

## Mech 3271

### *Chapter 3271: Fear No Death*

Many people in the expeditionary fleet already knew that the expert mechs designed by the Larkinsons were a little abnormal compared to others of their kind.

From the participation of Journeymen with unusual design philosophies to the contribution made by an MTA Master, the four expert mechs that the Larkinsons had currently managed to produce at the time of this battle all exhibited significantly greater power than expected!

A single expert light mech managed to traverse a large distance in open space and overcame a huge number of obstacles until finally taking out an expert heavy artillery mech that must have outmassed the former by at least eight times!

A masterwork expert rifleman mech not only managed to pave the way for the destruction of that oppressive expert artillery mech, but also continued to make its presence felt in every corner of the battlefield. As long as any of the friendly expert mechs entered a crisis, the powerful luminar crystal rifle would surely bark out a powerful energy beam that temporarily hindered the enemy from exploiting an advantage.

An expert swordsman mech that oddly wielded a masterwork mech sword fended off three different peers through a combination of exceptional skill and brilliant sword techniques. The expert pilot was so skilled that she handedly managed to fend off a famed dwarven hero as well as two extra helpers that were doing their best to drill through the human expert mech's extremely resilient armor.

And finally, a hefty spearman mech turned out to be way more resilient than anyone including its designers expected. The taunting expert pilot enraged the three opposing dwarven expert pilots so much that they continually tried and failed to inflict any meaningful damage onto the spearman mech. After working so hard to overcome its resonance shield and upper armor, it turned out that its second armor layer was much harder and much more resistant to damage!

To Ves, the effort the latter two expert mechs were making to keep three enemy expert mechs occupied each was nothing less than heroic!

It was absolutely worth the tradeoff to expend two expert mechs to keep six enemy expert mechs occupied. The former didn't even have to beat the latter. Just making sure that the enemies who tried to use gang tactics against the surprisingly resilient Larkinson expert mechs granted the humans a huge advantage in this battle!

In effect, the role of the First Sword and the Riot was to do their best to reduce the disparity in numbers as much as possible. So far, the two offensive expert mechs were

indeed managing to hold off their opponents, though to be fair they were far from defeating any of them. That was still a step too far for them as the interference from multiple expert mechs were hampering their moves.

It was not as if the dwarven expert pilots failed to realize what was going on. The problem was that they were in a rather helpless position themselves.

The strength of the First Sword and the Riot rose far beyond an average expert mech, and that was just by their armor alone. Their Unending alloy exterior practically made them immune to regular attacks and also enabled them to take much greater risks and trade blows for blows, knowing that any hits they received was just a fraction of the damage that they inflicted on the enemy machine.

That turned the two human expert mechs into rascals of some sorts. They couldn't be treated with common sense and had to be restrained by at least three different machines to prevent them from running away with their aggression and destroying a dwarven expert mech by relying on brute force!

Ves wasn't sure whether these confrontations would remain stable, but he had a lot of confidence in the protection offered by an armor system made primarily out of Unending alloy. As long as Venerable Orfan and Venerable Dise guarded the weak points of their machines carefully, they should last long enough to buy time for other elements of the expeditionary fleet to achieve a breakthrough.

"Hm, there are still a couple of enemy expert mechs that are unrestrained."

The expeditionary fleet still didn't have enough expert mechs to keep the remaining dwarven expert mechs pinned. One of them was currently rampaging close to the center of the battlefield.

The Burza Fens was an expert axeman mech that was similar to the Trementine. The expert pilot of the former was a lot younger and more inexperienced than the pilot of the latter.

Given these circumstances, General Kebrinore ordered the Burza Fens to reinforce the faltering lines of Molten Hammer mechs that were already beginning to flag after they witnessed thousands of comrades die from a massive area attack.

Initially, the Burza Fens made a huge impact. Its arrival rejuvenated the deflated morale of the Molten Hammers and also allowed them to reverse the tide and go on the offensive once again!

With each swing of the axe, the fast and unstoppable Burza Fens hacked Crosser and Larkinson mechs left and right. Not a single human mech was able to withstand a single blow from this simple but still powerful machine!

"Where are our expert mechs?!"

"We don't have any left to spare. They're all locked in their own duels!"

"Then what are we supposed to do, sir?!"

"We'll just throw enough mechs at it until it succumbs."

"Then where's our ranged support?"

"It's coming now!"

It took a short moment to organize a proper response against the Burza Fens. Just as it was about to chop a Bright Warrior in space knight configuration, its resonance shield rippled as a volley of ultra-heavy gauss rounds struck the barrier.

The dwarven expert pilot sensed something unusual from these attacks. They weren't as negligible as other regular ranged attacks.

The Eternal Redemptions had entered the fray! Although only a squad of them had turned their powerful cannons on the Burza Fens, it was still a useful form of support.

Sadly, if the Eternal Redemptions thought they could chew through the dwarven expert axeman mech's resonance shield in a minute, then they were sorely mistaken!

The Penitent Sister mech pilots who fired their cannons continuously at the Burza Fens didn't have much hope. They only sought to apply as much pressure as they could and hoped that they could slightly interfere with the dwarven expert pilot's movements.

It was at this time that a second unit of mechs stepped forth. Ves leaned in as one of his pet projects was about to show its worth.

Captain Dietrich Kotz was one of the leaders of the Battle Criers. He commanded roughly forty Bright Warriors in rifleman mech configuration, though General Verle kept his unit in reserve until now. Each of the mechs under his command had been issued with special replacement rifles that instantly won the hearts of his subordinates.

The Battle Criers were one of the few mech legions that received a batch of newly-developed luminar crystal rifles. In fact, the most loyal mech legion received the largest batch out of them all. The former Kinners had become delighted that their patriarch and liege lord remembered their existence and valued the role they could play!

Captain Dietrich adored the new luminar crystal rifle that he was allowed to handle. All of his men were of the same mind.

However, they were also aware that the Larkinson Clan wouldn't gift them the most modern and powerful ranged weapons at its disposal without expecting a lot in return.

The stronger the mechs, the greater the responsibility!

Therefore, when an unattended enemy expert mech had come forth in order to butcher a lot of regular mechs, Captain Dietrich and the rest of the Battle Criers courageously stepped up so that they could play the sacrificial lambs this time!

Dietrich knew his men well enough that they did not need to listen to a speech in order to accept the fact that they were about to clash directly against an enemy expert mech. The projected survival rate of confronting an expert mech such as the Burza Fens was difficult to calculate. Whatever the odds may have been, the Battle Criers anticipated a lot of sacrifices.

"Load light beam attack phase crystal." He ordered.

Every Bright Warrior including his own activated a setting on their luminar crystal rifle. The revolving chamber spun a bit until the active attack phase crystal had switched from positron beam mode to light beam mode.

The luminar crystal rifles held by the Battle Crier mechs soon changed in character. The crystal weapon released a soft and white glow that hinted at a new type of energy that most people had never encountered in their lives.

This was one of the most crucial elements that gave the Battle Criers the confidence to fight against an expert mech.

Certainly, they would have fought against an overpowering enemy regardless of the weapons they had at hand, but not even Kinners liked to commit suicide without achieving anything of value.

With the new weapons provided to them, the Battle Criers became fully committed to living up to their patriarch's trust!

"Men, the greatest burden of this battle rests on our shoulders." Captain Dietrich told his fellow mech pilots. "If we allow the Burza Fens to keep slaughtering our mechs by the hundreds, it will not only cause our counter-attack to fail, but also restore the confidence of the dwarves, thereby negating much of what we have worked towards. Will we allow that to happen, Battle Criers?!"

"NO!"

"Then let us tackle this great and terrible foe and prove to the galaxy once again that even gods can be slain by mortal hands!" Dietrich cried out as his Bright Warrior raised

its glowing luminar crystal rifle! "Fight until you die! Die until you fight! We fear no death because duty and service is in our blood! Attack!"

The Battle Criers advanced towards the unscrupulous Burza Fens with a pre-prepared plan in mind. Once their rifle-wielding Bright Warrior mechs reached a certain distance, their mech companies dispersed into squads which subsequently split up into individual mechs.

A couple of hundred Battle Crier mechs proceeded to fan out in order to attempt to surround the enemy axeman mech in a spherical formation.

The dwarven expert pilot, though consumed with hacking as many Larkinson mechs to pieces as possible, wasn't ignorant of the enemy's maneuvers. His eyes narrowed as he sensed something more out of this response than normal.

"Is this their plan to handle an expert mech? Hah! They're too naive!"

The Burza Fens stopped pursuing the retreating Crosser mechs and began to pivot towards the nearest Bright Warrior, accelerating with an impressive burst of speed that caused a lot of Battle Criers to miss their initial shots.

Hundreds of white light beams lanced the space just behind and around the dwarven expert mech. In this great forest of attacks, a handful of mech pilots finally managed to strike their target.

The dwarven expert pilot wasn't worried. The Burza Fens might just be a low-tier expert mech, but it was equipped with a serviceable resonance shield that could block the majority of mundane attacks with great efficiency.

Yet when the shield was finally struck by some of the laser-like beams, the dwarf uttered an alarmed cry as he experienced a greater sting than he thought!

"Those rifles!"

It was only now that he took the enemy's rifles more seriously.

When his Burza Fens finally closed in and chopped the entire torso of a Bright Warrior into half with a single powerful swing of its resonance-enhanced axe, the brethren of the fallen mech furiously fired their crystal rifles at the expert mech, their job now made easier now that the expert axeman mech had briefly stagnated in order to perform its attack!

Over fifty different light beams struck the resonance shield of the Burza Fens from different directions. Though the dwarven expert pilot ordinarily didn't pay much attention to it, he discovered to his horror that the stability of his first line of defense had already declined by at least 8 percent!

"Impossible!" The dwarven expert pilot cried. "They're not expert mechs or even pseudo-expert mechs! How can they deal so much damage?!"

### *Chapter 3272: Cut By Light*

The Burza Fens only got struck by a score of light beams for a brief instant, but the integrity of its resonance shield already dropped by 8 percent.

What did that mean? His expert mech only needed to get struck continuously for just a dozen seconds or so before he lost his greatest and most efficient barrier against regular attacks!

"This... I need to kill them right away!"

Yet when the axeman mech blasted off towards another Battle Crier mech before subsequently chopping it to pieces, the dwarven expert mech finally realized that he had fallen into a trap of the enemy's design.

The abnormally effective Bright Warrior mechs had come close enough to ensure a decent hit rate against a fast-moving axeman mech, but also made sure to spread out from each other so that they did not make it easy to get eliminated in quick succession.

Though the Burza Fens only needed a few seconds or longer to hop from Bright Warrior to Bright Warrior, the efficiency is too low! In the meantime, the Battle Criers persistently peppered the enemy expert mech's resonance shield with light beams.

Though many beams missed due to the clever maneuvering of the Burza Fens, its evasion characteristics weren't as exaggerated as that of the Dark Zephyr. The dwarven expert pilot also originated from the Molten Hammers who mostly preferred to fight head-on rather than dance around the battlefield.

Compared to Venerable Tusa, the pilot of the larger and stronger Burza Fens did not train his evasive skills. Sure, he was better at dodging attacks than an ordinary mech pilot due to his inherent strength, but he spent most of his training time honing and refining his offensive skills!

"Damnit! Do you think I can't hit you from afar?!"

Seeing that he needed to increase his killing efficiency, the expert pilot of the Burza Fens put all thoughts of slaying all of his opponents with his axe aside and commanded his mech to pull out a carbine resting on its back.

The small and compact laser carbine took up minimal space when it was dormant, but quickly unfolded so that it became thrice as long. Additional modules expanded to make room for additional expanded subcomponents.

Soon enough, the Burza Fens turned from a pure expert axeman mech into a reasonable approximation of an expert hero mech!

Although the dwarven expert pilot didn't excel in ranged combat, he was more than good enough to land consistent hits on average mechs!

"Your efforts are futile! Your mechs are too weak!"

The laser carbine was just a secondary weapon for the Burza Fens, but its design incorporated so many expensive exotics that its damage output actually exceeded that of the luminar crystal rifle utilized by the Battle Criers!

Of course, the cost of fabricating the weapons couldn't compare. The same amount of money needed to fund the production of this foldable carbine could easily be spent on fabricating hundreds of luminar crystal rifles!

