech would certainly not be as fast or proficient in attacking as the Gatecrasher, it shouldn't be much of a problem for the expert mech version of the Shield of Samar to project a massive resonance barrier.

This was its specialty, after all! There was little meaning in fielding a heavy space knight if its defenses could easily be bypassed.

Ves did not dare to assume that a defensive expert mech was redundant. Though he did not believe that other forces were capable of unleashing area attacks like his battle formations, it was best to assume that his future enemies would have at least something up their sleeves.

Whether it was warship-grade weapons or ultimate attacks released by powerful expert mechs, it was always prudent to have an extra safeguard on hand.

"I just need to make sure that Venerable Jannzi doesn't get in my way all the time." He muttered.

Many surviving Molten Hammer mech pilots were grateful for what their hero had done. To them, the appearance of the Gatecrasher and its attempt to block the supernatural energy attack was nothing less than magical!

Though Venerable Orthox's heroic efforts only managed to shield several hundred Molten Hammer mech pilots from instant death, these dwarves could still play a crucial role in the ongoing battle.

That was because the loss of over three-thousand mechs had wiped out half of their advantage in numbers!

To be more specific, the battle in the center had evened up as a result of all of the sudden losses. The Larkinson and Crosser mechs had a lot more room to breathe and would no longer feel as suffocated as before.

"The Forgehammers... they're gone..."

Since the death energy attack mostly swept the center of the Molten Hammer line, the losses disproportionately affected the mech pilots of the Iron Crusher mechs.

The powerful heavy melee mechs that seemed so powerful and unstoppable earlier had lost all of their sheen of invincibility.

Their illustrious mechs had turned into nothing else but scrap as far as the remainder of the battle was concerned. Even if the dwarves somehow managed to tow them back to their carriers, the Ferrils hadn't brought any spare mech pilots to replace the dead!

After all, not every mech force was like the Larkinson Army which was suffering from a surplus of thousands of mech pilots. The Ferril punitive fleet had left out its entire support train and any other resources and personnel that weren't critical.

The mech divisions did not retain that much excess mech pilots to begin with anyway. They were already under a considerable financial burden due to the need to purchase and service all of their expensive mechs and ships. Personnel expenditures were usually lower on the list of priorities.

The expressions of many dwarves, not just from the Molten Hammers, turned gloomy from this realization.

Many of them had become frightened, shocked, sad or angry at all of the sudden losses. Yet at the end of the day, they still had to fight a battle they started. It was too late for them to regret their decisions and their support for this action.

The Hivar Roarers were just as hard hit as well. While their other flanking units had remained unscathed, the side where Venerable Dise and the Swordmaidens had unleashed a bladestorm had become utterly ravaged.

The only mechs that had managed to make it through this extraordinary attack was the Crumbleshells. Their mech pilots had retracted all of their cannons before closing their

gun ports. They also angled their relative flat mechs so that they exposed as little of their surface to the bladestorm as possible.

Though their mechs all bore marks of damage, none of the mystical sword slashes managed to penetrate through their thick armor.

That didn't mean that all was well, though.

With all of their escort mechs in bad shape, the crucial Crumbleshells had become a lot more exposed!

The state of the right flank had become a lot more optimistic as a result! As soon as the Larkinsons and Glory seekers on this side of the battlefield advanced forward, they could easily roll up thousands of Hivar Roarer mechs with ease.

General Verle's eyes already lit up. The Swordmaiden battle formation exceeded his expectations. The power boost provided by the expert mech as well as its masterwork sword had made such a substantial difference that the victims had lost their will to battle!

"We need to strike while the iron is hot!"

Just as the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers were moving in to take advantage of the opening, Ves decided that the time was right to pull off his own stratagem!

He took one more look at his own appearance. He did not look like much of a god or anything like the traditional depictions of Vulcan. His Unending Regalia possessed impressive defenses but was merely a good piece of craftsmanship that was predominantly in black.

Would the dwarves care? Probably. Was it a fatal flaw? Probably not. Ves just had to tweak his story a little in order to sell his story to a greater extent.

"Hmm, maybe it's not a good idea to pretend I'm Vulcan." He hummed as he gripped the Hammer of Brilliance.

He was starting to have second thoughts about the wisdom of this move. However, the thought of being able to employ his rhetoric to confuse and divide the dwarves was too attractive to pass up. He had to give it a try!