Not only was the carbine significantly more powerful as a result, it also incorporated a small amount of resonating materials. This allowed the expert pilot to resonate just enough with the weapon to empower its laser discharges, thereby amplifying the weapon's damage output by a huge margin!

Though a single shot from the laser carbine was not powerful enough to disable a Bright Warrior mech in an instant, a couple of repeated hits quickly rendered the victim inoperative.

In fact, the dwarven expert pilot attempted to shoot the strange, glowing crystal rifles a few times. This was much harder to accomplish as he wasn't good enough as a marksman to land a hit on those slim weapons under real battle conditions.

Even if his laser carbine managed to strike one of those crystal rifles, the latter didn't blow up as anticipated. Instead, much to the dwarf's surprise, the crystal weapons soaked up the incoming laser beam as if they were sponges that had just encountered water. In the end, the rifles only exhibited a minute amount of damage to their exterior that did not fundamentally affect their performance.

"What is up with these ridiculous weapons?!"

"Venerable! The weapons carried by the human mechs are based on luminar crystal technology." A weapons engineer patched into the communication channel and provided the expert pilot with crucial information. "Although we haven't discovered why the luminar crystals of our opponents are so strong and resilient, attacking it with energy weapons is ineffective. We suggest you target the mechs instead."

"Fine." The dwarven expert pilot grunted.



That was bad news because the Bright Warriors he was fighting against were just sturdy enough that it took two to three hits in the same areas to penetrate their armor and inflict critical damage to their internals.

While this was still doable to an expert pilot, each and every extra shot needed to take down a Bright Warrior was seriously hampering his efficiency!

The fighting continued. The Burza Fens did not become deterred and fought to slay as many Battle Crier mechs as possible with the help of both its axe and laser carbine.

Though the Bright Warriors wielding their luminar crystal rifles did indeed fall at a faster rate than before, the Battle Criers remained undeterred!

They could clearly see that their new weapons were having a devastating effect on the enemy expert mech's resonance shield. Only a minute had passed and it was already starting to look as if it was on its last legs!

No matter how many mechs fell, the Battle Criers became more and more invested in this struggle. They even managed to grasp the timing of their enemy's attacks and ejected from their doomed Bright Warriors just before they succumbed.

Though it was painful to many to see the precious luminar crystal rifles floating away into space while they still had a lot of use left in them, neither the humans nor the dwarves could afford to pay attention to them. After a relentless and painful struggle, the Battle Criers finally pushed the resonance shield of the enemy expert mech to the brink!

"EVEN GODS AREN'T INVIOABLE!" Dietrich roared as he aimed his favorite new mech rifle at a location that he anticipated the expert mech would move towards.

A shower of light beams joined the one discharged by his Bright Warrior. They all formed a cage of white beams around the visibly more discomfited Burza Fens.

When Dietrich's light beam happened to strike true, the wobbling corona around the Burza Fens fell apart, exposing the naked metal of the dwarven expert mech's exterior to the enemy!

"We did it, Battle Criers! Switch the firing mode of your rifle to slicer beams! Let's cut through its armor!"

All of the Battle Crier mechs armed with luminar crystal rifles switched the firing mode in an instant.

The light beam was still an effective means to deal damage, but according to previous weapon testing sessions it was mostly effective against resonance manifestations.



It was much more efficient to use the right tool for the right job, and at this moment that meant employing an energy attack measure that was much more effective against the high-quality armor systems that expert mechs typically boasted. Even a low-tier expert mech such as the Burza Fens was still clad in extremely resilient armor that allowed the machine to have enough confidence to trade blow for blow against other powerful expert mechs!

Without the firepower of a high-quality, high-budget expert mech with true resonance, it was still a great challenge for mundane mechs to penetrate their armor.

Faster expert mechs might not boast thick layers of armor, but their high mobility made it extremely difficult to concentrate attacks on the same sections. As long as the machine performed evasive maneuvers, it could evade or redirect attacks towards lesser-damaged portions of its frame.

This was undoubtedly the case again this time. The dwarven expert pilot still sensed a latent threat from the Bright Warrior mechs. His suspicions were confirmed when Captain Dietrich and his fellow Battle Criers all commanded their machines to fire a different beam type at the Burza Fens!

Though the expert axeman mech made a greater effort to evade the attacks of the mundane mechs that the dwarf had underestimated, the Battle Criers were trained enough to direct their fire in different zones.

Just like before, a large and expansive cage of slicer beams formed around the Burza Fens. Though the majority of the deceptively thin and weak beams missed their mark, there were still half-a-dozen or so attacks that the dwarven expert mech failed to evade!

At first glance, the damage appeared negligible. The surface armor of the Burza Fens still looked intact. However, the dwarven expert pilot quickly noticed his machine transmitting alarm signals at him. Upon closer look, the thin knife-like beams had managed to cut remarkably deep into the surface armor of his expert mech!

"What in Vulcan's name is going on?! Energy weapons aren't supposed to be so effective!"

The dwarven engineers and analysts responsible for advising their expert pilots were all clueless. Aside from gleaning the basic properties of this new form of attack, they couldn't supply any acceptable explanations! All they could figure out was that the new type of attack beam did not inflict much heat damage but was instead abnormally effective at cleaving through solid matter.

"Venerable, you can't allow the enemy ranged mechs to concentrate their fire on expert mech. Its armor system won't hold against this kind of massed firepower. We highly suggest you retreat to our rear."

"I can't! These humans are cutting off my retreat path!"

It was at this time that the dwarves knew that the Burza Fens was in deep trouble. The Larkinsons may not have been able to field enough expert mechs, but they compensated for it by equipping a portion of their mechs with innovative new weapons that were abnormally effective against the various proactive measures that made expert mechs so hard to destroy.

With the Battle Crier mechs spread out far apart from each other, they continually fired their weapons at the Burza Fens with no regard to controlling their firing rate or conserving their energy.

Holding back was always a bad idea when fighting an expert mech! Even if the continuous firing were starting to stress the crystals that made up their weapons, the Battle Criers still put their all in this fight because eliminating this enemy expert mech as soon as possible was their greatest and only mission!

"Keep up the pressure!" Captain Dietrich excitedly cried as he tried his best to keep up with the erratic movements of the Burza Fens. "Spread out more and move away from it. Its killing efficiency isn't actually that high!"

In truth, only a few minutes had passed since the start of this intensive clash and already the Burza Fens demolished two mech companies worth of Bright Warriors!

This was a painful loss because the removal of 80 Battle Crier mechs meant that there were eighty less luminar crystal rifles wearing down the defenses of the Burza Fens. This effectively prolonged the time it took to take down the expert mech.

If the Battle Criers took too long to finish the job, then there was a great possibility that the expert axeman mech would chop them all to pieces before it reached its limit!

Captain Dietrich was determined not to let that happen!

"Heh, so you are only just that." The dwarven expert pilot smirked as he realized that he had gained the upper hand. "You fellows are good, but you're no match to a Vulcan-blessed dwarf! Let's finish this farce!"

The dwarven expert pilot was sick and tired of getting led around the nose. He should have converged with his fellow peers and sought to use the advantage of numbers to bully the outnumbered enemy expert mechs.

He was planning to do just that, but first he needed to take out the trash!

"Vulcan's children are not to be trifled with!"

*Chapter 3273: Evil Human Tech*

"What are those rifles!?"

Many observers who weren't informed about the new luminar crystal rifles looked astonished at their battle performance.

For example, at Master Willix's office inside the Halcyon Citadel, Master Olson could immediately judge that the firepower and effectiveness of those crystal rifles were beyond the norm!

"Effective against expert mechs."

"True." Willix coyly smiled.

"Mass production."

"Conditional."

"Propagation."

"Restricted."

"Reason."

"Alien tech."

"Ah."

Master Olson momentarily thought that she needed to warn the Friday Coalition to face this deadly new weapon system that the Larkinsons apparently developed recently. Although the Larkinson mechs weren't putting this new tech to the best use, the glimpses they showed already showed the incredible potential of the new luminar crystal rifles.

She was perceptive enough to notice that the rifles wielded by the Battle Crier mechs were a more down-scaled version of the Amaranto's exquisite masterwork rifle. The fact that the Larkinsons managed to make so many of these lesser rifles suggested that the clan had managed to develop a feasible way to mass-produce them in a timely and economic manner.

The implications were obvious. As long as the Larkinsons handed over this tech and the rights to use it to the Hexadric Hegemony, the Komodo War would immediately take a drastic turn as the Hexers would begin to deploy much more effective anti-expert mech units!

Fortunately, the mention of alien tech quickly assuaged Master Olson's concerns. As she thought about the implications of this weapons technology further, she quickly deduced that even if the Larkinsons managed to deconstruct the alien tech so that it fully conformed to human technological standards, the MTA would still prohibit its use on a wider scale.

Any weapon system that specifically targeted or countered expert mechs was not conducive to the Mech Trade Association's wider goals. As a Master Mech Designer, Carmin Olson had been inducted into enough secrets of humanity and the wider state of human space to know that high-ranking mech pilots played a crucial role to the Association and humanity's future.

In general, the only anti-expert mech weapons that were allowed to be put into general use were those that required expert mechs to begin with in order to employ. That was why expert mechs were able to utilize specialized resonating materials that dealt increased damage against their own kind.

The overall intention was to ensure that fielding expert mechs remained a high priority for every serious power in human power!

States needed to put more effort into cultivating high-ranking mech pilots. Any state that did so would gain the appreciation of the MTA. This was why states like the Garlen Empire was of considerable interest to the mechers. Even though its culture was distorted, it succeeded in producing more expert pilots and ace pilots than the norm!

In fact, Master Olson didn't need to tease any information out of Master Willix that the MTA was rooting for the Friday Coalition to win. Not only was its culture much more palatable than that of the Hexers, but the main reason why the Fridaymen had gained the upper hand was that it relied on fielding more expert mechs than their opponents!

As long as one side decisively won the Komodo War by making more use of expert pilots and expert mechs than the opposition, the winner would show to the rest of the star cluster that following the MTA's policies and recommendations was the best way to become stronger.

The Friday Coalition and the Mech Trade Association would both win as a result. As for the Hexers? Nobody cared about these female supremacists. Their mere existence stained the star sector with their illogical biases and unreasonable justifications to propagate their unequal policies. An enlightened organization such as the MTA never favored ignorance!

"Ves?" Master Olson asked as she continued to observe the live footage of the ongoing battle.

"Incentivized."

"Tech?"

"In reserve."

"Understood."

While Master Olson and Master Willix continued to discuss the wider implications of luminar crystal technology, another person was a lot more shocked.

"How is it possible?!" Jovy Armalon said as he tossed his half-empty bucket of snacks aside.

Before the bucket could drop to the deck and spill all of the food to the floor, a hidden module went to work and dematerialized the thrown objects before they could litter the interior of the stealthed courier vessel.

Jovy utilized his implant to call up detailed sensor readings and also referenced the MTA's expansive tech database. He quickly found out that Master Willix had already registered the advancements that the Larkinson Clan had made on luminar crystal technology.

"So it's alien tech..." He frowned.

The database entry on this tech stated that Ves Larkinson had actually contributed new and original research on luminar crystal technology. The Association officially acknowledged him as a contributor of restricted technology, which was an important recognition that granted the person in question the right to make use of his own inventions, within reason of course.

Jovy's interest in the new weapon system dropped a bit but never went away. Even if it was based on alien technology, the luminar crystal weapon system still presented humanity with another powerful solution to fight against certain kinds of foes.

"As long as the Larkinsons keep making the same kinds of advancements, these crystal weapons might become a lot more ubiquitous one day!"

He didn't have much hope for that, though. Humanity stole or salvaged a lot of alien technology over the years. All of the low-hanging fruit had all been plucked, leaving only the more difficult and obscure alien tech that was almost indecipherable.

If even the best MTA scientists couldn't make heads and tails of obscure alien advancements, then the odds that some random space peasant managed to unlock their secrets was minimal.

Perhaps the Larkinsons were lucky enough to stumble upon a breakthrough. It happened before, especially when there were so many humans in the galaxy to begin with. Yet the same lucky people never managed to make any follow-up discoveries.

In the end, only systematic research and development produced lasting gains. This was the inherent superiority of a huge organization like the Mech Trade Organization. It was large, wealthy and powerful enough to support an immense amount of systematic and organized research on countless different scientific subjects.

It didn't matter if many research teams weren't making quick progress. With so many different teams and projects, the MTA just had to sit back and reap the rewards whenever one of the many teams managed to solve a great problem.

Jovy smiled. "Only together will we be able to advance humanity's tech base."

Meanwhile, the dwarven expert pilot of the Burza Fens had enough of the nonsense that the enemy humans were throwing at him. The new crystal weapons wielded by the human mechs had thrown him off-guard for a while, but after eliminating over eighty of their number through a combination of axe and laser carbine attacks, the Battle Crier mechs no longer appeared so threatening.

Seeing that the incoming attacks had diminished to a more tolerable intensity, the expert pilot shaped his will and began to activate a powerful resonance ability. The powerful axe wielded by the Burza Fens began to glow brighter and brighter as it accumulated more energy.

Many Battle Criers including Captain Dietrich became alarmed at the sight. The spreading will signalled that their opponent was charging up for a powerful attack that somehow made him feel threatened despite the distance.

"The dwarven expert mech is charging for an area attack or something!"

"Stop him! Focus your fire on its flight system or its weapon arm!"

The Battle Criers were doing their best but the Burza Fens kept moving around which made it hard to inflict any targeted damage.

Captain Dietrich sensed that the threat was steadily growing stronger as his opponent apparently intended to go all out this time. An attack of this magnitude was absolutely not simple and he feared that the Battle Criers might lose their chance if the Burza Fens got its way.

"We need backup!"

Neither the expeditionary fleet nor the Ferril punitive fleet ignored what was going on in this corner of the battlefield.

The debut of the mass production version of the luminar crystal rifle was a noteworthy event for both sides!

To the Larkinsons and Glory Seekers, the new model rifles represented their new main weapon system for ranged combat. This was one of the advantages that they would rely upon in the future to gain an edge in the highly competitive Red Ocean.

As for the Ferrils, the luminar crystal rifles abhorred them. Any dwarf who could figure out the wider implications of his new tech regarded it as nothing less than a threat to dwarven heroes!

"I told you guys! The humans have been trying to destroy dwarvenkind step by step, starting with our heroes! If we allowed these murderous tall folk to reach the center of our empire, they would have probably found some way to ship these creations of their evil gods into the hands of the traitor dwarves. The lackeys of the evil gods would have used this new superweapon to kill each and every expert pilot that is on our side!"

"The MTA has to be behind this plot. Only the Big Two is technologically advanced to develop a killer weapon against expert mechs. This has to be a test run or something! Perhaps the Association sent these humans into our sovereign space because they want these nefarious humans to test fire their own weapons on our great dwarven expert mechs. In fact, what if this was a plot from the mechers to begin with?! This is pure evil! The MTA forced us to attack this human fleet just so that it can watch our expert mechs get torn to pieces by one of its new toys."

The dwarves reacted with so much alarm towards the unveiling of the luminar crystal rifles that they directed any artillery mechs they could spare to put the Battle Criers under fire.

Though this made the lives of Captain Dietrich and his brothers difficult, the Eye of Ylvaine wasn't blind. Commander Taon ordered his subordinates to immediately suppress the enemy artillery mechs who had shifted their attention away from the artillery duel.

"You can forget about harming our other Larkinsons while we can still exact punishment!"

A lot of ranged mechs fired on either the Battle Crier mechs or the Burza Fens, but none of the additional assistance resulted in a fundamental difference. The other soldiers all had their own priorities and threats to take care of. Shifting their attention to one enemy would leave another enemy unopposed. The price was too great to leave enemy units alone because they could subsequently reinforce others and trigger a collapse somewhere.



The dwarven expert pilot did not pin much of his hopes to other dwarves anyway. He still maintained enough confidence that he would be able to solve this threatening problem by himself.

After taking a copious amount of time to resonate with his expert mech's powerful axe, the Burza Fens looked and felt ten times more dangerous than before! Just the pressure it exuded from accumulating and compressing all of that will and power was enough to make the surrounding Battle Criers feel as if their hearts were about to stop!

The Battle Criers didn't just stand still and do nothing. Aside from trying to attack the expert mech and its axe with a relentless barrage of slicer beams, they also started to converge together.

This was a contradictory move. Against a probable massive area attack like the one that the Burza Fens was presumably preparing, they should have attempted to spread apart and increase their distance even further.

"What are the tall folk up to?" Some of the dwarven analysts wondered.

Though the actions of the human mechs were odd, that did not dissuade the dwarven expert pilot from continuing with its current course of action. In his belief, only power and his faith in Vulcan was enough to vanquish any human trickery!

#### *Chapter 3274: Engulfed By Wings*

There was a good reason why the Battle Criers acted counterintuitively, though. This soon became apparent when a pair of Battle Crier mechs that had been standing further behind had finally advanced forward.

Due to the limited supply of luminar crystal rifles, not every Battle Crier mech received one of the newfangled rifles.

The approaching mechs did not carry any useful weapons for that reason. Instead, they brought even more valuable cargo to the converging Battle Crier mechs.

The pair of mechs dragged over a large metal crate until they had reached the rear of the new mech formation.

After activating a silent signal, the crate automatically folded apart, revealing a special organic statue that had been hastily treated so that it could be exposed to vacuum.

Now, just as the Burza Fens made a mighty heave of its arm before throwing out its glowing, power-filled axe, the Battle Crier mechs along with the odd statue began to glow as well!

"STAND TOGETHER, BROTHERS! OUR DEDICATION IS INVINCIBLE AND LOYALTY IS IMMORTAL!"

Just before the spinning axe reached the formation of Battle Crier mechs, the entire formation began to glow in white as the Aspect of Tranquility began to look larger than life!

At the same time, the silhouette and projection of giant angel wings that looked like a scaled-up version of the feathered wings adorning the Aspect of Tranquility came into view. This giant apparition swept around the boxy formation of Battle Crier mechs and seemed to shield them against any attacks that came from outside.

This was a ridiculous display to the expert pilot of the Burza Fens. His thrown axe was far too powerful to be stopped by a mere physical projection or some kind of shared energy shield or something.

Indeed, when the spinning axe reached the giant angel wings, it passed right through as if the latter was nothing more than an illusion, which it surely was. The deathly axe struck a Bright Warrior right in the chest, causing the poor mech to get crushed to pieces!

However, the axe did not lose any force or bounce off into a random direction. Instead, it very purposefully ricochet into another nearby mech, where it crushed yet another poor mech before jumping away to attack another unfortunate mech with even greater speed and power!

"Hahaha! Your light tricks don't fool me! My axe-throwing skills are the best in my mech division and my Vulcan-forged axe is far more intricate than a simple weapon!"

Indeed, one of the measures used to keep the axe in a controllable flight was the special modules integrated in the heavy weapon. Although it seemed ridiculous to implement these features in an axe for an ordinary mech, expert mechs didn't play by the rules and could always bend them as long as their expert pilot was strong enough and budgets were sufficiently abundant!

Though the Burza Fens had never fought against an actual opponent since it was put into service, its dwarven expert pilot employed it plenty of times in live practice sessions.

When the Avido Berserker mech regiment was generous enough, they even paraded out practice bots or decommissioned mechs that had been converted into battle bots to serve as practice targets.

These were great opportunities for the dwarven expert pilot to practice his ultimate technique!

In every instance, the massively-empowered axe turned into a whirlwind of destruction, hacking every mech it came across. Every mech that got struck by the spinning axe would turn into a launching point that directed the weapon towards another target. Each time this happened, the axe would expend a bit of energy to increase the rotation and traversal speed of the weapon, thereby giving it greater and greater momentum with each hop!

This was not only the ultimate resonance technique of the Burza Fens, but also its best answer to one of its greatest weaknesses! The expert axeman mech was completely optimized for melee combat and did not possess any strong solutions against ranged opponents. However, by throwing its axe and allowing it to hunt down enemies by itself, the expert mech gained a powerful trump card that could give unsuspecting opponents a nasty surprise!

"Hahaha! Chop 'em to pieces! You human mechs are too weak!"

Initially, the spinning axe attack proceeded exactly as the dwarven expert pilot expected. After striking half-a-dozen mechs, the axe continued to gain speed, power and momentum, which was pretty strange to see!

Yet after it demolished a seventh Bright Warrior, the spinning axe actually began to lose a bit of speed. Though the difference was minute, by the time it shattered the tenth mech of the Battle Criers, it had lost a lot of power!

"What is happening?! My axe!"

While this was proceeding, the Battle Crier mechs continued to maintain their new battle formation without a care in the galaxy. The giant wings still glowed as bright as ever and the Aspect of Tranquility that anchored this entire manifestation had spread its calming glow far beyond its usual range!

While it simultaneously caused the mech pilots to lose sense of their emotions, they did not seem to mind it. The warm embrace of Lufa provided them sanctuary against the forces that they could not contend on their own. Although it was extremely hard for the Battle Criers to put themselves in the best state of mind to channel this special battle formation, with the Aspect of Lufa close at hand the difficulty of doing so had dropped to a trivial level!

Once it had bounced for the fourteenth time, the expert mech's axe had essentially lost all of the empowerment that should have kept it deadly. The Sanctuary Formation had apparently drained all of its energy and stripped it of its extraordinary character!

If not for the fact that the design of this axe incorporated a decent amount of resonating materials, the Sanctuary Formation could have depowered it faster!

Now that the dwarven expert pilot's will no longer enhanced its cutting and destructive power, it was just a mundane spinning object that could easily be evaded.

As the large formation slowly faded away, the Battle Crier mech pilots all regained their emotions but also became a lot more mentally exhausted than before.

Fighting against a dwarven expert mech was an incredibly stressful endeavor. Channeling their new battle network tired the Battle Criers out even further.

However, Dietrich and his other brothers thought it was worth it! The Burza Fens clearly invested a lot of power into the axe and to see it negated in a relatively short amount of time must be frustrating.

"This expert mech and its pilot can't fight forever. I don't believe it is still in good shape!"

Though it was difficult to judge how much fight an expert pilot still possessed, Captain Dietrich had been observing the enemy machine carefully and sensed that it had grown a lot more reluctant to fight the Larkinson Clan.

Weakness!

"Attack! Try and grab that axe if you can! This expert mech is a lot less scary if it doesn't have its weapon anymore!"

Unfortunately, the nearby mechs failed to capture the spinning axe. Even when it lost its extraordinary characteristics, it still contained plenty of maneuvering systems that deftly steered it away and back into the hand of the Burza Fens.

Even so, the dwarven expert mech exuded a much less savage aura than before. The Battle Criers became encouraged by the sight!

"Spread out and attack, same as before! Make sure to cover the expert mech's potential retreat path. Don't let it run!"

Captain Dietrich shouldn't have bothered.

"These tall folk..."

The dwarven expert pilot's pride had been completely provoked. After seeing these odd human mechs threaten his beautiful machine and foiling his attempt to destroy them in a single massive blow, he felt inferior. How could a powerful expert pilot such as him fail to beat a bunch of regular mechs?

His performance was shameful and completely disgraced the Avido Berserkers! Seeing these ranged mechs resume their attempts to cut through his expert mech's armor with

their oddly-sharp beams finally caused him to boil over. A switch had triggered in his mind that completely set him off!

"DON'T MOCK ME, HUMANS! ALL OF YOU MUST DIE SO THAT I CAN WASH OFF MY SHAME!"

The expert mech exploded in fury as the expert pilot finally channeled the most infamous characteristic of the Avido Berserkers!

The offensive mech regiment had a reputation for training prickly dwarves who were quick to anger. This was normally a negative character trait for mech pilots, but the Avido Berserkers were different.

They fought at their best when they were completely overtaken by maddening fury!

It was as if the Burza Fens underwent a metamorphosis. Its weakening trend had reversed and the power that exuded from its frame reflected the drastic change in mood of its expert pilot!

Captain Dietrich cursed. "Expert pilots are so crap!"

The strength of an expert mech did not just rely on the machine itself. The condition of the expert pilot was also a major factor in how well it performed!

True resonance came about when an expert pilot utilized their force of wills to resonate with their machines. Since the willpower of an expert pilot was rooted in his mind, the person's mental state played an outsized role in how resonance affected and amplified the performance of an expert mech.