Ves decided to stop overthinking the matter. He decisively pulled the trigger by donning a pre-prepared mask that instantly caused his demeanor to undergo a radical shift.

He had become more severe, grand and inviolable with the help of his Vulcan mask! At the same time, he became a lot more in tune with the Hammer of Brilliance that embodied all of the domains associated with Vulcan.

The luminar crystal pommel lit up in a soft and shifting light pattern that added a lot of extra mystique to the asymmetrical artifact.

He transmitted a silent signal that caused the Spirit of Bentheim and many other Larkinson ships to project an enormous image of himself in front of the expeditionary fleet!

Not only that, but the starships all transmitted an open feed that anyone on the battlefield could tune in. Ves didn't worry about the dwarves refusing to listen to his words because his projected image was simply too shocking!

"Who is that armored figure?!"

"That's their patriarch, I think!"

"How can he be a human?"

"That hammer! What is that hammer?!"

As Ves began to channel his spiritual energy in his mask in order to amplify his presence and strengthen his current persona, the giant projection that stretched across kilometers had become irresistible to the Vulcanites!

Even though they hated the tall folk with a vengeance, the presence exuded by Ves made them feel highly contradictory.

It was... as if they were looking at the idols of Vulcan that were dotted throughout the Vulcan Empire. In fact, those empty, lifeless statues were incomparable to the living figure that had presented himself to the dwarves!

"Children of Vulcan." Ves slowly began as he swept his gaze from left and right. "It is I, Vulcan."

In the end, he decided to go for broke.

For a moment, many dwarves stagnated as they were doing their best to repel the advancing human mechs.

Of all of the indignities that the tall folk had committed to the dwarven people, none of them had been audacious enough to pretend to be a god!

Yet all thoughts of objecting to this ludicrous statement had stalled when the furious dwarves beheld the enormous projection.

A part of them felt that this supposed Vulcan did not lie to them. The man's presence resonated with their faith so much that many of them fell into doubt.

Ves was able to sense the effect he had. He inwardly smiled as he recognized that he had commanded their attention.

"You have made a grave mistake, my children." He sincerely said in a sad tone. It helped a lot that he truly considered the Vulcanites to be his children in a sense. "Your devotion to me is admirable but your leaders have led you astray. Just because I watch over you doesn't mean that I am a dwarf. I am a human, one who has taught and guided your people out of my sincere appreciation for your kind."

"Lies!"

"Don't believe in this nonsense!"

Ves held up his tool and channeled his spiritual energy into the totem. The Hammer of Brilliance flared in a way that caused everyone to feel as if they could create the most perfect works if they used this amazing artifact!

"Your beliefs have led you astray. Your leaders seek to pervert and usurp my authority by replacing me with a false version of myself. From the moment you have turned away from the truth about my existence, you have fallen into a trap that seeks to weaken dwarvenkind by stripping it of my protection!"

Shock, outrage, doubt and many other turbulent emotions welled inside the Vulcanites. They so badly wanted to denounce the human as a fraud and a liar, but the persuasiveness of the figure who claimed to be Vulcan was too great!

*Chapter 3260: A Disappointed God*

The entire battlefield seemed to have turned into an audience for a ludicrous show. The giant projection of Ves made so many outrageous claims that not even the Larkinsons themselves knew what to believe!

Many Vulcanites did not listen to a word he said. However, there were many more impressionable dwarves that were not as firm in their denial. They either clung to the original Vulcan Faith or had become so unbalanced by the huge disasters that took place that they couldn't help but become enchanted by this narrative!

"It is not a lie." He said. "If you need any proof of my divinity, then look no further to the work created by my anointed agent in this realm. Look at the masterworks he made. He is barely over thirty years old and he has already created far more masterworks than any dwarven mech designer in his lifetime!"

Ves waved his hand, causing the Larkinson fleet to project additional images. The Quint, the Little Angel, the Amaranto as well as the First Sword showed up even though the last one wasn't strictly his work.

Regardless, the successive displays of masterworks impressed anyone with enough vision to recognize good craftsmanship. Since this was an extremely important preoccupation in the Vulcan Empire, this included a lot of members of the dwarven fleet!

Though Ves did not expect this argument to sway the Vulcanites, the more confusing nonsense he said, the greater the chance of affecting the battle performance of the Vulcanites.

He even hoped that a couple of dwarves would become so overcome with meeting their real 'god' that they would even be willing to turn against their own comrades!