In the most extreme cases, an expert pilot's emotions reached such extreme levels that they performed well above their normal levels!

This was actually one of the proven methods for an expert pilot to advance to ace pilot. It was just too difficult and risky to succeed most of the time. Even so, Patriarch Reginald Cross was so desperate that he had sought to rely on this method to see whether he could find his chance in this battle!

After the Burza Fens turned into an avatar of fury, the aggressively glowing expert mech raised its axe and launched at the nearest Battle Crier mech. The machine in question had no chance at all and quickly crumbled as the Burza Fens hacked it into pieces with just a single, powerful blow.

"DIE!"

The berserk dwarf did not neglect his other weapon either. The Burza Fens accurately shot down human mech after human mech with steady, precise shots of its laser carbine.

The Battle Criers were losing more and more mechs with each second that passed! The Burza Fens had become too oppressive and too powerful for the Battle Criers to cope with. Even though their luminar crystal rifles were slicing the fast-moving expert mech on a regular basis, they had lost too many mechs for them to apply damage quickly enough to the berserk machine!

When Dietrich saw that the mechs piloted by his brethren were being culled one by one, a weight pressed onto his heart.

He knew that his unit had failed to complete its mission!

The Burza Fens exploded with such great fury that it seemed as if the expert pilot itself was propelling it through sheer willpower!

When the expert mech finally turned to Dietrich's Bright Warrior and chopped its axe down to hack it in half, the mech officer decisively pulled the eject lever.

His cockpit soared away just before the deadly axe obliterated the head and torso of his mech!

His luminar crystal rifle spun away like a discarded toy.

In the end, the best effort of the Battle Criers to defeat or at least stall a dwarven expert mech resulted in failure.

Had the Battle Criers fallen short in their planning? Did Captain Dietrich issue the wrong commands in battle? Or did they never have a chance from the beginning?

All of these thoughts and more plagued the maturing mech pilot who thought he had a chance to achieve a great feat.

Now, it turned out that he was still too naive. He desired power more than ever, but didn't know whether he would ever have the opportunity to break through in his lifetime.

"I've always been a failure..."

*Chapter 3275: Out For Murder*

The clash between the Battle Criers and the Burza Fens was nearing its end. While the former managed to inflict a couple of setbacks to the latter, in the end the illogical and reality-defying powers of an expert pilot was too much for regular pilots to contend with. They weren't called demigods for nothing!

"Can mortal mech pilots like me only do this much?" Dietrich wondered with a sigh. "Expert pilots are still too powerful..."

The new luminar crystal rifles the Battle Criers received was just a single tool. It did not provide them with the complete package needed to fight against expert mechs on a more even basis.

At the very least, if they brought double the amount of Bright Warriors armed with the new model rifles, the outcome of this highly-watched clash could have produced a very different outcome!

"You guys didn't fail." Ves softly said as he saw the Battle Criers losing so many mechs that they fell below the critical mass that was the minimum level necessary to pose a threat to the Burza Fens. "We just prepared too few luminar crystal rifles for you. If we prioritized its production more..."

If there was one consolation to this disappointing end to Dietrich's participation in this battle, it was that he was certain that his cockpit was safe. The enemy expert mech never spared any time to attack the escaping human mech pilots.

This was mainly because taking out active threats was a greater priority than shooting down mech pilots who weren't able to contribute to the battle any further. If the expert pilot was stupid enough to waste precious time on shooting down ejected cockpits, a lot more Bright Warrior mechs would be intact right now which was not good news for the dwarf!

That didn't necessarily make Dietrich's mood any better. As his cockpit automatically flew back to the fleet, he became depressed as he imagined how much more damage his opponent could do once it was done with the Battle Criers. It still retained more than enough battle effectiveness to butcher a couple more hundred regular mechs!

Just as Dietrich thought that the Burza Fens would finish off the remaining Battle Crier mechs as if they were target dummies, two slightly more remarkable beams accurately struck the damaged portion of the dwarven expert mech's weapon arm!

These double slicer beams didn't seem to be any different from the other shots fired by the other Battle Crier mechs accurately struck a damaged elbow section that previous attacks had already damaged.

The twin shots achieved what all of the other attacks made by the Battle Criers failed to accomplish.

They made the Burza Fens halt.



To be more precise, the two slicer beams managed to exploit an earlier opening created by a lucky hit. This time, the two shots clearly weren't guided by luck but rather extremely high skill and excellent judgement!

Though the elbow joints of expert mechs were designed to be tough and resistant to damage, the slicer beams just managed to damage some of its mechanisms, causing the entire limb to hitch up for a moment. This ruined the dwarven expert mech's attack attempt and caused the Bright Warrior that was in its sights to back off with plenty of time to spare!

While the Burza Fens continued to aim and shoot its laser carbine at the retreating Battle Crier mechs, the expert pilot directed his attention to a pair of mechs that had recently approached this area of the battlefield.

Whereas most human mechs sought to stay as far away from an enemy expert mech as possible, the two marauder mechs purposefully sought out the expert mech of the Avido Berserkers.

"You..." The dwarf briefly frowned before recognizing the mechs in question. "YOU! YOU'RE THE ENVOYS OF THE EVIL WOMAN GOD WHO MURDERED MY BROTHERS!"

Venerable Joshua's lips twitched. Of all of the insults that an enemy has thrown onto his back, being called a representative of an 'evil woman god' was quite the moniker.

After the Penitent Sisters successfully launched their battle formation attacks, they retreated to the rear in order to catch their breath and recover from their great exertion.

Only Venerable Joshua and a small group of overeager Penitent Sisters threw themselves in the fight despite feeling as if they had sapped their brain juices.

After preventing the drug-induced dwarven expert pilots from breaking through the Larkinson and Crosser lines, Joshua noticed that the smaller struggle between the Battle Criers and the dwarven expert axeman mech wasn't going as planned.

"Looks like it takes an expert pilot to beat another expert pilot after all..."

This was why he was here. Seeing that there were so many ownerless luminal crystal rifles floating in space, he commanded his Valkyrie Prime to pass over its Unending alloy spear to another Valkyrie Redeemer and picked up the weapons previously utilized by the Battle Criers.

Of course, it was not that easy to pick up any random mech weapon wandering in space. Joshua had to wait until the Battle Crier support staff back in the fleet to disable the electronic locks on the powerful rifles.

If these precautions weren't in place, then any enemy mech could have picked them up and fired them upon the enemy!

Once the staff had completed this task, the luminar crystal rifles became ready for use in his hands.

Though Joshua didn't have a lot of opportunities to wield these rifles, he knew how to operate them. It was a bit awkward for him to wield two of them at once as the Valkyrie Prime had only been designed to hold one ranged weapon, but his familiarity with his current machine was high enough that he managed to cope.

"I WILL CRIPPLE YOUR FAILED EXPERT MECH AND REND YOU OUT OF YOUR COCKPIT SO THAT I CAN SQUEEZE YOUR UGLY TALL BODY WITH THE FINGERS OF MY MECH!"

Well, the dwarven expert pilot certainly sounded excited to meet Joshua.

The Larkinson expert pilot didn't blame the dwarf. As someone who was sensitive towards life, it pained him to play an important role in unleashing an enormous energy attack that snuffed out the lives of thousands of dwarven mech pilots.

He personally felt the vitality of the Molten Hammer mech force dropping as the energy wave attack swept through the defenses of their tough and sturdy mechs with ease.

Joshua found it rather contradictory that someone who was as sensitive towards life as him took on a job that was all about death and destruction. He wondered how someone like Ves handled this contrast. Was the patriarch the same as him and felt guilty about all of the killing that was taking place as a result of his work?

If so, then Joshua wanted to learn some tips from him. He faintly had the idea that he really needed to resolve his thoughts on the matter in order to go further in his career as a mech pilot.

He shook his head. This was not the time and place to entertain these deep thoughts. He still had a battle to fight!

"No matter how guilty I feel about reaping all of those lives, the dwarves brought it on themselves by attacking us. If not me, then another Larkinson mech pilot would have killed them. At least I've been able to save the lives of a lot of clansmen with my contribution."

The life of a Larkinson member always trumped that of the enemy. He took no pleasure in slaying dwarves, but if he had to increase his already prodigious body count again, he would not let his guilt get in the way of his duty.

"I'll bring you to the rest of your fallen dwarven comrades if you miss them so much!"

The Valkyrie Prime raised its luminar crystal rifles and fired another twin slicer beam salvo! This time, they accurately struck the weapon arm that had already been damaged by the prime mech's earlier shots.

Joshua wasn't satisfied, though. The slicer beams dealt respectable damage to an expert mech but the severity was still on the modest side. The power gap was inherently big from the beginning and the advantages of luminar crystal technology only moderately brought it closer.

A brilliant idea emerged in his mind.

"Why not try and resonate with the weapons?"

The rifles utilized by the Valkyrie Prime were different from the one used by the Amaranto. The mass production version did not contain any components that inherently resonated with expert pilots.

That did not stop Joshua, though. He focused his will and tried to extend his influence to the weapons.

Much to his glee, he succeeded in finding purchase in the weapon. Although the connections were too faint and rough for him to empower them or anything, the luminar crystals possessed just enough life for him to gain a more instinctive feel and understanding of their properties!

Therefore, when the Valkyrie Prime fired its next salvo, the two beams more accurately sliced through a small section of the dwarven expert mech's flight system!

Though the mobility of the Burza Fens was hardly affected by this minor attack, the dwarven expert pilot became increasingly more alarmed. Unlike the Battle Crier mech pilots, this human possessed the skill to maximize the penetrative properties of the luminar crystal rifles!

In response to the dangerous slicer beam attacks, the Burza Fens raised its laser carbine and snapped off an accurate shot that struck the Valkyrie Prime's shoulder.

The empowered laser beam failed to inflict any meaningful damage to the prime mech! Aside from heating up the armor section a bit, the attack failed to achieve anything of note!

It was only now that the dwarven expert pilot noticed that this fake expert mech was clad in the same first-class alloy as the other annoying human expert mechs!

"Looks like I won't be taking you down the easy way. So be it! I don't believe your mech is invincible!"

The Burza Fens accelerated forward even as the Valkyrie Prime was flying backwards. Their speeds weren't comparable and the more superior mech easily gained speed. Still, as it did, the prime mech constantly fired slicer beams after slicer beams as fast as its firing rate allowed.

The expert mech was too well-designed for a couple of carefully-aimed attacks to disable it right away, but Venerable Joshua began to wear down several systems and subsystems in rapid succession.

The Burza Fens steadily began to lose power, acceleration capacity, arm strength and various sensor systems.

Yet these wounds did not prevent the gap between the two unequal mechs from closing! The expert mech possessed plenty of redundancy and could still perform decently well even if the various slicer beams managed to inflict a lot of nasty cuts on its surface.

In the final seconds before the two mechs approached, the Valkyrie Prime unleashed its final double beam onto the fingers of the expert mech. This severely impacted its grip on its axe, so much so that the dwarven expert pilot had to adjust the way his mech held its weapon!

Even so, that didn't stop the Burza Fens from hacking down its axe onto the Valkyrie Prime's left arm!

Just before the heavy axe struck, the Valkyrie Prime tossed its rifles and crossed its arms, blocking the heavy axe chop with its forearms!

The Valkyrie Prime's wrists smacked into its chest and unloaded much of the physical force of the attack by allowing itself to be launched backwards!

Seeing that his proud axe strike failed to achieve any meaningful damage, the dwarven expert pilot reached a new level of fury.

"Argh! What does it take to tear through your armor?!"

The Burza Fens exuded even more power as its pilot became absolutely determined to avenge his fallen brothers!

The expert axeman mech began to assail the Valkyrie Prime with unrelenting aggression. The prime mech had just enough time to retrieve its spear and shield from an assisting mech, but after that Venerable Joshua could hardly breathe after that because a vengeful dwarf was out for murder!

### *Chapter 3276: Avenger Dwarf*

Ves always wondered how a prime mech would fare against a genuine expert mech.

The answer was that the contest would turn extremely lop-sided right away.

The 'duel' between the Valkyrie Prime and the Burza Fens just proved it. Although the Valkyrie Prime was not in its home element at the moment, its performance against the dwarven low-tier expert mech was downright shambolic!