When Ves thought about all of the discord he was sowing with his performance, he became more enthused about what he was doing. He increased his effort and began to pump himself up to such an extent that he increasingly started to regard himself as Vulcan!

"My children." He imperiously said. "It is not too late. Turn back against the falsehoods spun by fallen, corrupted dwarves and return to the light. Your current course will lead to nothing else but the destruction of your dwarven state and the regression of everything your forebears have fought for. Do not let their sacrifices be in vain."

The most fanatical members of the Dwarven God Cult refused to listen to him from the start, but that was okay. From his prior investigations on the Vulcan Empire, he knew that the upstart cult had only risen meteorically in the last decade. Many Vulcanites grew up inheriting the traditional faith of their parents who mostly accepted that Vulcan was a human deity rather than a dwarven one.

If he could convince these recent converts into embracing their old beliefs again, then he could definitely sabotage their willingness to fight!

Already he could sense that he was achieving increasingly more results. More and more mechs pulled back and stopped fighting as their pilots became more preoccupied with thinking about his identity and what he said than trying to win a battle for a version of Vulcan that might not even exist!

Ves raised his hammer over his head as if he wanted to make it abundantly clear that he was truly the real deal!

"REPENT! Lay down your arms and return to your ships so that you can go back to home! This is not a fight that will benefit dwarvenkind! Do not let yourself become the sinners who are responsible for triggering a war that will lead to the collapse of your great state and the deaths of many dwarves! I shall not warn you again. If you choose to persecute this human fleet, then be prepared to suffer damnation for all eternity! The punishment that my subjects have just inflicted upon you will be repeated a thousandfold!"

Just as Ves began to swing down his hammer in emphasis, a targeted artillery volley accurately struck several projection devices on the hull of the Spirit of Bentheim!

The giant projection of Ves in his guise as Vulcan grew fuzzy and incomplete. Though the other projections quickly restored the image, the interruption was noticeable enough to break the concentration of many watching and listening dwarves!

"Do not listen to this human!" Venerable Leiva roared as her voice overrid the communication channel of the Ferril mech pilots. The tall folk are our enemies and this bastard is trying to deceive you. He is our enemy, not our god!"

Her Gauss Baron continued to fire powerful volleys of gauss rounds at every projector in the expeditionary fleet that she could target. Though there were far too many of them for her to remove the human fleet's ability to maintain Ves' giant image, her powerful defiance along with her open refusal to acknowledge the claims made by the human set a powerful example to the dwarven mech pilots!

"Leiva is right! Don't fall for this human's elaborate tricks. It's all smoke and mirrors! There are dwarves by your side that need your help. Remember your oaths and fulfill your duty. Never forget that you take your orders from the dwarves who are on your side, not the humans who are just responsible for slaughtering thousands of your brethren's lives!"

Another expert mech surged forward. Though the Gatecrasher's violent red corona looked more ragged and unstable than ever, Venerable Orthox had not been this angry since the war that founded the Vulcan Empire.

Back in those days, the dirty, lying and cheating humans did everything they could to stop the dwarves from gaining their hard-earned homeland. Venerable Orthox had seen so many of his fellow dwarves fall because of false promises that the humans regularly regurgitated.

To him, no one blessed by Vulcan would ever employ a weapon that had killed thousands of dwarven lives at a time! Such a horror was the work of evil humans, not a god who ostensibly stood up for the Vulcanites. If that human brat was Vulcan or possessed by the god, then Orthox was a god pilot!

With the defiance shown by two of the strongest dwarven expert pilots in the Ferril punitive fleet, the spell had been broken. More and more dwarves managed to wake themselves from their crisis of faith.

"Well said, Orthox!" A younger dwarven voice spoke up. "No stinking human will tell us dwarves what to do. Those times are over now and we must fight to keep it that way!"

A third powerful expert mech bloomed onto the battlefield. A bright, glowing avian expert mech swept closer to the cut and battered Hivar Roarer mechs that had barely survived a bladestorm.

The avian expert mech carried many different weapon hardpoints. From its thick and sharp claws to its formidable positron beam weapons mounted underneath its wings, the stellar Paravad had finally come forth in order to support his peers in helping his fellow Vulcanites distinguish right from wrong!

More expert mechs emerged from the rear. Many powerful expert pilots that had previously remained unnoticeable in the rear had advanced forth and stimulated their mech's respective resonance shields in order to serve as bright and powerful beacons on the battlefield.

Many Vulcanites slowly sobered up and rallied to the wakeup call of their heroes and role models.