Once again, Unending alloy came to the rescue.

The Valkyrie Prime was essentially a prime mech upgrade to a regular Valkyrie Redeemer design. Its performance was better but the improved parameters were still in the general range of a standard mech. The only abnormal factor was its absurdly tough armor system.

Even that had weaknesses. The joints, transition areas and flight system were vulnerable hotspots that Venerable Joshua was doing his best not to expose them to the Burza Fens!

Though the expert mech was no longer in its best shape, its expert pilot appeared to be fueling it by continually generating an endless amount of hate towards the evil tall folk!

As an expert pilot himself, Venerable Joshua was aware how unreasonable his kind could be and how dangerous it was to fight against a riled-up demigod.

He had no choice, though. The Golden Skull Alliance was spread too thin and the other friendly expert pilots already had their hands full keeping multiple dwarven counterparts busy.

Therefore, as much as it was unfair to challenge a real expert mech with just a prime mech, Venerable Joshua had to step up. Right now, he could do nothing except get passively beat up, but as long as his Valkyrie Prime lasted for a long-enough time, then that was already enough!

"Why. Won't. You. Break!" The angry dwarf shouted as his Burza Fens chopped with great force, only for the mech to almost lose its grip on its weapon due to the deterioration of its damaged arm and finger mechanism. "ARRGGH!"

"Battle Criers, keep resume fire on the Burza Fens!"

With Joshua acting as a great decoy, the surviving Battle Crier mechs had rallied together again at a further distance. They began to employ their still-powerful luminar crystal rifles to fire continuous slicer beams in the direction of the Burza Fens.

The dwarven expert mech that was fueled by anger wasn't making it easy on the ranged mechs. The expert axeman mech was not only moving around a lot, it did not forget about using its laser carbine to pick off the Battle Crier mechs one by one.

The earlier slaughter had resumed, if at a slower rate. The Valkyrie Prime attempted to poke its spear against the laser carbine several times, but the Burza Fens never let the prime mech pull off its move.

The basic parameters of the two mechs were too far apart! The Valkyrie Prime may hold a defensive advantage, but the Burza Fens possessed an undeniable edge in power and speed! This meant that the expert mech permanently held the initiative. It could retreat whenever it wanted to and force its opponents to fight on its terms.

This was exactly what the angry dwarven expert pilot was doing at the moment. His expert axeman mech may be failing in trying to chop the Valkyrie Prime to pieces, but its attacks were still achieving at least some results. The joints were starting to show signs of wear and the constant heavy kinetic impacts on the exterior continually inflicted concussive blows to the internals.

As long as the Burza Fens kept wailing at the Valkyrie Prime for a minute or two, the latter would naturally stop working as its internal architecture turned to mush.

"One way or another, I'm going to crack open this shell of yours and peel you out like an unborn chick!"

It was all that Joshua could do to keep his mech as intact as possible. He stopped utilizing his prime mech's spear entirely and just focused on blocking the powerful attacks with its Unending alloy shield.

The greatest threat he needed to pay attention to was whenever the Burza Fens attempted to circle around the Valkyrie Prime in order to attack the latter's rear. The flight system was almost every flight-capable mech's greatest weak point and it was no different in this case.

"This... might not be going as planned." Joshua gritted his teeth as he tried to resonate as much as possible with his prime mech.

It didn't help much. A resonance shield supported by prime resonance was so weak that a single hefty axe strike was enough to shatter it to pieces!

Though Joshua tried to deepen his bond with the Valkyrie Prime and commune with the Superior Mother, there was only so much these tricks could do for him. The basic power gap was too big and he and his fellow Penitent Sisters had already exhausted themselves to pull their battle formation.

"I need backup here!" He requested over the communication channel. "This pissy dwarf here is really determined to take revenge for all of the buddies that I've killed!"

"Please stand by, Venerable Joshua. All of our expert mechs are preoccupied but help is on the way."

"That's not going to be enough! Unless you can direct a huge amount of Transcendent Punishers or Eternal Redemptions to pound this hostile expert axeman mech to pieces, my prime mech isn't going to last much longer!"

"We are trying our best to find options for you. Please hold on for a minute if possible."

"I'm not sure if I'll last a minute!"

The Burza Fens whacked at the shield of the Valkyrie Prime so many times with resonance-enhanced blows that the protective equipment actually began to warp and deform from the continuous blows!

Eventually, the shield actually snapped out of the Valkyrie Prime as the grip that held it together onto its arm had actually snapped from the excessive forces acting on its much-abused surface.

"Oh hell."

In the next dozen exchanges, Venerable Joshua and the rest of the Larkinson Clan finally learned that even Unending alloy had its limits.

The Burza Fens and its expert pilot performed true to their Avido Berserker heritage and began to gain more power and momentum with each strike it landed.

Every heavy axe attack it made caused the Valkyrie Prime to bounce away. Joshua did nothing to stop this because it not only bought his poor mech some time, but also bled away some of the force.

Nevertheless, this was just a desperation measure as the Burza Fens was too fast and could easily catch up to the prime mech's paltry retreat.

The constant beating caused Venerable Joshua's heart to boil. He yearned for the power of an expert mech even more! Why did others like Venerable Orfan and Venerable Dise get their turn first while he was stuck piloting a fine but ultimately inadequate machine?

Gear mattered and this was a lesson that Joshua was learning in the hardest way!

With the slow but continuous advantages gained by the Burza Fens, its expert pilot gained more and more encouragement, which further fueled his damage output. The



axe glowed stronger and stronger as the dwarf who channeled it pumped more will and emotion into his attacks.

"NO SHIELD IS UNBREAKABLE! NO MECH IS INVINCIBLE! WORLD SHATTERER!" The dwarven expert pilot roared as he pumped nearly all of his remaining power and reserves into his next strike!

When the axe came down like a meteor, Venerable Joshua shivered as he felt a strong threat of death engulfing his body. With his sensitivity towards life, the realization that he might very well die if he continued onwards was incredibly clear!

He did something that every expert pilot was ashamed to do. Some were so extreme that they never even allowed themselves to disgrace themselves by taking the coward's way out!

Fortunately, Venerable Joshua was not an honor-bound fool or someone who held himself to ridiculous standards.

"I'm sorry, guys, but I held this fellow off as long as possible."

Since time was of the essence, he did not delay any further and pulled the ejection lever.

The escape mechanism of the Valkyrie Prime was much better than that of a regular Valkyrie Redeemer. When Ves initially designed this prime mech, he invested a lot of effort into maximizing the survival of its pilots.

All of that paid off as the cockpit of the prime mech instantly shot away from the rear of the exhausted prime mech just as a glowing axe thundered through the already-battered chest plating of the feminine mech!

Though the Valkyrie Prime did not split in half from this mountainous blow, the wound it suffered from the front cut deep to the point that it had crushed the power reactor and many other vital components!

"Noo! My Valkyrie Prime!" Ves almost shot up from his observer's seat from the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim. "Someone, track the wreck of the Valkyrie Prime as well as any loose equipment and debris that came loose. I don't want to miss a single gram of Unending alloy, you hear me?! This material is priceless and crucial to building Venerable Joshua's next expert mech!"

Ves and Joshua silently mourned for the fall of the Valkyrie Prime. Though the prime mech was destined to be recycled anyway, it was still a great loss to the Larkinson Clan to lose it when it could still have contributed to the battle if it remained intact.

Without the Valkyrie Prime, the Larkinson Clan lost a machine that could hold off the Burza Fens. With its dwarven expert pilot flying so high at the moment, many people could already imagine how it could butcher entire mech companies on its own. The damage it incurred so far was slightly serious but did not debilitate its performance as much as everyone hoped.

Ves snapped out of his thoughts when he noticed the Burza Fens doing something different. For the first time since the start of the battle, it had begun to attack an ejected cockpit!

The Burza Fens raised its laser carbine and snapped a few laser beams at the cockpit that Venerable Joshua was riding on. The lasers struck but they did not deal any apparent damage aside from raising the cockpit's exterior temperature.

"Tch. This material again!" The dwarven expert pilot spat. "Since that's the case, I'll just chop you to pieces then!"

"No!"

This time, Ves really went mad! The Burza Fens did not waste any time with shooting its carbine at the cockpit and instead blasted forward while raising its powerful axe to launch a heavy blow.

If this expert mech struck the escaping cockpit with a serious blow, then even if the thin layer of Unending alloy managed to hold, the huge kinetic impact might overwhelm the inertial dampeners inside the cockpit and channel an immense amount of force to Joshua's body.

Such forces were far beyond what human bodies were capable of withstanding!

It was no different from falling out of the window of an office building!

"Stop the Burza Fens at all costs! Venerable Stark, I could really use your help at this moment!"

"I can't." The older female expert pilot spoke with great strain in her voice. "The enemy expert mechs are hunting my Amaranto down. My machine isn't resilient enough to expose itself and resist incoming attacks at a priority target."

This was one of the design weaknesses of the Amaranto. Ves never regretted the fact that he had too little Unending alloy on hand.

When it was applied to an expert mech, it practically made it unkillable among its peers.

When Unending alloy was absent, Ves discovered that his work didn't perform so much better than other mechs in the same class and price level.

He became more cognizant than ever that he had been relying too much on Unending alloy to turn losing situations into more favorable situations. This was good news, but it was not a systematic advantage that the Larkinsons could continue to rely upon going forward.

The dwarven military mech divisions had shown him how the Larkinson Army really should be put together. With enough strength and numbers, the regular mech troops under his command must become strong enough to defeat the dwarven opposition without relying on any trump cards!

"I need to rectify all of this after this battle finally ends..."

Of course, the Larkinsons still needed to survive and win this battle, and that was becoming a lot less likely as the Burza Fens had almost reached Joshua's cockpit!

"VENGEANCE FOR THE MOLTEN HAMMERS!"

With a single momentous swing, the Burza Fens chopped down its axe onto the small and vulnerable cockpit!

#### *Chapter 3277: Benchmark Results*

Ves enjoyed a grand view of the battle. In a modern battlefield, every element tried to be as connected to each other as possible.

Though the quality and quantity of network connections degraded over time due to all of the explosions and energy bursting through space, there were plenty of solutions to ensure that the entire battlefield remained visible to the fleet where the headquarters and the enormous support services of the Larkinson Army was housed.

There were hundreds if not thousands of operators and officers sitting behind their terminals providing constant support to the mech pilots at the front. Whether it was reminding them of incoming threats, providing individual weak point assessments or offering tactical advice to mech officers in the field, mech pilots never really fought by themselves.

Of course, not a lot of information got passed on by vocal communication. That was a rather inefficient and distracting method of giving mech pilots who were in the heat of battle a heads up. There was so much data of varying degrees of relevance that could be conveyed that overloading mech pilots with too much details became a very real threat.

Therefore, most mech armies implemented a better system where a web of heavily-encrypted signals and strong, point-to-point connections formed a vast combat communication network or warnet as it was colloquially referred to. The most distinguishing characteristic of warnets was that it utilized specialized AIs and

algorithms to dynamically filter and transfer relevant pieces of data to the correct recipients at the right time.

For example, someone engaged in a struggle for survival against multiple expert mechs such as Venerable Dise and Venerable Orfan didn't need to be told of events that happened on the opposite side of the battlefield. The data their mechs received from the Larkinson Clan's warnet was almost exclusively focused on providing the Larkinson expert pilots with the various properties and potential weaknesses of their opposing enemies.

Even then, the mech pilot might or might not choose to accept the data input. Human bodies, even with implants, weren't inherently powerful receivers and their ability to process and filter data was never as good as that of a huge mech that possessed plenty of room for advanced processors.

Depending on the configuration set by the mech pilot, the mech could transfer as much or as little data to its controller as preferred. This also went in the other direction as important commanders in the rear needed to obtain the most relevant data without getting flooded by minutiae in order to make the most appropriate decisions.

Ves wasn't a professional military commander and never pretended to be one. He only summoned a few projections that provided him with a strategic view of the lines and maneuvers on the battlefield.

He trusted senior officers such as General Verle and the rest of his staff to know what they were doing. Their performance in previous battles did not give him much reason to reconsider his trust.

What he really focused on during battle was the performance of his works. As a mech designer, his attention laid squarely on his own mechs and various other battle solutions.

From studying the first proper combat action of the Eternal Redemption model to judging the effectiveness of the battle formations evoked by the Penitent Sisters and Swordmaidens, Ves obtained an abundant amount of real battle data that enriched his understanding of his own work.

It was great to see his efforts translating into the outcomes he expected such as with the Eternal Redemption model. When he originally designed this large, fat and expensive cannoner mech, there were plenty of doubts whether the concept was sound and if the Larkinson Clan even needed a ranged mech that sacrificed mobility and flexibility for high impact damage and excellent penetration.

The Eternal Redemption performed well in almost every front that Ves had aimed for in its design. Aside from the regret that he completed its design before he managed to achieve a breakthrough in luminar weapon technology, the cannoner mechs with their

imposing Samheim ultra-heavy gauss cannons served as a great counter for the tough but relatively low-mobility mechs favored by the dwarves.

However, the views that Ves enjoyed also highlighted the various tragedies and setbacks that his men suffered in battle. His heart ached when he observed the various shortcomings of his Bright Warrior Mark I Version B contributing to the defeat or death of the mech pilots who entrusted their lives to his work.

It was hard not to take these losses personally. Though the Bright Warrior model still provided many advantages to his clansmen that they wouldn't have easily obtained if they piloted someone else's work, both the good sides and the bad sides of every mech design were on full display today.

What especially commanded his attention was the performance of his prime mechs.

In previous battles, their strengths had become highly pronounced. Though they weren't equal to the expert mechs fielded by the Friday Coalition and its temporary buddies, the Valkyrie Prime and so on performed admirably against ordinary second-class mechs.

This time wasn't the same, though. The Ferrils entered the battle with thirteen expert mechs at their disposal. While the Gauss Baron had been taken off the board relatively quickly, that still left a huge disparity in numbers that had been pushing the expeditionary forces to the brink!

It would have been helpful if the Golden Skull Alliance had enough regular mech units to throw at the enemy expert mech, but that was not the case this time. Aside from the ranged mechs of the Battle Criers, every other unit was fully occupied with containing and blocking the still-numerous dwarven mech divisions.

The ongoing firefight between the artillery mechs and other ranged mechs had proceeded unabated since the beginning. Ves did not even want to shift his attention to this lengthy confrontation because he would only grow more depressed at seeing his ranged mechs getting picked off over time.

The battle at the flanks proceeded unevenly. While the right flank was dominated by the expeditionary forces, the left flank was doing considerably worse as it had not been graced by the Swordmaiden battle formation. The largely-intact Crumbleshells were continuing to spin like frisbees while unloading their cannons onto any human mech in the vicinity.

Only a single friendly expert mech in the form of Venerable Linda Cross' Amphis was there to stop the dwarven expert mech deployed on this flank to overrun the expeditionary fleet's faltering flanking units.

There was only so much an expert knight mech could do to support the entire left flank. When avian mechs constantly attacked the Larkinson and Glory Seeker mech units

from every direction and when the Curmbleshells relentlessly broke down every strong formation, the chances of reversing the tide was slim without additional backup!

The quality of the mechs and mech pilots weren't at fault here. They just didn't have the numbers and the refined battle tactics and thought-out mech configurations to keep up with a professional military mech division like the Hivar Roarers.

From a larger perspective, this battle served as a benchmark to the expeditionary fleet's current combat capabilities.

Doing well in this benchmark meant that it would likely fare better against the harsh and intense competition in the Red Ocean.

Doing poorly against a bunch of stubborn dwarves who occupied a corner in the edge of the galaxy did not reflect well on the preparedness of the Larkinson Clan and its allies!

The immense scale of the battle along with the high degree of organization displayed by the dwarves diminished the importance of the two remaining prime mechs to a minimum.

Nothing needed to be said about the lack of agency of the Shield of Samar. Venerable Jannzi was relegated to the role of a bystander most of the time as the Slug Ranger mechs didn't even deign to waste their firepower on her useless prime mech.

Venerable Joshua was a bit better off as the adequate mobility of the Valkyrie Prime allowed him to take part in the offensive maneuvers of the Penitent Sisters.

Yet in the fighting that took place after the Penitent Sisters pulled off their battle formation, the Valkyrie Prime's performance was distinctly lackluster in scale and impact.

Sure, it dominated the scene wherever it fought, but its killing efficiency was not that impressive compared to a real expert mech. Prime resonance provided Venerable Joshua and his trusted machine a distinct advantage, but the expert pilot could have just relied on pure skill to achieve similar results.

Perhaps the only genuine advantage brought by the Valkyrie Prime was that it was so different from the other Valkyrie mechs that it attracted a lot of attacks from the enemy. The dwarves loved to take it down due to the key role it played in the prior battle formation, yet most of their attacks either missed or bounced off harmlessly against the Valkyrie Prime's armor.

"At least it's good for something in this battle." Ves muttered.

The more attacks the Valkyrie Prime attracted, the less the dwarves were directing them elsewhere. This was pretty much the most important contribution that Venerable Joshua was making at this stage of the battlefield.

The expert pilot wasn't satisfied with this. In previous battles, he had played a pivotal role where each of his actions profoundly affected the final outcome. To be relegated to nothing more than a stronger grunt in this massive engagement did not sit well with him. He was still a human, and every human possessed ambition.

"I can do more!"

The Valkyrie Prime's agency happened to put the hungry expert pilot in a position to come to the rescue of the Battle Criers as the Burza Fens was laying waste to their mechs!

The clash that ensued did not quite go according to Venerable Joshua's expectations, much to the dismay of the expert pilot along with many other Larkinsons paying attention to the Valkyrie Prime's exploits.

Now that the short and one-sided duel between the Valkyrie Prime and the Burza Fens ended in a crushing defeat of the former, Ves would have preferred that the occupants of the Shield of Samar and the Valkyrie Prime switched places for this engagement!

The maddened dwarven expert pilot of the Burza Fens had nothing else but vengeance in mind! The ghosts of thousands of Molten Hammer battle comrades haunted him from behind, their lives cut off prematurely after the apparition of a giant human female god reaped their lives as easily as culling a garden of weeds.

Fueled by hatred and driven by the need to exact retribution, the dwarven expert pilot's will and emotions were flying so high that his killer axe strike had gained a huge power boost.

Anyone who looked at the glowing, power-filled axe would instinctively get the impression that it could shatter an entire planet.

While its actual power level was not so exaggerated due to the limited resonance strength of the expert pilot, it still enabled the Burza Fens to execute a meteoric strike that was squarely locked on the feeble cockpit that was depending a lot on its meager thrusters to bring it back to safety.

As the axe chopped down like a divine guillotine that was set to execute one of the principal agents responsible for slaughtering almost a third of the Molten Hammer mech pilots, Ves couldn't control himself anymore.

"Noo! Joshua!"



Of all of the expert pilots in the field, Ves could least afford to lose Joshua! Not only was he one of the few Larkinsons who grew up on the same home planet as him, but he also developed a life domain that offered great promises for the future.

To see him perish when he was still young pained Ves deeply.

"He still owed me many decades of useful service!"

Ves hadn't even gotten a proper return on investment yet! There were so many more wonderful mechs with unique life-based innovations that he could have designed in the years to come. All of the Design Department's work on the Chimera Project would pretty much have to be thrown in the trash if the person it was based upon was no longer in the picture.

Ves almost closed his eyes when the axe was just about to strike the fleeing cockpit!

*Chapter 3278: Dwarven Blood*

However, when that earth-shattering axe finally swung down, it passed by without its formidable blade ever striking the thin Unending alloy shell that covered Joshua's cockpit.

Though the thick and heavy axe blade missed the cockpit by just a couple of meters, the resonance energy that exuded from the weapon still washed over the side of the vehicle, causing it to tumble and roll aside as if struck by a strong crosswind even though there was no air in space.

Still, much to Ves' relief, the cockpit and the precious expert pilot inside still remained intact!

Its tiny thrusters continued to sputter as much as they could to propel the cockpit further and further away.

"What happened?! Why did the Burza Fens miss?!"

When Ves directed his attention away from the cockpit and its key occupant that had just escaped a brush of death, the Burza Fens oddly did not pursue its chosen prey.

Instead, the mech frame looked as if it had been frozen in time. The axeman mech, which was previously on the move all the time, was drifting on a ballistic trajectory as all of its maneuvering had ceased.

As for the dwarven expert mech's dreaded axe, the weapon along with the arm that gripped it were floating away into deep space.

Ves blinked and suddenly noticed that an entirely new presence had crept up to the rear of the Burza Fens without his notice. He had been so taken by the Valkyrie Prime and Venerable Joshua's predicament that he lost sight of what was happening elsewhere!

The Dark Zephyr, which looked a lot more scuffed and worn than from the start of the battle, had managed to sneak up to the enemy machine while its obsessed expert pilot was completely tunnel visioned on exacting revenge on Venerable Joshua.

The expert light skirmisher utilized its sharp blades along with whatever resonance that Venerable Tusa could muster to perform two key actions.

First, the Dark Zephyr exploited an opening created by prior Battle Crier attacks and cut off the damaged and weakened arm section that held its axe.

Second, the Larkinson expert mech stabbed its other knife right in the back of the Burza Fens, which not only destroyed the key nodes of the flight system, but also paralyzed many other essential systems.

The tip of the knife had stopped just before it reached the rear of the dwarven expert mech's cockpit.

"Did people ever tell you that you should live and let live? I guess not." Tusa lightly said. "You should have taken a chill pill. Let me give you a lesson why getting consumed in your own your hatred is not a good idea!"

He did not delay any further and commanded his expert mech to thrust its second knife deeper!

What activity the Burza Fens still exhibited shut down a moment after the Dark Zephyr completed the assassination of an enemy expert pilot.

When the expert light skirmisher retreated its knife from the dormant dwarven expert mech's back, the tip of the dark blade was smeared in red.

"Even dwarves bleed in red." Tusa silently muttered as he completed this solemn little ritual.

At this point in the battle, Venerable Tusa was the only expert pilot who had killed his peers amongst the enemy ranks! He not only had the blood of just one dwarven demigod on his hands, but two now after he had ruthlessly shoved his knife through the cockpit of the Burza Fens!

"Tusa... thanks." Venerable Joshua softly expressed his gratitude from his retreating cockpit. "I'll... pay you back someday."

Tusa's lips curled into a brief grin, distracting him from the magnitude of his actions. "You don't need to make such a promise, Joshua. We're Larkinsons. We always have each other's backs."

A sense of brotherly camaraderie passed between the two expert pilots. This was what the Larkinson Clan was all about. This was what the clansmen were fighting to preserve. They were not about to let the dwarves take this paradise away from their hands!

In the next few minutes, the Dark Zephyr escorted Venerable Joshua's lone cockpit back to the Spirit of Bentheim. Once a squad of Living Sentinel mechs had come forth to take over this duty, the expert light skirmisher was left without direction for a time.

After Venerable Tusa successfully took the Gauss Baron out of the picture, he had taken his expert mech all the way back to the Larkinson fleet and parked it inside the Spirit of Bentheim's hangar bay in order to receive a quick resupply.

There was no time to perform any checkups or thorough repairs. He knew that the battle was not going well for the Larkinson Clan after the dwarves had shoved out all of its expert mechs into the battle at once.

However, just because his Dark Zephyr replenished its energy cells and dumped a lot of accumulated heat didn't mean it had regained its peak battle effectiveness.

Venerable Tusa had already expended the majority of his will and mental energy to defeat the Gauss Baron.

What happened at the end was especially draining for him. In the midst of desperation, he deepened his connection to his expert mech and resonated with the second design spirit of his expert mech.

With the help of the new design spirit that aligned so well with Tusa, the Dark Zephyr managed to borrow some of her powers and become untouchable the moment the Gauss Baron's self-destructed in the most violent way possible!

"I still can't believe that actually worked." Tusa stated.

He had been gambling when he tried to call upon Trisk. The little bird-like entity had only been born a handful of months ago and did not accumulate a lot of power in its short time of existence.

Yet in the face of Tusa's urgency, Trisk couldn't sit still. The ever-changing bird spirit expended all of the strength it could call upon and momentarily caused the Dark Zephyr to... become untouchable.

This state only lasted for a brief amount of time. The expert mech returned to its normal state a second or two later, but that was just enough for the machine to escape the initial destructive blast!