Though the identity of the man who claimed to be Vulcan was very much in doubt, there was no mistake at all about the authenticity of the dwarven expert pilots. Their expert mechs all exuded familiar vibes that many dwarven soldiers spent months or years working alongside with. The appearance of so many Vulcanite expert mechs at once successfully diminished the domineering presence of the giant projection!

When Ves counted the number of enemy expert mechs on the battlefield, he inwardly felt depressed.

The three Ferril mech divisions brought thirteen expert mechs in total. That was two less than the worst-case scenario, but still enough to outnumber the expeditionary fleet's expert pilots by a fearsome margin!

Ves saw that the time for talking had passed. Ves had definitely managed to mess up the thoughts of at least a portion of the dwarven mech pilots. Even those who were skeptical of his godhood ought to be more reserved about fighting his forces by now. Doubt was a subtle tool that could have very profound effects if employed correctly.

The last thing that Ves wanted to do was get into an argument against Venerable Orthox and the other dwarven expert pilots. Quibbling and arguing with dwarves only pulled him down to their level. His sacred image and his sense of inviolability would slowly become tarnished as a result.

In order to preserve as much awe as possible, he decided to cut his performance short.

He held his hammer in a fighting grip but tried his best to look disappointed at his dwarven flock.

"It is not too late." He spoke in a sympathetic voice. It was as if he truly cared about dwarven lives! "If you are truly my servant, then stop fighting and leave these humans in peace."

The projection disappeared as Ves cut the feed. He instantly removed his spiritual mask and stopped channeling spiritual energy.

"Damn, that's exhausting."

In order to make his performance as impactful as possible, he did not skimp on the amount of spiritual energy he expended. This caused him to feel very empty and lifeless right now. He quickly picked up a P-stone and drained much of the surplus energy that he had inserted into it beforehand with the help of Blinky's abilities.

"Ah, that's better."

He carefully placed the depleted P-stone back and turned his attention to the latest developments on the battlefield.

The battle was slowly getting back to full speed. The expeditionary forces had taken advantage of the holes that the battle formations had blown open. Not only were they taking advantage of the holes in the dwarven battle lines, they also took advantage of all of the shock and confusion of the dwarven mech pilots to pressure them throughout the entire front!

Ves soon noticed a clear pattern. The dwarven mech pilots who had been close to the battle formation attacks and had barely escaped the brush of death had incurred much more trauma than others. It was obvious in the way that many of their mechs sat still or fought back in a hesitant and rusty manner.

A lot of Molten Hammer mech pilots who had gotten close enough to the death energy attack that their souls almost turned to dust were experiencing a lot of difficulty in getting their head back into the fight.

The survivors of the Swordmaiden battle formation were barely any better off. The Hivar Roarer mech pilots who had lived through the bladestorm and experienced a nightmarish cocktail of mental pressure that they had never been trained to resist. Even though many of their cut and damaged mechs still retained some battle effectiveness, the poor pilots fought as if their mechs incurred at least twice as much damage!

The Larkinson, Glory Seeker Crosser mech pilots were not as impacted. They fought as hard and furiously as before and did not show any mercy to their muddled foes. They had become buoyed by the success of their big moves and gained a lot of confidence now that the dwarven mechs no longer outnumbered the mechs of the expeditionary fleet that much. The difference had shrunk to just a couple of thousands of mechs, and

this disparity was growing smaller with each second that passed as the human forces had gained a huge boost in morale!

"Brothers and sisters! Do not despair! Victory is still within reach! Let us lead the way!"

As one, the expert mechs of the Ferril Provincial Province had all entered the fray at once!

The Gauss Baron bombarded a mech company of Crosser mechs as they sought to exploit the holes in the Molten Hammer defenses. Every single resonance-empowered gauss round launched with such great power that not a single Crosser mech remained operational after getting struck.

The Gatecrasher charged shield-first into a squad of Bright Warriors in lancer configuration. The powerful dwarven expert mech blunted the spears and shattered the frames of the mechs that had attempted to charge the surviving but disarrayed Molten Hammer mechs!

The Paravad swooped in on the Swordmaiden mechs as they sought to massacre the damaged and crippled Hivar Roarer mechs at the right flank. The elite Swordmaidens led by Venerable Dise sought to take advantage of the broad opening that they created, but the expert avian mech of the dwarves single-handedly blocked the partially-exhausted Swordmaidens.

A new and more intense phase of the battle had begun!