Whatever else followed after the Gauss Baron's ruinous explosion was not as severe. The Dark Zephyr's excellent armor easily handled the aftermath, just as designed.

Still, its previous exploits not only left its two design spirits in an exhausted and expended state, but also drained almost all of the spiritual energy that had been infused in its Unending alloy. Furthermore, Venerable Tusa himself was coping with a headache that continued to impose a greater burden on him as he had already overstrained himself.

It was a miracle that he still managed to circle around and sneak up behind the Burza Fens without its dwarven expert pilot becoming aware of the danger.

The Dark Zephyr could be quite subtle in Tusa's hand. This was especially the case now that he managed to deepen his connection with his partner machine after going through a moment of life and death with it. His control over the expert mech had never been greater!

"Battle is truly the best crucible for mechs and their pilots."

After Venerable Tusa finished catching his breath, he reluctantly swept his gaze to the strategic overview of the battlefield. There were many more hotspots where his help was needed.

However, he did not blindly command his Dark Zephyr to blast off to the nearest unit that needed backup. He only had a limited amount of resources left to fight so he needed to pick his battles carefully.

Just looking at the other expert mechs clashing head-on against each other made his headache worsen. He wouldn't be able to keep up in a high-intensity body. His expert mech still had enough fight left in it, but the pilot as well as the design spirits had already bottomed out. All three of them needed a lot of rest to recover their combat effectiveness.

"I guess I'll keep playing the knife in the dark, then. It doesn't really make a difference whether I stab my knife from the front or the back of an enemy mech."

After Venerable Tusa picked out his next target, he turned around his expert mech and gradually flew away. He wasn't in a hurry to intervene. He knew he had to time his attack attempts carefully so that he could strike when his chosen victims were at their most inattentive towards other attackers.

Elsewhere on the battlefield, the battle still raged on. The clashes between the expert mechs still dominated the progression of the battle despite their lack of quantity compared to tens of thousands of mechs occupying most of the battlefield.

The high-level duel between Patriarch Reginald Cross and Venerable Orthox De Massie continued to heat up even as their expert mechs were still chipping away at each other's defenses!

Neither the Bolvar Rage nor the Gatecrasher looked anywhere close to nearing the end of their flight.

The Bolvar Rage's shoulder-mounted positron cannons were the first weapon modules to go. They were fairly exposed and vulnerable so it was not a surprise that Venerable Orthox managed to eliminate them by launching many targeted attacks at them whenever his expert mech came close.

The one-handed hammer wielded by the Gatecrasher did not look as large and imposing as that of the Bashravar, but its mass and various technological and material advantages strengthened its parameters to an unreasonable level!

"The weight of the Vulcan Empire rests on my hammer! The future of my people strengthens my shield! I am never alone! I fight with the hopes and dreams of dwarvenkind on my side, and I have become stronger for it! A selfish, power-hungry mech pilot like you will never comprehend what it means to fight for a cause!"

With this handy hammer, the Gatecrasher was able to dent the exterior of the Bolvar Rage with every solid hit. Its threat was so great that Patriarch Reginald did not dare to endure another direct hit from this weapon.

When cornered, Reginald would rather allow his expert mech get bashed by the Gatecrasher's shield than to endure another blow from the dwarven expert mech's hammer!

He wasn't letting his expert hybrid mech get beat up for free, though.

Initially, he concentrated on wearing down the Gatecrasher's powerful resonance shield. Reginald relied on all of the weapon systems of his Bolvar Rage but primarily leveraged the shotgun.

They were loaded with shells that contained an updated formula of pellets that worked especially well at draining resonance shields. Patriarch Reginald did not hesitate to expend all of the shells the Bolvar Rage carried in order to wear down the Gatecrasher's first layer of defense.

Once the Gatecrasher's resonance shield and energy shield both collapsed after enduring a lot of attacks, Reginald was still a long way from defeating the enemy expert mech.

Though the two mechs had already battled each out for a time, the Gatecrasher's extremely resilient physical shield was still going strong.

Sure, all of the ranged firepower the Bolvar Rage poured against its surface had caused it to become increasingly scarred and pitted. However, the scanners told Reginald that most of the damage was confined to the upper layers of the shield. He was nowhere close to punching through its depth!

This was bad news to the Cross Patriarch because Venerable Orthox was extremely skillful at making sure that its shield was always oriented towards the Bolvar Rage. Only a fraction of the latter's ranged attacks managed to strike the Gatecrasher's mech frame, but these incidental successes were so infrequent that the Gatecrasher almost looked as good as new!

"What a tough dwarf!"

After exchanging many blows, Patriarch Reginald gained an increased amount of respect for his opponent. Both the Gatecrasher and its skilled but calm expert pilot handedly resisted every attack in an efficient and effective manner.

In fact, the dwarven expert space knight mitigated so much damage that the Bolvar Rage could have easily slaughtered three low-tier expert mech with all of the attacks it launched up to this point!

It almost drove Patriarch Reginald mad from frustration!

"How much more damage do I need to deal before I can break open this dwarven mech!?"

#### *Chapter 3279: Pinning Mechs*

As a rule, Patriarch Reginald Cross never lost confidence in himself, but there were times when the overwhelming odds against him started to put him in a heavy mood.

"Space knights are not my most ideal opponents."

That was an understatement. Hybrid mechs were mech types that partially eschewed the specialization route that most mech types pursued. They were considered to be the all-rounders of the mech market and were usually filed under the 'other' category of mechs.

Hybrid mechs boasted greater versatility and more solutions in different scenarios, but all of that came at the cost of pure power. Aside from the Bolvar Rage's chest-mounted positron cannon, none of the other weapon systems it carried were powerful enough to inflict serious damage onto the Gatecrasher's prodigious defenses!

Still, despite being restrained by the bad matchup of mech types, Patriarch Reginald Cross did not believe he would lose this duel. The greater adversity and pressure imposed on him due to his various disadvantages only caused him to burst out greater strength and determination!

After evading another attack pass from the enemy, the Bolvar Rage spun and quickly fired another quick discharge of plasma that struck the rear and side of the Gatecrasher.

"Every defense can be overcome!" He told himself. "I just need to create the openings myself!"

Yet even as he fought with gusto, he always had to take into account that his Bolvar Rage was constantly expending a lot of energy. In comparison, the Gatecrasher did not make use of any energy-hungry weapon systems.

As long as this high-intensity battle continued like this, there was a real risk the Bolvar Rage would tire out long before the Gatecrasher was on its last legs.

"I can't let my opponent win on attrition!"

Knowing that Venerable Orthox was trying to earn a slow and steady victory by trying to outlast Patriarch Reginald did not help that much. So what if the Cross Patriarch was aware of the dwarven hero's intentions?

The most scumbag aspect about fighting defensive mechs was that these sturdy machines had all of the time in the galaxy to dance with their opponents!

Perhaps Venerable Orthox would have chosen to adopt a more proactive and aggressive strategy if his comrades were having a lot of difficulties winning without him, but for now he did not see the need to take too many risks.

Still, he almost lost his mental composure a couple of times when both the Gauss Baron and the Burza Fens got done in by the same enemy expert mech.

Even so, Venerable Orthox did not let that dictate his choices. If he began to loosen his defensive fighting approach, he might be able to deal more damage to the Bolvos Rage, but his Gatecrasher might also expose an opening which his opponent would ruthlessly exploit.

He could not allow this powerful expert hybrid mech to get away and hunt down the other dwarven expert mechs on the battlefield!



The Dark Zephyr was only a latent threat now that its expert pilot had expended all of his energy early on. In comparison, the Bolvos Rage was a much more long-lasting expert mech!

Despite its constant weapon discharges and energetic maneuvering, the Cross Patriarch's war steed was still going strong and would remain so for a decent amount of time. Its energy reserves were ridiculously high due to the extreme amount of investment put into the Bolvos Rage's design.

Hybrid mechs were typically characterized by their limited ammunition and energy reserves, but clearly this did not necessarily apply to a high-tier expert mech version of this mech type!

"I can't let this mech loose on my other comrades. I have to lock him in place at all costs!" Orthox vowed in his heart.

What he didn't know was that the Larkinsons also hoped for this to happen. It was more preferable for the Golden Skull Alliance if these two top combatants kept locking horns at each other for the remainder of the battle.

Though the situation looked bad for the human side, Ves still held a lot more hope for his expert mechs.

Their performance so far exceeded that of any other expert mech. The Dark Zephyr had gone ahead and proven the strength of its design and exclusive advantages.

It was subsequently the turn of Riot and the First Sword to prove their chops as expert mechs.

Neither of the two had it easy at the moment.

The Riot was getting beat up from all sides by three Molten Hammer mechs that were driven by angry dwarven expert pilots who also sought to take revenge on the humans for killing their comrades!

Venerable Orfan was constantly trying to deflect the attacks coming from the front of her expert mech while making sure that the attacks that landed on the rear did not hit anything important.

Though the Riot had withstood getting burned by powerful flames, getting smacked by a heavy hammer and getting chopped by a sharp axe, it still managed to remain up for now! Even its attackers were becoming increasingly more amazed at how resiliently the Riot's inner armor layer withstood all of the attacks.

However, it was only a matter of time before the Riot suffered a breach in its defenses! Though the Valkyrie Prime was not comparable to a real expert mech, its Unending

alloy exterior had eventually succumbed against the unrelenting power attacks of the Burza Fens.

The same thing could happen again this time especially if the Riot was unlucky enough to get smacked a few more times by the Bashravar's incredibly lethal warhammer!

"I could really use some backup here, fellows!" Venerable Orfan urgently requested for the umpteenth time. Her voice grew increasingly more stressed and desperate after each attempt. "My expert mech is practically falling apart at the seams!"

When Ves heard the request, he called up the Riot's telemetry and quickly studied its overall condition.

"You're doing fine and so is your expert mech, Venerable Orfan. Try your best and keep holding on. By my estimates, you can still hold on at this rate for at least ten more minutes. As long as you can buy us that much time, we can accomplish a lot in the other parts of the battlefield. It is crucial that you anchor these three dwarven expert mechs in place, though. Don't let them loose!"

Venerable Orfan violently cursed over the communication channel. "DO YOU KNOW WHAT \$\*&\$ I'M DEALING WITH?! THESE \$\*&\$ DWARVES ARE OUT FOR BLOOD AND IT'S MINE THAT THEY WANT TO DRAIN FIRST! WHY DON'T YOU GET DOWN HERE AND OFFER YOUR BODY UP FOR THESE DWARVES TO \$&\$@#\$ YOU UP FOR ONCE?! YOU DAMN MECH DESIGNERS ARE SUCH @#&\$\*(@# FOR EXPECTING US TO RISK OUR LIVES SO YOU CAN GET YOUR JOLLIES OFF AND SAY 'OOPS' WHENEVER ONE OF YOUR DESIGN MISTAKES SCREWS ME OVER!"

Ves swiped his fingers, which muted the direct communication channel to the Riot's cockpit.

He was not unsympathetic towards Venerable Orfan's struggles, but there were many more Larkinsons who also needed assistance. While the battle between the tens of thousands of regular mechs were slowly swinging in the favor of the expeditionary fleet, the balance was still too precarious and could easily be broken if the dwarven expert mechs changed tack.

Compared to Venerable Orfan's torture, Venerable Dise was having a considerably better time.

Unlike the Riot, the First Sword was a lighter and more mobile mech. With the crucial input of Ketis, the expert swordsman mech was designed to be a rough analogue of the strong and athletic bodies of the Swordmaidens.

In fact, the First Sword's proportions matched quite closely to that of Dise's proportions! The ratios were highly similar and the only real difference between their body shapes was that the expert mech looked like it wore a suit of light combat armor.

While these design choices meant that the First Sword was not as able to resist as many direct attacks as the Riot, its Unending alloy armor system still provided it with a sufficient buffer under these harsh conditions.

Right now, Venerable Dise was constantly keeping her expert mech on the move. The harder it was for the three expert mechs of the Hivar Roarers to pin it down, the longer it was able to last on the battlefield.

With this thought in mind, Dise did not hope to accomplish anything extravagant at first. She was already happy if she could just entangle the Paravad, the Morko Mark II and the Domingo Daren so that her fellow Swordmaidens and other comrades could sweep up the weakened Hivar Roarer mechs on this side of the battlefield without any complications.

The situation indeed unfolded as she had hoped. The Hivar Roarer expert mechs were initially supposed to bolstered the battered and demoralized mech pilots who had just lived through an energy bladestorm.

However, their inability to extricate themselves from the surprisingly strong and resilient First Sword meant that the regular dwarf mech troops lost the protection of their guardian angels. This caused them to become incredibly vulnerable to the sweeping counterattack launched by the Larkinsons and the Glory Seekers.

"We need backup!"

"Where are the Slug Rangers? Why hasn't our fire support arrived?"

"We can't hold these humans off with our damaged mechs. We need to retreat!"

"We can't retreat." General Kebrinore said in a stern voice to the beleaguered Hivar Roarers. "If we vacate this flank, these human mechs can turn around and attack our center units from the side. They'll quickly be able to roll up our formations if that happens. No matter what, hold out as long as you can. Don't focus on winning. Focus on surviving and buying as much time as possible. Your sacrifice has meaning and will be remembered!"

"..."

Though the general's words did not sound encouraging, a fatalistic realization had set on the Hivar Roarers at this flank. They knew that while their side was not going well for the Ferril mech forces, the other flank was doing a lot better.

As long as they kept the human mechs here busy, they might be able to buy enough time for their comrades on the other side of the battlefield to overrun the human's weakest flank.

Once that happened, it would be the turn of the dwarves to attack the main human forces from the side, thereby creating a turning point that could result in a cascading collapse of the enemy lines!

"We... we will hold, sir."

"Our lives belong to Vulcan! We shall do everything in our power to do him proud!"

"For the Empire! For the true dwarven god! For Ferril!"

The more the dwarves became disadvantaged, the more they woke up and began to put up a stubborn resistance. None of this was more true than with the Hivar Roarers, who despite all of the setbacks began to draw more strength from their fanatical beliefs as a way to prop up their morale.

"The Vulcan Empire shall exist for eternity!"

"Witness me, Vulcan!"

"Let me dedicate the blood of these evil human wretches to you, oh supreme god of dwarves!"

Plenty of scenes of heroism played out among the Hivar Roarers. The damaged and crippled bestial mechs resorted to throwing themselves onto the enemy human mechs just so that other friendly units could exploit the opening they created.

Still, the recovered morale among the dwarven mech pilots did not make as much of a difference as they hoped. Solid mechs mattered more than shouting repetitive slogans at each other.

When Ves saw the state of the two flanks, he grew increasingly more tense. He gripped his Hammer of Brilliance tighter as he tried to guess which one would collapse first.

If the dwarves managed to gain the upper hand in the left flank, then that would spell disaster for the expeditionary fleet. The opposite was the case if the Larkinsons and Glory Seekers completed their sweep.

The end phase of the battle was slowly coming within reach. Ves guessed it would not take long before the decisive moment arrived.

"Come on... We can't let these dwarves beat us. We can still win!"

*Chapter 3280: Venerable Merek Bulfuron*

Venerable Merek Bulfuron was a new breed of dwarven expert pilot.

Due to all of the fighting that took place during the successful rebellion that allowed the upstart dwarves to conquer the Smiling Samuel Star Sector, a huge generation of dwarven heroes and statesmen rose up. These dwarves subsequently dominated the newly-founded Vulcan Empire for decades to come.

Their influence could be felt from every corner, from the establishment of the ambrosia industry to the huge investment in building up a homegrown dwarven mech industry.

Every Vulcanite who lived up until today owed everything to the greatest generation of dwarves. They risked their lives, prosperity and freedom to rise up against the unjust tyranny of misformed humans and their treacherous gods.

Many free and happy dwarves held a lot of gratitude to the pioneers who provided them with a life that was countless times better than if they grew up in a typical human-owned mining planet.

Indeed, the Vulcan Empire reserved many days to honor a specific occasion, battle or great figure.

The issue was that after many decades of building up a powerful dwarven state, the same leaders were still in charge for the most part. It had long been considered a great honor to serve under one of the dwarves who fought for freedom.

It didn't matter whether the dwarf in question used to lead an insurgent cell behind enemy lines or just functioned as a bottom-ranked mech technician.

As long as they had anything to do with the great struggle, they received an immense amount of honor and recognition! In many cases, this regard translated to being put in charge of different functions.

To be fair, the nascent dwarven state back then was spread too thin. There was a shortage of qualified dwarven personnel and there were vacancies everywhere that had to be filled at all costs. The people back then weren't picky either. When they lived for years aboard overcrowded starships eating nutrient packs every day, even a tiny improvement was regarded as Vulcan's gift!

Times had changed, though. The dwarves who were born decades after the liberation of the star sector were not only better trained and educated, but they were also hungry and ambitious.

The newer generation wanted to take charge!

"Those old fogeys need to get out of the way first." Merek muttered.

The biggest frustration the younger dwarves held towards their elders was that their society had become more solidified. The early dwarves hogged all of the good positions

and also clung to them for many decades. Their beards may have turned grey by now, but many of them showed no sign of retiring anytime soon.

"It's one big corrupt mess!"

Though Merek understood the need to consolidate the gains made by the dwarves after they successfully booted the tall folk from Smiling Samuel, a lot of time had already passed. The Vulcan Empire not only built up a prosperous economy and infrastructure, but also invested in a huge military machine that was more than ready to bring the light of Vulcan to more regions of space!

The children of the revolutionaries grew up listening to the stories of their parents and grandparents. Though the tales contained much hardship and sacrifice, they also conveyed heroism and fighting for a righteous cause.

How could the newer generation not want to inherit the mission of the original revolutionaries and take it a step further?

"If only those stubborn old fools weren't so reluctant to continue the revolution!"

As far as dwarves like Venerable Merek were concerned, the conquest of Smiling Samuel was just the first step. Certainly, the dwarves in this star cluster had managed to earn their freedom, but how many other dwarves in the galaxy were still slaving under the yoke of the evil humans?

Compared to the territory that humans owned, the amount of star systems that dwarves held in their grasp amounted to just a footnote! Great injustices against the dwarven folk were still being committed in many other regions of space.

Even if the odds were overwhelmingly in the favor of the tall folk, why were the Vulcan Empire's leaders hesitating all of a sudden? They managed to defeat the humans before, so they could do it again! Now that they had finished building up a strong state, there was no reason anymore to delay the next phase of the revolution.

"Vulcan is on our side, so why are you not following his lead?"

The great Vulcan was constantly resisting against the evil human gods every day! The protector and role model of dwarvenkind had fought, bled and suffered at the hands of the tall folk for a much longer time and still managed to keep up his resistance.

However, the divine craftsman couldn't do it alone. There were too many slaves on the side of the tall folk. The dwarven people needed to fight by the side of their patron god in order to liberate their still-enslaved brethren throughout the galaxy!

Venerable Merek grew up yearning to become one of the blessed and righteous warriors of Vulcan. From young on, his devout parents never stopped telling the great gift that their god had bestowed to their people.

Without Vulcan, a free and prosperous dwarven state would have never come to life!

Merek was a good boy, so he did not take Vulcan for granted. He sincerely worshipped and centered his entire life around the God of Dwarves, Mechs and Craftsmanship. Several times per day, he knelt in front of an altar and prayed for the divine craftsman's understanding and blessings.

His devotion paid off. Whereas many other dwarven mech pilots went on to develop average careers, Merek stood out from the rest even before he graduated from the mech academy!

He worked harder than almost every other mech pilot in the Ferril Provincial Army. Many days, his body aches and his mind had become worn from constant study. Yet he never gave up any opportunity to develop and strengthen his piloting ability because he was on a mission, a holy mission!

Vulcan was constantly by his side. Without their god and savior, Merek and many other dedicated soldiers would have never grown strong enough. He was glad to have joined a devout brotherhood of like-minded believers in the dwarven god. He became even more ecstatic when he heard that his mech division would be one of the few who would be starting the fight against the tall folk once again!

All of the political power struggles that took place above his head did not concern him. No matter how much those old, corrupted heroes turned villains resisted the continuation of the grand struggle, Vulcan himself had stated many times that the revolution never ended until every single dwarf in this galaxy and the next was freed from the shackles that kept them in captivity!

This was Merek's holy mission! After many years of waiting and preparation, the Vulcan Empire was finally going to war again!

He was glad he could live in this wonderful time where he had the opportunity to honor and please the great Vulcan while he was still in his prime.

"Heh, those corrupted old grandpas can't stop us anymore!" Venerable Merek fanatically exclaimed. "We shall earn victory on this battlefield and discredit the false notion that Vulcan is a human god!"

Waging war and shedding the blood of cruel, debased humans was the best way to honor Vulcan. It was how the previous generation of dwarves managed to rise up from slaves to rulers.



Now that the oldsters had grown too comfortable with the trappings of power, it was up to younger and more devout dwarves like Merek to take over the torch and lead their blessed people to greatness!

Sadly, the grand victory that he was hoping for was not yet in sight.

"It's not fair!" Venerable Merek gritted his teeth as he piloted his Paravad against the powerful human expert mech. "The humans have more gods on their side!"

The lady that brought death and the sword that ravaged his fellow Hivar Roarers showed that the weak humans were too cowardly to fight on their own. After the descent of their gods, they quickly reversed the trend of the battle and made it a lot more even than it should have been!

Even so, determined dwarves like Merek did not lose hope! They still had an opportunity to win this battle and make Vulcan proud. They just had to go back to their roots and remember that dwarvenkind had always been the underdogs. In the past, it was rare for dwarves to start off a battle with an advantage, but they managed to succeed in enough crucial battles to win the war.

Perhaps this was Vulcan's test to the dwarven people. If Venerable Merek and his brothers failed to overcome these humans, then they might not be worthy to lead the new revolution!

"Watch me, Vulcan!" Venerable Merek roared! "Watch me fight and witness me vanquish this devil mech!"

The Paravad glowed brighter as his expert mech channeled his reinvigorated will! The avian expert mech spread its wings to aim its mounted positron cannons at the resisting human machine.

Powerful resonance-empowered positron beams struck the sword-wielding expert mech. Though the shots failed to penetrate the enemy expert mech's armor, this was just a warmup as the Paravad swept straight towards its prey in attempt to rake the enemy expert mech with its claws!

A silent clash took place as the Morko Mark II piloted by a colleague had launched an attack at the same time that forced the enemy expert swordsman mech to defend against the faster dwarven expert mech.

"I will peel apart your mech layer by layer until you're reduced to nothing, human!"

The sharp claws did not tear into the armor of the expert swordsman mech as he hoped, but the faint grooves on the surface proved that Merek's effort was not in vain.

The demonic expert mech could still be destroyed! He just had to be patient and persistent.

As his avian expert mech turned around in order to perform another attack pass, Venerable Merek waited for his two colleagues to distract the enemy machine before swooping in yet again!

This time, he succeeded in attacking the expert swordsman mech's rear. If the blasted human expert pilot did not lower her expert mech at the last moment, the Paravad would have been able to claw a piece of the flight system!

Merek tried his best to control his impatience. The thorny human expert mech couldn't be compared to any other machine of its kind. The evil human gods had been generous to their demonic agents. Wherever this abyssal metal came from, the dwarven expert pilot had no doubt that it had been soaked in the blood of millions of innocents in order for it to gain such incredible strength against material attacks!

"If you think your unholy armor will avail you, think again! Vulcan's light shall cleanse your filthy mech of sins, and we are his chosen agent!"

Again and again Merek went on the attack. The expert swordsman mech was helpless to resist as one machine couldn't possibly defend against three!

The only concerning matter was that Venerable Merek found it a little harder to land his blows with every attack pass. He had the sense that his opponent was growing more adept at defending herself.

In some cases, the enemy expert mech turned around and held its extremely deadly sword at the ready. Venerable Merek chose to avoid the heretical masterwork sword. He feared that the sharp claws of the Paravad might not survive a collision against this admittedly impressive weapon!

Just looking at the sword made Merek red with anger. Such an exquisite weapon looked as if it had been forged by the most divinely inspired dwarven swordsmith. It was a travesty that it fell into the hands of a human mech.

"I must reclaim this weapon and dedicate it to our people! Only dwarves deserve to wield this sword!"